

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

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 04/05/2019 05:24 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Alabama Coalition for Public Charter Schools (U282A190004)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	15	14
Objectives		
1. Objectives	20	16
Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants		
1. Subgrant Applicants	15	15
State Plan		
1. State Plan	20	19
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	14
Parent and Community Involvement		
1. Involvement	10	8
Flexibility		
1. Flexibility	5	5
Sub Total	100	91
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
Equitable Financing		
1. Equitable Financing	3	2
Sub Total	3	2
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
Charter School Facilities		
1. Charter School Facilities	4	4
Sub Total	4	4
Competitive Preference Priority 4		
Best Practices to Improve Struggling Schools/LEAs		
1. Best Practices	2	1
Sub Total	2	1
Competitive Preference Priority 5		
Serving At-Risk Students		

1. Serving At-Risk Students	3	2
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Sub Total	3	2
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Competitive Preference Priority 6

Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing

1. CharterSchool Authorizing	4	4
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Sub Total	4	4
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Total	116	104
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Technical Review Form

Panel #3 - Panel 3 - Alabama - 1: 84.282A

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: Alabama Coalition for Public Charter Schools (U282A190004)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. Quality of the Project Design

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: 14

Sub

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:

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

Strengths:

The applicant provides convincing evidence that the State has significant need for high quality options for educationally disadvantaged youth, such as ranking last in the nation on the NAEP and 45th on the ACT, and having the worst achievement gaps in the nation for Black, Hispanic and low-income students (Pages e37-8).

The proposed project demonstrates a strong rationale as the Theory of Action pulls from industry research and known best practices for promoting learning gains of educationally disadvantaged students. The applicant presents credible research - CREDO results proving brick-and-mortar, non-profit, urban schools serving low-income and minority students have been found to effectively increase student learning at a greater rate when compared to traditional district schools, and explains that the project will target awards to meet these research-based findings (Pages e38-39).

The applicant's sound Theory of Action centers on key partnerships (including learning from the Georgia Charter School Association), industry knowledge and research, and recruiting, training and supporting school leaders and high performing charter management organizations (Pages e39 and Appendix F).

A Logic Model, presenting the relationship between assets, activities, short- and long-term outcomes, and impacts, is provided on Page e116. Item c. on the Logic Model (Page e116) notes that the expectation is for at least 9 subgrantees to achieve a letter grade of A or B. This demonstrates the applicant has defined and set targets for school quality.

Sub

Weaknesses:

Given the rural nature of the State, more information on whether charter schools will be developed in Alabama's rural areas or not and how research and practice inform high quality rural charter schools would have strengthened the application. Since the applicant cited state level NAEP results as justification for need, it could have been made more clear if the proposed project will seek to address needs of students outside the target areas of Birmingham, Montgomery, Mobile and Huntsville (Page e39).

Alignment between the Logic Model (Page e116) and the objectives and activities could have been made more clear (Page e40-1) by providing more information on the timing of the short and long term outcomes and how "sustainable" will be determined.

Reader's Score: 9

2. 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:

(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 provides appropriate and clear goals, objectives and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project, and they are measurable.

The project objectives are to 1) increase the number of high-quality charter schools by at least 15 over the next five years, with emphasis on serving educationally disadvantaged students, and 2) advancing Alabama's charter authorizing quality. These objectives are clearly specified, understandable and measurable (Pages e39 – e40).

The applicant provides a clear and reasonable definition of what they consider to be a high-quality school on Page e39-40. This definition provides both a performance level – achieving an A or B on the annual state report card, and a comparative, relative measure – achieving a C in an attendance zone where the traditional district school serving similar grade levels is graded F. Having a comparative, relative measure indicates the understanding of how to hold schools accountable in a realistic and meaningful way.

The applicant provides a performance measure to achieve a "higher score against their index each year" for the NACSA rating (Page e41). This indicates a commitment to continuous improvement. Activities, performance measures and annual targets described in Table 1 on pages e40-41 align with objectives, and targets are measurable.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were found.

Reader's Score: 5

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 applicant describes a reasonable and ambitious plan for establishing fifteen new, replicating or expanding charter schools over five years and for improving authorizer quality.

The applicant describes the intent to build a pipeline, deliver an incubation program, and provide a high level of technical support in areas including 501c3 application support, charter application review and feedback, mock interviews, community engagement support, assistance with facilities acquisition and finance, strategic consulting, board governance, talent acquisition and development, fiscal sustainability and charter-district partnership (Page e45).

The applicant also notes a partnership with Black Alabamians for Education to build grass roots support (Page e45).

The description of the level of services, including the incubation services, to be provided, the vetting of applicants with proven track records, and the letters of support make these ambitious, yet reasonable objectives. Recruitment tools (CMO Recruitment rubric, Pages e129-134), tools from the incubator program, and the New School Design Project (Appendix F) are well-developed.

A second objective, advancing Alabama's standing in charter authorizing, has a good description of activities, aligned performance measures, annual targets, and ongoing evaluation.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not clearly articulate how they came up with the numbers for 15 new, replicating or expanding schools or where the schools are targeted to be located. Table 1. includes only 14 subgrants, with at least 10 serving 60% educationally disadvantaged, while other places in the application note the creation of 15 schools, targeting 12 serving at least 60% educationally disadvantaged (Page e40).

Beyond that CSP funds have not been available, the applicant provides inadequate information on what lessons have been learned through the slow growth of charter schools in the state. Additional information identifying the reasons for slow growth would have strengthened the application.

There could be better tie in between the objectives (Table 1 on Pages e40-41) and the Logic Model (Page e116). Defining "sustainability" would have been helpful, and that only two new authorizers will be in place at the end of five years does not seem ambitious.

Reader's Score: 16

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's response provides strong evidence of a well-planned and resource rich approach to ensuring high capacity of subgrant applicants.

The applicant provides strong evidence of the likelihood that eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the program will

meet objectives and improve educational results for students.

The applicant describes the successful CMOS they have been actively recruiting, including Democracy Prep, Citizens of the World, RePublic, and others (Page e48). Letters of support are provided e109, e110, and e111.

The applicant developed a CMO Recruitment Rubric (Appendix F, pages e129-134), which has particular attention on the evidence the CMO has on promoting student learning, especially with educationally disadvantaged students, and a Viewbook.

The New School Design Project, modeled from work from the Mind Trust, and including a year-long residency and comprehensive technical assistance (Appendix F), will develop in-state prospects (Page e49). The commitment new school developers will make to staying in the State is good for community engagement and sustainability.

There is a grant scoring rubric (pages e117-127) clearly specifying expectations that align with project objectives.

The applicant describes the experience and history of success the Executive Director and Charter Development Director has had with this exact type of work previously (Pages e48, e79-82).

The applicant explains that they will adopt what they view is an already strong applicant process the ALSDE and the commission developed with NACSA – including an external review by an impartial third party and a public hearing (Page e51). The Selection Committee, comprised of peer reviewers, will solicit feedback from parents and community members (Pages e51-52).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were found.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - State Plan

1. State Plan

Reader's Score: 19

Sub

1. The State entity's plan to--

a. Adequately monitor the eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity's program;

Strengths:

The applicant provides sufficient evidence of a strong monitoring plan and practices.

The applicant describes how they will adapt program and fiscal monitoring processes already underway at Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE), including use of the Data Center (Page e53). This data system includes monthly fiscal monitoring (Page e54).

Subgrantees will be required to submit quarterly progress reports detailing enrollment, academic and operational performance, and finances, have at least one onsite monitoring visit, and receive targeted technical assistance where necessary, during their initial year (Pages e54 and e55).

