



THE CAPACITIES OF CHARTER SCHOOL FOUNDING TEAMS

How to Identify and Assess for School Success

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¹ The “founding team” (sometimes referred to as the applicant team) is the group of individuals who submit the application to the authorizer and who will lead and/or govern this potential new school through start-up and the first years of operation. In some cases, individuals may leave or be added to this team during the initial stages of the school.

Authorizers are gateways for learning, bringing to life the aspirations of families and communities and the visions of hopeful school founding teams. Authorizers have the privilege and responsibility to review new school applications and decide which should open. These decisions shape the quality, quantity, and types of schools that students and communities can access.

Quality authorizers are reflective, seeking ways to evolve the application process in order to open the door for more great public schools for students and families. One key way to evolve and improve the application process is to “[shift rigor from paper to people](#).” Not only can this expand the talent pool of leaders in the charter space, but also authorizers who effectively identify and assess the founding team’s capacities can improve their ability to approve applications of schools more likely to succeed while reducing redundant, onerous written application requirements.

Founding team capacities refer to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors a team needs in order to develop and operate a quality school.

Founding team capacities refer to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors a team needs in order to develop and operate a quality school. These capacities are observable and the means by which a founding team executes on plans and responds to changing circumstances over time. A charter school founding team’s capacity to operate in a complex and entrepreneurial startup environment is paramount to school success. While it’s important to have a well-thought-out written plan, the team’s ability to adjust and adapt, while still executing on its vision, is the secret sauce of school success.

Authorizers overseeing schools with strong student outcomes use their [professional judgment](#), and make decisions based on evidence, rather than checking boxes or focusing on personal beliefs. This means they are able to assess the capacities of a founding team using evidence, while minimizing sources of individual and institutional biases that limit the ability to clearly understand what the team brings to the endeavor.

To identify the most important capacities of a charter school founding team, NACSA surveyed the charter school sector; interviewed authorizers, school founders, and organizations that support founding teams through the application and startup phases; culled research on successful school leaders and teams; and gathered wisdom beyond the education sector from the entrepreneurial, business, and philanthropic communities. (See Sources and References at the end of this document.)

We have deepened our understanding of founding team capacities that are critical for new school success. This resource identifies those capacities and provides guidance on how authorizers can assess for them throughout the application process.

THE CAPACITIES

Share this list (or an amended one, according to your authorizing office's priorities) with founding teams to transparently communicate that you are seeking evidence of these capacities throughout the application process.

GUIDANCE FOR ASSESSING CAPACITIES

Digest this section to prepare for this work: from assembling your review team to documenting evidence of each capacity to making decisions.

THE CAPACITIES IN DETAIL

Use these three-pagers to orient your review team to each of the nine capacities: a description, criteria, how to assess throughout the application process, how to focus on the evidence, and examples of evidence.

BLANK RUBRIC

Adapt this Word document for your own use to document the evidence observed and provide a rating for each capacity.

SAMPLE COMPLETED RUBRIC

Review this example of how the guidance can come to life in practice. The evidence provided are simply examples, meant to be illustrative and not comprehensive; authorizers and their reviewers should remain open to a variety of evidence that may demonstrate capacity.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON BIAS

Explore this list of resources to get started on and/or deepen your team's understanding of bias and practices to mitigate it.





CAPACITY 1: STRATEGIC FOCUS ON MISSION

Clarity of mission and vision; a clear, coherent, and cohesive strategy to achieve them.

Why It Is Important

The mission is the central guiding purpose of the school. Strategic focus on that mission keeps the team working towards the same goals.



CAPACITY 2: COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

Broad and deep engagement with the proposed school community to understand their desires, needs, and aspirations; dedication to the community's success and well-being.

Why It Is Important

Community commitment ensures that a school is created and implemented *with* students and families, not done to them.



CAPACITY 3: BUILDING A COALITION

Ability to communicate the school mission and vision to broad audiences and to motivate stakeholders to advocate on behalf of the school.

Why It Is Important

Starting a school requires buy-in from multiple stakeholders to support and navigate through the complexities of school development and operations.



CAPACITY 4: REFLECTIVE LEARNING

Active seeking of new information and stepping back from experience to understand the current situation and inform future actions.

Why It Is Important

Charter schools are institutions of learning at their core, and the founding team must embody the capacity to grow and evolve. There is always more to learn about developing and running a school—from community, students, other schools, and other fields.



CAPACITY 5: CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

Curiosity and a willingness to think outside the box to identify potential solutions to challenges; critical evaluation of how to adjust to be more effective in service to students and families.

Why It Is Important

Charter school development and operations are never short on challenges. Things can change quickly and school leaders need multiple pathways to solve problems.



CAPACITY 6: EFFECTIVE DECISION MAKING

Appropriate assessment of situations, ensuring consideration of various points of view and data; the courage to face decisions and thoughtfully weigh options while keeping student needs at the center.

Why It Is Important

Developing and operating a charter school requires constant decision making and prioritizing to make progress, avoid unnecessary setbacks in the startup process, and best serve students once operational.



CAPACITY 7: RELATIONSHIP WITH SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Demonstrated history of success in a variety of endeavors, large and small; experience with failure and demonstrated ability to learn, grow, and adapt.

Why It Is Important

Startup and operational success is achievable but not guaranteed, though successes and failures are certainly part of the journey. Honesty and vulnerability leads to learning, adjustments, and better decisions that support student success.



CAPACITY 8: TEAM AWARENESS

Ability to build and sustain a team committed and able to bring the mission to life.

Why It Is Important

A high-functioning team is critical to successful school startup and operation. Gathering the right people is the first step; team awareness and the ability to create the conditions to sustain and evolve supports long-term success.



CAPACITY 9: KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND EXECUTION

Know-how needed to start and operate a school; the capacity to execute on knowledge and skills at the right time to achieve maximum benefit.

Why It Is Important

Starting and operating a school is complex and requires a diverse set of skills and knowledge that, when activated at the right time, contribute significantly to the school's success.

Authorizers can shift rigor from paper to people.

[*NACSA's Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*](#) and our [*Recommendations for Rethinking the New School Application*](#) provide a guiding framework for an authorizer to revise application processes, policies, and materials. By doing so, authorizers can begin to shift rigor from paper to people, increasing their effectiveness in assessing the capacities of the founding team to deliver a high-quality school, bringing new talent into the charter space, and reducing the unnecessary length of (sometimes) overly burdensome and bureaucratic written application requirements.

