

**U.S. Department of Education - EDCAPS
G5-Technical Review Form (New)**

Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Arkansas Public School Resource Center (U282A180006)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	15	11
Objectives		
1. Objectives	20	14
Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants		
1. Subgrant Applicants	15	12
State Plan		
1. State Plan	20	20
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	10
Parent and Community Involvement		
1. Involvement	10	6
Flexibility		
1. Flexibility	5	4
Sub Total	100	77
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
Equitable Financing		
1. Equitable Financing	6	4
Sub Total	6	4
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
Charter School Facilities		
1. Charter School Facilities	6	5
Sub Total	6	5
Competitive Preference Priority 4		
Best Practices to Improve Struggling School/LEAs		
1. Struggling Schools	3	2
Sub Total	3	2
Competitive Preference Priority 5		
Serving At-Risk Students		

1. At-Risk Students	3	2
Sub Total	3	2
Competitive Preference Priority 6		
Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing		
1. Best Practices	5	4
Sub Total	5	4
Total	123	94

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - Panel 1 - Arkansas - 1: 84.282A

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: Arkansas Public School Resource Center (U282A180006)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

Reader's Score: 11

Sub Question

1. (1) The extent to which the proposed project demonstrates a rationale

Strengths:

The logic model on e40 makes broad use of Arkansas Public School Resource Center's existing assets, including its successful recruitment of out-of-state charter networks, its governmental and nonprofit partnerships, and its capacity to professionally develop charters, charter authorizers, and traditional public schools. This leads toward activities aimed at boosting the achievement of educationally disadvantaged students and the dissemination of best practices for charter schools and school districts. The rationale demonstrates a reasonable approach of using the Charter Schools Program to enhance the growth of charter schools and the dissemination of best practices especially to rural areas of Arkansas.

Weaknesses:

While the rationale is clear, the current need is less clear. The applicant notes that, "despite modest gains recently in graduation rates and on the National Assessment for Educational Progress, economically disadvantaged students in Arkansas still face massive achievement gaps and grave educational inequities" (e40). The applicant does not provide any qualitative or quantitative data of how wide the gaps and inequities are making it difficult to assess how much the state must work to close the gap.

Reader's Score: 8

2. (2) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable.

Strengths:

The applicant has provided an ambitious set of measurable outcomes (e41-e42). Outcomes include growth in the charter sector by 52% and an increase among district charter conversions by 36%. The applicant also has proposed a narrowing of the achievement gap in each year of the grant period (e42). Its dissemination activity seems to utilize its existing strengths in professional development of the charter and traditional public school sectors. Additionally, its proposed sub-grant award distribution provides incentives for schools that aim to serve students in low-achieving areas (e43).

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

Growth of 52% in the charter sector is an ambitious goal, and the applicant provides little evidence that it can fill this pipeline. Among the activities identified in its logic model on e41 is the recruitment of high-quality charter organizations in-state, but its recruitment described elsewhere in the application has focused mostly on out-of-state charter school networks (e34 and e53). If the applicant anticipates that in-state growth will come mostly from the expansion of existing charter operators, the applicant is still looking at a limited pool as it has committed to awarding only those schools “with a track record of success serving high percentages of educationally disadvantaged students ...” (e41).

Reader's Score: 3

Selection Criteria - Objectives

1. The ambitiousness of the State entity's objectives for the quality charter school program carried out under this program.

Note: In response to this criterion, an applicant may address (or cross reference) some or all of the components of application requirements (I)(A)-(G) in this notice, which require the applicant to provide a description of the State entity's objectives in running a quality charter school program and how the objectives of the program will be carried out.

Strengths:

As stated in the previous criterion, the objectives are ambitious — and they are aligned with the Charter Schools Program, particularly in their emphasis on encouraging charter growth to serve the most struggling students (e46). The applicant's greatest strength is in disseminating best practices, as it is a state entity that serves members in both the charter and traditional sectors and has the personnel with the skills to train and develop educators at all public schools (e48). It can claim success in recruiting out-of-state networks to come to Arkansas, which can be a challenge for states, even those that have a well-established sector.

Weaknesses:

As stated above, the applicant has provided little evidence that it can fill a pipeline that will lead to 52% growth in the charter sector. The Arkansas Public School Resource Center has provided ample incentives for schools to serve educationally disadvantaged students, and it has found community interest in charter schools in underserved regions in Arkansas (e46-e47). However it hasn't demonstrated that prospective charter schools have the necessary human capital to aggressively move into these markets. Additionally, the applicant generally refers to “high-quality” throughout, but — except for a footnote on e45 that defines high-quality — fails to incorporate that definition in the narrative.

Reader's Score: 14

Selection Criteria - Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants

1. The likelihood that the eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the program will meet those objectives and improve educational results for students.

Strengths:

The review process for sub-grants appears aligned with the process for authorizing charters (e60). In fact, much of the vetting that is done by the charter authorizer will go into the sub-grant selection process. Since the applicant has described how it recruits charter schools and the screening tools it uses during this process, much of the filtering has been done before the application process has begun (e53 to e55) creating a rigorous and strategic process. The applicant also states it will rank-order those schools that are authorized and award sub-grants to the highest quality schools (e60). Moreover, once selected, the applicant describes a thorough monitoring process that includes periodic desk-top reviews aimed at assessing the sub-grant's progress toward its project (e51-52).

Further, as mentioned above in this criterion, the applicant maintains a rigorous program designed to recruit applicants that are not only a good fit for Arkansas but can enter regions where the applicant wants to see growth.

Weaknesses:

The applicant's CSP Selection Committee is comprised of a member of the education department or the charter authorizing panel, along with two members from the applicant's team, who would be dedicated to this task (e50). This is not a peer-reviewed process that would include outside reviewers. Additionally, the narrative in this section poorly describes the process in which the applicant will assess out-of-state applicants.

Reader's Score: 12

Selection Criteria - State Plan

1. The State entity's plan to--

- 1) Adequately monitor the eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity's program;**
- 2) Work with the authorized public chartering agencies involved to avoid duplication of work for the charter schools and authorized public chartering agencies; and**
- 3) Provide technical assistance and support for--**
 - i. The eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity's program; and**
 - ii. Quality authorizing efforts in the State.**

Strengths:

The applicant's proposed monitoring process is particularly strong, with periodic desktop reviews that inform whether the sub-grantee gets an on-site visit. The applicant provides a table for what part of the sub-grantee's project gets reviewed, when it gets reviewed, and how often (e52). Further, it proposes to use the education department's data center to provide progress reports, which the applicant correctly noted is "a safeguard against the statistics that suggest the first year of a charter bears the greatest risk" (e57). Also, the planning period of a sub-grantee bears nearly the same scrutiny as the implementation phase (e59). Planning projects must submit quarterly reports to determine that the sub-grantee is on its way to a successful opening.

