



New Charter School Application Guidance

Purpose

This guide is intended to help applicants prepare a complete and thoughtful New Charter School Application for the University of Southern Indiana Office of Charter Schools.

The application itself identifies what information is required. This guide explains how to develop strong responses that clearly communicate your team's vision, planning, and readiness to open a successful public charter school.

Throughout the application, support your responses with evidence whenever possible. Strong applications are clear, concise, and demonstrate thoughtful planning rather than lengthy narrative.

What Makes a Strong Application?

Successful applications consistently demonstrate four characteristics.

- *A Clear Need* - Explain why the proposed school is needed and support that conclusion with evidence such as community engagement, demographic information, enrollment interest, academic performance data, or other relevant information.
- *A Strong Educational Model* - Clearly connect the school's mission, instructional design, curriculum, student supports, and assessment systems. Reviewers should understand not only what your school intends to do, but why those decisions are appropriate for the students you intend to serve.
- *Organizational Capacity* - Demonstrate that the founding team and governing board possess the collective knowledge and experience necessary to successfully govern and operate a charter school. If expertise is still being developed, explain how those gaps will be addressed.
- *Operational and Financial Readiness* - Show that the school has realistic plans for staffing, facilities, governance, finances, and implementation. Strong applications anticipate challenges and include practical contingency plans.

Completing the Application

School Information

Provide complete and accurate contact information.

If this application follows an approved Statement of Intent, information may be carried forward where appropriate. If significant changes have occurred since the Statement of Intent was approved, explain those changes within the application.

Founding Team

The founding team should collectively demonstrate the expertise necessary to open and sustain a successful charter school.

Reviewers are interested in the team's collective capacity, not whether every individual possesses every skill. Teams should demonstrate experience in areas such as education, governance, finance, operations, legal compliance, community engagement, and organizational leadership.

Be candid about areas where additional expertise is still being developed and explain how those needs will be addressed.

Educational Service Providers

If the proposed school intends to partner with an Educational Service Provider (ESP), Charter Management Organization (CMO), or another outside organization, clearly explain:

- The services that will be provided.
- How performance will be monitored.
- How the governing board will maintain independent oversight.
- The financial relationship between the school and the provider.

The governing board should remain ultimately accountable for the school's performance.

Executive Summary

Think of the Executive Summary as your school's introduction.

By the end of this section, reviewers should understand:

- Why this school is needed.
- Why this community.
- Why this founding team.
- Why the proposed model is likely to succeed.

Rather than repeating information from later sections, provide a concise overview that establishes the foundation for the remainder of the application.

Section 1 — People

This section should demonstrate that the proposed school is rooted in its community.

Describe the students and families the school intends to serve, how the community has been engaged throughout the planning process, and how community input influenced the school's design.

Support enrollment projections with evidence whenever possible. Explain the assumptions behind enrollment targets and identify the minimum enrollment required for financial sustainability.

Reviewers also expect applicants to honestly evaluate the strengths of the founding team while identifying any remaining capacity gaps and plans to address them.

Admissions policies should reflect Indiana's open-enrollment requirements and demonstrate equitable access for all eligible students.

Section 2 — Educational Model

Every aspect of the educational model should support the school's mission.

Explain the reasoning behind major design decisions rather than simply listing curriculum programs or instructional practices. Reviewers are interested in why those decisions were made and how they address the needs of the students the school intends to serve.

Describe how student progress will be monitored, how interventions will be provided when students struggle, and how the school will evaluate whether it is successfully achieving its mission.

Where appropriate, reference research, successful school models, or lessons learned from schools your team has studied.

Section 3 — Execution

This section demonstrates your team's readiness to open and operate the school.

Describe realistic plans for:

- Staffing and organizational structure
- Governance
- Facilities
- Student recruitment
- Transportation
- Food service
- Before- and after-school programming
- Fiscal management
- Implementation timelines

Reviewers understand that plans may evolve. They are looking for thoughtful planning, realistic assumptions, and evidence that the team has considered potential risks and appropriate contingency plans.

Required Attachments

Before submitting the application, verify that all required supporting documents have been included and clearly labeled.

Attachments should support the narrative rather than repeat it. Whenever possible, reference supporting documents within the application.

Before You Submit

Before submitting your application, consider the following questions:

- Does every section clearly support the school's mission?
- Is every major claim supported by evidence?
- Are enrollment projections realistic?
- Do the staffing plan and financial projections align?
- Have potential risks been acknowledged and addressed?
- Have all required attachments been included?

A well-prepared application tells one consistent story. The mission, educational model, staffing, governance, finances, and implementation plan should work together to demonstrate that the proposed school is both needed and capable of long-term success.