Subgrantees will have desktop reviews each semester of their second year (Page e55), and desktop reviews and at least one onsite review every two years will continue throughout other project years.

Sub

That the state education staff already provide monitoring and technical assistance using a highly developed reporting system where documents are centrally stored and accessed, that there will be ongoing close review of documents using the expertise of grant partners experienced with other state CSP grants, and that there are a small number of subgrantees, provide good justification that a strong monitoring plan is in place.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were found.

Reader's Score: 5

2. The State entity's plan to:

- b. Work with the authorized public chartering agencies involved to avoid duplication of work for the charter schools and authorized public chartering agencies; and**

Strengths:

The applicant references a non-duplicative monitoring process, including use of the Data Center as a repository of information (Page e53). The applicant notes the collaboration with ALSDE and NACSA regarding application and authorization processes (Page e56).

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not clearly explain a specific and ongoing plan to assure duplication of effort amongst the applicant, ALSDE and authorizers is avoided.

Reader's Score: 4

3. The State entity's plan to:

- c. 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 fully describes the operational technical assistance and support they will provide subgrantees in the incubator program, including leadership development, assistance with the charter application, strategic consulting, policy documents, and assistance with facilities acquisition (Page e56-64).

The applicant fully describes the grants management, fiscal management, infrastructure, compliance, data collection and management technical assistance they will provide to subgrantees (Pages e56-64).

The applicant fully describes the technical assistance and supports they will provide to authorizers, including regular trainings, board recruitment, and policies (Pages e41-47, Pages e57 and e58).

The applicant fully details the services the grant partners – Insignia Partners – will perform and notes their experience performing similar CSP grant management and evaluation work in Idaho and Michigan (Pages e57-8).

Sub

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were found.

Reader's Score: 10

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:**

(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; and

(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 provides an appropriate Management Plan (Table 6, Pages e59-64) describing timelines, responsible party and milestones for the Major Tasks, organized by the CSP Subgrant process, communications, recruitment & growth, charter authorizing, grant compliance and administration. The timelines and milestones seem realistic and include review and reflection (Page e60).

The proposed budget aligns with the management plan and proposed project. The budget includes \$55,000 for charter school and authorizer oversight and technical assistance and \$20,000 for authorizer training each year (Pages e253-8). The budget includes \$10,000 for an External Project Evaluation (Page e258).

The project pulls expertise from multiple partners, including the state department of education, grassroots advocacy, and seasoned charter school professionals experienced in managing federal grants.

The applicant describes how time commitments were assessed. The Executive Director will devote at least 80% of his time, and the Director of Charter Development will commit 100% of his time to this grant (Page e65). The Executive Director of NSFA has experience developing the charter sector in another state, has relationships with CMOS nationally, has provided hands-on technical assistance and strategic counsel similar to this work, and previously implemented a CSP grant (Page e48). The project includes a full-time person to work with new schools, and this is needed to meet the objectives of the proposed project. The applicant also notes time commitments of ALSDE and BA4E staff (e65).

A structure for ongoing communication - monthly check-ins with grant partners – is described (Page e65).

Given that project personnel have experience with CSP grants specifically, these time commitments seem reasonable and there is a strong probability the project will be delivered on time and within budget (Page e65).

Weaknesses:

The Management Plan did not fully define responsibilities and activities of all project partners as they relate to the project objectives, including how contracted services (e.g. the Principal Investigator, the Communications Consultant, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers) will be managed.

Reader's Score: 14

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 presents adequate evidence of the State entity's plan to solicit and consider input from parents and other members of the community.

The applicant describes Alabama's state law requirements for "meaningful, ongoing parent and community input into the operation of charter schools in the state (Page e66)." Applicants must provide a detailed plan for family/community engagement, demonstrate multiple ways they have engaged the community, and have 20% of the board comprised of parents (Page e66).

The applicant describes a strategy of attending public hearings (required of all charter applicants) and using parent and community feedback from those public hearings to inform subgrant decisions (Page e67).

The partnership with BA4E provides several mechanisms to highly integrate family and community engagement. The applicant describes phases of increasing parental outreach and involvement, from "Chat & Chews" to Community Advisory Groups (Pages e67-68).

There are letters of support from the Mayor of the City of Montgomery (Page e103) and the Montgomery Education Foundation (Page e104).

The budget includes \$50,000 for Parent and Community Involvement each year (Pages e252-e257).

Weaknesses:

Limited information was provided on how the applicant will solicit and use information from parents and the community throughout the implementation and ongoing operation of charter schools in the state across all project years.

The applicant did not fully describe a solid plan on how to keep parents engaged, and how they will demonstrate and document the work they will do in this area.

Reader's Score: 8

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 presents convincing evidence that State law provides a high degree of flexibility and that the State entity will work to maximize this flexibility.

The applicant explains that Alabama's state charter law automatically grants all charters autonomy from all education regulations other than federal regulations (IDEA, for example), civil rights and safety and statewide assessments (Pages e68-69). The applicant describes charter school flexibilities in State law – including teacher certification, teacher participation in the state retirement system and health programs, salary schedules, length of school day, and others (Pages e68-70). The applicant notes that NAPCS awarded maximum points in its assessment of flexibility in the state's charter law (Page e69).

The applicant explains how it works with the State entity to educate charter leaders to know what flexibilities there are (including providing a handout to potential operators), how it will continue to work with charter applicants to maximize flexibility, and how it will describe the impact flexibilities have on outcomes (Pages e69-70). Flexibilities are highlighted

during conferences and sharing of best practices, such on the repository of best practices curated on the website.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were found.

Reader's Score: 5

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority 2 - Equitable Financing

1. Competitive Preference Priority 2: Equitable Financing

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 comprehensive information on the extent to which the State ensures equitable financing, as compared to traditional public schools, for charter schools and students in a prompt manner.

The applicant cites State law providing the same amount of state funds for public charter school students as for traditional district students, including Foundation, transportation, school nurses, technology coordinators and other line items (Page e19).

Proportionate federal and state categorical aid is also required by law to be equitably distributed to charter schools (Page e19).

Alabama charter schools also have access to funding from the Alabama Public School and College Authority, which is related to facilities funding. The applicant cites that Alabama is one of 15 states that mandates charter schools receive the same amount of local tax revenue (Page e19).

The applicant very clearly describes how charter school funds are dispersed on a timely basis (Page e20), and how this process is the same as how traditional public schools are funded. The applicant provides good detail on the monitoring and corrective mechanisms to assure timely dispersal of funding is happening as intended (Pages e21-22).

Weaknesses:

The law allows that funds earmarked for debt services, capital expenditures and transportation be excluded from the calculation of local revenue for startup charter schools.

This demonstrates that there is not a complete 100% commitment and practice to assuring that charter school students receive the completely equitable amount of funding provided for district students.

Reader's Score: 2

Competitive Preference Priority 3 - Charter School Facilities

1. Competitive Preference Priority 3: Charter School Facilities

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 convincing evidence that the State provides extensive effort to assist charter schools with facilities.

The applicant notes that Alabama's new charter law follows the National Alliance for Public Charter School's model legislation (Page e22).

Alabama offers state-level facilities funding for charter schools, first right of refusal, access to tax exempt bonds and mill levies, one on one assistance with facility acquisition and low-cost leasing. A database of unused facilities is updated yearly, and a document titled "Priority Growth Regions" provides needed information for a market analyses to guide where new charters would be most needed (Pages e22-e27).