As noted in other sections of the application, the applicant is experienced in providing ample technical assistance to charter schools, charter authorizers and school districts in the state. It proposes to perpetuate all it has been doing.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 20

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers:**

Reader's Score: 10

Sub Question

- 1. (1) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks**

Strengths:

The application showcases a detailed management plan and timetable for activities (e63-e66). The table presented features the sub-grant application process and plan for monitoring, as well as when and how the Arkansas Public School Resource Center and its partners will launch their technical assistance, and the staff or staffers who own each part of those processes. Moreover, various projects – sub-grant process, communications, recruitment, and authorizing support – get their own timetable and list of activities that should give grant monitors a good way to check the state's progress toward achieving its CSP goals and objectives.

Weaknesses:

Page e64 shows confusing timeline that lacks clarity. The calendar year ends in December 2018, and while projects ought to resume during the next calendar year, the applicant still identifies 2018. It is not clear how the applicant is completing a project effectively within the timeline presented. This is evidenced on page e66 to a portion of the project being completed in 2017).

Reader's Score: 8

- 2. (2) The extent to which the time commitments of the project director and principal investigator and other key project personnel are appropriate and adequate to meet the objectives of the proposed project**

Strengths:

The identified staff appears well-suited to their respective CSP tasks (e62-e67). The Arkansas Public School Resource Center has a development director who has acted as the organization's (and the state's) chief recruiter of out-of-state charter school networks. And other personnel have experience managing multimillion-dollar budgets.

Weaknesses:

While the applicant has shown that its team is talented, there is no way to see how much of their time will be devoted to the CSP project. The table on e63 to e66 references various CSP teams (design team, communications team) without describing the composition or importance of the team and its members or how much of their time will be devoted to the administration of the CSP project, which is a basic question in this criterion. Importantly, there is no explicit mention of who will be the project director. While the development director may be taking on a large share of the responsibilities, it isn't clear that this individual is the project director.

Reader's Score: 2

Selection Criteria - Parent and Community Involvement

- 1. The State entity's plan to solicit and consider input from parents and other members of the community on the implementation and operation of charter schools in the State.**

Strengths:

A charter applicant in Arkansas has to document how it aims to gather public or community input in the proposal. Moreover, the Arkansas Public School Resource Center stated on page e68 that it would hold information sessions and other stakeholder meetings with several nonprofit and government organizations. It also proposes that these organizations will act as a conduit to gather input from families, and from that look to establish charter schools in

interested communities.

Weaknesses:

The partner organizations identified in the applicant's proposal are limited and feature an abundance of mostly charter- and choice-friendly entities (e68). The applicant has provided no evidence that these groups have the experience and capacity to facilitate communications as well as to and facilitate feedback from families and other community members who may be unfamiliar with charter schools.

Reader's Score: 6

Selection Criteria - Flexibility

- 1. The degree of flexibility afforded by the State's charter school law and how the State entity will work to maximize the flexibility provided to charter schools under such law.**

Strengths:

The applicant describes a charter school law that exempts charters from much of Arkansas statute with the exception of certain accountability measures, special education programs, and health and safety laws (e70). Charters also may submit an application to an authorizer at any time – a freedom that many states don't extend to charter applicants. The applicant describes charter flexibility when it comes to governing structures, grade configurations, school locations and behavior plans. A recent legislative session afforded charters more flexibility around evaluation systems.

Weaknesses:

The applicant raises the following statement: "APSRC will continue to work with the authorizer to conduct and share the latest research and innovations in pedagogy, school operations, school finance and more, and to forecast any additional areas of flexibility that may be necessary to effectuate such innovations" (e72). It is unclear what this means. It raises questions as to whether the authorizer has impeded flexibility in any way. And it raises questions as to whether the application process infringes on autonomy.

Reader's Score: 4

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority 2 - Equitable Financing

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the State in which it is located ensures equitable financing, as compared to traditional public schools, for charter schools and students in a prompt manner.**

Strengths:

Pursuant to state statute, Arkansas charter schools "shall receive funds equal to the amount that a public school would receive" (to e21). Additionally, the Arkansas Public School Resource Center (the applicant) indicates that charter schools have equal access to categorical funds, such as those for English Language Learners. This appears not only equitable in access, but proportionate as well, as the applicant has indicated that both base operational and categorical funding are distributed on a per-pupil basis. Moreover, the Arkansas legislature has been increasing these categories of funding while amending the state charter school law to accommodate growth in the sector, particularly by facilitating the expansion of existing charter schools (e22). Lastly, the legislature has established an appropriation designed to substitute for a charter's lack of levy authority – or what appears to be the lack of access to discretionary millage (e22). This appropriation is aimed at enhancing a charter's ability to fund capital improvements, expansions, and maintenance and operations.

Weaknesses:

While the aforementioned legislative appropriation helps plug a gap between charter and districts in local levies, that appropriation can go up and down in any given year. This makes it an unpredictable funding stream, even in stable financial times, that is vulnerable to political tensions. Also, the application makes no mention as to when charter schools receive their funding, and how promptly the state ensures that charters receive the funding they have coming to them.

Reader's Score: 4

Competitive Preference Priority 3 - Charter School Facilities

1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the State in which it is located provides charter schools one or more of the following:

- a) Funding for facilities;**
- b) Assistance with facilities acquisition;**
- c) Access to public facilities;**
- d) The ability to share in bonds or mill levies;**
- e) The right of first refusal to purchase public school buildings; or**
- f) Low- or no-cost leasing privileges.**

Strengths:

The Arkansas legislature has provided charter schools with a dedicated – funding stream for facilities. The applicant has further documented that charters in the state have the right to access unused or underutilized public school facilities, the right to lease those facilities at below fair-market value, and the right of first refusal (e26). Notably, the applicant itself has experience in assisting charter schools find available facilities and has offered a technical assistance manual aimed at helping charters with the acquisition, development and financing of school facilities (e25). Moreover, the applicant has established a facilities assistance team in house, a member of which was once the chief executive of the state's finance authority (e25-e26).

Weaknesses:

As noted in in the previous priority, the referenced Open-Enrollment Public charter School Facilities Funding Aid Program is a dedicated funding stream, but it is unpredictable. While the legislature increased the appropriation in this program in 2017-18, that may not be the case in future years.

Reader's Score: 5

Competitive Preference Priority 4 - Best Practices to Improve Struggling School/LEAs

1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the State in which it is located uses best practices from charter schools to help improve struggling schools and local educational agencies.