The authorizer should balance their assessment of the written application and a founding team's capacities in making decisions about new schools. This is especially true at a time when the written application is often compiled by a hired consultant and in the age of potential use of artificial intelligence (AI) to help write applications for founding teams. This assessment of capacities should be included as part of a comprehensive charter application review process; it should not replace other complementary elements of a high-quality written application review.

You can assess for these capacities throughout the new school application process and into a school's startup year and beyond, though this guidance is focused on the new school application process and opportunities to gather evidence of capacities prior to the critical decision to approve a new school.

As an authorizer, your policies and practices already likely include some assessment of capacities of the founding team. Your policies may already reference NACSA's *Principles & Standards*, which validate the inclusion of an even more robust analysis:

A quality authorizer. . . .

- Requires all applicants to present [...] evidence of [...] **founding team members demonstrating diverse and necessary capabilities, and clear evidence of the applicant's capacity to execute its plan successfully.**
- Grants charters only to applicants who have **demonstrated competence and capacity to succeed** in all aspects of the school, consistent with the stated approval criteria.

Use this guidance to revisit and expand on those policies and practices or develop new ones.



MULTIPLE WAYS TO DOCUMENT CAPACITIES

Just as an employer likely engages with potential hires more than once—through collection of resumes, screening interviews, performance tasks, group interviews, and additional meet and greet opportunities—an **authorizer should have multiple points of engagement with a founding team before making a high-stakes decision on a charter application**. Your process likely includes two or more touchpoints, and you might want to add more.

Through an application information packet, Request for Proposals, or similar, an authorizer ensures the founding team is both aware of capacities the authorizer prioritizes and has the opportunity to demonstrate these capacities throughout the application process. Consider sharing a short description of the capacities, such as the one provided here, with founding teams.

An authorizer reviews a wide variety of evidence to assess a founding team's capacities and should use professional judgment to determine whether the breadth and depth of evidence is substantial enough to demonstrate the capacity. **This is not about compliance or checking boxes**. A single experience or data point is not enough to substantiate the presence of a capacity. **Capacity is something that is demonstrated over time and requires multiple data points**.

Below are some sources of evidence:

- Interviews
- Performance tasks
- Observations of board or founding team meetings
- Community meeting observations
- Letters of intent (LOI)
- Written applications
- Authorizer informational meetings
- Site visits
- Founding team planning events, task force meetings, community advisory sessions, etc.
- Organizational assessments of the founding team (e.g., funders, charter support/ incubator organizations)²

² Information should be shared with permission and with full transparency. Authorizers may seek to understand the context of the assessment/evaluation to better understand the applicability of the information.



Early Stages of the Process

Initial conversations, LOIs, information sessions, or other early touchpoints with a founding team can provide an authorizer with initial information about a founding team's vision and capacities. Attendance and engagement at authorizer-hosted information sessions by the founding team is a data point related to reflective learning, demonstrating a team's desire to understand the process. The authorizer also learns about a school's mission, founding team makeup, and connection to and engagement with community at this early stage and can use this data to assess how things change or evolve over time.

The Written Application

Most authorizers' written application requirements already include many opportunities for the founding team to demonstrate their capacities, from their strategic focus on mission and commitment to community, to team awareness and knowledge, skills, and execution. The application rubric or evaluation criteria sets expectations for quality. Authorizers already require submission of resumes, team bios, and other evidence of the team's background knowledge and experience. Authorizers assess written applications for mission coherence throughout, and most authorizers require evidence of engagement with the community to document need and demand. You may want to revise, or in some cases add, written application questions given the guidance below, though **we caution you not to add too many questions to a potentially already burdensome written document.**

Capacity Interview(s)

Most authorizers conduct a single Capacity Interview, though in many cases this interview is focused on addressing gaps in the written application. Think more broadly about Capacity Interviews, including their number and duration, and ensure that these interviews are geared towards gathering evidence about the founding team's capacity and not only about addressing deficiencies in the written application. As an applicant for a job often has multiple interviews, at times with multiple individuals and with different areas of focus including a performance task or other scenario-based tasks, **a strong new school application process includes enough time and space for comprehensive interviews of the founding team, which could take place over multiple interviews or one longer interview, and with different areas of focus and/or with subsets of the founding team.**³ Review and update your approach to Capacity Interviews given the guidance here and below.

Performance Tasks

Often included as part of Capacity Interviews, performance tasks or scenarios can be useful tools for gathering evidence about the founding team's capacities. Tasks or scenarios often present a team with a challenge or situation that requires an action or decision. This could be a financial circumstance, enrollment challenges, a pattern of parent complaints, or academic performance that falls far below targets. An authorizer will likely have the opportunity to gather evidence related to more than one capacity through a performance task or scenario. For example, in a finance-related scenario, not only can the authorizer assess the team's knowledge and skills around school finance, but also their capacities of creative problem solving and effective decision making.

Ongoing Touchpoints

In addition to information sessions, letters of intent, multiple interviews including performance tasks or scenarios, and the written application, an authorizer can engage in additional touchpoints to assess capacity. Observations of community meetings; formal and informal ongoing conversations; attendance at founding team planning meetings or board meetings; review of online, tv, radio, or print media; and other strategies can deepen an authorizer's evidence base. The structure of ongoing touchpoints, and how evidence from these engagements is collected, should be determined by policies, but be flexible to be responsive to a given applicant. Transparency to a founding team is important to ensure that everyone is aware when the authorizer is gathering data on capacities and when the authorizer is informing applicants of the process or providing training.

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³ NACSA is updating our [Capacity Interview Resources](#) and our guidance of just one 90-minute Capacity Interview as the field comes to better understand that this is insufficient.



FOCUS ON THE EVIDENCE

Assemble a Great Review Team

The composition of application review teams is an important aspect in ensuring your assessment of founding team capacities is evidence based. Importantly, application reviewers must be diverse in terms of background, identities, and experiences, having expertise not only in areas of education, charter operations, and charter finance but also with the particular education model being proposed, and within the proposed school community. We know that a more diverse, thriving authorizing staff results in better decision making for all students, as the profession more closely reflects the students and communities it engages. In the same way, **a diverse review team is more likely to bring the wealth of experience and perspectives that lead to better understanding of a founding team's capacities, mitigation of bias, and stronger decision making.**⁴ From NACSA's *Principles & Standards*, a quality authorizer “engages, for both written application reviews and applicant interviews, highly competent and diverse teams of internal and external evaluators...”