The applicant provides extensive detail on how public charter schools are treated as public schools in the state with regards to equitable access to facilities and facilities financing initiatives. This includes bonds through the Public School and College Authority and grants for capital improvements, as well as tax exempt, low-interest loans. The applicant notes how that State assures that charter schools can purchase any type of public facility (Pages e22 through e27). The applicant describes the knowledge and experience in facilities financing held by one of its hired staff. The applicant notes that it provides a facilities financing workshop for charter applicants (Page e24).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were found.

Reader's Score: 4

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

1. Competitive Preference Priority 4: Best Practices to Improve Struggling Schools and Local Educational Agencies

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 describes how best practices from charter schools are disseminated through breakout sessions at the annual Summer Professional Learning Conference attended by every district in the state, including charter schools (Page e27). The applicant states that every subgrantee will be required to attend the earmarked Best Practices session and Innovation Zone schools will be encouraged to attend (Page e27). The applicant also describes a partnership with the Montgomery Education Foundation, Athens City Schools, the ALSDE and others to disseminate best practices of conversion charter schools (Page e28).

The Association will also partner with the Alabama Association of School Boards and participate in their annual summer conference (Page e28). There is an online Best Practices Clearinghouse anyone can access, and this is updated at least once annually with best practices nationally and from charter schools in Alabama (Pages e28-29). The applicant notes how best practices are vetted for scalability and evidence (Page e29).

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not provide sufficient detail on the process or evidence of how the State identifies best practices from charter schools and uses these best practices to improve struggling schools and local educational agencies. The applicant does not describe the extent (i.e. the number or percentage of struggling schools) the State has supported in adopting what specific practices, and if these practices have improved student learning outcomes.

Reader's Score: 1

Competitive Preference Priority 5 - Serving At-Risk Students

1. Competitive Preference Priority 5: Serving At-Risk Students

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 explains how State law has a specific intent and makes a specific commitment to prioritizing charter schools that serve at-risk students (Page e29-e30).

The applicant describes relationships with charter operators that have shown success serving at-risk youth, particularly students at risk of dropping out or have dropped out. The applicant describes how they have purposely recruited CMOs with track records of strong learning outcomes with economically disadvantaged populations – such as Democracy Prep, KIPP, Gestalt, IDEA, ACCEL, ResponsiveED, and others (Page e31).

The applicant plans to support charter schools serving at-risk students through preference during the subgrant application process, with school serving more than 60% educationally disadvantaged students receiving a \$500,000 supplement. They have targeted for 12 of the 15 planned-to-be awarded schools to receive this supplement (Page e32).

The applicant also describes state support services schools can access for at-risk students, including the Innovative Pathways to Graduation program (Page e32),

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not fully address what they will specifically do to support schools that serve at-risk students. Information on specific supports the applicant will provide, such as career counseling, were not clearly presented.

Reader's Score: 2

Competitive Preference Priority 6 - Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing

1. Competitive Preference Priority 6: Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing

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 provides a thorough response demonstrating the extent it has taken steps to ensure that all authorized public chartering agencies implement best practices for charter school authorizing.

The applicant cites State law referencing nationally recognized quality standards for charter authorizing (Page e33) and references NACSA's best practices for authorizing standards (Page e34). The applicant describes how the performance of authorizers is monitored, including an annual performance report and how well the schools they authorize are meeting contract goals. There is an online platform to collect evidentiary information. A process for corrective action, including dismissal, for authorizers is described (Page e34).

The applicant describes what they will specifically do to ensure all authorized public chartering agencies implement best practices for charter school authorizing (Pages e33-37).

The applicant will smartly continue to partner with the state, which has designated \$200,000 annually in the state's education budget to support the Commission's work through trainings and technical assistance to increase the capacity of authorizers (Page e35). The applicant notes that grant funds will be used to train new authorizers in best practices and that quarterly regional authorizer trainings will be held (Pages e35-36). The budget supports are clearly defined on Pages e251-257.

On Page e46, the applicant describes how it will contract with NACSA for an annual evaluation to continue improving authorizer policy and practice. The results of this evaluation will be used to develop plans to continually improve the State's index rating on NACSA's Standards and Principles and 12 Essential Practices.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were found.

Reader's Score: **4**

Status: Submitted
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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Alabama Coalition for Public Charter Schools (U282A190004)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	15	13
Objectives		
1. Objectives	20	15
Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants		
1. Subgrant Applicants	15	15
State Plan		
1. State Plan	20	19
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	11
Parent and Community Involvement		
1. Involvement	10	8
Flexibility		
1. Flexibility	5	5
Sub Total	100	86
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
Equitable Financing		
1. Equitable Financing	3	3
Sub Total	3	3
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
Charter School Facilities		
1. Charter School Facilities	4	4
Sub Total	4	4
Competitive Preference Priority 4		
Best Practices to Improve Struggling Schools/LEAs		
1. Best Practices	2	1
Sub Total	2	1
Competitive Preference Priority 5		
Serving At-Risk Students		

1. Serving At-Risk Students	3	2
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Sub Total	3	2
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Competitive Preference Priority 6

Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing

1. CharterSchool Authorizing	4	4
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Sub Total	4	4
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Total	116	100
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Technical Review Form

Panel #3 - Panel 3 - Alabama - 1: 84.282A

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: Alabama Coalition for Public Charter Schools (U282A190004)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. Quality of the Project Design

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: 13

Sub

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:

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

Strengths:

The applicant provides a well-developed rationale for the need for the grant project based on data obtained from national and state sources indicating the dismal outlook of education in Alabama. Additionally, the project is supported by research from the Center for Research on Educational Outcomes (CREDO) indicating the success of charter schools in advancing student outcomes. Pg. e37 – e39

Weaknesses:

The activities listed in the Logic Model are not directly aligned to the performance measures included in the objectives. The Logic Model is vague and does not include outcomes related to each of the performance measures identified in the objectives. The document is more of a checklist of activities each partner will perform to adequately meet the project goals. These two documents should be closely aligned to ensure project success. Pg. e39 – e41 and e116

Reader's Score: 8

2. 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:

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

Strengths:

Objectives provided contain measurable targets and performance measures and are justified based on the newness of the state's charter law. Along with the newness of the law is the need to develop other high quality charter school authorizers in order to expand the educational options within the state. The narrative in section B explains the

Sub

process of ensuring all authorizers are high quality and the process includes an effort of attracting other LEAs that would offer charter options within their district. The applicant has adequately addressed this criterion. Pg. e39 – e41 and e46 – e47

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

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 state of Alabama has a very new charter law (2015) and only two operating charter schools at the writing of this application. The applicant projects that 15 charter schools will be opened in the 5 year grant project, being a mix of new start-ups and replication/expansion charters. This goal is ambitious given the novelty of charter schools within the state. By working with national CMOs the applicant hopes to bring networks of charter schools that have a track record of positive educational outcomes for educationally disadvantaged students, to specific areas of the state. With these successful charter schools, the applicant will be able to meet the goals outlined in the project narrative. Pg. e43 – e46 and e71 – e72

Even though Alabama has a very strong charter law, the applicant will partner with NACSA to perform an annual evaluation of the charter law. Areas of policy and practice that do not score high on the performance tool will be considered for improvement within the charter authorizing practices. NACSA will rely on the National Standards and Principles that have been developed and currently used by many states to ensure high quality authorizing practices. Pg. e46

Weaknesses:

