

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

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 06/26/2017 12:37 PM

## Technical Review Coversheet

**Applicant:** Rhode Island Department of Education (U282A170024)

**Reader #1:** \*\*\*\*\*

	Points Possible	Points Scored
<b>Questions</b>		
<b>Selection criteria</b>		
<b>Flexibility</b>		
1. Flexibility	10	8
<b>Sub Total</b>	10	8
<b>Selection Criteria</b>		
<b>Objectives</b>		
1. Objectives	15	13
<b>Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants</b>		
1. Quality of Subgrant	15	15
<b>State Plan</b>		
1. State Plan	20	19
<b>Parent and Community Involvement</b>		
1. Involvement	10	9
<b>Quality of Project Design</b>		
1. Project Design	15	13
<b>Quality of the Management Plan, Theory of Action</b>		
1. Management Plan	15	15
<b>Sub Total</b>	90	84
<b>Priority Questions</b>		
<b>Competitive Preference Priority 1</b>		
<b>Periodic Review and Evaluation</b>		
1. Review and Evaluation	5	5
<b>Sub Total</b>	5	5
<b>Competitive Preference Priority 2</b>		
<b>Charter School Oversight</b>		
1. Charter School Oversight	5	5
<b>Sub Total</b>	5	5
<b>Competitive Preference Priority 3</b>		
<b>Authorizer other than LEA or Appeal Process</b>		
1. Authorizer other than LEA	2	2
<b>Sub Total</b>	2	2

**Competitive Preference Priority 4**

**Equitable Financing**

1. Equitable Financing	2	2
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

**Competitive Preference Priority 5**

**Charter School Facilities**

1. Charter School Facilities	2	2
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

**Competitive Preference Priority 6**

**Best Practices to Improve Struggling Schools/LEAs**

1. Struggling Schools	2	2
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

**Competitive Preference Priority 7**

**Serving At-Risk Students**

1. Serving At-Risk Students	2	2
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

**Competitive Preference Priority 8**

**Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing**

1. Best Practices	5	5
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>

<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>117</b>
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# Technical Review Form

Panel #9 - Panel 9 - Rhode Island - 1: 84.282A

Reader #1: \*\*\*\*\*

Applicant: Rhode Island Department of Education (U282A170024)

## Questions

### 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 provided complete and well-organized evidence of the flexibility afforded to charter schools in Rhode Island law. Each area of evidence included notation of the aligned state statute or resource document provided in the Appendices and explanation of the support. The following are noted areas of flexibility:

- Administrative relationship between authorizer and charter schools is a direct connection from RIDE and charter school board of trustees (pg. 16);
- Outside of graduation requirements and state content standards, the curriculum program is at the charter school level of decision-making and implementation including school day and calendar, providing curriculum autonomy (pg. 16);
- Charter schools are not bound by local collective bargaining agreements and, in some cases, do not have to participate in Rhode Island Teacher Retirement programs, providing staffing autonomy (pgs. 16-17);
- State and federal entitlement funding streams depending on if there is a Memorandum of Understanding with district for some charter schools, go directly to the charter school, providing fiscal autonomy (pg. 17);
- The Consolidated Resource Plan used by Mayoral Academies and Independent Charter Schools as do local districts and their charter schools outlines the purpose of federal program resources, how the statutory obligations can be met, and explains how federal program resources can be used to address specific programs' needs. Following that guidance on appropriate use of funds, schools also have flexibility within Federal law for expenditures (pg. 17).

#### Weaknesses:

The types of charter schools in the state are identified as Mayoral Academies, district charter schools, and non-district charter schools but a clear definitions or distinctions between the three are not provided to inform the reviewer (pg. 17). Additionally, it is not clear if "independent charters" (pg. 16) is referencing non-district charters or another type of charter school.

It appears that non-district charters may have more flexibility than district charters (pgs. 16-17), and Mayoral Academies have flexibility in personnel more like non-district charters, but this is not thoroughly explained in this section.

The work of the Rhode Island Department of Education to maximize flexibility afforded to charter schools by statute is not clearly identified. Specifically addressing this element of the section's criteria would fully develop the applicant's flexibility discussion.

Reader's Score: 8

### Selection Criteria - Objectives

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

**Strengths:**

The applicant clearly states and provides rationale as to why the focus for the CSP grant is on providing all students with access to high-quality education (pgs. 18-20) and uses data to support its priority. Additionally, each of the CSP application's three objectives is clearly identified with rational and discussion of needs that the CSP is designed to address (pgs. 20-28).

An approach is also described in this section. The use of a centralized online enrollment system for student and families wanting to learn about and/or enroll in charter schools would seem to be a potentially positive process for charter schools (pgs. 23). This is a unique opportunity that may be afforded due to the size of the state, but could become best practice in communicating about charter schools and enhancing ensure tracking of student enrollment in a charter school if not on the rosters of other public LEAs.

Another aspect of the applicant's objectives is related to Objective #1: Increasing the number of high-quality educational opportunities by discussing the impact on available opportunities through the RFP process and prioritizing authorizing of "new charter seats" for educationally disadvantaged students. The applicant provides explanation of this practice on page 22 with further information provided in Appendix F12, Request for Proposal for New Student Seats.

The ambitiousness of the applicant's program objectives are reasonable, and feasible, and demonstrate increase in both the quality of education in the state and the number of charter school opportunities. The applicant describes a significant goal of 30% additional charter schools over the previous years' average of two per year to three per year for the time span of the grant (pg. 20).

**Weaknesses:**

Rhode Island is proposing to open only nine charter schools over the course of the five year grant period (p. 20). The applicant states that "new charters have opened at an average rate of two per year." It would seem that the average rate over that last ten years will not be maintained. No explanation is provided as to the expected lower than average rate.

**Reader's Score:** 13

**Selection Criteria - Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants****1. The likelihood that the eligible applicants receiving subgrants under the program will meet those objectives and improve educational results for students.****Strengths:**

The applicant establishes a reasonable expectation that successful subgrants will meet the program objectives for CSP. This likelihood is supported through the following subgrant strategies:

- Charter proposals will be reviewed through an RFP process using independent evaluators (pg. 29);
- Proposals for expansion must include evidence of a proven track record of success (pg. 30) including the state's accountability system and on the charter performance review system;
- CSP proposals are expected to have clear goals aligned to RICSP program objectives, specifically 2-3 annual goals related to Objective #1 and #3 (pg. 30). Additional depth is added to this expectation on pages 31-32's discussion of how charter schools are to demonstrate alignment with the RICSP goals.

The detail provided on pages 31-32 regarding the alignment of subgrant goals to program objectives suggests that improvements in educational results for students through, for example, focusing on groups of students and creating partnerships with districts will be realized.

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

### Selection Criteria - State Plan

#### 1. The State entity's plan to--

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

#### Strengths:

The sufficient adequacy of the applicant's monitoring of subgrants includes:

- All subgrant recipients are required to prepare quarterly detailed reporting on goals, benchmarks, activities and current budget summaries (pgs. 34-35);
- Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) will align the CSP quarterly reports to existing quarterly reports all charters are required to complete as well as modify the charter school annual report template subgrantees to include reporting on their CSP goals (pg. 35);
- RIDE will establish financial performance expectations and have sessions for charter business managers, Chief Financial Officers and charter school board finance committees to provide assistance with the fiscal oversight (pg. 35).

The above-mentioned monitoring strategy components highlight two expectations for CSP. First, duplication of work for charter schools and authorizes will be reduced through RIDE's modification to reporting and secondly, the anticipation of assistance to charter school leadership on financial expectation and reporting.

Additional evidence of efforts to reduce duplication of work is provided in discussion of Office of College and Career Readiness' holistic approach to performance review system for charter schools (pgs. 32-33) with the example of collaboration with the state Auditor General and in reviews of use of federal funds (pg. 33).

