

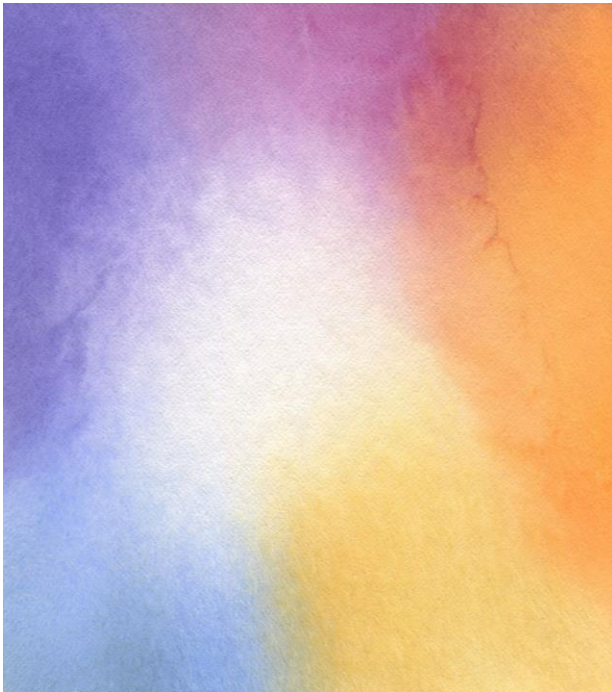
# Charter Applicant Capacity Interviews

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Adapted from NACSA's Plug and Play Resources

For Additional Resources visit  
<https://www.qualitycharters.org/core-resources/capacity-interview/>



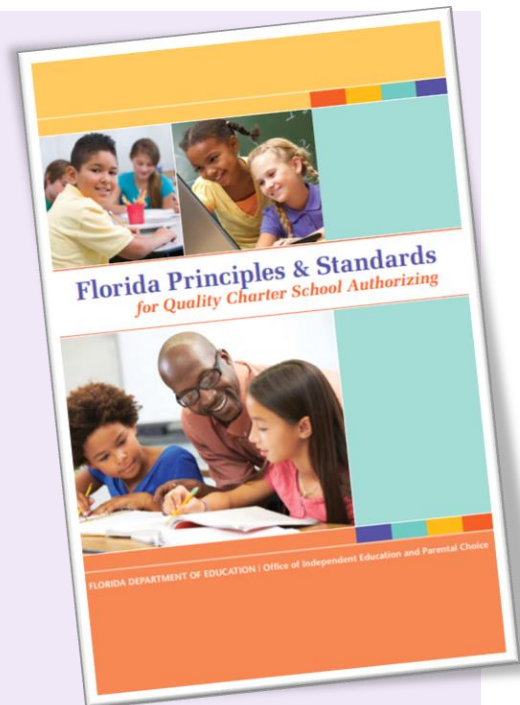
# Areas of Focus

- ✓ Understand the **purpose** of the capacity interview in the application process
- ✓ Understand the **characteristics** of a successful capacity interview
- ✓ Implement effective **preparation** for and **facilitation** of the capacity interview
- ✓ Understand the **role of evidence** from the capacity interview in the final recommendation

# Best Practices in Charter School Authorizing

A quality authorizer implements a comprehensive application process that:

- includes **clear** application questions and guidance;
- follows fair, transparent **procedures** and rigorous **criteria**; and
- grants charters only to applicants who demonstrate a **strong capacity** to establish and operate a **quality** charter school.