Assess Based on Evidence, Not Assumptions or Biases

Reviewers assessing a founding team's capacities and charter application materials should have adequate training in the capacities, assessment criteria, and examples that demonstrate what reviewers look for to confirm capacities. The application review team must assess based on concrete evidence and data—what they heard, observed, read, etc.,—not on how conversant a founding team is or how personable (or not personable) they are. From NACSA's *Principles & Standards*, a quality authorizer “provides orientation or training to application evaluators (including interviewers) to ensure consistent evaluation standards and practices, observance of essential protocols, and unbiased treatment of all applicants...”

Because capacities are patterns of learned behaviors, observing those patterns and behaviors are done so through our own perspective. As such, bias can play a role in how a reviewer observes and understands an applicant's capacities to launch and run a successful school. Individual review team members may (consciously or unconsciously) expect more examples of effective decision making from a Black or Latine founding team than from a White founding team, for example. Or, review team members may make assumptions about a founding team's knowledge and skills in education and finance, because English is not the first language of many members of the founding team, and the written application includes some grammar mistakes. **It is critical that the authorizer and review team seeks to understand, makes conscious, and then attends to their own biases and assumptions so that they can fairly see the fullness of knowledge, skills, expertise, experience, and capacities of the founding team.**

There are a range of useful professional development resources, trainings, and activities that can help an authorizer improve their practices and mitigate bias. [Click here for a list of resources to get you started.](#)

⁴ For an example of the power of a diverse review team, see: <https://qualitycharters.org/2021/05/lessons-learned-from-reviewing-a-public-charter-school-application-for-endazhi-nita-awiging-indigenous-education-by-and-for-its-community/>



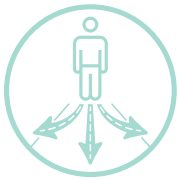
Assess the Founding Team Members as a Group

Surely, the capacities of the proposed school leader merit special attention. But ultimately, it's the team as a whole that must be considered at the application phase. Any one individual will not embody all or even most of the capacities, nor will all team members embody any one capacity. But a successful charter founding team as a whole—and how they work together—should be able to demonstrate or develop these patterns of behavior over time throughout the charter application engagement.

Consider Your Own Capacity

Of course, an authorizer's own internal capacity—size of staff, available resources for application reviews, and the number of applications typically received—will necessarily impact the scope of an authorizer's assessment of the founding team's capacities. If your resources are limited, consider where you can have the most impact and best gather evidence. If assessing for nine capacities is too challenging, you may choose to prioritize a subset of the capacities within your application process. Consider focusing on the five capacities that most closely align to your organization's values, priorities, local challenges, and observed experience in successful schools.

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DECISION MAKING

Ratings

The authorizer's assessment of a founding team's capacities is part of the overall evaluation of the application. [NACSA's Application Evaluation Criteria](#) provides guidance focused on the written application, though it is also useful for assessing a founding team's capacities.

These three ratings are adapted from this *Application Evaluation Criteria* resource and can be used by authorizers as part of their assessment process for each capacity.⁵

- Meets the Standard: Evidence is multi-faceted and demonstrates that the team members, as a whole (or multiple individuals on the team), substantially meet the criteria for the given capacity.
- Partially Meets the Standard: The evidence demonstrates that the team members, as a whole (or multiple individuals on the team), meet the criteria for the given capacity in some respects, but is not observed in multiple instances or with sufficient completeness.
- Does Not Meet the Standard: The evidence is wholly insufficient or significantly lacking; or opportunity was provided to demonstrate the given capacity and the founding team did not provide demonstrative evidence of that capacity.

⁵ These are used in the Sample Completed Rubric provided later in this resource.



Aggregating Ratings and Making Recommendations

NACSA's *Principles & Standards* outline that a quality authorizer “grants charters only to applicants who have demonstrated competence and capacity to succeed in all aspects of the school, consistent with the stated approval criteria.” This means that the preponderance of evidence from a variety of data points shows an applicant’s thorough preparation; presents a clear, realistic picture of how the school expects to operate; and **inspires confidence in the founding team’s capacity to carry out the plan effectively.**

Most authorizers take a holistic approach to making this determination and do not aggregate ratings mathematically. Only after assessing all aspects of the new school application—the quality and viability of the written educational, operational, and financial plans; compliance with legal requirements; demonstrated need, demand, and community engagement; the founding team’s capacities, and additional due diligence, among other criteria—do authorizers make a recommendation to approve or not approve a new school.

Applications must meet minimum statutory requirements. Then, authorizers may require an applicant to meet certain or all standards or criteria to earn a recommendation for approval. They may also recommend approval for applicants who meet certain core standards and most or nearly all other standards. Authorizers may also designate preference (or priority) criteria, particularly in situations where a limited number of charters are available.⁶

Ultimately, authorizers who engage in a robust assessment of founding team capacities must use their professional judgment to weigh the balance between the “what” (i.e., the plan in the written application) and the “who” (i.e., the capacities of the founding team).

The best written application plan provides little assurance that the founding team has what it takes to execute a strong startup. Similarly, an exceptionally strong founding team with a minimally developed plan may not yet be ready to start a charter school.

However, founding teams who excel in these capacities may be well positioned to use their startup year effectively to work through gaps in their initial written plans, overcome challenges, leverage their coalition, and use creative problem solving and effective decision making, among other capacities, to ensure they are ready to open. Approving these applications can bring new talent, new school models, and more leadership—with ties to communities—to meet the aspirations and needs of these communities.

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⁶ See [DC Public Charter School Board Charter Application Guidelines](#) (p.18-19) or [SUNY Charter Schools Institute 2024 Request for Proposals](#) (pp. 6-12) for examples.

THE CAPACITIES IN DETAIL



Guidance for each capacity follows, including: how an authorizer might probe for or experience them in the written application, through interviews or performance tasks, and through ongoing touchpoints; considerations for staying focused on the evidence; and examples of evidence or lack thereof. The guidance and examples are illustrative, and an authorizer should be open to other ways to probe a founding team and for the team to demonstrate their capacities.



HOW TO ASSESS CAPACITY 1

STRATEGIC FOCUS ON MISSION

DESCRIPTION

Clarity of mission and vision; a clear, coherent, and cohesive strategy to achieve them.