There is a lack of clarity between the Logic Model and the narrative relating to objective #2. The discrepancy is found as whether or not the authorizer evaluation performed by NACSA will produce evaluative results each year of the project or at the culmination of the project. While the narrative indicates that progress toward great authorizing practices will increase each year with the annual evaluation, the targets on page e41 and those contained in the Logic Model only identify a change in authorizing practices in year 5 of the grant project. Pg. e41, e46 and e116

Reader's Score: 15

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 was organized in 2013 as the Alabama Coalition for Public Charter Schools which was a support organization for new charters. After getting the charter law passed in 2015, the coalition morphed itself into a full service charter school support organization under the name of New Schools for Alabama (NSFA). This group, along with other likeminded organizations began planning for the growth of high quality charter schools in Alabama. Through network opportunities based on contacts known by the Executive Director, the applicant will seek CMOs outside of Alabama that have experience working with educationally disadvantaged students and have proven success with this population to open new charter schools within the state. By using a CMO recruitment rubric, the applicant will determine which groups are a good fit for the Alabama charter school landscape and types of students that are targeted within this project ensuring that program objectives to improve educational outcomes will be met. Pg. e129 – e134 and e47 – e49

The narrative provides strong evidence supporting the successful implementation of new high quality charter schools within the state. This project provides an opportunity for aspiring leaders to apply for admittance based on their background experiences and a well-developed, detailed proposal for a new charter school. The individuals selected will be given start-up funding to participate in a year-long residency program with national CMO KIPP and will be provided with technical assistance while preparing their charter application. This program will produce highly qualified school leaders ready to take on the task of opening a new charter school. Pg. e49 – e50

In-state existing charter schools that work with the target population of educationally disadvantaged students will be encouraged to apply for additional charters to help expand the offerings for Alabama students. The applicant has provided evidence that each of these three groups – out of state CMOs, innovative leaders from Alabama and in-state charter schools – will likely produce new charter schools that will meet the objectives of the project and provide a high quality education to educationally disadvantaged students and help to close the achievement gaps. Pg. e30 – e31

Because the applicant is referencing the applications of approved charter schools from the ALSDE's application process , and is taking this information and other information provided by the subgrantee through a peer review process that is comprehensive and rigorous, there is a high chance that these subgrantees will be successful within their grant project. Pg. e51 – e52 and e143 – e170

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - State Plan

1. State Plan

Reader's Score: 19

Sub

1. The State entity's plan to--

- a. Adequately monitor the eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity's program;**

Sub

Strengths:

The applicant thoroughly addressed this sub-criterion in the following manner. Monitoring processes planned by the applicant will be joined with the continuous monitoring completed by ALSDE. The applicant plans to monitor all areas of academic, operational and financial performance. Pg. e53 – e54

A Data Center located within the ALSDE houses a wide variety of school and student level data that will also be used by the applicant for monitoring purposes. There is also a data collection portal that allows a charter school's finances to be monitored every month. These tools will be invaluable as the applicant progresses through this project. Pg. e53 – e54

Each subgrantee will be required to submit a quarterly report during the first year of the grant and each will participate in a site visit the first project year. Applicants that appear to be struggling or are not meeting the set goals will be offered a variety of technical assistance depending on the need. Pg. e54 – e55

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

2. The State entity's plan to:

b. Work with the authorized public chartering agencies involved to avoid duplication of work for the charter schools and authorized public chartering agencies; and

Strengths:

The applicant is very cautious not to cause subgrantees, or state authorizers to report the same information to different entities. There will be a focused effort on using the data that is available and already reported to monitor subgrantees, and to consider which applicants for funding have a good possibility for success. Because the ALSDE has a rigorous application process, as noted in state policy ratings by the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools, the applicant will review information within the application for a charter school, to assist in determining if the new charter operators would be strong candidates for start-up funding through this grant project. This section of the application is adequately developed based on the narrative provided. Pg. e54 – e56

Weaknesses:

There is not strong evidence to indicate that the authorizers efforts in securing needed paperwork from the charter schools will be lessened by this project. Because the information gathered by the applicant for the purposes of the grant project is information that is already collected by the authorizer, there is no evidence presented that would indicate less duplication of effort on the part of the authorizers, only the applicant. Pg. e54 – e56

Reader's Score: 4

3. The State entity's plan to:

c. 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:

Through a partnership with Insignia Partners each subgrantee will have technical assistance for the management of their CSP subgrant. Insignia Partners will collect and analyze data, and assist with mandatory reporting, including tracking of expenses and reimbursement requests. Subgrantees will be monitored for compliance as well as assisted with specific aspects of the charter operation as determined by these compliance checks. Additionally, a comprehensive site visit in year three of the project will be completed by the partner organization, Insignia Partners. These two activities will provide adequate assistance to subgrantees in order for them to meet the goals of their projects. Pg. e57 – e58

Technical assistance is provided throughout the subgrantee process. Through a partnership with NACSA, the subgrantees will receive charter board training and assistance with the actual development of their prospective governing boards. Necessary policy documents will be provided relative to board governance and operations by NACSA. The applicant will provide all subgrantees the opportunity to participate in the incubator program with the opportunity of having a one-year leadership training residence within a highly successful CMO. Pg. e56 – e57

According to the narrative on pg. e37 under Competitive Preference Priority #6, the applicant will dedicate a portion of their technical assistance for the training of new charter operators in the state. The new authorizers will be trained using the National Association of Charter School Authorizers protocols that have been used by the state to develop and refine the charter authorizing endeavors to date. Pg. e37

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

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:

(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; and

(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 narrative provides a timeline for major tasks needed throughout the 5 years of the grant project. Responsible entities are listed along with the milestones that will support the project tasks. Pg. e59 – e64

The project director has committed 80% of his time to this grant and the Director of Charter Development is committed with 100% of their time devoted to the implementation of the project. Personnel working in the ALSDE office will devote significant time to this project, with 50% of the coordinator's position and 50% of a new staff member devoted specifically to the subgrantee CSP project. Pg. e65 – e65

Individual resumes are included in the Appendix. Personnel involved in this project are highly qualified and well versed in charter school operations. Both the Project Director and the Charter School Office Coordinator have significant

experiences within the charter sector, from development to state policy work, classroom experience and monitoring at the state level. Partners involved in the project are well qualified with pertinent experiences to support the specific aspects of the grant program in which they are involved. Pg. e79 – e96

Weaknesses:

There are discrepancies between the budget narrative and the application narrative. The positions of external evaluator and communication consultant are included in the budget narrative, but there is no discussion of these two positions within the application narrative. Pg. e255 – e258

Activities on the timeline do not express all performance measures presented in the program objectives. There is also no indication of the long term program outcomes as identified in the Logic Model. Pg. e59 – e64 and e116

Time commitments by the partners in the project are vague. The narrative indicates that partners will contribute their “maximum allowable time”. A clearer picture of what percentage of their work time is committed to the project is necessary to determine if the grant will be successful. The budget includes expenditures for the partner organizations, but these expenditures are not supported in the application narrative. Pg. 64

Reader's Score: 11

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:

As mandated by state law, charter school applicants must include the methods in which they have involved community members in the development of the application and requires the applicant provide evidence of this support within the application process. Through the use of the charter school's application through the ALSDE as a guide to providing subgrantees funding, NSFA will be able to access the information provided concerning parent/community involvement within each charter school that applies for a subgrant. Pg. e66 – e67

Parents will make up at least 20% of the governing board. Again, this is mandated by law. This will ensure some level of parent involvement in the charter school. Pg. e66