Strengths:

While Arkansas law recognizes that charter schools can be a laboratory of innovative practices that can be shared among traditional public schools, the applicant best addresses this criterion by ably showcasing its experience and capacity at disseminating best practices to both charter and traditional schools statewide. The applicant, in fact, has a hybrid membership model serving both charter schools and school districts, bringing its members together at an annual conference focused on professional development (e30). Additionally, the state has certified that the Arkansas Public School Resource Center may provide intensive long-term professional development for low-performing schools (e31).

Weaknesses:

The applicant refers to a conversion charter school as a best practice to improve struggling schools and local educational agencies (e28). However, the conversion process is a mechanism for a traditional school to operate as a charter, not a best or innovative practice that can be replicated in or shared with LEAs for the purpose of improving struggling schools.

Reader's Score: 2

Competitive Preference Priority 5 - Serving At-Risk Students

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which it supports charter schools that serve at-risk students through activities such as dropout prevention, dropout recovery, or comprehensive career counseling services.**

Strengths:

The applicant has shown that the state education department has empowered it with resources to provide coaching and intensive support to low-performing – or Focus and Priority Schools – in Arkansas (e33). The department has provided the Arkansas Public School Resource Center with literacy resources aimed at improving proficiency at struggling schools. Moreover, the applicant notes several approaches it takes in supporting schools that serve a high percentage of at-risk students, highlighting literacy and student-growth strategies (e34). Notably, the applicant can document success in recruiting out-of-state charter networks that have some track record at lifting student achievement in lower performing schools (e34). In addition, many of the networks have provided letters of support for this applicant.

Weaknesses:

The applicant introduced the model of Restorative Justice into its charter school network, but failed to elaborate in the application how that model works or how it would work in this CSP project (e34).

Reader's Score: 2

Competitive Preference Priority 6 - Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which it has taken steps to ensure that all authorized public chartering agencies implement best practices for charter school authorizing.**

Strengths:

The applicant has demonstrated that it has experience working directly with the state's authorizing entity, at times lobbying the State Board of Education and the legislature to promote regulatory enhancements to authorizing (e36). Beyond the basic statutory provisions that require charter school monitoring, auditing and measurable goals for student achievement, which are part of most all charter school contracts, the applicant has documented on pages e36 and e37 a relationship with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA). In 2016 and 2017, NACSA provided professional development for the applicant and the authorizer on best practices in authorizing. NACSA also provided a summative assessment to address future needs.

Weaknesses:

Beyond the professional development offered to the authorizer to enhance its capacity interviews, the applicant does little to address what it has done to promote quality authorizing at the proposal or application stage. In previous years, the Arkansas Public School Resource Center has actively recruited out-of-state charter networks to come to Arkansas. But if it seeks the growth it proposes, quality applicant reviews and interviews will be critical, particularly as the authorizer vets the expansion of existing charters (to assess whether these existing schools have the capacity to grow).

Reader's Score: 4

Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Arkansas Public School Resource Center (U282A180006)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	15	11
Objectives		
1. Objectives	20	14
Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants		
1. Subgrant Applicants	15	13
State Plan		
1. State Plan	20	20
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	10
Parent and Community Involvement		
1. Involvement	10	7
Flexibility		
1. Flexibility	5	5
Sub Total	100	80
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
Equitable Financing		
1. Equitable Financing	6	5
Sub Total	6	5
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
Charter School Facilities		
1. Charter School Facilities	6	6
Sub Total	6	6
Competitive Preference Priority 4		
Best Practices to Improve Struggling School/LEAs		
1. Struggling Schools	3	3
Sub Total	3	3
Competitive Preference Priority 5		
Serving At-Risk Students		

1. At-Risk Students	3	2
Sub Total	3	2
Competitive Preference Priority 6		
Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing		
1. Best Practices	5	4
Sub Total	5	4
Total	123	100

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - Panel 1 - Arkansas - 1: 84.282A

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: Arkansas Public School Resource Center (U282A180006)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

Reader's Score: 11

Sub Question

1. (1) The extent to which the proposed project demonstrates a rationale

Strengths:

The APSRC aims to narrow the achievement gap in Arkansas through new and expanded charter schools and district conversions by fall 2023(e40).The applicant also intends to improve student outcomes in existing charter schools by increasing its community based partners and expanding programs that have demonstrated success (e42). A dissemination of best practices through forums, online portals and fall conferencing will assist the applicant in meetings its identified objectives (e42). The logic model, provided on page e40, confirms the intent to increase the number of high quality charter schools, specifically with a focus on disadvantaged and underserved students. The applicant aims to have 21 new or expanded high quality charter schools and 10 district conversions complete by Fall 2023 (e20). Among the applicant's planned activities to ensure intended outcomes are met are technical assistance, new sub-grants, recruitment of high quality charter organizations, and the dissemination of best practices (e40).

Weaknesses:

The applicant references NAEP results (e40), but does not explicitly tie this to their target population. Broad statements on achievement gaps are made, but no elaboration or data is provided regarding what those specific inequities are and how the CSP application will assist in improving them.

Reader's Score: 8

2. (2) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable.

Strengths:

The application reflects an efficient process for sub-grants, and ways to recruit applicants who have the most impact on disadvantaged populations (e39-43). Charter application timelines (Appendix F) for the project are clearly outlined and supported by a charter application process, as well as an award timeline (e50). The applicant discusses its intended outcomes (e41-42), including increasing charters by 52% and having at least five best practices shared from the online portal. In addition, the focus of recruitment for sub-grants will be will be charter organizations with a track record of serving high percentages of educationally disadvantaged students (e41-42). The desire to expand high quality charter programming and the number of expansions with an emphasis on underserved populations is also reflected in the sub-grant application process.

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

Baseline data is not provided as a means of determining and comparing quality levels to inform future decisions. While APSCR maintains a definition of high quality (e45), they do not incorporate or integrate the definition in their plan for out of state recruitment or throughout the application.

Reader's Score: 3

Selection Criteria - Objectives

1. **The ambitiousness of the State entity's objectives for the quality charter school program carried out under this program.**

Note: In response to this criterion, an applicant may address (or cross reference) some or all of the components of application requirements (I)(A)-(G) in this notice, which require the applicant to provide a description of the State entity's objectives in running a quality charter school program and how the objectives of the program will be carried out.

Strengths:

The application exhibits long term objectives for the CSP grant (e45-e52). The grant application process is discussed in depth (e49-e50), including its review process and timeline (e50). The selection committee membership is also discussed on pages e50-e51. Evaluation methods are addressed, and the applicant intends to ensure evaluation data associated with the grant is made public (e51). A list of activities intended for monitoring grant progress, along with a supporting timeline, is found on page e52.