CRITERIA

- ✓ Have a clear and measurable school mission that centers students and the community, and is a consistent through-line in the application process.
- ✓ Share an understanding of and commitment to the mission and vision and are each grounded in their own personal “why” related to the mission and vision.
- ✓ Possess a shared understanding of the theory of action and/or logic model, which aligns to the mission and vision and are likely to lead to desired outcomes.
- ✓ Show commitment to defining, measuring, and achieving great outcomes for students; clear on desired student outcomes, consistent with the mission.
- ✓ Able to discern among early-stage, middle-growth, and established organizational needs; can map out plans for growing toward a sustainable, fully developed organization.

GUIDANCE FOR...

...the written application:

Pay attention not only to the quality and clarity of the mission and vision, but also to how they are evident throughout the various elements of the school's plan—from curriculum and staff professional development, to facilities and financial plan. Observe the extent to which the plans and people are strategically aligned and likely to achieve the mission and vision. Example prompts:

- *State your proposed school's mission and vision. How will you evaluate the extent to which the school is achieving it? Explain how you will implement this given the proposed school model.*
- *Include a theory of action and logic model for your educational program, and include any mission-specific student outcomes you seek to achieve.*

...interviews:

Probe the “why” of this charter school and seek to understand the team's ability to strategize to meet its goals. Expect multiple individuals to be able to articulate the mission and explain the theory of action and logic model. Example prompts:

- *Why are each of you involved in this endeavor? Why this charter school and why in this community?*
- *What is the vision of this school for the 1st year, 5th year, 10th year?*
- *What will be your first steps post-approval?*
- *What are the core elements of your plan and how do these elements align to your mission?*
- *What is your theory of action? Talk us through your logic model.*

...ongoing touchpoints:

Pay attention to how the school mission and vision evolve or stay consistent throughout the application phases and how the founding team talks about them. If they have evolved, what led to that evolution and how did the team move through this change? Attend one or more founding team meetings during the planning phase to observe the extent to which the mission is central to the plan and the team's approach to developing a cohesive strategy.

STAY FOCUSED ON THE EVIDENCE

- Be mindful of moments where your own biases and/or limited information may influence how you assess for Strategic Focus on Mission. For instance, you may be less familiar with the identified population and/or model and may subconsciously seek more-than-necessary proof points. Ensure that the applicant review team is diverse and includes individuals familiar with the identified population and/or model. Look for opportunities to assess the founding team’s evidence-based argument for the education model, rather than drawing conclusions of the validity based on your own experience with the model.

EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE	EXAMPLES OF LACK OF EVIDENCE
✓ In an initial informal meeting with the founding team, members communicate their personal “why” that is unique to their own lived experience and connection with both the community and the school’s proposed mission. ✓ The founding team speaks about a self-sustaining model 5-10 years into the future, and discusses what will be the same and realistically different with the established school. ✓ The written application includes mission-aligned student outcomes/goals, and during the interview, team members speak to these outcomes: why they are included, how they align with the school’s mission, and plans to achieve them.	✗ When asked why this model, in this community, the founding team struggles to communicate their ‘theory of action,’ how this educational model will benefit the community, and how they will know they are achieving the mission. ✗ The school’s model includes a focus on student wellness. The budget, staffing, and professional development plans do not include evidence of dedicated staff focused on student wellness nor a commitment to professional development for staff. During interviews, the team indicated only that all teachers would be responsible for supporting student wellness and could not articulate the strategies for how this would be implemented.

[For more examples of evidence \(or lack of evidence\) see the Sample Completed Rubric.](#)

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HOW TO ASSESS CAPACITY 2

COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

DESCRIPTION

Broad and deep engagement with the proposed school community to understand their desires, needs, and aspirations; dedication to the community's success and well-being.

CRITERIA

- ✓ Demonstrate sustained relationships to, engagement with, and responsiveness to diverse students and families in the community.
- ✓ Center school design and plans on community aspirations, demand, co-creation, and/or need; prioritize the student experience for diverse student groups.
- ✓ Have positive community standing, including good, well-developed rapport, relationships, and reputation among community stakeholders.
- ✓ Follow through effectively on commitments to the community.
- ✓ Exhibit concern about and commitment to the well-being of the community.

GUIDANCE FOR...

...the written application:

Look for evidence that the community is a core part of the founding team's ongoing planning and evidence of the founding team's ongoing relationship to and standing within the community. Example prompts:

- *Describe the community the school seeks to serve. (The community may be defined by geographic radius, target neighborhood, or a particular student population.)*
- *Identify community stakeholders including families, organizations, and other community members, whom the founding team engaged to learn of the aspirations and needs of the community and seek input into the design of the proposed school.*
- *Explain the ways in which the community's input and feedback informed the school design.*
- *Require submission of resumes and/or bios of founding team members.*

...interviews:

Probe the founding team to seek evidence of authentic understanding of and partnership and engagement with the community and that the team is incorporating community voice into the plan. Since interviews may be weeks or months after submission of the written application, seek evidence of ongoing and sustained engagement. Example prompts:

- *Tell us about your approach to working with and within the community the school seeks to serve.*
- *Who are your biggest advocates in the community and how did you engage with them?*
- *How did you incorporate advice and feedback from the community, including students and families from diverse backgrounds, students with disabilities, and English learners? What changed in your school plan?*
- *How have you engaged with the community since you submitted the written application? In what ways did feedback from the community confirm or challenge your plans? How have your plans evolved based on community input?*

...ongoing touchpoints:

Seek to observe the founding team engaging directly with the community, through attending community design or advisory sessions, informational meetings, focus groups, or other in-person or virtual convenings.

STAY FOCUSED ON THE EVIDENCE

Communities are not monoliths; they encompass individuals with diverse viewpoints, experiences, and aspirations. Rarely does one group or leader speak for an entire community. Pay attention to how the founding team views its community, who they have engaged with, and the consistent and divergent ideas they have heard from the community. Having community expertise on the application review team can support effective assessment of this capacity.

EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE

- ✓ The founding team invites the authorizer to a community design session with the community. The design session is well attended and includes potential families and local businesses. This session is part of a larger design process, and during the session the team shares how they incorporated feedback from a previous session into the model.
- ✓ The founding team creates an advisory committee of community stakeholders and meets with the team regularly to share updates on school development and planning. The advisory committee provides feedback to the founding team that is visible in the school's plans.
- ✓ Voices included from the community include families of students with disabilities, English learners, and others from diverse backgrounds.
- ✓ Startup plans include regular meetings with the community.