A partnership with BA4E (Black Alabamans for Education) will provide opportunities for parents and community members to become familiar with charter schools as an option for their students. Interested parties will be educated on the merits of charter schools in their neighborhood through Charter School 101 Parent Empowerment Sessions and will be afforded the chance to visit local charter schools. BA4E will seek out individuals wishing to become advocates for charter schools and will offer training in the subject hoping trainees will join Community Advisory Groups and ultimately, assist charter schools in their community. Pg. e67 – e68

Weaknesses:

Information is provided that indicates the manner in which parents have access to data regarding all schools in the state. This data is maintained by the applicant and updated annually. This is a great tool to help parents identify appropriate schools for their children, but this will not provide parents and community members an opportunity to provide input on new and upcoming charter schools. Pg. e66

Reader's Score: 8

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:

Alabama's charter law provides great autonomy to charter schools as evidenced by the 12/12 score received from the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools in the categories of school autonomy, fiscal and legal autonomy and exemption from collective bargaining agreements. Pg. e69

In order to ensure new charter schools understand their flexibility, the applicant in conjunction with the ALSDE will discuss this topic with subgrantees during technical assistance consultation. Pg. e69

A list of common areas of flexibility will be provided to these charter school applicants as well as information about common practices relative to these components of flexibility within currently operating charter schools. This information will also be disseminated to charter schools within the state with ideas as to how other charters are using the flexibility waivers. Pg. e69 – e70

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority 2 - Equitable Financing

- 1. Competitive Preference Priority 2: Equitable Financing**

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:

Equitable funding is provided through the strength of the charter law as demonstrated by the following examples. Charter schools receive the same amount of state funding as district schools as required by state law. This funding includes all categories of state funds that would have been given to the resident district in support of the student. Pg. e19

State law requires that a proportional amount of funding be provided to charter schools for the education of special needs students, ELL and gifted students and AP program, school nurses and preschool programs to name a few. Pg. e19

Charter schools have access to facility funding through the Alabama Public School and College Authority. Additionally, charter schools are awarded their proportional share of local revenues, excluding funding earmarked for special

expenditures by the school board. Pg. e19

Charter schools receive their funding in the same timeframe as district schools and receive local revenues on a quarterly basis. Pg. e19

The applicant has thoroughly addressed this criterion.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority 3 - Charter School Facilities

1. Competitive Preference Priority 3: Charter School Facilities

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 adequately addresses each sub-criterion in the following manner:

Charter schools do have access to funding for facilities. They receive a share of the Public School Fund which supports certain aspects of facilities development; purchasing land, debt payments, insurance for the facilities, purchase of educational technology and equipment purchases. Pg. e23

Alabama law is strong relative to ensuring charter schools have access to facilities in which to operate. Facilities funding is available through the state and through tax-exempt bond markets. Technical assistance is provided throughout the facilities acquisition phase. With an extensive network of available public schools and commercial buildings noted on the applicant's website, the subgrantee will work with the applicant to acquire a building below market value. Charter schools are offered the first right of refusal of an empty building and have the ability to access mill levies if they are a district sponsored or a conversion charter school still under direction of a school district. Pg. e22 – e23

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 4

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

1. Competitive Preference Priority 4: Best Practices to Improve Struggling Schools and Local Educational Agencies

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:

Charter schools best practices are being shared at the state's annual summer conference which includes both charter school educators and district educators. There is a commitment that at least one session will be provided for this dissemination. Pg. e27 – e28

Weaknesses:

Other than charter school best practices being highlighted at an annual conference, there is no evidence of these practices actually being utilized to assist struggling schools. Pg. e27 – e29

Reader's Score: 1

Competitive Preference Priority 5 - Serving At-Risk Students

1. Competitive Preference Priority 5: Serving At-Risk Students

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:

Charter schools in the state are given wide support for at-risk students, ranging from a very flexible law that allows high schools to initiate programs that will help students that have been dropouts to return and successfully complete high school. Additionally, during the subgrantee's application process, applicants that will serve populations with at least 60% educationally disadvantaged or at-risk students will receive additional start-up funds of \$500,000. Pg. e30 – e32

In order to ensure enough seats for at-risk students evidence is provided to indicate the applicant is actively recruiting for CMOs outside of the state that traditionally serve a high percentage of these students to open charter schools in Alabama. Pg. e29

Weaknesses:

There is no intentional mention of the applicant directly assisting the charter schools in offering drop-out prevention or recovery programs nor did the applicant discuss assisting charter schools in establishing a comprehensive career counseling program.

Reader's Score: 2

Competitive Preference Priority 6 - Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing

1. Competitive Preference Priority 6: Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing

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 demonstrates strong development of this criterion. Alabama state law indicates that authorizers will be evaluated using national best practices. To date, the state has worked with NACSA (National Association of Charter School Authorizers) to develop these best practices. Applications submitted to the ALSDE (Alabama State Department of Education) by LEAs wishing to be an authorizer are vetted using these national standards. Additionally, new authorizers are required to pledge support to the charter schools that are sponsored. Pg. e33 – e37

The applicant has earmarked technical assistance funds from this grant to provide training to new authorizers in the Principles and Standards for Quality School Authorizing. These principles and standards were developed by NACSA and are widely utilized throughout the United States. Pg e36

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 4

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 04/05/2019 05:24 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 04/05/2019 05:24 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Alabama Coalition for Public Charter Schools (U282A190004)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	15	15
Objectives		
1. Objectives	20	19
Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants		
1. Subgrant Applicants	15	15
State Plan		
1. State Plan	20	19
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	14
Parent and Community Involvement		
1. Involvement	10	10
Flexibility		
1. Flexibility	5	5
Sub Total	100	97
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
Equitable Financing		
1. Equitable Financing	3	3
Sub Total	3	3
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
Charter School Facilities		
1. Charter School Facilities	4	4
Sub Total	4	4
Competitive Preference Priority 4		
Best Practices to Improve Struggling Schools/LEAs		
1. Best Practices	2	1
Sub Total	2	1
Competitive Preference Priority 5		
Serving At-Risk Students		

1. Serving At-Risk Students	3	3
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Sub Total	3	3
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Competitive Preference Priority 6

Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing

1. CharterSchool Authorizing	4	4
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Sub Total	4	4
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Total	116	112
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Technical Review Form

Panel #3 - Panel 3 - Alabama - 1: 84.282A

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: Alabama Coalition for Public Charter Schools (U282A190004)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. Quality of the Project Design

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: 15

Sub

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:

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

Strengths:

The applicant makes a compelling case for investment in charter schools in Alabama in both the abstract and project narrative (e16 and e37-38) highlighting the historic and profound opportunity gaps for Black, Hispanic and low income students. As evidence, the applicant notes that Alabama ranks 50th in math and 46th in reading on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), and 45th on the ACT College entrance exams.

Citing research found in CREDO's Study on Charter Management Organizations from 2017, the applicant notes the ability of non-profit, brick-and-mortar charter schools in urban settings to have a statistically significant positive impact on low-income, minority student outcomes (e38). The applicant also highlights the alignment of the grant activities and proposed outcomes to the cited research stating that they will only make the subgrants available to non-profit, brick-and-mortar charter schools. Additionally, the applicant will focus its recruitment efforts on charter organizations and leaders that have a demonstrated history of serving disadvantaged populations and will incentivize applications that target these groups (e39). Also in alignment with the research findings, the applicant plans to concentrate its recruitment and growth efforts in Alabama's larger urban areas (e39).