Weaknesses:

Some objectives are not clearly measurable which makes it difficult to assess levels of ambitiousness around these important data points.. The applicant states that "High percentages of educationally disadvantaged students" (e47) will be addressed by at least 15 of 21 open enrollment grantees. However, what is meant by high percentages is not specified. The applicant says that each grantee will "undergo periodic evaluations to assess progress toward achieving the goal of providing high-quality educational opportunities" (e51). However, there is no indication of specifically how those outcomes will be measured, or what data will be used to confirm achievement of the identified goals. In addition, it is not clear if the practices outlined for these objectives will be mandatory components for all sub-grant awardees. For example, APSCR will post best practice deliverables and offer breakout sessions as part of a fall conference (e48). However, it is not clear if participation or attendance will be required of any schools or programs receiving sub-grant funds. The technical assistance team will identify a plan to notify sub-grantees of compliance issues, but that plan is not outlined within the application.

Reader's Score: 14

Selection Criteria - Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants

1. **The likelihood that the eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the program will meet those objectives and improve educational results for students.**

Strengths:

A selection rubric and contact log will be used to assist in the recruitment process for sub-grants, as will site visits, as outlined on page e53 and Appendix F. The selection rubric will ensure applicants whose work reflects the project goals and intended outcomes will be chosen as awardees. The contact log will provide documentation of monitoring and technical support provided for applicants and awardees. Partnerships have been identified with the Walton Family Foundation, as well as charter schools associated with Friendship Public Charter Schools in DC, Democracy Prep from New York, and Gestalt Community Schools in Memphis (e54). Both out of state and in state recruitment will be considered, and letters of commitment are provided for each potential school identified for recruitment. A number of

currently existing charter programs within Arkansas meet the applicant's desired criteria for serving 60% or more educationally disadvantaged students and demonstrating a propensity for growth (e54 and 55).

Weaknesses:

While a selection rubric has been provided, further development of the rubric would make selection of sub-grantees whose applications align with this project's objectives, goals and outcomes more likely. There is no external peer review process (e50); the outlined process for selection and application approval is described as in-house. Per statute, a peer reviewed process is required (Section 5203(b)(3) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA); Title III of the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015; and sections 200.302(a) and 200.331(d) of the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards).

Reader's Score: 13

Selection Criteria - State Plan

1. The State entity's plan to--

- 1) Adequately monitor the eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity's program;**
- 2) Work with the authorized public chartering agencies involved to avoid duplication of work for the charter schools and authorized public chartering agencies; and**
- 3) Provide technical assistance and support for--**
 - i. The eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity's program; and**
 - ii. Quality authorizing efforts in the State.**

Strengths:

The applicant provides information on the effective monitoring processes that currently exist with Arkansas Public School Resource Center (APSRC) and the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE). This applicant will work to ensure applicants are monitored for programmatic and fiscal performance in an ongoing basis. This will allow for stronger accountability as well as developing supportive resources for subgrantees. The ADE Data Center (e56) will be utilized to acquire necessary grant data and to ensure transparency and continual feedback for accountability. The Division of Public School Accountability and School Improvement Unit, as part of the Arkansas Department of Education, will engage in monitoring activities and provide assistance to grantees. Campus visits and quarterly progress reports will be conducted, in conjunction with monitoring activities completed by the Teaching and Learning team, Finance Team, and Grant Specialist, (also part of the Arkansas Department of Education). Examples of monitoring activities can be found on pages e57-e59. APSCR will work closely to avoid duplication of work for sub-grantees or its authorizer (e59). A rigorous scoring system will be developed to rate each application, and technical assistance will be enhanced through a partnership with NACSA (e61).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses identified.

Reader's Score: 20

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers:**

Reader's Score: 10

Sub Question

- 1. (1) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks**

Strengths:

The applicant provides a timeline chart, which outlines milestones and responsible parties can be found on page e63. The applicant has attempted to ensure appropriate personnel are designated with tasks that will ensure project objectives and outcomes are met, and that sub-grantees receive the necessary support for expansion or development. In addition, membership of a design team is identified on page e67.

Members of the selection committee and grant personnel reflect necessary education, charter, and budget experience for effective recruitment and grant facilitation (e48). To ensure fidelity of grant tasks and meeting necessary objectives, key personnel must have experience working with grants and charter school development. In addition, the proposed budget aligns with intended project outcomes and tasks.

Weaknesses:

There are some inconsistencies in the timeline, including expected 2017 targeted goals (e66) and 2018 dates that should be 2019 dates. The dates listed in this section are hard to follow, which makes it difficult to assess how effectively and efficiently the milestones will be addressed.

Reader's Score: 9

- 2. (2) The extent to which the time commitments of the project director and principal investigator and other key project personnel are appropriate and adequate to meet the objectives of the proposed project**

Strengths:

The applicant identifies the necessary qualifications of anticipated key personnel. In addition, key roles are assigned to milestones throughout the management plan chart (e63-e67).

Weaknesses:

This prompt requires applicants to identify key commitments of project director, project investigator, and other key personnel. However, key project personnel are not identified within the application. The budget funds two full time staff members, a director of charter development and a grant specialist. However, the budget narrative identifies their role as disseminators of best practices, rather than in charge of other grant duties. In addition, resumes provided are inconsistent with the listed members of the selection committee (e67). There are resumes that are provided that don't fit into the provided narrative. Selection committee members should not be in-house. A design team and communication team are referenced but there is no indication of who comprises either group. Because the necessary personnel are not clearly identified (including time commitments), it is not clear whether those commitments are appropriate for project efficiency or completion.

Reader's Score: 1

Selection Criteria - Parent and Community Involvement

- 1. The State entity's plan to solicit and consider input from parents and other members of the community on the implementation and operation of charter schools in the State.**

Strengths:

Charter school applications in Arkansas must demonstrate local community support that demonstrates they have community buy in and have incorporated their feedback into their overall efforts In addition; the applicant intends to solicit feedback from multiple stakeholders, including parents and community members. Information sessions will be made available, and the applicant will regularly attend meetings where outreach can be provided to stakeholders; parent surveys are also scheduled to gather parental feedback (e69). Seven organizations within the state have already provided letters of support, including Arkansas Learns, Urban League of Arkansas, Arkansas Rural Education Association, Arkansas Department of Education, Arkansas State Board of Education, Arkansas Governor's Office, and Walton Family Foundation (e68). These letters of support are necessary to ensure community buy-in to any developed or expanded schools.

Weaknesses:

While organizations are identified as supporters, it is not clear how these particular groups will solicit feedback, gauge success of stakeholder meetings, or initiate substantive family and community involvement to support the application. The application would have been strengthened by a clear description of how families will be engaged by the different charter stakeholders in the charter development process. In addition, it is not clear how any solicited feedback would be utilized to improve the quality of programming provided.