# The Interview: Form & Function

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**WHY, HOW, WHAT, WHO, WHEN**

# WHY:

## Purpose of Capacity Interview

To determine whether:

**The proposed educational program is sound**

**The plan is educationally, financially, and operationally comprehensive and cohesive**

**The applicants are likely to implement the proposed program with fidelity**

# HOW:

## Preparing for the Interview

- Establish a realistic timeline to complete the application reviews and receive feedback from the Application Review Committee Members.
- Determine if the interviews will be in person or through a video-conferencing platform.
- Identify and prioritize questions, concerns, and gaps in the application.
- Establish a method for the question/answer part of the interview.
  - Will the questions/concerns be provided to the Applicant ahead of time?
  - Will each member provide the questions/concerns to a designated member of the panel to consolidate and prepare prior to the interview?
  - Will each member of the panel present his/her own questions/concerns?
- Assign specific roles and responsibilities for assistance during the interview.
  - Interview facilitator
  - Timekeeper
  - Note-taker unless each member keeps his/her own notes
  - Audio/Video Recording

# HOW:

## Anatomy of the Interview

Depending on the needs of each District and the staff involved, the anatomy of the interview may look a bit different.

The interview block may include:

- Introductions and Overview - 10minutes
  - District staff
  - Applicant Team
  - What to expect during the interview
- Questions from District panel - 55-75 minutes
- Closing and Next Steps - 10-15 minutes
  - District Lead informs Applicant/Team of follow-up and approximate timeline
  - Applicant/Team comments



# WHAT:

## Obtaining the Correct Info

What type of information do you want to receive from the Applicant/Team?

### **External validity**

Does the application reference a sound program structure?

Are the procedures based on research or practice?

### **Internal consistency**

Do the sections align when needed?

Does the application reference the District's procedures?

### **Capacity to execute**

Does the Applicant have the necessary expertise?

Are there others involved that have the experience that the Applicant may lack?

### **Evidence of success**

Is the Applicant successfully operating any other charter schools?



# WHAT:

## Types of Questioning

### 1. Closed

Have you identified a school leader?

Do you have a letter of commitment from a reliable funding source?

### 2. Open-ended

What criteria did/will you use to select a school leader?

Describe the function of the ELL Committee.

### 3. Scenarios

What will you do if enrollment is 20% below expectations?

Suppose students are not performing adequately. What are some things that the board can change to assist the school leader?

A parent contacts the board chairperson complaining about a teacher. What is the board's responsibility in this situation?

# WHO:

## Who Should Be Present?

District Staff	Applicant
Lead - Director of Charter Office	Application Contact Person
Content Area Experts- <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Curriculum</li><li>• ESE</li><li>• ESOL</li><li>• Budget</li><li>• Specialty Experts, i.e. Montessori, STEAM...</li><li>• Any other highly deficient area</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Board Member(s), if identified</li><li>• Principal Candidate, if identified</li><li>• Members of leadership team with content area expertise on Educational Plan/Curriculum, ESE, ESOL</li><li>• Finance</li><li>• Education Service Provider or Charter Management Organization representative</li></ul>
Legal Counsel, depending on District preference	
School Board Member(s), depending on District preference	
External Reviewers i.e. school principals, depending on District preference	

# WHEN:

## During the Interview - Opening

### Welcome/Introductions:

- District Reviewers:
  - Name
  - Role/Title
  - Content reviewed
- Applicant Group:
  - Name
  - Role with Proposed School
  - Involvement with the writing of the application

### Set the stage:

- Inform applicants that the review team has read the application, met as a group to discuss, and developed questions to better understand the proposed application. It is beneficial to have a script so that you don't leave out any information from one capacity interview to another.
- Inform applicants interview will be recorded.
- State time when interview will end.

# WHEN:

## Effective Interviews

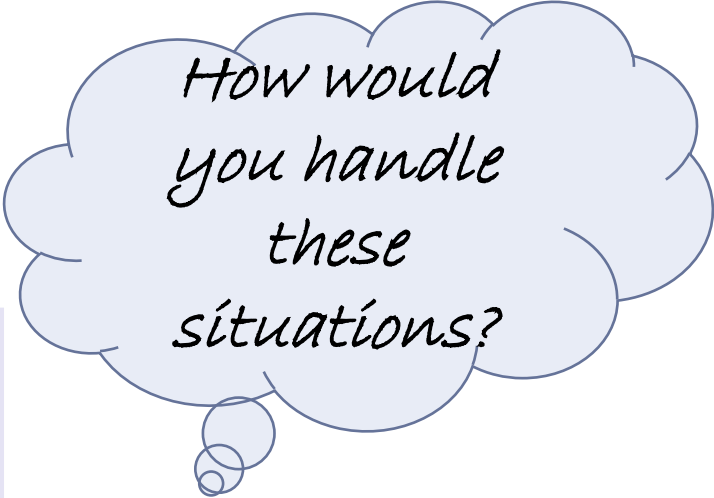
DO'S	DON'TS
Have a brief pre-meeting with District staff to review expectations	Do not provide technical assistance or advising
Prepare and prioritize questions	Do not belabor a question if the applicant is struggling
Pose one question at a time	Do not appear disinterested or disengaged
Avoid leading questions	Do not give a recommendation or decision on the spot
Ask thoughtful follow-ups	
Look for non-verbal cues	
Be open-minded	