Sub

Weaknesses:

There were no weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

2. 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:

(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 offers a sound theory of action with supporting activities that are aligned to the plan's objectives and provides clearly defined, time-bound performance measures and targets throughout (e39-41, e44-47, and e116).

The applicant clearly states the objectives and ties the project components to relevant measurable outcomes. On pages e39-40, the applicant notes the first objective, which is to create 15 new charter schools within the five-year life of the grant. The applicant describes its second objective on pages e40-41, which is to become a national leader in authorizing quality as demonstrated by NACSA's authorizer evaluations.

To meet the new charter school goal, the applicant highlights activities it will undertake including to communicate the availability of subgrants, incubation and technical assistance opportunities; identify, incubate and recruit leaders and CMOs; and provide technical assistance before, during and after the application process (e39-40 and e44-45).

Performance measures, which are clearly related to the activities, are noted including: annually engage the requisite number of recruitment targets from high-quality pipelines to meet award timetable; award 15 competitive subgrants, 75% or 12 of which will serve educationally disadvantaged students; and 100% participation in technical assistance programming during start-up years (e40 and e44-45). In addition to the activity-specific performance measures, the applicant provides measurable annual targets for the grant awards to ensure the subgrant process remains on-track to meet the objectives by year five of the grant (e40).

Related to the second objective of advancing Alabama's standing as a national leader in authorizing quality, the applicant proposes the following activities and specific and measurable, related performance measures. The key activities include: to conduct an annual evaluation of Alabama's authorizing practices aligned to NACSA's best practices for authorizer evaluation; to provide quarterly authorizer training for all authorizers; and to identify and recruit local school boards that would make quality authorizers (e41). Related specific performance measures include: a measurably higher score against their index year authorizer practice evaluation (e41), conducting at least 4 training and evaluation sessions per year; and 2 new school boards to elect to become authorizers (e41). Annual targets for authorizer related activities are also defined for each year of the grant (e41 and e46-47).

Sub

Weaknesses:

There were no weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

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:

Though seeking to achieve only two objectives, the applicant provides a robust state plan that is both ambitious and feasible to achieve the stated goals. The applicant seeks to increase the number of charters in Alabama by 15 new schools and to advance Alabama to become a national leader in authorizing quality (e16). Though seemingly narrow in breadth, the depth of the plan and the coordinated effort to develop a statewide system to create and sustain high quality charter schools and authorizers is ambitious in its commitment and pursuit of excellence in both areas.

The applicant notes the ambitious nature of the growth-related objective on page e43 highlighting that, at present, Alabama only has two charter schools in operation. With a target of 15 schools over the five years, 12 of which will focus on educationally disadvantaged communities, the goal is to increase the charter market by over 200% (e44).

The applicant documents a wide array of activities from an organized coalition of partners to meet the new charter goal including parent and community awareness and engagement in the charter movement (e66-68) and new leader and school incubation and development activities (e39-40 and e44-45).

The applicant also shows a significant commitment to assuring that the CSP grant award process is conducted in an effective and timely manner and its approved applicants are selected and supported in a manner aligned to ensure quality schools are produced in Alabama. Specifically cited are activities aligned to the NIA including: to communicate the availability of subgrants in alignment with NIA (I)(A)(2) and, per NIA (I)(A)(3), to provide technical assistance before during and after the application process (e39-40 and e44-45).

The applicant plans to provide incubation and technical assistance opportunities and to identify and recruit leaders and CMOs with a history of providing outcomes for educationally disadvantaged students as noted in its performance measures which are: annually engage requisite number of recruitment targets from high quality pipeline to meet award timetable; award 15 competitive subgrants, 75% or 12 of which will serve educationally disadvantaged students.

In alignment with NIA (I)(A)(3)(c), the plan provides clear expectation that the schools will meet the needs of their English language learners and students with disabilities by a variety of efforts, including requiring 100% participation in technical assistance programming during start-up years (e40 and e44-45). Included in the application, selection, monitoring and technical support activities to support the ongoing financial sustainability of the new charter awardees.

The applicant describes its second objective on pages e40-41, which is to become a national leader in authorizing quality as demonstrated by NACSA's authorizer evaluations. In alignment with the NIA (A)(b)(11)-(12), the applicant proposes to

support the increase of quality authorization efforts through key activities such as: to conduct an annual evaluation of Alabama's authorizing practices aligned to NACSA's best practices for authorizer evaluation; to provide quarterly authorizer training for all authorizers; and to identify and recruit local school boards that would make quality authorizers (e41). Related specific performance measures include: a measurably higher score against their index year authorizer practice evaluation (e41 and e116), conducting at least 4 trainings and evaluation sessions per year; and 2 new school boards to elect to become authorizers (e41 and e116). Annual targets for authorizer related activities are also defined for each year of the grant (e41 and e46-47).

Weaknesses:

There is a lack of clarity in the application regarding the 6 schools already authorized and the fact that only two are open at present. It is unclear how these 6 already authorized schools are counted amongst the 15 schools to be developed under this grant. (e44).

Reader's Score: 19

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 an abundance of evidence related to the quality of its subgrantees. New Schools for Alabama (NSFA) calls out its mission to cultivate and support a statewide sector of high-quality schools to serve the most educationally disadvantaged students (e47) as well as the track record of its leader in implementing a successful CSP State Entities Grant (e48).

The coalition details plans to cultivate the pipeline of high-quality applicants via external CMO recruitment and the cultivation of in-state prospects (e48-50). The application also notes existing interest from several high-performing existing CMOs, such as Citizens of the World, Democracy Prep, Freedom Prep, RePublic and Inspire NOLA and details the criteria used to appropriately vet CMO candidates using their CMO Rubric (e129-133).

NSFA also details its plans to provide comprehensive technical assist to aspiring leaders during the application process and to grow future school leaders using a year-long KIPP-Fisher Fellowship (e50).

In addition to cultivating a high-quality pipeline of well-prepared applicants, NSFA notes its plans for a peer review

process of all applicants done by experience charter leaders and impartial third parties (e34), using a rigorous application rubric (e117-127).

Noted throughout are the requirements of extensive plans, details and experience in serving underserved students and delivering educational outcomes as well as the specifically weighted and separately scored financial plan and workbook (e117-127).

Weaknesses:

There were no weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - State Plan

1. State Plan

Reader's Score: 19

Sub

1. The State entity's plan to--

- a. Adequately monitor the eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the State entity's program;**

Strengths:

Significant details are given describing how New Schools for Alabama (NSFA) and InSignia Partners will monitor academic, programmatic, and fiscal performance using monthly reports and data provided in the state system along with additional reporting and onsite visits (e53-58).

The applicant will use the comprehensive Data Center and process used by the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) to effectively monitor the subgrantees in the program (e53). The Data Center captures district and school report cards and student dashboards and interventions (e53).

They will also use the ALSDE statewide reporting system to monitor month-to-month fiscal activity. Additionally, NSFA will coordinate oversight with the state to include oversight from both the Division of Accountability and Compliance and the LEA Accounting and Fiscal teams (e54).

Substantial and noteworthy monitoring will be provided for first-year applicants. The monitoring efforts will afford a greater degree of assurance of the successful outcomes for new schools. Oversight for first year schools will include quarterly progress reports and at least one on-site visit with a desk-top review during the first year (e55).

Sub

Additional monitoring will be provided in the review and approval subgrant budgets, which will ensure that all proposed spending activities are in compliance with Federal standards. The applicant will also monitor the drawdown of funds to ensure that the funds are being used on allowable expenses (e58).

Finally, the applicant will receive, review and provide input on materials for all authorizer hearings which will add an additional layer of oversight to the review and reauthorization or renewal process (e55).