Additional evidence of technical assistance is provided in discussion of support to "new seat" subgrant applicant the will occur prior to the close of the application window (pg. 33-34) and through pre-opening tasks for new schools or expansions that are provided in Appendix F17, Pre-Opening Handbook. The RIDE technical assistance opportunities, both through personal contact and written guidance, demonstrate a strong emphasis on having charter school prepared to operate and perform well.

#### Weaknesses:

The applicant suggests that CSP subgrant funds will be disbursed through a reimbursement process as reimbursement requests must include school's Board Chair certification (pg. 35). Inclusion of more information regarding this area of CSP subgrant implementation would strengthen the application.

### 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:

Parent and community involvement discussed on pages 36-38 is presented through the lenses of charter authorization, oversight, and accountability. Each component is presented with a summary explanation of how RIDE and the Council

solicits and considers inputs from parent and community member in authorizing charter schools as well as oversight and accountability practices. Two notable practices are the onsite interviews RIDE's team has with parents in the charter renewal process and the annual school climate survey for charter school stakeholders conducted by Rhode Island Department of Education. More detail regarding parent and community involvement was provided in Appendix F12, Request for Proposals for New Student Seats and was helpful in demonstrating the input being sought.

#### **Weaknesses:**

In discussing the New Charter Seat Authorization process, it is not clear what avenue would be used for "inviting community stakeholders to submit local impact analyses of charters' academic, programmatic, and fiscal impact on a community (pgs. 35-36). The applicant continues with discussion of solicitation of public comments and hearing for authorizing decisions, but does not elaborate on how or in what format community stakeholders would provide impact analyses. If such explanation is provided in the Appendix F12, Request for Proposals for New Student Seats, it was not clearly identifiable. Elaboration on this step in the authorization process could provide a stronger understanding of community involvement.

**Reader's Score: 9**

#### **Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design**

**1. The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the State entity's charter school subgrant program, including the extent to which the project design furthers the State entity's overall strategy for increasing the number of high-quality charter schools in the State and improving student academic achievement. In determining the quality of the project design, the Secretary considers the quality of the State entity's process for awarding subgrants for planning, program design, and initial implementation including--**

- 1) The subgrant application and peer review process, timelines for these processes, and how the State entity intends to ensure that subgrants will be awarded to eligible applicants demonstrating the capacity to create high-quality charter schools; and**
- 2) A reasonable year-by-year estimate, with supporting evidence, of (i) the number of subgrants the State entity expects to award during the project period and the average size of those subgrants, including an explanation of any assumptions upon which the estimates are based; and (ii) if the State entity has previously received a CSP grant, the percentage of eligible applicants that were awarded subgrants and how this percentage related to the overall quality of the applicant pool.**

#### **Strengths:**

The applicant provides a detailed identification of the strategies RIDE has taken to strengthen its new seat application process to improve both the quality of the process and the quality of the applicants (pg. 38). Furthermore, RIDE is aligning the subgrant process with the new seat application process (pg. 38). Specific steps for this combined RFP are outlined with explanation on pages 39-40 and provide evidence of a sound process to increase the number of high-quality charter schools and improve student achievement. Notably, the process includes opportunities for technical assistance with applications, invites written public comments and applications, and conducts at least two public community hearing for applications in the location where the charter will be based (pgs. 39-40). Timeline information is provided in Appendix F12, Request for Proposals for New Student Seats and the process covers the better part of a calendar year for the thoroughness of the process. Additional quality assurance is evidenced by Appendix F18, Example of CSP Subgrant Application.

Reasonable year-by-year estimate of nine of subgrants expected to award during the five-year project period and the average size of the subgrants is provided in chart form on page 44. Previous discussion of the proposed number of nine new schools can be found on page 10 in the Objectives section. The funding awards are based on feedback from previous CSP award applicants (pg. 44).

The applicant provides historical data and information regarding the number subgrant applicants and success rate (pg. 43) with rational as to expectation of a 10% per year, 30% over the grant period increase in the number of new charter schools in the state.

**Weaknesses:**

The applicant has been a previous recipient of CSP awards but it appears that the Request for Proposals (RFP) (e213) will mirror the past RFP application. There is no information provided as to how the RFP process might change to meet the new criteria of CSP grants, any State or Federal legislative changes, or other possibly needed modifications. Additionally, given the past success rate of awards compared to applicants being only 15-20%, there is no indication of how barriers to successful awards will be addressed for this grant application or any lessons learned from past grant opportunities.

**Reader's Score:** 13

**Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan, Theory of Action**

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan and the project's theory of action. In determining the quality of the management plan and the project's theory of action, the Secretary considers the following factors:**
  - 1) **The quality, including the cohesiveness and strength of reasoning, of the "logic model" (as defined in this notice), and the extent to which it addresses the role of the grant in promoting the State-level strategy for using charter schools to improve educational outcomes for students through CSP subgrants for planning, program design, and initial implementation and other strategies;**
  - 2) **The extent to which the State entity's project-specific performance measures, including any measures required by the Department, support the logic model; and**
  - 3) **The adequacy of the management plan to--**
    - i. **Achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including the existence of clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks; and**
    - ii. **Address any compliance issues or findings related to the CSP that are identified in an audit or other monitoring review.**

**Strengths:**

The applicant presents a well-detailed program proposal with a comprehensive logic model (pgs. 47-52) that demonstrates potential for improving educational outcomes for students and meeting the outlined CSP objectives. The management plan provided on pages 53-56 describes a project with strong potential to meet its objectives on time and within budget as key responsibilities and personnel have been identified to implement the plan. Milestones are noted for each year of the grant period and project activities are methodically presented, organized by objectives, on pages 54-56 demonstrating comprehensive preparation that has been done for this CSP. Dependent upon the issues that may arise during the CSP project such as fiscal or operational questions, the Charter School Coordinator and Charter School Specialist are identified personnel for issue resolution (pg. 53).

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

**Reader's Score:** 15

**Priority Questions****Competitive Preference Priority 1 - Periodic Review and Evaluation**

1. **To meet this priority, an applicant must demonstrate that the State provides for periodic review and evaluation by the authorized public chartering agency of each charter school at least once every five years, unless required more frequently by State law, and takes steps to ensure that such reviews take place. The review and evaluation must serve to determine whether the charter school is meeting the terms of the school's charter and meeting or exceeding the student academic achievement requirements and goals for charter schools as set forth in the school's charter or under State law, a State regulation, or a State policy, provided that the student academic achievement requirements and goals for charter schools established by that policy meet or exceed those set forth under applicable State law or State regulation. This periodic review and evaluation must include an opportunity for the authorized public chartering agency to take appropriate action or impose meaningful**



necessary.

**Strengths:**

The Rhode Island CSP applicant documents that charter schools in the state are reviewed and evaluated by the authorizing public chartering agency at least one every five years since statutorily the maximum charter offered to schools is up to five years (pg. 2).

An example of the review framework used for charter schools by the Charter Team in the Rhode Island Department of Education Office of College and Career Readiness is provided in Appendix F2 (e262-e306). It demonstrates a robust review and evaluation process to determine the extent to which as charter school is meeting the terms of the school's charter, and meeting or exceeding the student academic achievement requirements and goals as established the school's charter or under State law.

Also, state statute gives the state's sole charter authorizer, the Council of Elementary and Secondary Education, authority to revoke a school's charter at any time as outlined in R.I.G.L. 16-17-5.1 and the Commissioner can impose meaningful consequences such as probation on a charter school not meeting its responsibilities (pg. 4).

The fully developed response by the applicant justifies receiving the maximum score for this Competitive Preference Priority.