# WHEN:

## Kinds of Difficult Situations

**Applicant has difficulty answering questions**

**One person dominates the conversation, answering all the questions**



*How would you handle these situations?*

**Gaps or weaknesses in the school proposal are recognized**

**Potential conflicts of interest are disclosed**

**Applicant Team has disagreement during interview**

# WHEN:

## Managing Difficult Situations: Scenario #1

*The applicants are longstanding members of the community who feel ownership over the schools and are nostalgic for their own educational experience but have little professional experience in education or school operations.*

**Guidance:** Explore the degree to which the Applicant has thought through the educational program and the curriculum plan.

**Example:** How did you choose the educational program? Were there other programs that you considered? Why did you settle on [the one proposed]?

**Example:** How will the school ensure compliance with special programs for Students with Disabilities and/or English Language Learners?

# WHEN:

## Managing Difficult Situations: Scenario #2

*The applicant states that the school will be recruiting students and asks where s/he can obtain a list of all students in an area who have indicated that English is not the primary language spoken at home so s/he can not send those households marketing materials.*

**Guidance:** Test whether you have understood the response correctly and whether the applicant intended to convey what you heard. Try paraphrasing or repeating back to the applicant what you have heard.

**Example:** I want to ensure that I understand you correctly. What I hear you saying is that you do not want English language learners to enroll in your school. Is that accurate?

**Example:** Let me ask a related question. Based on the area where you wish to locate, what do you anticipate your potential enrollment of English language learners to be?

**Example:** I believe you just said that your school will not serve any students whose primary language isn't English. What would happen if a student enrolled in your school and was subsequently identified as needing additional language support?

# WHEN:

## Closing the Interview



- Thank the Applicant/Team for their attendance and participation in clarifying the District panel's questions/concerns.
- Provide the next steps to the Applicant/Team. It is beneficial to have a script so that you don't leave out any information from one capacity interview to another.
- Ask if the Applicant/Team has any questions or needs additional clarification on what to expect.



# Post-interview Debrief

- Determine whether all outstanding questions and concerns were adequately addressed during the interview.\*
- Identify any areas that are still a concern.
- Provide responses and/or recording to the committee members who were not present and ask them to confirm if the answers were adequate.
- Remind committee members to keep comments objective, aligned with the evaluation criteria provided in the Model Charter School Application Evaluation Instrument, and in accordance with federal and state statute, if applicable.

\*Can be done with the immediate panel and/or the larger committee for consensus on the final recommendation.

# Post-interview Debrief

## Important Considerations for a *Strong vs. Weak* Application

Did they write it themselves or hire a consultant?

Did they have limited resources that prevented the development of a polished application?

Do they have the capacity to realize their plan in all areas (educational, organizational, and business)?

Is the application a reflection of their professionalism/expertise?

Were they able to adequately respond to or have the appropriate team members respond to the interview questions?

Were all sections of the application (educational, organizational, and business) equally strong and well-written?

Do they know what they don't know?

Does it resemble any prior, unrelated applications that the District may have received?

Do they have plans to address unknown variables or unanticipated events?

Do they understand high stakes accountability?

# Additional Resources

## **NACSA:**

- [Capacity Interview Tools and Resources Interview Preparation Form](#)
- [Sample Interview Questions:](#)
- [Opening Script Template](#)