Reader's Score: 7

Selection Criteria - Flexibility

- 1. The degree of flexibility afforded by the State's charter school law and how the State entity will work to maximize the flexibility provided to charter schools under such law.**

Strengths:

The authorizer may waive any provisions of the Title 6 Education of the Arkansas Code that it sees fit with a few specific exclusions (Ark. Code Ann. § 6-23-701; e70).The authorizer maintains a public list of waivers and a spreadsheet of areas of law waived statewide (e70). Per Arkansas Legislative session, charter schools can adopt their own evaluation systems, accountability systems, and facilities. A necessary balance between compliance of state and federal laws and autonomy that supports innovation are provided by the authorizer.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses identified.

Reader's Score: 5

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority 2 - Equitable Financing

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the State in which it is located ensures equitable financing, as compared to traditional public schools, for charter schools and students in a prompt manner.**

Strengths:

The process for ensuring charter schools receive equitable financing, per Arkansas Code, is outlined on page e21. With the passage of this law, the state promotes and ensures equitable funding, in addition to equitable timing of funding. The state has also ensured that alternative funding options are available for charter schools that would compensate for the property taxes that traditional schools would typically receive (e22). In the 2017-18 school year, funding was allocated in the amount of \$525 per student out of a total \$5 million appropriation (e22). The state's funding allotment for teacher

retention and charter school recruitment is higher than neighboring states (e21-22).

Weaknesses:

While the state is working to ensure equitable timing of funding (e21), it is not clear to what extent this funding is prompt. More detail is needed regarding how the state is ensuring this funding is received in a timely manner.

Reader's Score: 5

Competitive Preference Priority 3 - Charter School Facilities

1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the State in which it is located provides charter schools one or more of the following:

- a) Funding for facilities;
- b) Assistance with facilities acquisition;
- c) Access to public facilities;
- d) The ability to share in bonds or mill levies;
- e) The right of first refusal to purchase public school buildings; or
- f) Low- or no-cost leasing privileges.

Strengths:

The applicant has provided details on the legislation that was passed in Arkansas to improve charter schools' access, development and financing of facilities. Arkansas offers facilities funding on a per pupil basis, access to bonds and rights of first refusal to purchase public buildings (e23). The state supports the acquisition of facilities by maintaining a Charter Facilities index of available facilities as well as by providing charter facilities loan funds (e25). Because charter school facilities access is available through so many avenues, organizations interested in applying for new schools or expansions are not hindered.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses identified.

Reader's Score: 6

Competitive Preference Priority 4 - Best Practices to Improve Struggling School/LEAs

1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the State in which it is located uses best practices from charter schools to help improve struggling schools and local educational agencies.

Strengths:

The applicant provides a plan for sharing out best practices from and within the charter schools. These robust resources are shared with other schools through training, publications, and virtual environments throughout the state, on an ongoing basis (e29-32). In addition, best practices will be disseminated equally to charter schools and other school organizations or districts (i.e. public schools) equally.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses identified.

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority 5 - Serving At-Risk Students

1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which it supports charter schools that serve at-risk students through activities such as dropout prevention, dropout recovery, or comprehensive career counseling services.

Strengths:

The applicant has provided direct coaching and intervention services for charter schools demonstrating difficulty addressing at risk populations. In addition, the applicant embraces schools that provide dropout programs. APSRC has a history of serving as a charter school provider within the state that meets the needs of low performing schools, and has recruited national charter operators whose focus is on dropout prevention and recovery (e33-34). A state commitment and infrastructure (including literacy supports) are clear and present throughout the application.

Weaknesses:

The inclusion of restorative justice as a model for charter schools is identified as a goal (e34), but this is not adequately explained. It is not clear how restorative justice will address the needs of the students or the schools. It is also unclear how it would be incorporated within the network and support the overall objectives of the project.

Reader's Score: 2

Competitive Preference Priority 6 - Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing

1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which it has taken steps to ensure that all authorized public chartering agencies implement best practices for charter school authorizing.

Strengths:

The Charter Unit and APSRC work together on an ongoing basis to update any processes and regulations necessary to support best practices and accountability within Arkansas Charter Schools (e36-37). Examples of changes that have been made to improve the quality of the process are provided (36-37). NASCA has been utilized in the past to provide professional development for the applicant's schools, which focused on authorizing practices (e36-37).

Weaknesses:

It is not clear how the authorizer will vet applicants for expansion or how proposals will be reviewed. More information is needed to determine what criteria would be used to determine sub-grantee awards and how the process of review and award would be facilitated.

Reader's Score: 4

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 06/12/2018 03:54 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 06/12/2018 03:54 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Arkansas Public School Resource Center (U282A180006)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	15	8
Objectives		
1. Objectives	20	13
Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants		
1. Subgrant Applicants	15	11
State Plan		
1. State Plan	20	20
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	9
Parent and Community Involvement		
1. Involvement	10	6
Flexibility		
1. Flexibility	5	5
Sub Total	100	72
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
Equitable Financing		
1. Equitable Financing	6	4
Sub Total	6	4
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
Charter School Facilities		
1. Charter School Facilities	6	6
Sub Total	6	6
Competitive Preference Priority 4		
Best Practices to Improve Struggling School/LEAs		
1. Struggling Schools	3	2
Sub Total	3	2
Competitive Preference Priority 5		
Serving At-Risk Students		

1. At-Risk Students	3	2
Sub Total	3	2
Competitive Preference Priority 6		
Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing		
1. Best Practices	5	4
Sub Total	5	4
Total	123	90

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - Panel 1 - Arkansas - 1: 84.282A

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: Arkansas Public School Resource Center (U282A180006)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

Reader's Score: 8

Sub Question

1. (1) The extent to which the proposed project demonstrates a rationale

Strengths:

The applicant provides adequate information regarding demographics and regions targeted for charter growth as evidence for the rationale. For example, the response describes national data on demographics that offer supportive evidence of the rationale for need, including the state's poverty (2nd lowest per capital income in USA), and the large geographically isolated minority population in the Delta region (e53 ,54). Also, Appendix F provides additional details regarding how and where charter school growth should occur. These materials are also shared with potential CMOs looking to expand into Arkansas (e139 – 152). The applicant has an extremely ambitious goal of increasing the number of high quality charters by 52% (e41). A logic model is provided (e40) that describes existing assets, objectives, activities and outcomes that are aligned to support the applicant in achieving the highly ambitious goal of 52% expansion in the number of high quality charters for the state's most educationally disadvantaged regions, including the Delta region.