Weaknesses:

There were no weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

2. The State entity's plan to:

- b. Work with the authorized public chartering agencies involved to avoid duplication of work for the charter schools and authorized public chartering agencies; and**

Strengths:

The applicant provides an effective coordination of efforts and use of existing state data to avoid duplication of efforts. NSFA notes that it will synchronize its oversight efforts with ALSDE to avoid duplication, and it will utilize the existing comprehensive monitoring process to provide both academic and fiscal oversight (e53).

The State Data Center will be utilized and the applicant will rely on standard state reports in its monitoring efforts. Other supporting departments at ALSDE will participate to provide a coordinated and non-duplicative oversight effort (e54).

Additionally, NSFA will rely on existing charter application forms and the grant application scoring committee will apply a defined scoring standard to the existing application document (e56).

Weaknesses:

It is unclear if the proposed efforts will avoid duplication of work for the LEA authorizers, since the application does not identify a clear plan to address this.

Reader's Score: 4

3. The State entity's plan to:

- c. 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 application highlights extensive assistance and support for subgrantees in the program, such as: assistance with facilities location and acquisition (e24), in-person professional development highlighting best practices, electronic resources related best practice strategies (e28-29), additional grant funding for those serving in areas of high need (e31-32), and a comprehensive suite of trainings and resources (e32).

NSFA will also provide technical assistance before, during and after the application process and throughout the startup years (e40) including automatic access to incubator program training and both operational assistance and grant management support, including data collection and reporting, financial management, compliance monitoring, and infrastructure development (e56-58).

The applicant will also assist subgrantees with board recruitment and policy development related to governance and operations (e57).

Related to quality authorizing, the applicant will continue quarterly trainings for authorizers (e24) and partner with ALSDE to provide authorizer and charter board training (e57).

Weaknesses:

There were no weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

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:**

(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; and

(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 offers a very well-developed management plan to support the objectives of the project within the proposed timeline and within budget specifically noting that NSFA will be the lead partner in the collaboration and the owner of ensuring timely delivery of the services and activities to support the objectives (e59). As noted by the applicant on page e59, the management plan offered details the “essentials” and the related responsible parties and timeline and milestones. The applicant noted on page (e59) that this plan does not constitute the full depth and breadth of all required subtasks noted throughout.

The logic model’s defined long-term outcomes, found on page e116, are clearly supported by the management plan’s major tasks and related milestones. Specifically, the long-term outcomes of a) 200% increase in the number of charter schools in Alabama; and b) 15 new charter schools of which 12 will serve populations that are 60% or more educationally disadvantaged; and c) 9 subgrantees will achieve a letter grade of A or B, are supported by the management plan’s CSP grant process (e59-60), its communication plan (e60-61), and its recruitment and growth plan (e62). The essential tasks noted in the management plan and the activities described throughout the full narrative are supported by appropriate time commitments by the various partners and sufficient funds as noted in the budget narrative (e248-258). The final long-term goal (c) defined in the logic model (e116) to achieve a measurably higher score on NACSA’s authorizer evaluation is also supported throughout the management plan activities and milestones related to charter authorizing found on pages e62-63.

Similarly, the short-term outcomes seen in the logic model also align to the proposed essentials seen in the management plan which are deemed as appropriate and adequate to support the proposed long-term targets (e116, e58-68). The short-term outcomes are noted in the logic model as (i) new high-quality applicants, (ii) sustainable high-quality schools, and (iii) high-quality authorizing practices (e116). These are supported extensively in the detail of essential related tasks found on pages (e58-68).

The applicant notes the specific roles and time allocations for each of the partners including appropriate time allocation from the two most significant participants which are NSFA and the ALSDE Charter Office. NSFA staff time allocation of 80% of the executive director’s time and 100% of the Director of Charter Development seems appropriate to the activities outlined, as does the 50% time from both the coordinator and one additional FTE at the ALSDE Charter Office (e65). A specific strength is seen in the track record of the NSFA leader’s past experience in implementing a successful CSP State Entities Grant (e48).

Other partner capacity is highlighted in the efforts of Black Alabamans 4 Education (BA4E) and Insignia Partners, all of which provide a realistic coordination of efforts to address the objectives described (e65). Specifically, BA4E’s organizational activities directly align to and support the engagement activities proposed to ensure sufficient parent engagement, support and input in the charter schools throughout the state (e67-68).

Finally, activities noted in the logic model and in the management plan are well supported by resources allocated in the budget to support the work (e248-258).

Weaknesses:

The narrative and management plan specifically call out the contract with NACSA to conduct both an index year and ongoing annual evaluation of authorizer practices. The budget shows an allocation of funds for a contract with NACSA, but does not clearly list the index or annual evaluations in the list of activities to be performed (e253, e255 and e 257).

Finally, the budget mentions and allocates funds for an external project evaluator to conduct an evaluation of the project on whole (e258), but the grant project evaluation is not clearly noted in the management plan (e59-64).

Reader's Score: 14

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 provides a substantial and thorough plan to support parent and community engagement in the charter movement in Alabama. The commitment to this goal is highlighted by the applicant in citing the requirement of applicants to demonstrate multiple ways in which they have engaged the community, to outline a detailed plan for opportunities and expectations of parental involvement, and that they must show significant and objective evidence of community support as part of the application process (e66). Specifically, charter applicants are asked to specifically describe "the role of any parents and community members involved to date in the development of the proposed school" (e157). Additionally, the grant scoring rubric used in selecting subgrantees states that in order to achieve a top score in this area, an applicant must not only give specific details related to the parent and community involvement in the development of the school, but also convincingly demonstrate that the school has built strong parent/guardian and community demand and how it plans to ensure genuine and ongoing community and family engagement in the future (e121).

If approved, the applicant also plans to solicit direct input from parents and community members related to subgrantees via the Selection Committee. After the public hearing for new applicants, the Committee will actively solicit feedback asking parents and community members about their perceptions of the applicants and requesting that they score the applicants across multiple criteria. The input will be utilized later to inform subgrant award decisions (e52).

In order to foster transparency and support parent and community involvement, the applicant provides a "For Parents" section on its website, which features an interactive map of the location of all charter schools that are color coded based on the schools A-F Report Card grade (e66).

New Schools for Alabama (NSFA) will also partner with Black Alabamians for Education (BA4E) to equip, inform and empower Black families with information on accessing high quality educational options. In the future, BA4E will target its efforts in regions targeted for ACSP subgrants. Through the grant, BA4E will expand its mission-aligned efforts which currently include: Chat & Chews, where community members eat a free meal and discuss educational issues; facilitated small group meetings to grow awareness of charter schools as options; educate and inform the parents about the history of charter schools and their impact; as well as empower parents via training on community engagement and activity. Finally, BA4E program completers are invited to join the Community Advisory Group which supports the targeted regions jointly identified by NSFA and BA4E (e67-68).

Weaknesses:

There were no weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

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 notes that state charter law provides for the maximum flexibility from regulations that pertain to traditional public schools (e68). Specifically, the law states that charter schools are exempt from state teacher certification requirements and that the teachers may choose to but are not required to participate in the retirement and health programs (e68). The state law was scored 12 out of 12 points for policy ranking for school autonomy, fiscal and legal autonomy and automatic express exemptions from collective bargaining agreements as rated by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS).

Additional flexibilities are noted as: salary schedule, expenditure of funds, length of day/year, time allocations and credit requirement, dual enrollment, online course, and physical education restrictions, course requirements and teacher certifications (e69-70).

