Minnesota Office of Charter Authorizing | www.themocha.org

New Charter School Letter of Intent
Review and Evaluation

The sole purpose of the Minnesota Office of Charter Authorizing (MOChA) is to authorize charter schools in Minnesota through the legal instrumentality of chartering as defined in Minnesota Statutes §124E, *supporting and advancing the purposes of charter school law*[1] by serving as a single-purpose authorizer whose mission is to improve *all* pupil learning and *all* student achievement.

As required in Statute, MOChA - a single-purpose authorizer - does not limit applications it solicits, considers, or approved to any single curriculum, learning program or method. Rather, following NACSA's *Principles and Standards*, considers diverse educational philosophies, approaches, and school models.

The MOChA board is guided by and committed to fulfill the three Core Principles espoused by NACSA:
1. Maintain high standards for schools
2. Uphold school autonomy
3. Protect student and public interests

MOChA's rigorous approval criteria is aligned to NACSA's *Principles and Standards*:
- Requires all applicants to present a clear and compelling mission, a quality educational program, a solid business plan, effective governance and management structures and systems, founding team members demonstrating diverse and necessary capabilities, and clear evidence of the applicant's capacity to execute its plan successfully.
- Establishes distinct requirements and criteria for applicants who are existing school operators or replicators.
- Establishes distinct requirements and criteria for applicants proposing to contract with education service or management providers.

Likewise, decision making is multifaceted and rigorous, aligned to NACSA's *Principles and Standards*:

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[1]   MOChA's standards for quality charter school authorizing are based NACSA's *Principles and Standards.*

- Grants charters only to applicants that have demonstrated competence and capacity to succeed in all aspects of the school, consistent with the stated approval criteria.
- Rigorously evaluates each application through thorough review of the written proposal, a substantive in-person interview with each qualified applicant, and other due diligence to examine the applicant's experience and capacity, conducted by knowledgeable and competent evaluators.
- Engages, for both written application reviews and applicant interviews, highly competent teams of internal and external evaluators with relevant educational, organizational (governance and management), financial, and legal expertise, as well as thorough understanding of the essential principles of charter school autonomy and accountability.
- 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.
- Ensures that the application-review process and decision making are free of conflicts of interest, and requires full disclosure of any potential or perceived conflicts of interest between reviewers or decision makers and applicants.
- Approves applications that comprise a detailed plan for school opening, operation, and fiscal stability, with little substantive work left for later development.

The application cycle consists of the following steps:

1. MOChA will review the Letter of Intent within 15 days of receipt. MOChA will review the Letter of Intent within 30 days of receipt.

2. MOChA determines potential mission alignment and capacity. The Letter of Intent should not be an initial exploration of ideas but rather a *summary of a thoughtful and cogent plan for how the proposed school will develop and implement a high-quality program for students.* If a Letter of Intent fails to demonstrate alignment with the MOChA vision, mission and authorizing priorities, MOChA staff will notify the founding team that the school would not qualify for MOChA authorization.

3. If the Letter of Intent shows the potential for the new school to match the vision, mission and authorizing standards of MOChA and satisfies the evaluation thresholds, the applicants will be invited to an interview.

4. Initial Interview: The interview is an opportunity for the Founders to articulate the need and plan for a new school as well as their capacity and ability to execute a plan. There is not a predetermined set of questions.

5. Based on the Letter of Intent and interview, MOChA will post a Denial Notice or an Invitation to complete a New Charter School Application within 10 days of the interview.

Feedback to Founding Teams
Whether Founders are invited to submit a New School Application (based on the Letter of Intent and interview), MOChA will furnish a copy of consolidated reviewer comments and interview notes (if applicable).

Evaluation Rubric
MOChA utilizes an evaluation team comprised of authorizing program staff, independent external evaluators, and at times other MOChA community members deemed appropriate based on their unique

skill sets and experiences to conduct a comprehensive review of the documents. Each member of the evaluation team uses the adopted scoring rubric that follows to provide feedback and make a recommendation as to whether or not the materials merit further consideration and possible approval.