Weaknesses:

This response does not meet the fully developed expectations for two primary reasons. First, while the applicant provided extensive information regarding charter school priority growth areas within Appendix F (e139 -152), there is not a clear and direct tie between the information provided in Appendix F and the logic model or rationale for charter expansion. Second, the applicant made several broad statements related to achievement and need but lacked sufficient supporting evidence. For example, the applicant stated that the National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP) results demonstrate 'massive achievement gaps for economically disadvantaged' students, but there was a lack of data to support this reference (e40).

Reader's Score: 7

2. (2) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable.

Strengths:

The applicant's performance measures (e41-42) are generally specific and measurable. The applicant provides 3 outcomes and 3 objectives. Objective 1 has three clearly specified performance measures that are directly supportive of the goals and outcomes. For example, objective 1's performance measurement is to increase new, expansion and replication charters by 52% from the current 25 charters to 38, and to increase district conversion

Sub Question

charters by 36% from the current 28 to 38 (e41). Therefore, the applicant meets the clearly identifies and provides baseline data and progress targets to reflect the specified and measurable objective criteria.

Weaknesses:

The goals, objectives and outcomes provided within the application are poorly developed as demonstrated by the fact that they do not meet the standards defined for performance measures on CSP Notice of Intent to Apply (CSP NIA) (pp 64-65). According to CSP NIA, applicants are required to measure, monitor and report on three national program performance measures (GPRA) and the applicant only addresses one of the three GPRA. Objective 1/Performance Measure 1 (e41) will meet GPRA requirement 1 (CSP NIA p 64) by reporting on the number of charter schools. While the applicant references improving student outcomes as the focus of Objective 2 (e40), the performance measurement identified (students improve faster and decreased achievement gaps) will not adequately address student achievement as defined in the NIA. Applicants must measure, monitor and report on the achievement of 4th and 8th grade students in math and reading/language arts on state mandated assessments (CSP NIA p 64). The application lacks clear and coherent plans to meet this requirement. GPRA 3 (CSP NIA p 64), requires applicants to demonstrate plans to measure, monitor and report on cost per student but the application lacks clear reference that it will meet this expectation.

According to the CSP NIA (pp 64-65), project specific performance measurements are expected to be: a) clearly specified and measurable; b) include baseline data; c) identify performance targets; and d) demonstrate a timeframe in which the performance targets should be met. While the applicant's performance measures (e41-42) are generally specific and measurable, most do not include baseline data, identify performance targets and/or demonstrate a timeframe. For example, in Objective 2 Performance Measure 1 (e42) the applicant states it will 'narrow achievement gaps', but data is not provided to show current achievement gaps, growth targets are not provided, and the performance measure lacks a timeframe for when the target will be achieved.

According to the CSP NIA (pp 65), applicants are required to clearly describe the data collection and reporting process as well as the organization's capacity to collect the required data. The applicant describes the ADE Data Center as a comprehensive data management system that provides APSRC with student growth data, but it is unclear how the Data Center will be utilized to report on GPRA and project specific performance measurements that monitor student growth, achievement and discipline to improve charter success.

Reader's Score: 1

Selection Criteria - Objectives

- 1. The ambitiousness of the State entity's objectives for the quality charter school program carried out under this program.**

Note: In response to this criterion, an applicant may address (or cross reference) some or all of the components of application requirements (I)(A)-(G) in this notice, which require the applicant to provide a description of the State entity's objectives in running a quality charter school program and how the objectives of the program will be carried out.

Strengths:

Throughout the project narrative, the applicant, at least minimally, addresses all application requirements (I)(A)-(G) which provide a sufficient description of APSRC's objectives for running a quality charter school program and describes how the program objectives will be carried out. The description of how the applicant meets application requirements (I)(A)-(G) is both thread throughout the application and specifically described on e72-e79. The applicant provides a well-defined and state specific definition of a high-quality charter school (footnote e45). There is also a very clear definition of educationally disadvantaged youth (footnote e47).

The applicant's relationship with NACSA, ADE and the Charter Authorizing Panel are well described and clearly demonstrative of a statewide system of support to improve the charter application process and authorization efforts (e37). Strong technical assistance is described that brings together the resources of APSRC, ADE and authorizers to ensure

charters can and do access federal programs and funding for disadvantaged students, especially students with disabilities and English learners (e73).

As required, transportation processes are addressed in the charter applications (e77) and the applicant clearly describes charters that do not plan to offer transportation are required to request waivers that include alternate plans for transportation for their students. The applicant also describes authorizer responsibilities to ensure that transportation service proposals do not have an exclusionary effect on low socio-economic populations. Within the subgrant review process, there will be positive scoring priorities for subgrants that provide transportation (e78).

Weaknesses:

The applicant's responses to application requirements (I)(A)-(G) do not provide the quality of evidence needed to demonstrate the ambitiousness of the project objectives to be considered fully developed for this section. The applicant briefly addresses financial sustainability of subgrantees (e74) when it mentions that subgrantees are required to show a multiple year budget without the subgrant. But there is not enough clarity in the response to demonstrate that subgrantees will be fiscally sustainable at the end of the grant.

As noted above, the applicant provides a clear state specific definition of a high-quality charter school (footnote e45), however this definition is not used within the application to provide data that aligns Objective 1 and its performance measures (e41) and Objective 2 and its performance measures (e42). For example, Objective 1 would be significantly stronger if it measured extent to which new schools meet the state definition of a high-quality charter school and how quickly the school progresses to earn status as a high quality charter school. Baseline data could have been provided to document how many current schools meet the definition for being high quality and a target could have been set for percentage increase in number of schools that meet this standard.

The applicant states that the new application process (e49) results in "only approving high-quality charters" without providing evidence to prove this statement. However, according to the provided timeline (e37), the new application process is less than a year old. Therefore, according to the state definition of high-quality charter (footnote e45), there would not yet be data available to assess the extent to which new charters meet this definition.

Reader's Score: 13

Selection Criteria - Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants

1. The likelihood that the eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the program will meet those objectives and improve educational results for students.

Strengths:

The applicant provides well developed evidence to document that there are systems in place to ensure that eligible applicants will receive subgrants, and that subgrantees will be able to meet objectives and improve student outcomes. This includes documentation of a variety of processes and systems to ensure that subgrantees will meet the identified objectives and improve educational results for students (e52). Authorizer approval is a pre-requisite for subgrant eligibility and submission of a comprehensive CMO Expansion Rubric is required for approval of CMO's to open schools within the state (e60). In addition, the applicant provided a very clear plan for monitoring that includes timelines and responsibilities (e52). Finally, the applicant has intentional plans to design processes to notify and support subgrantees if there are compliance issues.

