

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 (160.405.2(5), RSMo). 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 Process

As is required in 5 CSR 20-100.260.2(A), the UMSL CSO implements a thorough charter application process as outlined in section 160.400.11(2), RSMo, and according to the timeline outlined in section 160.405.2(1)– (4), RSMo, without requiring any fee from the applicant in accordance with section 160.400.6, RSMo.

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. A prospectus must be received by May 1st of the year preceding the year the school plans to open (i.e. prospectus is due May 1, 2022 for a school planning to open Fall 2023). The UMSL CSO recommends submitting a prospectus earlier than May 1st but will accept them until May 1st.

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, 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” for students, staff, parents, etc.
- Expected academic, operational, financial outcomes
- Evidence for, or explanation of, how the school design will produce those outcomes
- The school’s innovation
- The founding team:
 - List of 501(c)(3) board members and any identified staff
 - A description of the capacity to open and operate the school
- If the applicant is an existing school operator, brief background about other schools
- If the applicant intends to contract with a third-party education service provider (ESP), information about the provider and the services it will provide
- Plans to secure a facility for the school
- A projected cash flow statement 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

- Maximum five (5) pages
- Submitted electronically via email as a PDF to Susan Marino - susan.marino@umsl.edu
- All pages numbered
- One-inch margins on all sides
- 12-point Times New Roman font
- All spelling and grammar correct
- Spacing standard: single space
- No attachments or ancillary documents
- Embed links to research, charter management organizations, and 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 that sets high expectations for 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

applicant 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, 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 or not 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, may also be conducted.

High Risk Students: The UMSL CSO gives priority to applicants that propose a school oriented to high-risk students and to the reentry of dropouts into the school system as defined in section 160.405.2(5), RSMo.

Independent Schools Transitioning to a Public Charter School: 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.

After the initial review, the UMSL CSO will send the applicant a letter either inviting the applicant to submit a full application (if the prospectus and additional information requested demonstrate the foregoing characteristics), or explaining the reasons the applicant is not invited to submit a full application.

Step 2: Application Submission

In alignment with 5 CSR 20-100.260.2(B.1-2) the UMSL CSO has developed and made readily available a charter application that—

1. Includes comprehensive questions to elicit the information needed for a rigorous evaluation of the applicant's plans and capacity in accordance with the requirements stated in section 160.405.1(1)–(17), RSMo; and
2. Clearly articulates any chartering priorities the UMSL CSO has established, including the priority to serve high-risk students in accordance with section 160.405.2(5), RSMo.

If, after the review of the prospectus, the applicant is invited to submit a full application, the applicant shall submit an application that details the education, organization, governance and business plans of the school. One can find the full application and guidance on our webpage: <https://coe.umsl.edu/w2/initiatives/Charter/>. The application includes detailed evaluation criteria. The applicant must provide evidence of the 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

- Documentation demonstrating that in alignment with section 160.405, RSMo, the applicant has given a copy of its application to the school board of the district in which the charter school is to be located and to the state board of education, within five business days of the date the application is filed with the UMSL CSO.

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

Independent Schools Transitioning to a Public Charter School

In the case of an existing independent school seeking to become a public charter school, the UMSL CSO:

- May waive certain sections of the application
- Will require submission of student achievement assessment data and data reports from previous years of operation for review purposes

Existing School Operators

In alignment with 5 CSR 20-100.260.2(C) and (D.1-4), the UMSL CSO has differentiated and supplemented application requirements and corresponding evaluation criteria for applicants who currently oversee or manage charter schools in Missouri or other states.

For applicants that are existing school operators, the UMSL CSO application requires—

1. Specific information about the existing operator’s prior academic achievement, particularly if the applicant has operated or is operating schools in Missouri, and successful management of nonacademic school functions, including financial and organizational performance, in accordance with section 160.415.7, RSMo;
2. An explanation of any never-opened, terminated, or non-renewed charter schools (including terminated or non-renewed third-party contracts to operate charter schools) within the last five (5) years and other such requirements as outlined in section 160.415.7, RSMo;
3. A description of the existing school operator’s proposed growth plan; and
4. The operator’s most recent financial audits.

Consult Section B.1-A in UMSL’s application.

Third Party Education Service Providers (ESP)

In alignment with 5 CSR 20-100.260.2(E), the application for applicants that intend to contract with an education service provider for substantial educational or charter school management services requires—

1. A draft of the proposed management services agreement that sets forth proposed key terms, including roles and responsibilities of the charter school governing board, the charter school staff, and the service provider; the services to be provided; the measures by which the charter school governing board will evaluate the service provider; a detailed explanation of compensation to be paid to the service provider;

- financial controls and oversight; methods of contract oversight and enforcement; and conditions for contract renewal and termination; and
2. A disclosure and explanation of any existing or potential conflicts of interest between the charter school governing board and proposed service provider or any affiliated business entities.

