## Tool 7: New Charter Application Guidance

In creating a new charter school application, authorizers should consult section 1719-A of the PA School Code, which outlines information that must be included in any new charter application. Materials that authorizers request in a New Charter Application should also provide the review team with information to evaluate whether the proposed charter school will align with the district’s performance framework. Most charter application forms also include a set of prompts that are used to create an “application narrative,” a list of supplemental documents and/or forms applicants must submit, and a set of initial assurances to be signed. Some authorizers include an additional section or addendum specifically for existing charter schools in which applicants provide information on the performance of their existing charter schools.

The list below shows one way to organize the narrative portion of a charter application so that it aligns with the sample performance framework in this Toolkit.[[1]](#footnote-1) Each section of the application should have a list of prompts that applicants will use to create their application narrative. Below, we have only provided sample prompts for the equity sections of the application; however, district staff, school board members, and legal counsel should collaborate on creating prompts for the remaining sections. Topics may be reorganized. Each category and prompt in the application should map to a component of the performance framework.

Application Narrative Outline

* + 1. **Educational program design and capacity**

**Subsections:** *Authorizers should create specific prompts for each subsection.*

* Mission, Vision, and Program Overview
* Curriculum and Instruction Design
* Student Performance Standards
* High School Graduation Requirements (High School Only)
* School Calendar and Schedule
* Supplemental Programming
* Parent, Family, and Community Engagement
  + 1. **Equity**

**Subsections**

* Supporting All Students

Possible Prompts:

* + 1. Describe the proposed charter school’s methods and strategies for identifying and serving students with disabilities (both low and high incidence), including but not limited to students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or Section 504 plans, in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations. Include proposed processes for identification, providing a continuum of services, and assessment and progress monitoring.
    2. Explain why the proposed curriculum is likely to successfully differentiate education for students with disabilities. Cite research or evidence that supports the appropriateness of the school’s approach to serving students with disabilities.
    3. Describe the processes and procedures that the proposed school will employ to identify, assess, and serve students who are English Learners, including a description of the Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP), rationale for the LIEP choice, progress monitoring processes, and exit criteria.
    4. Describe how the charter school will meet the needs of at-risk students, including students experiencing homelessness and system-involved students, as well as students who struggle academically. Include school-based supports, potential alternative placements, electronic support, and any other means by which at-risk or academically struggling students’ needs will be met. Include a description of how students will be assessed.
    5. Identify school staff and external/contracted professionals and the responsibilities each will carry out related to special education, ELs, and other at-risk students.
    6. Explain how this section of the application was developed, including the relevant experience of current members of the applicant group in this area and the use of third-party expertise if applicable.
* Student Recruitment, Enrollment, and Retention

Possible Prompts:

* + 1. Provide the enrollment capacity of the school, including grade distribution.
    2. Describe the student population that the proposed charter school would serve and the needs of that population.
    3. Discuss the reason for selecting the community(ies), the charter applicant’s ability to serve this community, and its current connections to the community.
    4. Address the charter school’s anticipated racial and ethnic composition, special education, EL, and free/reduced lunch eligibility rates, and explain how these rates compare to those of the district(s) located in the area that the school plans to serve. Explain the types of recruitment efforts that will be employed to ensure that the proposed charter school’s enrollment of at-risk populations will mirror that of the district(s) located in the area that the school plans to serve.
    5. Provide data to support enrollment projections and evidence that the school will be able to meet and sustain them over the term of the charter.
    6. Describe how the school will publicize and market its program to a broad cross-section of prospective students throughout the district(s) located in the area that the school plans to serve, including families that may be less informed about options. Include specific outreach strategies such as partnerships with nonprofits, community organizations, parent groups, other educational institutions/providers, mass media outlets, translation services, etc.
    7. Describe the application, enrollment, and admission processes at the charter school, both prior to the beginning of the school year and throughout the academic year.
* Student Discipline

Possible Prompts:

* + 1. Explain the proposed charter school’s guiding philosophy around discipline.
    2. Describe the creation of the school’s Code of Conduct and the steps that were taken to develop it, including input gathered from stakeholders in the proposed community and how the Code of Conduct aligns with the proposed charter school’s mission and state and federal law.
    3. Explain whether the charter school’s disciplinary policies and practices are limited to the authority legally granted to schools and protect students’ rights under state and federal law.
    4. Explain what due process schools will provide prior to the administration of any exclusionary discipline.
    5. Describe how the school will consider the needs and rights of students with disabilities in disciplinary actions and proceedings, as well as who will be responsible for ensuring compliance with federal laws and regulations governing the discipline of students with disabilities, including conducting and documenting manifestation determination reviews.
    6. Discuss how the schools will advise parents/guardians of students struggling with academic, social, or behavioral performance.
    7. Describe alternative placement procedures for students. Include a description of alternative placement procedures for students with disabilities and other needs.
    8. Describe how the school will assess and systematically address any disparities in implementation of discipline practices among student groups.