Weaknesses:

Two primary weaknesses inhibit a score of fully developed. Most importantly, the selection process defined in this application does not meet the statutory requirement for peer review. The selection committee identifies a representative from either ADE or CAP and staff from APSRC. This represents an internal selection committee, not a peer review process (e50) with external reviewers. The CMO outreach (e54-55) process to bring in high quality out-of-state CMOs

lacks substantive evidence that the identified CMOs will be high quality subgrantees with a strong capacity to meet the needs of Arkansas students.

Reader's Score: 11

Selection Criteria - State Plan

1. The State entity's plan to--

- 1) Adequately monitor the eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity's program;**
- 2) Work with the authorized public chartering agencies involved to avoid duplication of work for the charter schools and authorized public chartering agencies; and**
- 3) Provide technical assistance and support for--**
 - i. The eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity's program; and**
 - ii. Quality authorizing efforts in the State.**

Strengths:

The applicant provides a fully developed response describing the state entity plan.

The applicant states that it has capacity to monitor subgrantees because of the access to ADE Data Center which provides comprehensive reports on student outcomes, including student growth data, demographics and enrollment information (e56-57). The applicant provides a clear description of its monitoring and oversight responsibilities which includes access to ADE's fiscal and administration online tool so APSRC will be able to monitor subgrantees fiscal stability for early warning signs (e58) of fiscal instability. The applicant also states that planning grantees will not receive implementation funds unless they have successfully completed planning tasks and appropriately used funds (e59).

The applicant clearly describes partnerships with ADE and Charter Authorizing Panel (e60-61) that will minimize duplication of work for both the charter schools and authorizer. This includes a thorough overview of the authorization process and how the subgrant process will be embedded within it. Instead of charters being required to complete both an authorization process and a separate subgrant process, APSRC will add a scoring system to the currently required information and then share that information with the Charter Authorizing Panel, making both processes better streamlined and supportive.

The applicant provides a detailed overview of its grant management technical assistance plan and timeline (e61).

The applicant thoroughly describes its plan for technical assistance and support to improve quality authorizing in the state (e61). A key aspect of this plan is the partnership with NACSA. NACSA will provide annual training for the authorizing panel. Also, using grant funds, APSRC will create new authorizer materials using the NACSA recommendations from its 2016-17 report. Finally, ADE Charter Unit will facilitate annual work sessions with the authorizing panel and APSRC leadership for reflection and strategic planning to continually ensure the collaboration is successful.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 20

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan for the proposed project. In determining the quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

Reader's Score: 9

Sub Question

1. (1) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks

Strengths:

The timeline provided within the applicant's management plan clearly defines responsibilities and milestones for ensuring the proposed project will be completed on time and within budget (e63-67).

The timeline includes processes required in the Federal Register, including the subgrant process, fiscal compliance reviews, and a communication plan for both sharing grant information and disseminating best practices for charter authorization. Particular strengths include that the timeline is broken down in four key areas action areas: subgrant process, communication, recruitment and authorization. Each action area provides a general description with specific partners involved in the action area. The timeline, responsible party and milestones are identified (e63-67). Members of the selection committee are identified, and their qualifications are provided to further enhance understanding of project management. While design team members are not specifically identified, the work of this team is very clearly delineated (e62-63).

Weaknesses:

The response lacks attention to detail on the dates provided within the timeline which makes the timeline difficult to track. Most of the dates should be 2019, not 2018 (e63-67). The applicant also states the selection committee will be chosen in November 2017 (e66) which causes further confusion to the order of activities. In addition, the applicant states it will 'incentivize dissemination' but provides inadequate follow up information to clarify the meaning of the statement (e65). The budget narrative funds external evaluation at \$5000 per year but the narrative doesn't elaborate on the plans to conduct an external evaluation (e239-252).

Reader's Score: 8

2. (2) The extent to which the time commitments of the project director and principal investigator and other key project personnel are appropriate and adequate to meet the objectives of the proposed project

Strengths:

The applicant describes the qualifications of APSRC's Director of Development and provides information on the qualifications expected for the new Grant Specialist (e67).

Weaknesses:

The applicant provides an inadequate description of the time commitments of key project personnel. While three individuals and their current titles are noted (e67), they are described as members of the Selection Committee. The applicant does not reference the project director or principal investigator or identify their time commitments. The budget narrative funds two full time staff (Director of Charter Development and Grant Specialist) but their roles are described as "dissemination of best practices", so it is unclear whether these individuals might hold the roles of project director or principal investigator (e239-252). The design team and communications team are given key tasks in the timeline (e62-63), but it is not clear who holds these roles or time commitment for these teams. In Appendix B (e84-107), ten resumes are provided but only one of the individuals (APSRC Director of Development) is mentioned within the narrative. Therefore, it is unclear what roles these individuals will play within the grant. At least one resume appears to be outdated, because the resume does not document an association with any of the partner

Sub Question

organizations mentioned or funded within the grant.

Reader's Score: 1

Selection Criteria - Parent and Community Involvement

1. The State entity's plan to solicit and consider input from parents and other members of the community on the implementation and operation of charter schools in the State.

Strengths:

The applicant sufficiently describes the state's commitment to parent and community input into operation of the state's charters through its explanation of {Ark Code 6-23-302} requirements for significant engagement at a variety of levels during the authorization process (e67). In addition, the applicant has partnerships with organizations such as the Urban League, Rural Schools Association and others to post surveys to gather feedback from their stakeholders on family interest and need for alternative educational options. This information will be used to connect developers to communities with identified interest/needs. Finally, the applicant has processes in place to survey current charter school families regarding their satisfaction with their school (e68-69).

Weaknesses:

The application lacks information on outreach plans for the currently targeted communities. The organizations listed as partners for community engagement are great state partners, but unlikely to have the capacity needed for significant family and community engagement in targeted communities. It lacks sufficient description of how families will be engaged in the charter development process as well as a description of how subgrantees will be expected to engage families and other community members, as required in the Federal Register (C 1 iv).

Reader's Score: 6

Selection Criteria - Flexibility

1. The degree of flexibility afforded by the State's charter school law and how the State entity will work to maximize the flexibility provided to charter schools under such law.

Strengths:

The applicant provides a fully developed description of the State of Arkansas flexibility as well as APSRC's role in maximizing flexibility in the past and future.

The applicant clearly describes how the State of Arkansas has historically offered significant flexibility for charter schools, and the recent expansion of this flexibility. Since the initial charter school law, The Charter Schools Act of 1999 was enacted; schools have been able to waive anything in the state's Title 6 code except for six key state requirements. The state also affords flexibility by allowing charters to request waivers both within their original charter and request amendments to their charter at any time (e70). In addition, ADE maintains an updated list of all possible waivers (230 distinct waiver opportunities), commonly used waivers and a public list of all waivers used by charters (e69-70). In 2017, the state further increased flexibility for charter schools by expanding it to include critical aspects such as accountability, evaluation and start up facility requirements.