An odd number and minimum of three reviewers will receive inter-rater reliability training prior to reviewing applications. Reviewers are selected based on expertise and experience.

Each reviewer will independently provide a numeric rating for all sections of the application elements. A meeting of the evaluation team is convened and individual team members share their ratings for each section of the application. The evaluation team then reaches a consensus rating for each section.

Approval is based these requirements:
- Overall application consensus rating: 3.0 or above
- All sections require a consensus rating of 2.0 or above

MOChA reserves the right to deny an application for any reason it deems appropriate.

Name of Applicant (Primary):	
Name of School(s):	
Name of MOChA Reviewer:	
Date(s) of Review:	

Instructions for Application Reviewers
Please review the following criteria to rate applicant responses. Within each section, specific criteria define the expectations.

Rating	Characteristics
4 = Exceeds the Standard	The response inspires confidence in the applicant's understanding of key issues. Information supplied is accurate, appears realistic, and responds to all application elements. Strengths are numerous and response is of sufficient quality and detail to suggest that a New Charter School Application would lead to the development of an exemplary charter school.
3 = Meets the Standard	The response addresses elements in most areas and strengths outweigh weaknesses and a New Charter School Application would lead to the development of a high-quality charter school. Weaknesses, if present, are minor and unlikely to adversely impact the school's ability to develop and operate successfully.
2 = Partially Meets the Standard	The response meets the criteria in some respects but has substantial gaps in a number of areas and lacks detail. The response may contain incorrect information, appear overly optimistic/simplistic, or fail to respond to all application elements. While some strengths may be present, they are outweighed by weaknesses which appear likely to adversely

	impact the ability to develop and operate a high-quality charter school.
1 = Does Not Meet the Standard	The response is incomplete, inaccurate, underdeveloped, unrealistic, demonstrates a lack of preparation, or otherwise raises substantial concerns about the viability of the plan or the applicant's ability to carry it out. Weaknesses outweigh any strengths and make it appear unlikely that the plan presented would result in a high-quality charter school.

Disclosure	
MOChA Board of Directors, staff, and advisors are required to disclose any conflicts of interest. Annually or when seated, employed, or contracted, all individuals are required to sign the Conflict of Interest Policy. Moreover, to ensure all applications and other materials submitted to MOChA for review or consideration are fairly evaluated, reviewers are required to identify any conflicts of interest. Prior to reviewing these materials, please determine if you have a conflict of interest and, if so, apprise the Executive Director or Board Chair. By signing and submitting this review, you assure no conflict exists.	
Signature	Date

LETTER OF INTENT NARRATIVE	RATING & COMMENTS (Please cite application page numbers as appropriate.)
I. Clarity	
• Responses are complete, precise, articulate, thoughtful and cogent	1 2 3 4
Comments/Suggested Interview Questions:	
II. Experience and Expertise	
• Founders have experience, expertise, and capacity to lead and then guide the effort • Founders have a clear understanding of their roles (governance) and requirements (legal)	1 2 3 4
Comments/Suggested Interview Questions:	
III. Comprehension	
• Founders have a clear understanding of the proposed learning program • There is a broad distribution of understanding within the group, i.e., all members are engaged and knowledgeable • The need is well defined in reference to available school options and performance as well as research for the learning	1 2 3 4

model • The demand is supported, including community input (e.g., meetings, surveys, etc.) • Clear understanding of the Statutory Purpose(s), especially improving achievement for *all* students	
Comments/Suggested Interview Questions:	

IV.	Capacity and Commitment	
	• The founders convey a genuine interest and commitment to undertaking required to open a high-quality school • The founders understand the time, effort and commitment required to open a high-quality school	1 2 3 4
Comments/Suggested Interview Questions:		

V.	Additional Information

Overall Rating	
Rating Points: (Add the points for each item in this section)	
Average Rating for Section: (Divide the total points by the number of rated items)	
Source: Individual ratings (1-4) for each of the items in this section	