NSFA also highlights its activities to support awareness and utilization of said flexibilities, in that they cross-reference the application materials of other charters to demonstrate concrete examples of flexibilities for applicants and they identify regulatory autonomies and facilitate breakout sessions where leaders share their best practice and the autonomy that made each possible (e70).

Weaknesses:

There were no weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority 2 - Equitable Financing

1. Competitive Preference Priority 2: Equitable Financing

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 application shows that Alabama state law requires each of its public charter students to receive the same amount of funding as compared to traditional public schools. It is also noted that the law requires Alabama State Department of Education to direct a proportionate share of federal and state categorical aid to public charter schools serving students who are eligible for programs such as Special Education, ESL, Gifted, Advance Placement, Pre-School, and School Nurse programs (e19).

Additionally, the applicant highlights the noteworthy strength that Alabama is one of less than 15 states that mandates that charter schools receive the same amount of local tax revenue (e19-20). Also cited as evidence is the state requirement to disperse transportation funding to charter schools on the same basis as it is paid to traditional districts (e20).

In regard to timeliness, the state requires that the districts provide funds to the charter schools, in a timely manner, aligned to the type of charter school, whether start-up or conversion (e20-21) and that the district must disseminate those funds in the same manner and using the same calculations as it does its district schools (e21). The state department monitors the activities via monthly financial reports completed at the district and school level. Noted also is the department's authority to step in and intervene should a district fail to fulfil its obligation. If the district does not self-correct or is in persistent violation, the state has the power to revoke its ability to authorize charter schools (e21-22).

Weaknesses:

There were no weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority 3 - Charter School Facilities

1. Competitive Preference Priority 3: Charter School Facilities

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 clearly meets the requirement of the competitive preference. It notes the 2015 law which established charter schools was modeled after the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools' Model Law, and, thus was specifically crafted to ensure charter schools had access to adequate facilities (e22).

Evidence offered notes that the state legislature has the authority to issue bonds to charter schools and traditional schools alike and that Alabama Code § 16-13-234 ensures that charter schools receive their share of the Public School Fund (PSF) monies via these low interest loans (e22-23). The state PSF provisions guarantees the charter will receive the same amount per pupil in matched funds.

Assistance with facilities acquisition is also provided through multiple avenues (e23-25). The applicant notes that all charter schools receive comprehensive assistance with facilities identification, acquisition and finance in that Alabama Code mandates that the ALSDE maintain a list of all unused facilities on its website and that the list be updated annually (e23).

Additionally, New Schools for Alabama (NSFA) partners with the department to expand that list to include underutilized facilities and includes buildings that are not exclusively public school buildings. The Charter Facilities Index list also provides an interactive map and preferred geographic areas, all having pictures, footage and price. Related support is offered via the NSFA Priority Growth Document which details population trends and existing educational options and other market analyses (e24).

In addition to the Priority Growth Document, NSFA also provides in-person technical assistance, with deep expertise from former VP of Financing and Lending from the Charter Impact Fund, Chris Reynolds (e24).

By law, Alabama ensures that charter schools have first right of refusal to purchase unused or underutilized public school facilities that are on the market and that the terms of purchase are reasonable (e25-e26).

Finally, evidence is provided that conversion charter schools in the state have access to local mills (e26).

Weaknesses:

There were no weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 4

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

1. Competitive Preference Priority 4: Best Practices to Improve Struggling Schools and Local Educational Agencies

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 proposes that it uses charter best practices to improve struggling LEAs and charter schools by highlighting in-person and electronic dissemination methods (e27-29).

Noted is ALSDE's commitment to offer a breakout session, including a cross-sector panel, highlighting charter school practices at its annual professional learning conference and the applicant's contractual requirement for its subgrantees to attend at least once (e27). Additionally noted is the dissemination strategy to ensure that conversion charter schools receive relevant charter best practice information via the Alabama Association of School Boards summer conference (e28).

The applicant also details the one-on-one consultation offered to assist with implementing best practices and inform strategic planning of charter schools, along with an annual in-person convening of charter operators, applicants and partners to share best practices (e28).

Finally, the applicant discusses its electronic strategy consisting of providing a repository with resources that include charter best practices which have measurable supporting data (e29).

Weaknesses:

It was not clearly noted how the applicant ensures that struggling schools and LEAs are targeted and supported for performance improvement using charter school best practices.

Reader's Score: 1

Competitive Preference Priority 5 - Serving At-Risk Students

1. Competitive Preference Priority 5: Serving At-Risk Students

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 Alabama Coalition of Public Charter Schools meets the requirements and offers comprehensive support and technical assistance to charter schools that service at-risk students. The applicant notes the state law's specificity, which states that one of the stated purposes for charter schools is to close achievement gaps between high and low performing groups of public school students (e29).

The state's support of at-risk students is evidenced by its provision to allow charter schools to offer enrollment preference to at-risk students and that the statute specifically requires that all authorizing entities prioritize applications to serve at-risk students (e30). Ala. Code § 16-6F-7 is cited as evidence that every charter school must specifically articulate how it will serve at-risk students (e30).

The applicant notes its strong history of relationship building and recruiting high quality charter operators with a track record of success in serving this population with the specified services, noting that it has successfully recruited operators such as: Democracy Prep, Gestalt Community, KIPP and Freedom Prep. Additionally, the applicant highlights that the first charter school approved in Alabama was ACCEL Day and Evening Academy, a dropout prevention model (e31). Also cited is the history of support for these schools and the applicant's strong relationships with out of state schools that have a track record of providing both dropout prevention and dropout recovery services (e31).

Of additional consequence is the fact that all of the charter schools approved thus far are located in an attendance zone with 60% or more at-risk students (e31).

The applicant notes its specific target of having 12 of the 15 new subgrantees meet the qualifications of serving at-risk and educationally disadvantaged students with such programs (e32).

Finally, the state's support of student programs is detailed as providing categorical funding for such programs, providing a comprehensive suite of resources and training, and online monitoring tools to help schools track and monitor early warning signs (e32-33).

Weaknesses:

There were no weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 3

Competitive Preference Priority 6 - Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing

1. Competitive Preference Priority 6: Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing

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 provides a variety of assurances related to quality authorizing practices and to holding schools and authorizers accountable that will ensure best practices in charter school will likely be implemented (e33-37).

Highlighted is the authorizer application requirement to explain the board's capacity for oversight and its commitment to perform quality authorizing per the NACSA standards. The application package requires a commitment to and plans for quality authorizing, including providing support to applicants and approved charters, monitoring school performance, and holding schools accountable (e33-34).

The applicant cites the responsibility of the authorizers to monitor the ongoing performance of the charter schools that it authorizes and the Alabama code that specifically allows the authorizers to not renew or to revoke a charter that fails to meet standards of fiscal management (e37).

It is noted that ALSDE has specific responsibilities under the law to review and evaluate authorizer quality using nationally recognized standards for quality authorizing (e33) and that it has the appropriate authority granted to revoke the chartering authority of both the local school boards and/or the charter commission, if it finds an authorizer not in compliance (e34).

Also highlighted are ALSDE's authorizer monitoring processes which require authorizers to submit a detailed annual report with granular detail on the performance of each charter school it has authorized, including academic, operational, and financial data, including financial audits (e34 and e37).

Finally, the applicant highlights that the Alabama Legislature has provided \$200,000 annually in the budget for the commission's work, that ALSDE currently provides training and technical assistance for both the commission and local authorizers (e35).

Weaknesses:

There were no weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 4

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