The applicant provides evidence of the roles that APSRC's legal team, Teaching and Learning Unit and Charter Development unit have played in supporting innovation by using the state's flexibility laws (e72). This information is followed by a description of APSRC's plans for researching and sharing innovations and forecasting additional flexibility needs to implement new innovations (e72). Finally, the applicant connects their research and forecasting efforts with legislative advocacy to assist in moving the legislature toward new laws and regulations that might be needed to enable new flexibility (e72).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority 2 - Equitable Financing

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the State in which it is located ensures equitable financing, as compared to traditional public schools, for charter schools and students in a prompt manner.**

Strengths:

The applicant provides a well-developed response demonstrating that the state of Arkansas ensures equitable financing when compared to traditional public schools by citing relevant code {Ark code 6-20-305} requiring equitable funding (e21) and describing how the state provides equal access to state and federal funding sources such as transportation, student growth and Medicaid administration funds (e23). In addition, the applicant provides some evidence of prompt funding for charters by describing that state law now allows schools adding campuses to receive funding in July based on estimated enrollment (e22). This is an expansion of state law which previously limited 'advance' payment for start up only to new schools and schools that were adding a new grade level (e22).

Weaknesses:

The applicant's response is not fully developed because the application lacks sufficient information on the promptness of fund distribution to charters in comparison to traditional schools. For example, the table (e21) describes a timeline for fund distribution only for charters – not traditional public schools. Without that data, it is unclear whether the state provides funds in a prompt manner as compared to traditional districts. The applicant also describes equitable access to funds such as transportation, student growth and Medicaid administration (e23) but it lacks information on fund distribution in comparison to traditional public schools that is necessary to determine if these funds are distributed in a 'prompt manner.

Reader's Score: 4

Competitive Preference Priority 3 - Charter School Facilities

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the State in which it is located provides charter schools one or more of the following:**

- a) Funding for facilities;**
- b) Assistance with facilities acquisition;**
- c) Access to public facilities;**
- d) The ability to share in bonds or mill levies;**
- e) The right of first refusal to purchase public school buildings; or**
- f) Low- or no-cost leasing privileges.**

Strengths:

The applicant provides a fully developed response that clearly describes strong charter school facility supports by specifying how the state provides funding in all six areas listed within the prompt (e23-28). This includes but is not limited to: a process for using ADM from the last 3 quarters to determine eligibility for facility funding aid (e22); increased state allocation for charter school facilities over the last several years with a significant increase for FY18 (e23); overview of allowability of funds to be used for lease or purchase of property (e24) at or below market value (e28) and the state's effort to keep an up to date list of available facilities that would be suitable for schools (e26-27). The applicant's collective description of facility supports for charter schools demonstrates that the state is well vested in assisting charters to find,

afford and construct. In addition, the GEPA description (e12) is focused on the state's effort to improve access to charter schools through facility equity.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 6

Competitive Preference Priority 4 - Best Practices to Improve Struggling School/LEAs

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the State in which it is located uses best practices from charter schools to help improve struggling schools and local educational agencies.**

Strengths:

The applicant's response adequately demonstrates how it uses best practices from charters to improve struggling schools and LEAs. It provides information that state charter school law is interpreted to mean that charter schools are to be innovation labs (e28). Arkansas Public School Resource Center (APSRC) serves both traditional LEAs and charter schools so it is uniquely qualified to share best practices between the two types of public education entities (e30). The applicant offers information that the state has a clearinghouse for dropout prevention models which can be shared or replicated by both charters and traditional public schools (e34-35). In addition, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) continues to maintain its best practice dissemination website (e29) from its 2011 CSP grant.

Weaknesses:

Two primary weaknesses give evidence that the response does not meet requirements to be considered fully developed. First, while the state's dissemination process is well described, the response lacks a description of its plans to vet practices to determine if they are best practices prior to dissemination (e29-30). Second, while the applicant states it provides comprehensive services which include professional development (PD) for sharing best practices of high performing charters (e30), the response lacks a complete description of the relevant services or PD aligned to this CPP, beyond a brief reference to the restorative justice model.

Reader's Score: 2

Competitive Preference Priority 5 - Serving At-Risk Students

- 1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which it supports charter schools that serve at-risk students through activities such as dropout prevention, dropout recovery, or comprehensive career counseling services.**

Strengths:

The applicant provides adequate evidence that it will provide support to charter schools serving at risk youth including: APSRC already provides, and will continue to provide, direct coaching and intervention to struggling schools as part of its overall school improvement services (e32); APSRC is creating a clearinghouse design for programmatic best practices; and the state is recruiting new CMOs that have a strong background in supporting at risk students. In addition, there will be preference points in the subgrant application for high school programs further addressing the need for high schools serving educationally disadvantaged students (e76).

Weaknesses:

The response is not well developed because it lacks specificity in directly connecting identified initiatives to addressing needs of struggling students through activities such as dropout prevention, dropout recovery and career counseling. For example: Summit/Facebook personalized learning is mentioned but there is limited information regarding this initiative and how it supports the criterion (e32); references are made to recruitment of national models with success working with at-risk populations (e32,34), but evidence supporting that statement is lacking; and there is limited information on why the addition of restorative justice to the network will improve outcomes for struggling youth (e34).

Reader's Score: 2

Competitive Preference Priority 6 - Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing

1. **To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which it has taken steps to ensure that all authorized public chartering agencies implement best practices for charter school authorizing.**

Strengths:

The response is well developed and provides strong evidence to document the steps Arkansas has taken to ensure all chartering agencies use best practices for charter authorizing. For example, recent state laws such as Act 462 and Ark Code {6-23-403/505} improved charter authorizing practices legislatively. The first, added non-ADE representation on the Charter Authorizing Panel (CAP) and the second expanded financial accountability for schools and provided greater responsibility/authority for authorizers when audit findings occur. The new Ark Code {6-23-403} also strengthened the state's review process for 1st year schools (e36, 39).

The applicant clearly describes a multi-year partnership with the National Alliance of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) that will be extended through the grant period to provide technical assistance to the CAP and APSRC (e37). The applicant documents NACSA's recommendations, how the state has begun to implement the recommendations and the steps APSRC will take to further implement these recommendations (e37). Finally, the applicant provides a detailed timeline related to this effort (e46).

Weaknesses:

The application lacks information demonstrating how the applicant uses the authorization process to effectively vet new charter applications.

Reader's Score: 4

Status: Submitted
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