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

**Reader's Score:** 5

**Competitive Preference Priority 2 - Charter School Oversight**

**1. To meet this priority, an application must demonstrate that State law, regulations, or other policies in the State where the applicant is located require the following:**

**a) That each charter school in the State--**

- 1. Operates under a legally binding charter or performance contract between itself and the school's authorized public chartering agency that describes the rights and responsibilities of the school and the authorized public chartering agency;**
- 2. Conducts annual, timely, and independent audits of the school's financial statements that are filed with the school's authorized public chartering agency; and**
- 3. Demonstrates improved student academic achievement; and**

**b) That all authorized public chartering agencies in the State use increases in student academic achievement for all groups of students described in section 1111(c)(2) of the ESEA (20 U.S.C. 6311(c)(2)) as one of the most important factors when determining whether to renew or revoke a school's charter.**

**Strengths:**

Rhode Island charter school oversight responsibility is assigned to the Council of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The following state statute and regulations that guide the Council's oversight of charter schools includes:

- Charters schools will operate under a legally binding charter (pgs. 4-5);
- Charter schools must demonstrate improved academic achievement (pgs. 5-6);
- Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will require charter schools to adhere to record keeping, report and auditing requirements and procedures mandated by state statute (pg. 6).

The applicant includes explanation of each oversight topic as well as regulation and guideline examples in Appendices.

The fully developed response by applicant justifies receiving the maximum score for this Competitive Preference Priority.

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

**Reader's Score: 5**

**Competitive Preference Priority 3 - Authorizer other than LEA or Appeal Process**

**1. To meet this priority, the applicant must demonstrate that the State--**

- a) Provides for one authorized public chartering agency that is not an LEA, such as a State chartering board, for each individual or entity seeking to operate a charter school pursuant to State law; or**
- b) In the case of a State in which LEAs are the only authorized public chartering agencies, allows for an appeals process for the denial of an application for a charter school.**

**Note: In order to meet this priority under paragraph (b) above, the entity hearing appeal must have the authority to approve the charter application over the objections of the LEA.**

**Strengths:**

Rhode Island has one non-local education agency that authorizes public charter schools in the state, the Council of Elementary and Secondary Education (pg. 6). Rhode Island law provides for due process appeals for schools denied during the formal review process and required Rhode Island Department of Education to hold a hearing after a denial or prior to non-renewing or revoking a school’s charter (pg. 7).

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

**Reader's Score: 2**

**Competitive Preference Priority 4 - Equitable Financing**

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

**Strengths:**

The applicant presents three evidences of equitable financing for the state’s charter schools:

- State statute states that all “charter schools are funded using the same state funding methodology and timeline as traditional public schools (pg. 7);
- State statute “guarantees equitable local funding for all charters, paid directly by each district in which a charter student resides” with quarterly payments made to charter schools “consistent with the timeline of local funding for other state schools (pg. 7);
- State statute makes charter schools eligible for equitable federal funding with reimbursements on the same timelines as local districts (pg. 8).

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 2

### Competitive Preference Priority 5 - Charter School Facilities

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

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

**Strengths:**

Rhode Island's facilities support is provided to charter schools through "school housing aid and School Building Authority Capital Fund" (pg. 8). The applicant provides explanation that charter schools can be reimbursed through the fund for up to 30% of facilities costs approved by the Council if the projects meet RIDE's School Construction Regulations.

**Weaknesses:**

A clarifying explanation for "school housing aid" (pg. 8) should be considered to improve reviewers understanding of the state's facilities support for charter schools.

Reader's Score: 2

### Competitive Preference Priority 6 - Best Practices to Improve Struggling Schools/LEAs

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

**Strengths:**

The applicant present convincing examples of the intent and use of charter schools to help improve struggling students and local educational agencies as noted by:

- The Charter School Performance Review System Handbook which includes "dissemination and partnerships as a criterion when evaluating the organization and leadership of a charter school with the intention of promoting lessons learned and best practices (pg. 9).
- In a prior CSP grant, RIDE awarded four subgrants to charter schools meeting one of three identified priorities aligned to work to improve schooling for struggling students and development of partnerships with low-performing public schools to achieve mutually beneficial objectives (pg. 9). Examples are provided on page 10 and show innovative and promising practices
- In providing subgrants from this CSP opportunity, RIDE will 1) prioritize applicants who created partnerships with districts/school with low academic achievement, achievement gaps, or serve large populations of educationally disadvantaged student; 2) require demonstration of evidenced-based result for practices and processes intended to be shared; 3) include best practice activities in annual charter school reports (pg. 10).

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 2

### Competitive Preference Priority 7 - Serving At-Risk Students

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

**Strengths:**

The applicant provides convincing evidence of Rhode Island's intent to use charter schools to serve at-risk students by including in charter school legislation that at least half of the state's successfully contracted charter schools are designed for at-risk students (pg. 11). Additionally, the applicant provides examples of significant charter school models focused on targeting and serving at-risk students with summative descriptions of the Shelia "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy and NEL/CPS Construction Career Academy (pg. 13).

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 2

### Competitive Preference Priority 8 - Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing

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

**Strengths:**

The applicant provides explanation of its steps to ensure best practices as utilized for authorizing charter schools by describing its next steps following a self-analysis of Rhode Island Department of Education's authorizing practices with National Association of Charter School Authorizers' (NACSA) practices. Strategies have been identified for improvement in five of the twelve NACSA essential practice areas, including contracts, application criteria, application timeline, application interview, external expert panel, renewal criteria and annual report. Each of the intended improvements discussed are on pages 14-16.

Further evidence of the steps the applicant is taking to implement best practices for charter school authorizing is presented in the project objectives section, Objective #2 (pgs. 22-26), with changes to authorizing practices including the use of independent reviewers for evaluating charter proposals.

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

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**Status:** Submitted

**Last Updated:** 06/26/2017 12:37 PM



Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 06/26/2017 12:37 PM

## Technical Review Coversheet

**Applicant:** Rhode Island Department of Education (U282A170024)

**Reader #2:** \*\*\*\*\*

	Points Possible	Points Scored
<b>Questions</b>		
<b>Selection criteria</b>		
<b>Flexibility</b>		
1. Flexibility	10	8
<b>Sub Total</b>	10	8
<b>Selection Criteria</b>		
<b>Objectives</b>		
1. Objectives	15	13
<b>Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants</b>		
1. Quality of Subgrant	15	15
<b>State Plan</b>		
1. State Plan	20	20
<b>Parent and Community Involvement</b>		
1. Involvement	10	9
<b>Quality of Project Design</b>		
1. Project Design	15	14
<b>Quality of the Management Plan, Theory of Action</b>		
1. Management Plan	15	14
<b>Sub Total</b>	90	85
<b>Priority Questions</b>		
<b>Competitive Preference Priority 1</b>		
<b>Periodic Review and Evaluation</b>		
1. Review and Evaluation	5	5
<b>Sub Total</b>	5	5
<b>Competitive Preference Priority 2</b>		
<b>Charter School Oversight</b>		
1. Charter School Oversight	5	5
<b>Sub Total</b>	5	5
<b>Competitive Preference Priority 3</b>		
<b>Authorizer other than LEA or Appeal Process</b>		
1. Authorizer other than LEA	2	2
<b>Sub Total</b>	2	2

**Competitive Preference Priority 4**

**Equitable Financing**

1. Equitable Financing	2	2
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

**Competitive Preference Priority 5**

**Charter School Facilities**

1. Charter School Facilities	2	2
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

**Competitive Preference Priority 6**

**Best Practices to Improve Struggling Schools/LEAs**

1. Struggling Schools	2	2
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

**Competitive Preference Priority 7**

**Serving At-Risk Students**

1. Serving At-Risk Students	2	2
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

**Competitive Preference Priority 8**

**Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing**

1. Best Practices	5	5
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>

<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>118</b>
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# Technical Review Form

Panel #9 - Panel 9 - Rhode Island - 1: 84.282A

Reader #2: \*\*\*\*\*

Applicant: Rhode Island Department of Education (U282A170024)

## Questions

### 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:

Applicant specifically describes the ways in which it provides flexibility for charters schools (e33). As the only authorizer for the state, the Council has been very pro-active in setting up processes to improve their own accountability including the use of National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA)'s best practices as the framework for improvement (e31). Through a Self-Assessment of authorizing practices using NACSA's 12 essential practices for high quality authorizers RIDE identified gaps in 7 of the 12 practice areas. Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) has created interventions within its own systems to improve authorizer quality. This includes changes (e31-33) such as: an evaluators guide is now being provided to those assessing quality of new charter applications, applicants now receive evaluation criteria in advance as well as copies of the evaluation at the end so they can more clearly understand their strengths, address weaknesses and the new charter template (e22). Other improvements to authorizer practices include face-to-face interviews, an external panel of experts to review applicants (SchoolWorks has been identified as external partner to conduct evaluations) and an improved renewal criterion. Within the new Charter School Performance Review System (CSPRS) there is an annual rating system and annual report for each school that uses multiple indicators (e20). As result of this rating system, schools will then be able to participate in a differentiated renewal processes. (e38) RIDE chose not to expand seats in charter schools in 2016 and instead focused efforts on improving authorization process. This included working with the legislature to create new laws. Together, these changes will significantly enhance the quality of authorizing in the State of Rhode Island.

