



## **Application Process**

UMSL seeks high-quality applications from individuals and groups who have the skill, capacity and vision to initiate and sustain high quality public charter schools. Priority is given to applications that focus on alternative education and educating high-risk students and the reentry of dropouts (Missouri Revised Statutes 160.405.2(5)). Over the last decade, UMSL has learned a great deal about what it takes to establish and operate a high quality public charter school. Clearly a strong educational program is a critical ingredient for success. Equally important are the organizational and financial practices, systems and leadership that support the program. As more has been learned about the elements of successful charter schools, these lessons have translated into policies and practices for determining which applications should be approved and which should not.

### ***Application Submission Deadlines***

UMSL CSO will accept applications at any time after an applicant first submits a prospectus and is then invited to apply. Our office has 90 days to review the full application and determine if it will sponsor the proposed school. Missouri Statutes require charters be granted by the State Board of Education by January 31 in order to open school the following school year. **In order to meet this deadline and open school the following school year, the UMSL CSO must receive the school's application by July 1.**

Applications received July 1 or after will be reviewed for opening a year following the next school year, unless otherwise decided by the UMSL CSO. We are now accepting applications for 2020-21 school openings.

### ***Application Process***

UMSL's application process in brief is as follows:

- Step 1: Prospectus Submission
- Step 2: Application Submission
- Step 3: Application Evaluation and Capacity Interviews
- Step 4: UMSL CSO Decision
- Step 5: DESE Submission and State Board Approval

## **Step 1: Prospectus Submission**

All new and existing school applicants begin the process by submitting a prospectus. This “executive summary” describes the basic elements of the applicant’s plan for establishing a charter school.

### Prospectus Content

A thorough prospectus addresses the following:

- The school’s mission
- The school’s location and targeted student population
- The number of students the school plans to serve in the first year and when it is at full enrollment, the grades served, and the anticipated opening date
- The school design:
  - If a replication of an existing model, include links to websites and performance data along with contact information for existing school(s)
- A day in the life of the school for students, staff, parents, etc.
- Expected academic, operational, financial outcomes
- Evidence for, or explanation of, how the school design can produce those outcomes
- The school’s innovation
- The founding team:
  - List of 501©3 board members and any identified staff
  - A description of the capacity to open and operate the school
- Plans to secure a facility for the school
- A cash flow statement for the period from application to opening.
- Resumes, vitas, and/or any other relevant information regarding the school’s founding board and any identified staff. These pages do NOT count towards the five-page maximum.

### Prospectus Format

The prospectus should conform to the following:

- Maximum five (5) pages
- Submitted electronically via email as a PDF to Bill Mendelsohn - [mendelsohnb@umsl.edu](mailto:mendelsohnb@umsl.edu)
- All pages numbered
- One-inch margins on all sides
- Minimum 11-point font
- Times New Roman or Cambria font
- All spelling and grammar correct
- Spacing standard single space
- No attachments or ancillary documents
- Embed links to research, charter management organizations, existing schools as applicable

- The resumes, vitas, and cash flow statement do not need to follow the previous editorial requirements, but should be part of the single PDF.

### Initial Review and Invitation to Apply

Once received, the UMSL CSO will have fourteen (14) days to review the prospectus. At this stage, the submitted documents should demonstrate that the founding team has:

- A compelling reason to open a charter school—whether by doing something different, better, or for a different population—as schools of choice, the applicant should be able to show a need and demand for their proposed school, for the population they intend to serve, in the area they intend to offer it;
- A sound educational model—whether an established school model or a new innovation, the founders will have a strong research or experiential basis for a high expectation of a quality education for their expected population;
- Strong support—may be financial or in-kind, but starting a charter school is a resource intensive endeavor with a high possibility of failure, so a successful operator will have spent years developing the support network of families, agencies, teachers and other educational professionals, and funding to be successful; and
- Board capacity—with the diversity of skills and knowledge, experience, and ability to attract and identify strong school leadership and provide stability to nurture the organization.

The UMSL CSO reserves the right but is not obligated to request additional information based on the Prospectus prior to determining whether to invite the applicant to submit a full application. Additional reviews, such as professional consultant evaluations, interviews and due diligence on programs the applicant proposes to use, also may be conducted.

**Existing Schools:** In the case of an existing school seeking to become a public charter school, the UMSL CSO will set up a site visit to observe the school in operation and interview school leaders.

If the prospectus and additional information based upon it demonstrate the foregoing characteristics, the UMSL CSO will invite the applicant to submit a full application. **In order to open school the following school year, the UMSL CSO must receive the school's application by July 1.**

### **Step 2: Application Submission**

The applicant submits an application that details the education, organization, governance and business plans of the school. You can find the full application and guidance here. The applicant must provide evidence of capacity of the founding group to govern and manage a

public school. A successful application provides data on prior school success or evidence as to why the innovative approach has a likelihood of success. It also has appendices that include:

- Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws
- Five-Year Budget and year-one cash flow analysis with budget assumptions noted
- Board Member resumes, with a minimum of seven board members

The founding board of the school must formally approve the application and its board president must sign the DESE Cover Page.

**Existing Schools:** In the case of an existing schools seeking to become a public charter school, the CSO may:

- Waive certain sections of the application.
- Require submission of student achievement assessment data and data reports from previous years of operation for review purposes.

We highly recommended that all applicant or prospective applicants consult the collection of approved charter applications available online at DESE: <http://dese.mo.gov/quality-schools/charter-schools/applications>.