EXAMPLES OF LACK OF EVIDENCE

- ✗ The board and/or founding team members are not personally connected with the community in any way and cannot point to evidence that they have engaged with the community about the school plan.
- ✗ The written startup plan lacks important action steps to develop the founding board and engage within the community, beyond what is minimally required through the application process.
- ✗ The school model is proven in another community, but that community's demographics are vastly different and the application provides no recognition or thought as to how the model will be adapted for the target community. The application lacks relevant data analysis as to how the school model will improve student outcomes for the particular community where they seek to locate.

For more examples of evidence (or lack of evidence) see the Sample Completed Rubric.

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HOW TO ASSESS CAPACITY 3

BUILDING A COALITION

DESCRIPTION

Ability to communicate the school mission and vision to broad audiences and to motivate stakeholders to advocate on behalf of the school.

CRITERIA

- ✓ Effectively communicate the school's mission, model, and philosophy to diverse external audiences and stakeholders.
- ✓ Build and maintain relationships across diverse interest groups to engage others in understanding, supporting, and acting on behalf of the mission.
- ✓ Present the school as a resource to enhance the community.
- ✓ Able to navigate power and influence within local systems, structures, and people.

GUIDANCE FOR...

...the written application:

Look for evidence of engagement, connections, and partnerships with stakeholders from varied experiences and sectors of the community, like business leaders, community leaders, and organizations serving the population the school aims to serve. Example prompts:

- *Identify key stakeholders you have engaged with; describe their support for the proposed school, including any commitments they have made. Stakeholders may include community leaders, business people, elected officials, organizations, and others.*
- *Include as attachments any letters of support, draft agreements, or MOUs that outline potential partnerships for things such as planning, program, or organizational design including co-location, shared services, pledges of resources, or participation on the board or other committees.*

...interviews:

Probe for communication skills; awareness of community needs, desires, and aspirations; engagement with the local school district, businesses, and government officials; and plans for future and continued engagement.

Example prompts:

- *Who else are you hoping to engage?*
- *What is your elevator pitch?*
- *Who have you spoken to who has not supported your idea and how will you navigate this?*
- *How are you leveraging your support from others so that they act on behalf of your mission?*

...ongoing touchpoints:

Seek evidence of how the coalition has grown in real time, and look for developing relationships and growing investment in the school.

STAY FOCUSED ON THE EVIDENCE

→ Not everyone supports charter schools; sometimes there may be opposition. It is important that the founding team is aware of and acknowledges opposition where it exists and at the same time has a strong enough coalition of supporters to ensure it doesn't hinder the startup and ongoing success of the school. A founding team's ability to navigate power and influence in local systems and structures is that much more important when opposition is strong.

EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE	EXAMPLES OF LACK OF EVIDENCE
✓ The application includes a robust and diverse set of letters of support. Letters offer more than just support, but also promises of partnership and resource sharing. ✓ During an interview, the founding team references key community organizations and leaders that they have engaged for advice and are able to point to specific elements of their model that have been influenced by these interactions. ✓ The applicant provides a growing list, as seen over ongoing touchpoints, of business leaders they have spoken to in the community as well as the local state representative and city council person.	✗ The founding team is bringing an educational model that is well known in other states, but not in this community. No board members are from the community nor do they have strong ties to the target community. When asked how they engaged the community in the design process, the team references informational sessions where they communicated the model but cannot point to evidence that they sought advice from others or have built ongoing relationships with leaders in the community. ✗ The founding team indicated that they planned to reach out to local businesses, faith leaders, and other local governmental leaders once the application is approved.

[For more examples of evidence \(or lack of evidence\) see the Sample Completed Rubric.](#)

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HOW TO ASSESS CAPACITY 4

REFLECTIVE LEARNING

DESCRIPTION

Active seeking of new information and stepping back from experience to understand the current situation and inform future actions.

CRITERIA

- ✓ Adept at gathering input, information, and data and using it to reflect and solve problems.
- ✓ Actively seek advice from multiple perspectives and people from multiple backgrounds; demonstrate openness to feedback, vulnerability, and curiosity of new ideas.
- ✓ Rather than settling for what is known, ask challenging questions and explore creative avenues to learn and grow in service of the mission.
- ✓ Display commitment to the professional development of all team members, in service of the mission.

GUIDANCE FOR...

...the written application:

Include questions to prompt written reflections of the process of developing the school model and other key aspects of the application. Example prompts:

- *Share your process to develop your theory of action, and how it has evolved over time.*
- *From whom did you seek advice when developing your school outcomes? How did this advice shape the final product?*
- *Provide an outline of planned professional development for board members and school leadership for the coming year. Include the rationale behind the plans.*
- *Provide examples of other schools or programs that you have researched or visited and what you have learned from them.*

...interviews and performance tasks:

Call on the team to model reflection of practice and invite openness to feedback. During an interview, observe whether the team seeks guidance from each other and/or the interview team. Example prompts:

- *Tell us about a time when the founding team disagreed on a strategy, path, or element of the model and how you moved through the conflict.*
- *Share with us schools, programs, or people you have learned from during the school development process. What have you learned and how are you using what you learned?*
- *How do you decide from whom to seek input on questions or challenges you face?*
- *What does this team need to get better at?*
- When giving the team a case study or performance task, observe whether they reflect and learn from the experience. During the task, do individuals listen with curiosity to one another? Can they articulate key takeaways or learnings from the experience and how they might apply these to their school?

...ongoing touchpoints:

Look for moments of reflection, adjustment, or honest contemplation of challenges or missteps. For instance, you may observe how the founding team engages in the learning or orientation opportunities related to the new school application.

STAY FOCUSED ON THE EVIDENCE

→ Be aware of cultural norms that may hold individuals back from displays of vulnerability. Instead, seek evidence that demonstrates the team’s commitment to learning. Does the team step back from time to time and exhibit openness to feedback? Do they listen to and learn from each other and diverse voices in the field?

EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE

- ✓ During informational sessions, founding team members ask the authorizer about key pitfalls the authorizer has observed related to school financial management. This leads to revisions on the school’s financial management plans in the written application.
- ✓ The professional development plan includes specific growth plans for individual team members, for example, the board treasurer, skilled in accounting but not familiar with school finance, plans to seek mentorship from a recently retired school finance director.
- ✓ Members of the founding team visited a school that they are using as a model. They discovered that one key aspect of the model did not align well with their target population, so they radjusted their model at the advice of founding parents.