#### Weaknesses:

It is understandable that district charters have less flexibility, but the applicant should describe strategies it uses to support those charters in maximizing the flexibilities they receive. (e40) The proposed online enrollment system which will be funded through this grant to minimize duplication of services and increase state accountability, has the potential to actually take away flexibility, uniqueness of school enrollment processes and community engagement. Charter schools are uniquely designed and it could be challenging for a more generic online enrollment system to capture the true uniqueness of a school. The applicant should address how this new tool would be designed to protect flexibility.

Reader's Score: 8

### Selection Criteria - Objectives

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

#### Strengths:

Each objective is clearly defined within the Objectives section, and then the logic model (e64-69) provides tremendous depth of detail which describes the performance measures, performance targets as well as an explanation for why the targets were chosen. Whenever available, baseline data is provided to assist reviewer in determining ambitiousness and likelihood of success for meeting each performance target. If baseline data was not available the applicant described how



and when baseline will be established as well as an explanation for why baseline does not exist. The applicant lists GPRA requirements and provides performance measures and targets for each. Given this depth of detail, it is evident that Objectives 2 and 3 are aligned to the state plan, as well defined, ambitious and achievable.

**Weaknesses:**

Objective 1 is aligned to state plan, as well defined and achievable, however it doesn't appear to be particularly ambitious. The state has met this target nearly every year with or without CSP funds. Given the incredible interest (wait list e38) and need (e37) documented, the applicants Objective 1 to launch 9 new charters may be aligned to past practice, but is not overly ambitious. While it does increase the number of charters by 30%, this does not provide significant impact on either the interest or need. RIDE has put tremendous effort on increasing their capacity for quality authorizing as this effort and has a very high-quality partnership with NACSA. This, along with the changes in law make it reasonable to believe the state could launch more than 9 new charters in 5 years and still continue to have high quality opportunities for children. Nine new schools is directly in line with current practice, which is good – but if there are currently 19283 children in low performing schools and only 2700 children will be able to access the new schools, there are still 16583 children left in under performing schools. Nearly one half of these children have already stated they want a charter, but with the current plan, they will not be able to access one within the next 5 years.

**Reader's Score:** 13

**Selection Criteria - Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants**

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

**Strengths:**

The applicant provides convincing arguments that RIDE will produce eligible subgrantees that are highly likely to meet program objectives and improve educational results for children. This is evidenced in several ways. First, past performance is a predictor of future success. In the 2013 National Charter School Study (e45-46) RI charter school students gain exceptional number of days of learning in reading and math. Also, PARCC (e46) assessment results from 2016 show that current charters have more successfully made the transition to new assessments than their urban counterparts. Second, the Council is the sole authorizer and RIDE is the primary technical assistance provider. Together with NACSA, they created a system that provides high degree of support to potential subgrantees throughout the entire process which will minimize risk of a subgrantees receiving funds but never actually opening school or opening a school that is not prepared for success. There are very specific criteria for new startups as well as expansions (e47) and all are based on NACSA quality indicators. Rather than holding open competitions, RIDE invites proposals for CSP subgrants once a school has been approved by council for 'preliminary agreement'. Finally, all subgrantees must have 2-3 annual goals specifically aligned to Objectives (academic achievement of students by subgroup with emphasis on educationally disadvantaged) and Objective 2 (partnership with low performing traditional schools) this proposal. This direct alignment will not only assist RIDE in meeting its overall project goals, but will strengthen the charter movement and relationship with traditional education. The school's CSP goals must be included as part of the school specific goals set forth in the charter proposal and will have annual performance targets associated with them that will be monitored by RIDE.

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

**Reader's Score:** 15

**Selection Criteria - State Plan**

## 1. The State entity's plan to--

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

### Strengths:

1. The applicant system for monitoring and supporting developers both as they prepare for an RFP as well as once an award is given is comprehensive and very well defined. For example, (e51 and Appendix F18) the applicant provides a copy of a sample subgrant application and quarterly reporting template and will offer training for the application as well as reporting. Quarterly reports will be reviewed by both the Charter Team members and fiscal compliance staff. RIDE will revise the current annual report system for charters so that it can be used to report on CSP outcomes.
2. Since the state is the only authorizing agency (e49), there is technically no duplication between authorizers and schools. However, RIDE is taking an extremely pro-active position and will use project funds to deepen the performance system tool so it further minimizes duplications that occur in reporting and evaluation processes with the overall RIDE and other state agencies. This tool, which was created in partnership with charter leaders in the state and NACSA, was designed to create 'holistic, one stop set of academic, fiscal and organizational performance expectations' that are clear to understand. This in and of itself will directly impact the duplication challenge faced by school leaders. Furthermore, it was impressive to see that RIDE plans to integrate the system it can be used by both the Auditor's office and for IDEA compliance monitoring. Such cross agency partnerships will benefit not only the charter system but the state as a whole.
- 3i. Since the only eligible applicants will be those with approved preliminary agreements (e50-51) with the Council, the technical assistance (TA) provided by RIDE will be woven together to include both creating the systems to be approved for preliminary agreements and TA for the eligible applicants during the RFP process. Every applicant will receive a Pre-Opening Handbook (appendix F17) that will guide them through all pre-opening tasks and this will be reviewed by RIDE staff during their scheduled check ins. This support will include specific assistance to applicants back on track if they are struggling to meet progress monitoring deadlines/tasks.
- 3ii. As the only authorizer in the State of Rhode Island, RIDE cannot provide technical assistance for quality authorizing, but is instead the recipient of technical assistance. On (e31-33), the applicant describes its partnership with NACA to improve its outcomes as an authorizer. Through this partnership, RIDE has identified 7 specific strategies (from NACSA 12 essential practices) that are being addressed to improve their own outcomes as an authorizer.

### Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 20

## 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:

RIDE currently has established systems for parent and community engagement at multiple moments during the authorization process (e52-53). This includes: public comment periods, local impact analysis opportunities and an evaluation of community support is required during the application process. State law requires at least 2 public hearings for each proposal and RIDE noted (e53) that in 2016 there were over 725 public comments made for 8 charter proposals. This is impressive community engagement. RIDE conducts a local impact analysis for the community but also invites any

stakeholder or organization to provide an independent one also. These are reviewed by the state, posted on their website and made available for public comment. All of this data is then included when application is submitted to Council for authorization.

Demand and public support are also required as part of the application process. (e54) The engagement process does not stop with initial authorization, but is also a required part of renewal process at several different points. This is an extraordinary effort on the part of the state to ensure family and community voices are heard and valued.

**Weaknesses:**

While the local impact analysis is a very unique aspect of the proposal, the application needs a more thorough description of how the local impact analysis will occur.

