



Guidance on Forming a Charter School in Minnesota

Getting Started

Charter school developers should have a full understanding of Minnesota’s Charter School Law – [Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 124E](#). This is the first step in exploring the creation of a charter school. Charter schools are public, nonsectarian schools open to all students. The process for forming a new charter school is specified in Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.06.

Per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.06, subdivision 1(a), the developer(s) of a charter school must be either a licensed teacher under [section 122A.18, subdivision 1](#), or a group of individuals that includes one or more licensed teachers under [section 122A.18, subdivision 1](#).

Be prepared to collect evidence that supports need and demand for the proposed charter school. “Need” means the reasons the proposed school is necessary in the community to be served. The need for a charter school can be demonstrated by, for example, understanding and articulating why existing school options in the community are insufficient or inadequate. “Demand” means the desire of prospective families to enroll their children in the proposed school’s education program. Demand can be evidenced by, for example, feedback from listening sessions or survey results from prospective families. Example documentation of demand includes, but is not limited to, sign-in sheets or attendance lists from informational meetings or listening sessions, signed petition forms in support of the proposed school, and completed surveys from prospective families.

Locate an Authorizer

Before forming a charter school, the school developers must apply to be chartered by a State-approved authorizer. The charter school developer(s) should seek an authorizer whose mission aligns with the proposed school’s mission. A list of State-approved authorizers may be found on [Minnesota Department of Education's \(MDE\) Organization Reference Glossary webpage](#).

Every five years, MDE administers the Minnesota Authorizer Performance Evaluation System (MAPES) to evaluate authorizer performance. MAPES reports, as well as other authorizer reports, can be found on [MDE's website](#) by selecting the authorizer’s name on the left side of the page.

Complete Application with Authorizer

Once charter school developers have located a potential authorizer, the next step is to contact the authorizer to learn more about their organization and alignment of the proposed school’s mission to the authorizer’s mission.

Developers will need to complete the proposed authorizer's new charter school application and process, being cognizant of authorizer and statutory timelines. Each authorizer has its own set of timelines and expectations for submission of charter school proposals.

Affidavit Submission to MDE

Once an authorizer has approved a new charter school's application, the authorizer submits a new charter school affidavit to MDE. An authorizer must file an affidavit at least 14 months before July 1 of the year the new charter school plans to serve students. For example, an affidavit would have to be submitted by May 3, 2021 to serve students in fall of 2022.

Charter School Contract/Charter Number

Once the commissioner approves the affidavit, an authorizer must execute a statutorily compliant contract with the school within 45 business days and send the contract to MDE within 10 business days of execution.

Once the authorizer's contract is verified to be statutorily compliant, it will be accepted by MDE. The charter school will then be issued a charter number/local educational agency (LEA) number. After receiving a charter/LEA number, the charter school has all the powers and responsibilities of a public charter school in Minnesota. MDE emails additional information to authorizers and charter school developers including New School Next Steps and New Charter School Opening Guidance during this time.

Federal Charter Schools Program Grant

A charter school is eligible to apply for a [Federal Charter Schools Program \(CSP\) Grant](#) once the affidavit is approved. There are typically two start-up grant competitions held each year. MDE staff will communicate directly with eligible schools regarding the grant round opportunities. More information about the grant competition is available on [MDE's CSP Grant Competition webpage](#). A start-up subgrant provides funds for up to one year of planning and two years of implementation (operation). Most new charter school developers find this source of revenue fundamental in starting a charter school.

Readiness to Open

Each authorizer has "ready-to-open" standards that are part of the authorizer's oversight and evaluation process contained in its commissioner-approved authorizing plan and which may be stipulated in the charter contract. It is important for the charter school to fully understand these standards and work to fulfill them in the timeframe specified by the authorizer. The authorizer will determine the school's readiness to open based on these standards. In the event the school does not meet the authorizer's ready-to-open standards, the authorizer may postpone the school's opening per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.06, subdivision 3(h).

MDE has established a Charter School Boot Camp to prepare charter school leaders for opening a charter school. Find more information on [MDE's Charter School Boot Camp webpage](#).

Resources

- Additional information pertaining to Minnesota charter schools may be found on the [Charter Schools webpage](#) of MDE's website.
- When developing the charter school budget, the [Interactive Projection Models](#) within Data and Analytics may be a helpful tool (Home > Data Center > Data Reports and Analytics > School Finance Spreadsheets > Charter Schools: Category "Charter Schools", Subcategory "Interactive Projection Models").
- Additional organizations with guidance and resources that may be helpful for new charter school developers include the [Minnesota Association of Charter Schools](#) (MACS), the [Minnesota Association of Charter School Authorizers](#) (MACSA), [Great MN Schools](#) and [Minnesota Council of Nonprofits](#).