EXAMPLES OF LACK OF EVIDENCE

- ✗ The authorizer observes a community meeting where the founding team shares the school’s mission and vision for the school. During the meeting, the team does not seek advice from the community, even after a community member speaks up to note that a similar model already exists in their community and that they really desire more diverse options.
- ✗ Neither in the written application nor during multiple interviews did the founding team provide examples of other schools that have implemented a similar educational program, even when directly asked. The authorizer is aware of a number of similar programs in the state and nationally.

For more examples of evidence (or lack of evidence) see the Sample Completed Rubric.

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HOW TO ASSESS CAPACITY 5

CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

DESCRIPTION

Curiosity and a willingness to think outside the box to identify potential solutions to challenges; critical evaluation of how to adjust to be more effective in service to students and families.

CRITERIA

- ✓ Openly consider multiple perspectives and strategies, particularly in support of students and families.
- ✓ Use identified problem-solving strategies to creatively understand problems and explore solutions.
- ✓ Can imagine multiple, sometimes innovative, ways to solve problems, take action, and overcome obstacles.
- ✓ Able to adjust to changing circumstances and see conflict and failure as opportunities for growth, iteration, and change.
- ✓ Assess data and other inputs to adjust course as necessary.

GUIDANCE FOR...

...the written application:

Look for evidence that the founding team is thoughtful about potential challenges and has an approach to overcoming them. Look for creative, new strategies for education, backed by a well-thought-out theory of action, research, logic model, and strategic design for implementation in the context of the application. Example prompts:

- *Provide contingency plans for startup challenge areas including facilities, achieving enrollment targets, or meeting fundraising goals.*
- *How would you approach a situation in which students with disabilities are enrolling at a lower than anticipated rate?*
- *How does your school solve a problem in this community?*

...interviews and performance tasks:

Seek to understand obstacles the founding team has already experienced and how they moved through them. Listen for evidence of an approach or strategies for problem-solving, which at minimum seeks multiple perspectives, is agile enough to adjust course when needed, and does not stop at simple answers. Example prompts:

- *Tell us about a time when you experienced an unforeseen obstacle, problem, or challenge in your professional careers. Talk through how you worked through these challenges and what you learned.*
- *Talk about when you have had to change an element of your proposal and how you approached this issue.*
- *Provide a scenario that shows student performance on statewide assessments and nationally-normed assessments after year one that are far below targets. What will the board and leadership do?*

...ongoing touchpoints:

Observe the team as they creatively solve challenges that emerge, especially in the early planning phase when the team often needs to adapt to unforeseen circumstances as they activate their plans. At every turn, the team should adjust to challenges; look for that ability to productively and effectively work through challenges.

STAY FOCUSED ON THE EVIDENCE

Challenges and problems in the planning phase (as well as startup and operations) are inevitable; how a team approaches the inevitable challenges and problems is what matters. Look for opportunities to understand the team’s capacity to gather and absorb critical information and use that to move through challenges beyond the surface-level.

Applicants may not be excited to share with the authorizer, particularly during the application phase, the challenges or tough decisions they have faced or are facing. Be aware of that tendency for applicants to seek to show the authorizer that they have it all together, know what they are doing, and are not struggling. It is important to make the founding team comfortable and honestly share what information you are seeking. Share that you know that there are and will be no shortage of challenges, problems, and struggles as the team moves through the planning, development, startup, and operation of a school. You want to know that they can effectively work through those challenges. It can be useful to ask them how they have solved problems in other areas of their professional careers to direct the questions more to their capacity of problem solving and less to the challenges they may be facing now.

EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE	EXAMPLES OF LACK OF EVIDENCE
✓ The founding team has analyzed the state’s charter school law and thoughtfully questions whether the typical governance structure is legally required or something that has become unquestioned practice over time. They are exploring different approaches to governance that better suits their mission and vision. ✓ Midway through the school’s charter development process, the team loses out on a key centrally-located facility. Rather than move to another community, the team comes up with a creative co-location solution with a community health clinic that has extra space to rent.	✗ The written application acknowledges that teacher hiring is likely to be a challenge given the specialized licensing requirements their model demands and the current state of teacher hiring statewide. The written application provides no solutions to this challenge. In a subsequent interview, the founding team indicates that they are going to “outwork” other schools in attracting teachers, but have no concrete or creative approaches to addressing the challenge. ✗ Throughout the application process, when given multiple opportunities to share challenges and their approaches to solving problems, the team has continually referenced that they meet to discuss the challenge and come up with a solution. When pushed, they did not once share that they sought out outside or varied perspectives nor that they had a particular problem-solving strategy that they implemented.

[For more examples of evidence \(or lack of evidence\) see the Sample Completed Rubric.](#)

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HOW TO ASSESS CAPACITY 6

EFFECTIVE DECISION MAKING

DESCRIPTION

Appropriate assessment of situations, ensuring consideration of various points of view and data; the courage to face decisions and thoughtfully weigh options while keeping student needs at the center.

CRITERIA

- ✓ Thoughtfully consider information and data—including multiple perspectives from diverse stakeholders—in actions and decisions, considering potential benefits and drawbacks with full awareness of consequences.
- ✓ Confident about making challenging decisions and changing course when necessary.
- ✓ Able to assess when to make principled versus pragmatic decisions.
- ✓ Adept at prioritizing decisions, actively managing the relationship between risk and reward, and knowing when to bring others into the process.
- ✓ Center students in all decisions.

GUIDANCE FOR...

...the written application:

Seek to understand the rationale for developing the school model and business plan, to look for evidence that the team has gathered data and information from diverse sources and weighed decisions with care and awareness of impact. Review the business plan, budget narrative, and budget assumptions closely for resource allocation decisions that align well with the mission implementation strategies. Example prompts:

- *Describe your approach to making key decisions during the startup year.*
- *What foundational values inform your decisions?*

...interviews and performance tasks:

Seek insight into who is involved in decision making, what information the team will seek and from whom, and how the team approaches challenges. Asking scenario questions can be particularly effective. Example prompts:

- *Walk through a major decision you had to make as a team and how you came to your ultimate decision. What factors did you consider? What were (or might be) unintended consequences of that decision?*
- *How do you bring those most impacted into the process of making decisions?*
- *Provide a scenario in which enrollment in the fall of the school's inaugural year is 15% below budgeted projections. The team must determine its response to this situation.*

...ongoing touchpoints:

It is especially useful to observe effective decision making during the development process, when the founding team demonstrates how well they are able to formulate a plan and translate that plan into decisive action. Attend one or more board meetings during the planning phase to observe how the board makes decisions. Look for thoughtful iterations on the team's plans, ask when they adjusted course, and seek clarity as to why this shift may have occurred.