**Reader's Score:** 9

**Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design**

**1. The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the State entity's charter school subgrant program, including the extent to which the project design furthers the State entity's overall strategy for increasing the number of high-quality charter schools in the State and improving student academic achievement. In determining the quality of the project design, the Secretary considers the quality of the State entity's process for awarding subgrants for planning, program design, and initial implementation including--**

**1) The subgrant application and peer review process, timelines for these processes, and how the State entity intends to ensure that subgrants will be awarded to eligible applicants demonstrating the capacity to create high-quality charter schools; and**

**2) A reasonable year-by-year estimate, with supporting evidence, of (i) the number of subgrants the State entity expects to award during the project period and the average size of those subgrants, including an explanation of any assumptions upon which the estimates are based; and (ii) if the State entity has previously received a CSP grant, the percentage of eligible applicants that were awarded subgrants and how this percentage related to the overall quality of the applicant pool.**

**Strengths:**

1. The applicant (e45-50) clearly describes the application and review process, which gives strong evidence that the system is set up for ensuring high quality charter schools are approved. The applicant provides sample of the CSP application itself in the appendix (F18) that was used in 2015 and will be adapted for the current requirements. (e56-59) This further delineates the process for applying authorization itself and the CSP subgrant. The applicant demonstrates how the two parts blend together to support development of high quality schools. Technical assistance provided includes a forum with current charters which will further assist newly developing charters as they begin to build their own network of support.

2i - RIDE states there will be an 10% increase (e60) in number of charters each year by adding 3 per year. The assumption is based on historical data, which demonstrates readiness to start high quality charter. (e61) RIDE anticipates only offering planning grants in 1st year which aligns with the 2018 process for new seat proposals. Schools would be eligible for \$200K for planning and then \$400K spread out over next 2 years. RIDE made this choice due to past grantee feedback that more funds are needed during planning. On page e61, the graph demonstrates the timeline for subgrantees awards.

2ii. In the Applicant's past CSP grant (e60), RIDE recommended subgrant applications when they felt applicants were ready for success – which resulted in 15-20% of those who started the charter application. This practice will continue in the new CSP grant.

**Weaknesses:**

1. A sample RFP (Appendix F18) was provided, but given the significant changes in how RIDE plans to support applicants using best practices for authorizing (e31) and the changes in priorities for educationally disadvantaged youth

(e28), there would need to be a great many changes to the RFP. This application was also from the time period before the 2016 legislative changes (e38) were put in place with the new accountability systems. It would be more helpful if there was a resource or tool that explained key changes that will be made to align the old RFP to the new system. One would not expect a fully developed new application, but a crosswalk or some other tool would be extremely helpful to the reviewer.

2i. No weaknesses noted.

2ii. The applicant described a high rate of potential schools that started the application process but never started (e60). 15-20% of potential schools never make it through the process to become schools. It may benefit the applicant to provide an analysis of what it sees as the primary causes for lack of readiness to move forward from preliminary approval to final approval to start up. The applicant also does not clearly demonstrate the systems that are now in place (or will be put in place through a new grant) which may address this 'non start' rate.

**Reader's Score: 14**

### **Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan, Theory of Action**

**1. The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan and the project's theory of action. In determining the quality of the management plan and the project's theory of action, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

- 1) The quality, including the cohesiveness and strength of reasoning, of the "logic model" (as defined in this notice), and the extent to which it addresses the role of the grant in promoting the State-level strategy for using charter schools to improve educational outcomes for students through CSP subgrants for planning, program design, and initial implementation and other strategies;**
- 2) The extent to which the State entity's project-specific performance measures, including any measures required by the Department, support the logic model; and**
- 3) The adequacy of the management plan to--**
  - i. Achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including the existence of clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks; and**
  - ii. Address any compliance issues or findings related to the CSP that are identified in an audit or other monitoring review.**

#### **Strengths:**

1. The logic model (e64, 66, 68) is well defined. It clearly demonstrates the links between the vision for change and the activities, outputs and outcomes expected as a result of the effort.
- 2- The Logic Model (e65, 67, 69) includes strong and clear performance measures that are data driven. It also includes 'target explanations' that define why the measure was chosen and/or how it aligns to the rest of the state strategy.
- 3i. The applicant very clearly describes key staff and responsibilities for project oversight and implementation. The Gantt chart (e71 – 73) is an excellent overview of the timeline, which shows RIDE has specifically thought out the implementation process to ensure they can achieve their objectives. The design of the Gantt chart is easy to follow and shows not only timeline and milestones, but identifies lead person responsible for ensuring task is complete. (e438 – 444). The budget narrative aligns to the project and meets all required percentages for subgrants, administrative costs and technical assistance.
- 3ii. In the description of the project and RFP process, the application adequately describes how RIDE will address compliance.

#### **Weaknesses:**

The application would benefit from a clearer description of how serious or significant compliance issues will be handled, including what will happen if RIDE were to have compliance issues identified by USDOE.

## Priority Questions

### Competitive Preference Priority 1 - Periodic Review and Evaluation

1. To meet this priority, an applicant must demonstrate that the State provides for periodic review and evaluation by the authorized public chartering agency of each charter school at least once every five years, unless required more frequently by State law, and takes steps to ensure that such reviews take place. The review and evaluation must serve to determine whether the charter school is meeting the terms of the school's charter and meeting or exceeding the student academic achievement requirements and goals for charter schools as set forth in the school's charter or under State law, a State regulation, or a State policy, provided that the student academic achievement requirements and goals for charter schools established by that policy meet or exceed those set forth under applicable State law or State regulation. This periodic review and evaluation must include an opportunity for the authorized public chartering agency to take appropriate action or impose meaningful consequences on the charter school, if necessary.

#### Strengths:

The applicant clearly describes a system of accountability and support that ensures not only that there is periodic review and evaluation of charter school, but also that there are systems in place to make sure that the reviews happen. For example: (e19) the applicant partnered with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) and charter practitioners to create the new Charter School Performance Review System which will inform school's annual performance and help Council prepare for renewal process. Given the state's approach to authorization (one authorizer in the state) and the stakeholder created accountability tool, data regarding academic performance and other required indicators is easily accessible. The new Charter School Performance Review System (e19-20) has the academic performance indicator as the primary gauge of success of school's educational program. As per state law, this indicator is weighted very heavily in decision to renew or revoke charter. Additional accountability measures that weigh in the renewal decision include finances, organizational practices and compliance. State law (e21) requires a contract review process every 5 years. However, the State Commissioner can place a charter on probation and revoke its charter if improvements are not made. Council has the authority to revoke a charter at any time for not meeting educational objectives, materially violating charter or failure to demonstrate academic success, organizational success and financial viability. Together, this evidence clearly shows that the periodic reviews, evaluations, and systems Rhode Island has put in place will ensure compliance occurs. Rhode Island clearly has the ability to intervene in a meaningful way when schools are not performing appropriately.

#### Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

### Competitive Preference Priority 2 - Charter School Oversight

1. To meet this priority, an application must demonstrate that State law, regulations, or other policies in the State where the applicant is located require the following:
  - a) That each charter school in the State--
    1. Operates under a legally binding charter or performance contract between itself and the school's authorized public chartering agency that describes the rights and responsibilities of the school and the authorized public chartering agency;
    2. Conducts annual, timely, and independent audits of the school's financial statements that are filed with the school's authorized public chartering agency; and
    3. Demonstrates improved student academic achievement; and
  - b) That all authorized public chartering agencies in the State use increases in student academic achievement for all groups of students described in section 1111(c)(2) of the ESEA (20 U.S.C. 6311(c)(2)) as one of the most important factors when determining whether to renew or revoke a school's charter.