Consult Section B.1-B in UMSL's application.

The application must include additional provisions and structures that ensure:

- There will be rigorous, independent contract oversight by its governing board
- The school maintains financial independence from the ESP. This includes the following:
 - Its governing board is independent from the ESP's management and/or governing board.
 - The school's finances are separate from the ESP's finances.
 - The school's financial operations and decision-making are independent of the ESP's operations and governance.

UMSL does NOT accept applications from third party education service providers that practice a policy of retaining ownership of the building or physical assets therein in which the charter schools they manage are located.

Step 3: Application Evaluation and Capacity Interview

In order to meet established deadlines and open school the following school year, the UMSL CSO must receive the application by July 1 of the school year preceding the proposed opening year. The UMSL CSO 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. 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 (ie an application received July 2, 2021 will be considered for opening fall 2023). We are now accepting applications for 2023-24 school openings.

In alignment with 5 CSR 20-100.260.2(F), the UMSL CSO employs a team of qualified application evaluators with relevant educational, organizational (governance and management), financial, and legal expertise to review and evaluate the charter application according to the established evaluation criteria. In alignment with 5 CSR 20-100.260.2(G), the UMSL CSO staff is provided orientation or training as application evaluators to ensure consistency in the application of the approval criteria.

Once submitted, the Charter School Office staff, its consultants, and the Dean of UMSL's College of Education comprise the team that rigorously evaluates 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 UMSL CSO 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 and in alignment with 5 CSR 20-100.260.2(H) the UMSL CSO staff and the Dean of UMSL's College of Education will conduct an **in-person capacity interview** with each qualified applicant to examine the applicant's experience and capacity, and conduct due diligence to examine the applicant's experience, capacity, and track record of performance. 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.

In alignment with 5 CSR 20-100.260.2(I), the UMSL CSO will advise charter applicants of the meaning of local education agency (LEA) status as it concerns the operation of the charter school as outlined in section 160.415.4, RSMo.

In alignment with 5 CSR 20-100.260.2(J) the UMSL CSO will grant sponsorship approval only to applicants that have demonstrated competence and capacity to succeed in all aspects of the school, with particular consideration to any available information about schools previously operated in Missouri, if applicable, and consistent with the published application evaluation criteria, in accordance with sections 160.400.11(2) and 160.405.2(2), RSMo.

Step 4: UMSL CSO Decision

In alignment with 5 CSR 20-100.260.2(K), the UMSL Charter School Office will promptly notify applicants of approval or denial and, if the charter is denied, notify the applicant in writing explaining the factors that determined the decision, in accordance with section

160.405.2(3), RSMo. The UMSL CSO will issue a written notice of acceptance or denial within 90 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 Missouri State Board of Education within five business days following the denial.

Step 5: DESE and Public Schools Submissions and State Board Approval

Once the UMSL Charter School Office approves the application, we will work with the applicant team to prepare for submission to the Missouri State Board of Education (MOSBOE). Together, the UMSL CSO and the applicant team will negotiate and approve a five-year Performance Contract that includes measurable student academic achievement targets and include it in the application appendices. To examine the Performance Contract template, see Appendix 3: UMSL Charter School Performance Contract Template. 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.

In alignment with 5 CSR 20-100.260.2(L), the UMSL CSO will submit an electronic copy of each approved charter, accompanied by a statement finding that the application meets the statutory requirements and the monitoring plan under which the sponsor will evaluate the academic performance of the charter school, to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for review by November 10th (or the next business day if November 10th falls on a Saturday or Sunday) of the year prior to the proposed opening date of the charter school as outlined in section 160.405.3, RSMo. Final applications should be submitted to DESE at least six weeks prior to a particular state board meeting date. The founding board of the school must formally approve the application and its board president must sign the DESE Cover Page.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has 60 days to review the application on behalf of the State Board of Education (MOSBOE) and may offer recommended changes to assure alignment with statute and regulations. Applicants are not required to accept DESE recommendations outside of statutory or regulatory requirements. The final application and agreements are also submitted to St. Louis Public Schools as required in statute.

For schools that plan to open the following school year, MOSBOE reviews applications no later than the January meeting. The Office of Quality Schools (OQS) of DESE—shepherds the application through the MOSBOE approval process.

Statutory Requirements – Standard 2: Application Process and Decision Making:

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

RSMo_160.405.1-2: UMSL will provide an application process that will determine if an applicant is sufficiently qualified to operate a charter school

RSMo_160.405.2(3): UMSL will provide applicants written letter(s) of denial, with the reasons for denial, and copy the state board

RSMo_160.405.2(5): 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_160.405.4(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 <Name of> 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.

UMSL Charter School Contract – Related Sections

Also refer to Appendix 2: UMSL Charter School Contract: Article II.