STAY FOCUSED ON THE EVIDENCE

→ It is important not to let your agreement or disagreement with a decision bias your assessment of this capacity. What matters here is the decision-making process the team uses, the voices included, the team’s consideration of the impact of their decisions, and, longer term, the results of those decisions.

EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE



The application’s startup plan is well-developed and during the interview, multiple people on the founding team reference steps in the startup plan and how the team will divide up the work.



In the application, the team lays out options for facilities and demonstrates awareness of the pros and cons of the options, balancing cost, location, transportation needs, and alignment with mission. During an interview, the team shared an update regarding the diverse stakeholder input they have gathered and the multiple financial scenarios they have developed to support their decision making.

EXAMPLES OF LACK OF EVIDENCE



During an interview, when asked why the team is implementing a specific education model and how this will be most effective for the target population, it becomes clear that the model was chosen because of one founding member’s experience with it, and the team cannot speak to its effectiveness with the target population.



The founding team is applying to open in less than one year, even though they do not have a sustainable budget with their current growth plan and have not engaged the community in their plans.

[For more examples of evidence \(or lack of evidence\) see the Sample Completed Rubric.](#)

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HOW TO ASSESS CAPACITY 7

RELATIONSHIP WITH SUCCESS AND FAILURE

DESCRIPTION

Demonstrated history of success in a variety of endeavors, large and small; experience with failure and demonstrated ability to learn, grow, and adapt.

CRITERIA

- ✓ Regardless of the sector, task, or organization, have demonstrated success at achieving goals.
- ✓ Remain committed to achieving the mission through challenges and obstacles.
- ✓ Honest and open about past successes and failures; identify learning from both, exhibiting maturity from overcoming challenges.
- ✓ Reflect on risks taken in the past and mitigate against repeat negative outcomes.
- ✓ Exhibit courage to take calculated risks and are prepared to respond to multiple potential outcomes.

GUIDANCE FOR...

...the written application:

Look for successes in the founding team's resumes and bios. Ensure that the team is composed of individuals with diverse experience in multiple fields that are in some way relevant to the mission or education. Resumes and bios point to this success, regardless of sector, cause, or magnitude. Example prompt:

Require submission of resumes and/or bios of founding team members.

...interviews and performance tasks:

Ask questions and craft performance tasks to assess comfort with both success and failure and how the team applies learning from both. Applicants should recognize they may not have all the answers at the time of the application, and an interview can be a time to discuss these challenges openly. Example prompts:

- *Share a time when you have successfully created or completed something. What did you learn?*
- *Share a time when you struggled or failed at something. What did you learn?*
- *Why do you believe you're best suited to start and operate a charter school?*
- *How does the team support one another through successes and failures?*
- Provide a scenario from a charter school that closed. Ask the team to discuss what information would be useful to understand the causes of that closure and what learnings they can apply to their school.

...ongoing touchpoints:

Create space for vulnerability and honest reflection of success and failure that can facilitate a more honest conversation about how the team has responded in moments of achievement and challenge. Assess how the team responds to successes and failures throughout the length of the charter application process.

STAY FOCUSED ON THE EVIDENCE

→ Understand that it may be challenging for applicants to share their failures: they are trying to demonstrate that they know what they are doing, not that they are having challenges and have experienced failures. While any authorizer certainly appreciates individuals who have a track record of success, a team’s response to failure is more important than the failure itself. Additionally, if the school becomes operational, it is important for school leaders and the authorizer to have open communication about successes and challenges in real time.

EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE

- ✓ Multiple team members speak openly about times when they did not succeed at an endeavor, what they learned, and how that learning is being applied to the current application.
- ✓ A founding team is applying for a second time, and the application demonstrates material changes that incorporate feedback from the first round application.

EXAMPLES OF LACK OF EVIDENCE

- ✗ During an interview, the team has difficulty recognizing a failure in community engagement, and is quick to point to external factors as the main cause for the failure to build strong partnerships with community leaders.
- ✗ While the founding team includes an individual with charter finance experience, this person was part of a school that recently closed due to financial challenges. When prompted to reflect on that experience, the individual was unable to provide concrete reasons for or reflections on what went wrong.

[For more examples of evidence \(or lack of evidence\) see the Sample Completed Rubric.](#)

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HOW TO ASSESS CAPACITY 8

TEAM AWARENESS

DESCRIPTION

Ability to build and sustain a team committed and able to bring the mission to life.

CRITERIA

- ✓ Build collaborative, inclusive team environments that support a focused internal coalition able to execute on the mission.
- ✓ Cultivate an environment where people, including students, are valued, developed, and motivated to work toward the mission.
- ✓ Able to build and maintain a diverse team with complementary and relevant skills and expertise and utilize the team's strengths at the right time and place.
- ✓ Able to identify individual and overall team strengths and weaknesses and understand impact on others across contexts, especially with community, students, and families.
- ✓ Aware of and tend to all potential conflicts of interest and nepotism, while also navigating local context.

GUIDANCE FOR...

...the written application:

Seek evidence of team awareness in the leadership and governance plans and startup plan, including professional development of board and leadership, priorities in hiring, possible conflicts of interest, onboarding, and ongoing organizational structures to support sustainability like succession planning. Look for evidence that the team demographics, experiences, and commitment to community represents the communities they seek to serve. Example prompts:

- *Provide a draft conflict of interest policy.*
- *Provide a draft professional development plan for founding board members and leadership.*

...interviews:

Assess how well the team has coalesced to develop its first output—the application. Assess how well the team knows each other's strengths and expertise, and how they communicate with each other and share in answering questions. Example prompts:

- *How did you come together as a team?*
- *What is your approach to building a collaborative and inclusive team environment?*
- *What are the most important capacities of the school leader of this particular school?*
- *How do you approach conflict as a team?*

...ongoing touchpoints:

Observe how the team interacts with one another, and how oriented the team is toward listening to one another and respecting perspectives and contributions to the mission. Look for moments where the team shares stories of bonding and exhibits shared pride in development of the application.