**Strengths:**

A1. RIDE has very clear governing regulations (e22) that describe what must be in final charter, including all statutory requirements for the specific type of charter chosen (3 options), as well as governance, administration, financial and operational plans. For example, charters must have accountability plan that has BOTH school specific academic and operational goals AND achievement/ operational goals established by Commissioner. RIDE now provides a charter template that is being phased in, with all charters required to use template by 2017-18 which will be greatly beneficial because it ensures that schools know all regulations and can clearly understand compliance requirements vs flexibility opportunities. A2. If the applicant meets these criteria as state law requires (e23) annual independent audit of financial records must be submitted within 6 months of close of fiscal year. RIDE also has a unique partnership with the State Auditor's office to annually follow up on each charter's annual audit to ensure compliance has occurred. A3. The applicant describes very high standards for the expectation of student achievement for all students. This is evidenced by (e22) charters having local accountability goals for achievement and being required to meet very high goals set by the state. The state goals include (e23) demonstrating improved performance compared to communities where students would otherwise be enrolled and within state accountability system which measures overall proficiency on state assessments and measures such as achievement gaps and student growth.

B. The applicant specifically describes (e19, e22) the critical importance that academic achievement has within the annual performance review process of a school and most importantly, the renewal process.

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

**Reader's Score: 5**

**Competitive Preference Priority 3 - Authorizer other than LEA or Appeal Process****1. To meet this priority, the applicant must demonstrate that the State--**

- a) Provides for one authorized public chartering agency that is not an LEA, such as a State chartering board, for each individual or entity seeking to operate a charter school pursuant to State law; or
- b) In the case of a State in which LEAs are the only authorized public chartering agencies, allows for an appeals process for the denial of an application for a charter school.

**Note: In order to meet this priority under paragraph (b) above, the entity hearing appeal must have the authority to approve the charter application over the objections of the LEA.**

**Strengths:**

a). As noted (e23) the Council is the only authorizer in the state which meets the priority. b). RIDE has a specific appeal process that is available for charters that have been denied. Information is also provided regarding those charters that have been revoked. Appendix F6 provides excerpts from code that describe process appropriately.

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

**Reader's Score: 2**

**Competitive Preference Priority 4 - Equitable Financing****1. To receive points under this priority, an applicant must demonstrate the extent to which the State in which it is located ensures equitable financing, as compared to traditional public schools, for charter schools and students**

prompt manner.

**Strengths:**

The applicant clearly demonstrates charters are funded equitably with traditional districts. State law (e24) requires the same funding methodology/timeline for payment to charters as to traditional districts. Current funding is \$8979 for core instructional programming plus \$3592 for free/reduced eligible students. In addition, charters receive quarterly payments from local districts for local tax dollars broken down on a per pupil basis. While districts can decrease this financial payment due to unique situations, charters do receive equitable funding. On (e25) the applicant provides evidence that federal funds and other available aid are also equitably distributed. For example, state statute requires that each charter type is eligible to receive "other aids, grants, Medicaid revenue and other revenue as though it were a school district". Since state funding is distributed on the same schedule to both traditional and charter schools, the applicant also meets the 'in a prompt manner' requirement of this competitive preference.

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

**Reader's Score: 2**

**Competitive Preference Priority 5 - Charter School Facilities**

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

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

**Strengths:**

The applicant describes Rhode Island law (e25) that allows charters to receive up to 30% of facility costs covered through RIDE School Building Capital Fund and school housing aid. On the same page, the applicant also notes that about 1/3 of all current charters have used these funds and that over \$47M in funding has been awarded to charters. This meets requirement for competitive preference.

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

**Reader's Score: 2**

**Competitive Preference Priority 6 - Best Practices to Improve Struggling Schools/LEAs**

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

**Strengths:**

The applicant thoroughly describes Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) role as being a connector between traditional districts and charters (e26) including how it previously used dissemination grants as a tool for such connections. Four dissemination grants were awarded and each subgrant was required to meet three priorities which included partnerships with 'focus' or 'priority' schools as defined by law and aligned to the state's pending ESSA plan. These grants also required partnerships to leverage resources from both the charter and non-charter participants so that

they could both achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. While dissemination grants sparked this collaboration, RIDE also partnered with the Rhode Island Foundation so there was a mix of public-private funding to support the work. This demonstrates a true commitment to the work that extends beyond federal grant funds and works towards true collaboration. Several examples (e27) provided a deeper look into the relationships between the struggling traditional schools and the successful charters. The applicant also refers to Rhode Island Mayorial Academies as being a national leader in district-charter collaborations in relation to personalized learning. These practices will be continued with next round of funding.

**Weaknesses:**

No weakness noted.

**Reader's Score: 2**

**Competitive Preference Priority 7 - Serving At-Risk Students**

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

**Strengths:**

The applicant completely meets this priority for serving at risk youth in several ways. For example, per state law (e28) at the primary purpose for having charters is to increase learning opportunities for all, with an emphasis on educationally disadvantaged/at risk youth and at least ½ of all charters must be reserved for applications that increase opportunities for at risk youth. The state has been giving preference in charter application for schools serving educationally disadvantaged schools for over a year. The statewide enrollment chart on (e29) demonstrates the effort has resulted in charters having the same disadvantaged rates as urban centers and higher than state averages. It was impressive to see that in 2013 National Charter School Study reported that Rhode Island's charter students gained an average of 86 days in reading and 108 days in math which is extremely strong gains. The applicant also refers to a focus on this application in supporting new innovations for dropout prevention, recovery and career counseling.

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

**Reader's Score: 2**

**Competitive Preference Priority 8 - Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing**

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

**Strengths:**

While the Council is the only authorizer in the state of Rhode Island, the state has place significant emphasis on improving authorizing processes. RIDE partnered with the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) to assist them in designing a plan for improving authorization in the state using NACSA's 12 essential practices. RIDE began the collaboration by completing NACSA's self-assessment and identified 7 areas where improvements are needed. A few examples of the changes being made to improve authorization (e31-34) include: creation of a common charter contract, revised application timelines to separate the new school development v. expansion efforts and adding an interview to the authorization process. Objective 2 of this proposal will deepen the relationship with NACSA (e39-43) and should make significant improvement's in the quality of authorization in the State of Rhode Island.



**Weaknesses:**

No weakness noted.

**Reader's Score:** 5

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**Status:** Submitted

**Last Updated:** 06/26/2017 12:37 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 06/26/2017 12:37 PM

## Technical Review Coversheet

**Applicant:** Rhode Island Department of Education (U282A170024)

**Reader #3:** \*\*\*\*\*

	Points Possible	Points Scored
<b>Questions</b>		
<b>Selection criteria</b>		
<b>Flexibility</b>		
1. Flexibility	10	6
<b>Sub Total</b>	10	6
<b>Selection Criteria</b>		
<b>Objectives</b>		
1. Objectives	15	12
<b>Quality of Eligible Subgrant Applicants</b>		
1. Quality of Subgrant	15	15
<b>State Plan</b>		
1. State Plan	20	19
<b>Parent and Community Involvement</b>		
1. Involvement	10	8
<b>Quality of Project Design</b>		
1. Project Design	15	15
<b>Quality of the Management Plan, Theory of Action</b>		
1. Management Plan	15	15
<b>Sub Total</b>	90	84
<b>Priority Questions</b>		
<b>Competitive Preference Priority 1</b>		
<b>Periodic Review and Evaluation</b>		
1. Review and Evaluation	5	5
<b>Sub Total</b>	5	5
<b>Competitive Preference Priority 2</b>		
<b>Charter School Oversight</b>		
1. Charter School Oversight	5	5
<b>Sub Total</b>	5	5
<b>Competitive Preference Priority 3</b>		
<b>Authorizer other than LEA or Appeal Process</b>		
1. Authorizer other than LEA	2	2
<b>Sub Total</b>	2	2

**Competitive Preference Priority 4**

**Equitable Financing**

1. Equitable Financing	2	2
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

**Competitive Preference Priority 5**

**Charter School Facilities**

1. Charter School Facilities	2	2
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

**Competitive Preference Priority 6**

**Best Practices to Improve Struggling Schools/LEAs**

1. Struggling Schools	2	2
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

**Competitive Preference Priority 7**

**Serving At-Risk Students**

1. Serving At-Risk Students	2	2
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

**Competitive Preference Priority 8**

**Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing**

1. Best Practices	5	5
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>

<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>115</b>
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# Technical Review Form

Panel #9 - Panel 9 - Rhode Island - 1: 84.282A

Reader #3: \*\*\*\*\*

Applicant: Rhode Island Department of Education (U282A170024)

## Questions

### 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 articulated the key ways Rhode Island's independent charter schools can maximize their flexibility to organize. The applicant articulated the key ways Rhode Island's independent charter schools can maximize their flexibility to organize themselves around a core mission or instructional approach, to have autonomy over their curriculum, to recruit high quality staffing and deploy their personnel in creative, program-centered ways, to control their own financial resources, and to structure their school day and calendar (p. 16).