### **Step 3: Application Evaluation and Capacity Interview**

Once submitted, the Charter School Office staff, its portfolio of consultants, and the Dean of UMSL's College of Education rigorously evaluate each application. The process includes a thorough review of the written proposal including its financial operations, five-year budget projections, and student support systems. The review may include analyses by external consultants to assure the applicants have the experience and capacity to govern and manage a high performing public school and have considered the myriad details required to start and maintain one. The office will also exercise due diligence to examine the applicant team's experience and capacity. The UMSL Application Guidance includes specific evaluation criteria.

Applicants must present the following elements in the completed application:

- A clear and compelling mission and vision
- A quality educational program
- A solid business plan
- Strong evidence that effective governance and management structures, systems and expertise are in place
- Profiles of founding team members demonstrating diverse and necessary capabilities
- Clear evidence of the applicant's capacity to execute its plan successfully
- A viable plan and financial capacity to secure a facility to house the school
- A closure plan

Prior to the final decision, applicants are required to participate in a **capacity interview** with Charter School Office Staff and the Dean of UMSL's College of Education. Participants must include the charter public school governing board chair and school leader (if identified). The applicant team may also consist of board members, and any identified staff.

The purpose of the interview is to further determine the capacity of the governing group and founding staff, their understanding of their roles and their knowledge of their model. Interviews are highly structured, with specific questions relating to the application, the backgrounds of the petitioners and the needs of the community.

The UMSL CSO will grant sponsorship approval only to those applicants that have demonstrated competence and capacity to succeed in *all* aspects of the school, consistent with the stated approval criteria outlined in the application guidance.

#### **Step 4: UMSL CSO Decision**

The UMSL Charter School Office will issue a written letter of acceptance or denial within 45 days from receipt of the application. If the office chooses not to sponsor an applicant, the letter of denial will provide reasons for denial with a copy sent to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

#### **Step 5: DESE Submission and State Board Approval**

Once the Charter School Office approves the application, it will work with the applicant team to prepare it for submission to the Missouri State Board of Education (MOSBOE). Together, our office and the applicant team will negotiate and approve a five-year performance contract that includes measureable student academic achievement targets and include it in the application appendices. To examine the performance contract template, see Appendix 4: UMSL Charter School Performance Contract Template in the UMSL CSO Handbook, located at our [website](#). The team will also approve an assurance statement that the school will comply with all state and federal statutes and regulations that govern Missouri's charter public schools.

The final application and agreements, with a sponsorship letter from the UMSL CSO are submitted to the MOSBOE for approval, as outlined in Missouri's Revised State Statutes. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has 60 days to review the application on behalf of the State Board of Education and may offer recommended changes to assure alignment with statute and regulations. Applicants are not required to accept Department recommendations outside of statutory or regulatory requirements.

Currently, MOSBOE reviews applications no later than the January meeting for schools that plan to open the following calendar year. The Office of Quality Schools (OQS) of DESE—shepherds the application through the state board approval process. To be placed on the agenda of the January state board of education meeting, the OQS requires submission of the final version of the application **no later than November 1**. MOSBOE also reviews applications earlier in the year. Final applications should be submitted to DESE at least six

weeks prior to a particular state board meeting date. Accompanying the application will be a statement of finding that the application meets all requirements.

### ***UMSL-Charter School Contract***

Upon the MOSBOE's approval of the application, UMSL and the approved school agree to a separate contractual agreement that lays out additional terms defining the relationship between the two. The term of this contract covers the period from the MOSBOE approval date to the end of the first five years of the school's operation. To examine the full contract template, see Appendix 2: UMSL-Charter School Contract Template in the UMSL CSO Handbook, located at our [website](#).

### ***Third Party Providers of Educational Design and/or Management***

A charter school that contracts with third party providers of educational design and/or management must include additional provisions and structures within its application that verify rigorous, independent contract oversight by its governing board and the school's financial independence from the external provider. This includes the following:

- Its governing board is independent from the third-party provider's management and/or governing board.
- The school's finances are separate from the provider's finances.
- The school's financial operations and decision-making are independent of the provider's operations and governance.

UMSL does NOT accept applications from Educational Management Organizations that practice a policy of retaining ownership of the building in which the charter schools they manage are located.

### ***Statutory Requirements - Application Process***

The following statutes and codes form the basis of UMSL's responsibilities related to the application process and decision making:

**RSMo\_160.405.2(1):** UMSL will provide an application process that will determine if an applicant is sufficiently qualified to operate a charter school

**RSMo\_160.405.2(2):** UMSL will provide applicants written letter(s) of denial, with the reasons for denial, and copy the state board

**RSMo\_160.405.2(4):** When granting charters to similarly qualified applicants, UMSL will give priority to charter schools oriented to high-risk and reentry of dropouts

**RSMo\_160.405.3:** UMSL-approved charter applications will be submitted to the state board of education with:

- A statement of findings related to meeting legal requirements
- A plan to monitor the academic performance of the applicant

RSMo\_160.405.5(8) Any request for further review by the state board of education includes:

- (a) Documentation that a copy of the charter application was provided to the St. Louis Public School District Board of Education
- (b) A statement outlining the reasons for approval or disapproval addressing statutory requirement

**5\_CSR\_20-100.260 (2):** This section of the Code of State Regulations pertaining to Standards for Charter Sponsorship details the sponsor's responsibilities related to the charter school application process and decision making.