STAY FOCUSED ON THE EVIDENCE

→ This capacity is not about the specific people who are currently on the team, but about their individual and collective strengths and gaps and their ability to recognize those. It is also about how the team welcomes new members with intentionality, remains open to diverse perspectives, experiences, and needs, and creates a sustainable team environment. Be careful not to be overly seduced by big names or resumes of team members or to discount the individual who's been out of the working world while caring for children and engaging in their community. Both perspectives and experiences are valuable for a founding team, and the team dynamic is an important element of success.

EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE



The school model requires expertise in a particular approach to special education programming. The team currently has minimal experience in this area but presents a detailed plan for both recruiting expertise for board membership and contracting with a local organization that can provide guidance.



During multiple interviews, board members demonstrate a strong rapport with one another, a willingness to challenge each others' ideas, and a practice of listening to each others' perspectives. They explicitly communicate respect for one another and a commitment to being "in this together."

EXAMPLES OF LACK OF EVIDENCE



The founding team brought on a new member just before submitting the written application; however, that member stepped down from the team within two months. The authorizer learned that the founding team did not have an onboarding process to effectively welcome this new team member nor orient them to the project.



The founding team includes a husband and wife team. While this is not explicitly prohibited in charter statute, the team had not considered the potential challenges or conflicts this would bring. Months after the authorizer brought this to the team's attention, they still had not engaged in a discussion about this or developed a policy to address actual or perceived conflicts of interest.

[For more examples of evidence \(or lack of evidence\) see the Sample Completed Rubric.](#)

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HOW TO ASSESS CAPACITY 9

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND EXECUTION

DESCRIPTION

Know-how needed to start and operate a school; the capacity to execute on knowledge and skills at the right time to achieve maximum benefit.

CRITERIA

- ✓ Relevant knowledge, skills, and ability to execute in areas of education, finance, and governance.
- ✓ Experience and expertise in the particular educational model being proposed.
- ✓ Able to apply experience and expertise in charter school leadership or other fields to the development and operation of this charter school.
- ✓ Relevant skills in school operations; can effectively navigate the public systems of compliance and reporting.

GUIDANCE FOR...

...the written application:

At a minimum, request resumes and bios of founding team members and assess for specific expertise in the areas of charter finance, governance, and the educational model being proposed. Additional relevant areas of expertise, especially based on the school's model, includes special education and multi-language learner support. Example prompts:

- *Explain how this team has the relevant skills, knowledge, and ability to develop, start up, and operate a charter school.*
- *What additional skills, knowledge, or experience are you seeking to add to the team?*

...interviews:

Ask questions about the team's experiences and how they apply to this proposal, including for team members who have experience outside of education. Probe whether founding team members will continue to have an ongoing role in the development and operations of the school. Example prompts:

- *Share how your experience in [a specific field, organization, or industry] makes you well-suited to support the development of this charter school?*
- *Who will hold critical roles in the school going forward?*
- *Discuss how your governance model, committees, and systems will help ensure people with the relevant expertise and experience are well-utilized by the school.*
- *What new skills, knowledge, or experience will you look to bring on to the board once the school becomes operational?*

...performance tasks:

Provide challenging scenarios related to school finance, governance, operations, or academic performance that can provide opportunities for the team to highlight their knowledge and skills. For example:

Provide a scenario in which enrollment in the fall of the school's inaugural year is 15% below budgeted projections. Assess the team's understanding of school finance as they seek to develop a plan of action to address the challenge. Such a scenario will provide opportunities to assess not only knowledge and skills, but also other capacities outlined above.

...ongoing touchpoints:

Pay attention to how the founding team evolves over time, including if and how individuals with new and diverse skills, knowledge, and perspectives are brought on to the team to address any areas of need.

STAY FOCUSED ON THE EVIDENCE

Take care not to overemphasize status-centered experiences like prestigious degrees or C-suites corporate experience or underestimate practical life experience and skills of parents, small business owners, or other potential community team members. For instance, an individual's experience running their own small business might be more applicable to charter school financial management than the experience of a CFO in a large corporation. Assess evidence in terms of how the team will be able to apply and execute on its knowledge and skills.

EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE



A computer science school's founding team has developed a detailed table of relevant experience and expertise noting founding team knowledge of key areas including leadership in a local engineering firm, charter finance, previous charter school leadership, and human resources. The team also names areas where they want to continue to develop and prioritize these in their board recruitment planning materials.



When asked during an interview who will hold roles into the future, several founding members point to their interest in board leadership and school operations. One individual points to their relevant experience starting and running a small business as useful to supporting the school as it launches.

EXAMPLES OF LACK OF EVIDENCE



The founding team of a college prep high school is missing representation of the higher education community or someone who has experience working with high school students on post-secondary planning. When probed on the school's approach to supporting students' paths to college, the founding team was unable to provide an overarching philosophy, nor a specific plan. Further, the staffing plan lacked any evidence-based strategies for recruiting a diverse team with complementary skills.



The team is exploring as a primary option facilities development in partnership with a local nonprofit. This would require substantial financing, coordination among the parties, legal requirements, etc. The current team includes no one with background or experience in these areas, nor a plan to bring on anyone with such expertise.

[For more examples of evidence \(or lack of evidence\) see the Sample Completed Rubric.](#)

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Authorizers have gotten a lot right in vetting new schooling opportunities. Yet, in many places the application process is too bureaucratic and onerous, and privileges particular kinds of models and operators.

NACSA conducted research during 2022 to better understand the gateways and barriers to more great schools for communities. We met with authorizers, school founders, support organizations, consultants, and other stakeholders. Together, we developed [recommendations](#) on how the new school application process should evolve, building on the strengths of authorizing practice cultivated over two decades as well as transforming weaknesses.

To activate these recommendations, NACSA convened 20 authorizers from around the country during 2023 as part of our Leadership in Action cohort. With this group, we engaged in research and discussion about revising the new school application process, including the recommendation to shift rigor from paper to people. We sought to understand the capacities of a founding team that are “most important to the successful launching and running of a quality charter school.” In addition to working with these authorizers, NACSA surveyed school founders, school incubator organizations, and other charter school stakeholders; and reviewed research and wisdom on successful school leaders and teams from the entrepreneurial, business, and philanthropic communities.

We are grateful to the innumerable authorizers, school founders, school support organizations, and others who have contributed to this effort. We give special thanks to: BES, Charter School Growth Fund, New Schools Venture Fund, SUNY Charter Schools Institute and school leaders, and all the authorizers, school leaders and founders, charter school advocates, Leadership in Action cohort members, and leadership supporters who participated in focus groups, interviews, and formal and informal conversations and provided feedback on these resources.

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