#### Weaknesses:

The Rhode Island charter school law is severely limiting in that it provides for no more than thirty-five charters. This limitation is inflexible and inhibits charter school development and access (p. e165). The other limiting factor is the fact that there are different categories of schools with different levels of autonomy. Independent charter schools enjoy substantial flexibility supported by charter school statute while In-District charters must negotiate collective bargaining agreements that make their personnel policies less flexible (p. 16-17).

Reader's Score: 6

### Selection Criteria - Objectives

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

#### Strengths:

A change in the charter school law to allow for applicants to develop a "network" charter shows some promise in reaching the objective to increase the number of high-quality educational opportunities for Rhode Island's educationally disadvantaged students (p. 21).

The second objective aimed at improving the quality and efficiency as a charter school authorizer is highly ambitious and comprehensive. The applicant takes proactive steps that should have a positive impact on the authorizing process as well as aid the schools; such as creating a centralized online enrollment system freeing schools from this task and better understanding enrollment patterns. The applicant implements a performance review system with increased transparency and more clarity around renewal and expansion decisions (p. 27).

The third objective related to fostering partnerships between charters and traditional districts to raise student achievement, particularly for educationally disadvantaged students, is reasonably ambitious given the limited number of charters in Rhode Island. Both new charter applicants and expansion applicants must include dissemination and

partnership practices thereby subgrant application will need to include the specific dissemination activities. Preference is given to subgrant applicants, both in past practice and in the future, that focus on sharing dropout prevention, dropout recovery and counseling service (p. 27). Four subgrants were awarded to charter schools under a previous CSP grant with diverse proposals ranging from developing dual language programming to developing capacity of instructors to grow a college going culture at a school with high rates of low-income students (p. 27). The applicant will also include in its annual charter report a focus on partnerships and will create a centralized bank of activities on its website (p. 28).

**Weaknesses:**

The applicant's first stated objective of increasing the number of high-quality educational opportunities for Rhode Island's educationally disadvantaged students (p. 19) is not ambitious given the fact the state only aims to increase the number of charter schools by 9 schools beyond the current 30 (p. 20). The state has only averaged opening two new schools a year confirming a lack of ambition in this area. This is troubling given the fact that there were 15,430 total applications for the 2017-18 school year yet only 8,087 could enroll (p. 21).

**Reader's Score: 12**

**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 past track record of success includes findings from a research study that found that students who attend charter schools in Rhode Island, gain, on average, 86 days of additional learning in reading and 108 additional days of learning in math, accounting for the strongest relative performance of a charter sector in any state (p. 29). This past success provides compelling evidence that improved educational results for students will continue.

Improved vetting of proposals by using an independent, nationally-recognized partner demonstrates an additional commitment to improved quality of subgrant applications (p. 29).

The applicant insists that proposals for expansion that they have a proven track record of success and schools must provide evidence of past performance data on the state assessment (p. 30) which also demonstrates a commitment to improving the quality of subgrant applications.

The applicant demonstrates another level of accountability for subgrant applicants by requiring them to set school-specific goals to which they'll be held accountable to (p. 30). The subgroup applicants are additionally required to set goals on how to serve educationally disadvantaged students (p. 31). The requirements increase the likelihood of improved applicants focused on improved student achievement.

The requirement for subgrant applicants to include plans related to charter/district collaboration (p. 31) provides assurance that such collaboration will take place.

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

**Reader's Score: 15**

## Selection Criteria - State Plan

### 1. The State entity's plan to--

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

#### Strengths:

The applicant's plan for monitoring subgrant awardees is adequate and includes quarterly reports that indicate progress toward all goals, benchmarks and outcomes described in the approved grant application along with staff follow up with the school (p. 34-35). In addition, the applicant partners with other state agencies to monitor finances, Title 1 programs, and teacher certification (p. 33). One very strong component of the technical assistance provided is helping applicants that are off track from their pre-opening tasks with technical assistance and support, such as filing help with a financial plan, identifying a facility, or connecting with other organizations in the charter sector who can provide capacity and support, to ensure the team meets all required milestones (p. 34).

Since the applicant is the only authorizer, there is no duplication of authorizing work by other agencies (p. 32).

#### Weaknesses:

The applicant's plan to provide technical assistance and support lacks specific details regarding when and how this technical assistance will be provided (p.34).

Reader's Score: 19

## 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 includes substantial plans for soliciting and considering community feedback through hearings and public comment for proposed charters (p. 35-36). The applicant utilizes feedback first by including it in the analysis on the academic, programmatic, and fiscal impact and then also by providing community stakeholders with an additional opportunity to help evaluate that proposed impact all of which are posted on a website for public consumption (p. 36). The applicant requires itself to conduct at least two public hearings for each new/expansion proposal further demonstrating the desire to consider community input (p. 36).

**Weaknesses:**

The applicant did not mention any specific strategy for soliciting parent feedback of prospective parents of proposed schools or soliciting feedback from current parents of schools seeking expansion (p. 35-36).

Reader's Score: 8

**Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design**

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the State entity's charter school subgrant program, including the extent to which the project design furthers the State entity's overall strategy for increasing the number of high-quality charter schools in the State and improving student academic achievement. In determining the quality of the project design, the Secretary considers the quality of the State entity's process for awarding subgrants for planning, program design, and initial implementation including--

1) The subgrant application and peer review process, timelines for these processes, and how the State entity intends to ensure that subgrants will be awarded to eligible applicants demonstrating the capacity to create high-quality charter schools; and

2) A reasonable year-by-year estimate, with supporting evidence, of (i) the number of subgrants the State entity expects to award during the project period and the average size of those subgrants, including an explanation of any assumptions upon which the estimates are based; and (ii) if the State entity has previously received a CSP grant, the percentage of eligible applicants that were awarded subgrants and how this percentage related to the overall quality of the applicant pool.

**Strengths:**

The applicant's quality of project design is complete, logical, and rigorous. The applicant enhanced its application process to establish the priority for new charters or expansions that increase the number of seats for educationally disadvantaged students and that is directly aligned to RISC Objective #1 (p. 39). These enhancements include using an independent, nationally recognized third-party evaluator, soliciting public feedback, focusing on published standards for assessing quality, and doing a capacity interview (p. 38-39).

Another strong part of the design is providing technical assistance and support to ensure that teams meet all required milestones to open or expand (p. 41).

The strategy of having applicants apply additionally for start-up subgrants to support planning and implementation further ensures quality because of the use of a peer review process made up of education professionals (p. 41).

The plan to fund 3 grants each of the first three years is reasonable and based on data based on the success rate of past applicants for new seat proposals (p. 43).

The applicant stated that the funding plan is in alignment with the current pipeline of expansion applications and the current pipeline of new school applicants (p. 43).