1. **Operations and Capacity**

**Subsections:** *Authorizers should create specific prompts for each subsection.*

* + - * + Governance
        + Staffing
        + Facilities and Transportation – Charter school applicants should be prompted to explain the accessibility of their facilities, regarding both location in the community, including access to the school via public or other form of transportation, and whether there are facilities issues that may create barriers to any students with disabilities.

1. **Finances and Capacity**

**Subsections:** *Authorizers should create specific prompts for each subsection.*

* + - * + Financial Plan
        + Financial Management Capacity

### **Charter Applications: Examples**

Table 7.1 shows how three authorizers embed equity throughout the narrative of their charter applications. Areas that align to the equity-focused domains in the sample performance framework are highlighted in red and marked with a star(\*). This section [overview](#_New_Charter_Application_1) includes links to the full applications among the external examples.

Table 7.1: Examples of Components in a Charter Application Narrative (equity-focused areas highlighted in red and indicated with \*)

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Pittsburgh public schools | school district of philadelphia | massachusetts department of edUCATION |
| **I. Mission, Purpose and Needs, Marketing Data**   1. Mission 2. Purpose and Needs\* 3. Marketing Data\*   **II. Strategic Planning**   1. Annual Measurable Goals & Strategies 2. Best Practices and Habits of Practice 3. School Improvement Planning   **III. Management Plan**   1. Admissions Policy and Criteria\* 2. Student Discipline Policy and Expulsion Criteria\* 3. Governance (Board) 4. Plan for Staff, Parent and Community Involvement and the General Public Life of the School 5. Description of How Charter Will Manage and Administer the School 6. Descriptions of Staff Conditions, Work, and Professional Development   **IV. Education Plan**   1. Education Program 2. Accountability, Student Assessment and Evaluation 3. Meeting the Needs of At-Risk Students, Bilingual Students, and Students with Disabilities\*   **V. Operations**   1. Budget and Fiscal Operations 2. Facilities, Transportation, and Food Service 3. Liabilities, Insurance, and Risk Management 4. Legal Issues\*   **VI. Personnel/Leaders**   1. Information on Key Personnel | **I. Academic Program**   * 1. Educational Philosophy   2. Curriculum & Educational Plan   3. Diverse Learners\*   4. Extracurricular Activities   5. Student Supports & Services\*   **II. Organizational Capacity and Compliance**   1. Founding Applicant/Coalition 2. Governance 3. CMO and Third Party Service Providers 4. Dissolution Plan 5. School Leadership 6. Talent Acquisition, Development, and Evaluation 7. Staff Benefits 8. School Operations 9. Student Discipline, Code of Conduct, and Due Process\* 10. Charter School Safety Plan 11. Insurance Coverage   **III. Community Engagement, Support, and Impact**   1. Targeted Community\* 2. Recruitment, Admissions, & Enrollment\* 3. Parent/Guardian/Family Engagement   **IV. Finance and Operations**  **V. Facilities**  **VI. Existing Charter School Operators (if Applicable)**   1. Track Record of Successful Outcomes & Compliance 2. Current Capacity for Replication 3. Closed, Non-Renewed, Revoked, and Surrendered Schools; Terminated Contracts; Expired Charters 4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Programming Adaptations for New Local Content 5. Long-Term Growth 6. Serving as a Model for Replication | 1. **Faithfulness to Charter** 2. Mission 3. Key Design Elements 4. Description of the Community(ies) to Be Served\* 5. Enrollment and Recruitment\* 6. **Academic Success** 7. Overview of Program Delivery 8. Curriculum and Instruction 9. Student Performance, Assessment, and Program Evaluation 10. Supports for Diverse Learners\* 11. Culture and Family Engagement      1. **Organizational Viability** 2. Capacity 3. Governance 4. Management 5. Facilities and Student Transportation 6. School Finances 7. Action Plan |
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1. This tool is based on the [NACSA Model Charter School Application](https://www.qualitycharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NACSA_Core_Resources_Charter_School_Application.pdf). National Association of Charter School Authorizers. (2018). Core resource: Charter school application. Retrieved from <https://www.qualitycharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NACSA_Core_Resources_Charter_School_Application.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)