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 15

**Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan, Theory of Action**

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan and the project's theory of action. In determining the quality of the management plan and the project's theory of action, the Secretary considers the following factors:

- 1) The quality, including the cohesiveness and strength of reasoning, of the “logic model” (as defined in this notice), and the extent to which it addresses the role of the grant in promoting the State-level strategy for using charter schools to improve educational outcomes for students through CSP subgrants for planning, program design, and initial implementation and other strategies;
- 2) The extent to which the State entity’s project-specific performance measures, including any measures required by the Department, support the logic model; and
- 3) The adequacy of the management plan to--
  - i. Achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including the existence of clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks; and
  - ii. Address any compliance issues or findings related to the CSP that are identified in an audit or other monitoring review.

**Strengths:**

The applicant's logic model is well organized to meet the objectives of the project including a reasonable timeline for fulfilling the short term and long term outcomes (p. 47). Objectives, strategies, and key activities logically flow seamlessly into outputs and outcomes (p. 47-48). The model includes innovative elements and enhancements to their application process (p. 47-48). These include providing technical assistance to applicants which may enhance the chance of high quality applications for expansions and new schools, requiring a local impact analysis to evaluate community support for new seats for educationally disadvantaged students, aligning the monitoring process for subgrant applications, and for charter school annual performance streamlining the authorizing process (p. 47-48).

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

**Reader's Score:** 15

**Priority Questions**

**Competitive Preference Priority 1 - Periodic Review and Evaluation**

1. To meet this priority, an applicant must demonstrate that the State provides for periodic review and evaluation by the authorized public chartering agency of each charter school at least once every five years, unless required more frequently by State law, and takes steps to ensure that such reviews take place. The review and evaluation must serve to determine whether the charter school is meeting the terms of the school's charter and meeting or exceeding the student academic achievement requirements and goals for charter schools as set forth in the school's charter or under State law, a State regulation, or a State policy, provided that the student academic achievement requirements and goals for charter schools established by that policy meet or exceed those set forth under applicable State law or State regulation. This periodic review and evaluation must include an opportunity for the authorized public chartering agency to take appropriate action or impose meaningful consequences on the charter school, if necessary.

**Strengths:**

The applicant's description of its periodic review and evaluation process was robust in that it includes academic, financial, organizational, and compliance indicators evaluated each year. Summaries and findings are considered in the renewal process with three possible outcomes - renewal, renewal with conditions, or non-renewal (p. 3). State law requires the maximum amount of time the Council may establish or continue a charter is up to five years meeting the 5-year requirement (p. 2). Another strength is that the applicant clearly states that academic success of the school is weighted most heavily in renewal decisions (p. 3).

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.



Reader's Score: 5

### Competitive Preference Priority 2 - Charter School Oversight

1. To meet this priority, an application must demonstrate that State law, regulations, or other policies in the State where the applicant is located require the following:

a) That each charter school in the State--

1. Operates under a legally binding charter or performance contract between itself and the school's authorized public chartering agency that describes the rights and responsibilities of the school and the authorized public chartering agency;
2. Conducts annual, timely, and independent audits of the school's financial statements that are filed with the school's authorized public chartering agency; and
3. Demonstrates improved student academic achievement; and

b) That all authorized public chartering agencies in the State use increases in student academic achievement for all groups of students described in section 1111(c)(2) of the ESEA (20 U.S.C. 6311(c)(2)) as one of the most important factors when determining whether to renew or revoke a school's charter.

#### Strengths:

The applicant sufficiently described that it and the charter schools in the state operate under a legally binding contract that specifies the responsibilities of the school and the Council of Elementary and Secondary Education, the sole authorizer of charter schools in the state. Additionally, in Appendix F3 (e264-e165), the application provides excerpts from RI Charter Statute that further delineates additional responsibilities and rights of the school as well as responsibilities of the authorizer. The applicant provides satisfactory assurances that it will conduct annual, timely, and independent audits (p. 4). The applicant also clearly articulated a strong commitment to Improving student achievement and that student achievement would be weighted most heavily in the Council's decision to renew a charter (p. 6).

#### Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

### Competitive Preference Priority 3 - Authorizer other than LEA or Appeal Process

1. To meet this priority, the applicant must demonstrate that the State--

- a) Provides for one authorized public chartering agency that is not an LEA, such as a State chartering board, for each individual or entity seeking to operate a charter school pursuant to State law; or
- b) In the case of a State in which LEAs are the only authorized public chartering agencies, allows for an appeals process for the denial of an application for a charter school.

**Note:** In order to meet this priority under paragraph (b) above, the entity hearing appeal must have the authority to approve the charter application over the objections of the LEA.

#### Strengths:

The applicant meets this requirement as it is the sole charter authorizer in the state (p. 6). In addition, although it is the sole authorizer in the state, an appeals process is available to any charter applicant denied a charter (p. 7).

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

**Reader's Score: 2**

**Competitive Preference Priority 4 - Equitable Financing**

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

**Strengths:**

The applicant has a strong commitment to equitable funding for charter schools clearly declaring that charters receive the same per pupil funding as traditional districts (minus 7% for specific traditional district costs) and that charters are funded using the same methodology and timeline (12 monthly payments) as traditional public schools (p. 7).

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

**Reader's Score: 2**

**Competitive Preference Priority 5 - Charter School Facilities**

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

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

**Strengths:**

The applicant provides evidence of supporting the funding of facilities for charter schools by stating that the schools can apply for reimbursement of up to 30% of the approved facility costs (p. 8). It was also impressive that approximately one-third (8) of Rhode Island's charter schools have been allocated \$47MM worth of facilities funding to date (p. 8). The additional funding provided from the local per pupil calculation (p. 7) from local property taxes potentially provides funding for costs for capital projects or facility costs.

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 2

### Competitive Preference Priority 6 - Best Practices to Improve Struggling Schools/LEAs

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

#### Strengths:

The applicant provides compelling evidence that dissemination of best practices to help struggling schools by including dissemination and partnerships as a criterion for its Performance Framework (p. 9). The applicant also plans to award sub grants that focus on partnerships with districts and schools that have struggled with academic achievement, achievement gaps and/or that served large percentages of educationally disadvantaged students (p. 11) and that schools are to include highlights of dissemination activities in an annually published charter school report (p. 11). The applicant also highlighted specific examples where charter schools have disseminated practices focused on developing a college-going culture, differentiation to improve achievement in mathematics, and evidence-based argumentation instructional practice (p. 10).

Lastly, the applicant's commitment to funding dissemination efforts and to requesting regular updates from the charter schools provides more evidence of a strong commitment to dissemination best practices (p. 11).

#### Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 2

### Competitive Preference Priority 7 - Serving At-Risk Students

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

#### Strengths:

The applicant conveys a strong commitment by providing for one-half (1/2) of the total number of charter public schools in the state shall be reserved for charter school applications designed to increase the educational opportunities for at-risk pupils (p. 11).

The applicant also provided evidence that charters in Rhode Island serve similar percentages to the urban district averages and a higher proportion compared to the statewide averages (p. 12).

The applicant also reported impressive research that students who attend charter schools in Rhode Island, gain, on average, 86 days of additional learning in reading and 108 additional days of learning in math (p. 12).

The applicant described two programs that have been effective in serving pregnant, parenting and underserved teens and other at-risk of dropping out of school (p. 13).

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

**Reader's Score: 2**

**Competitive Preference Priority 8 - Best Practices for Charter School Authorizing**

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

**Strengths:**

The applicant utilized a self-analysis of RIDE's current authorizing practices against NACSA's 12 essential recommended practices. This should significantly improve its authorizing practices including taking steps to implement a common charter contract, to adopt an evaluator's guide with documented criteria, to develop a separate application processes for new charters compared to expansions, to conducting capacity interviews with charter applicants, to providing an external evaluator to for application evaluations, and to develop and implement a new charter performance review system to inform the renewal process (p. 14-15). Specific best practices for authorizing recently adopted such as implementing a common charter contract, conducting a capacity interview as part of the application process, and utilizing external evaluators to conduct application evaluations (p. 15) speak to the applicants ongoing commitment to continual improvement.

**Weaknesses:**

No weaknesses noted.

**Reader's Score: 5**

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