Charter School Research Collaborative: Letter of Inquiry Guide

Letter of Inquiry (LOI) Application

Letters of inquiry are due via Submittable August 4, 2025, by 5:00 p.m. ET. MIT Blueprint Labs will invite selected applicants to submit full proposals 2–3 weeks after LOI submission.

Questions? Contact chartercollab@mitblueprintlabs.org.

Contact Information

Primary Investigator (PI)

- First Name
- Last Name
- PI Email
- PI Phone Number
- PI Title
- PI Organization/University
- Street Address
- State
- Zip Code

I agree to follow MIT's conduct and community standards, should I receive and accept a grant. Read all policies here. (Checkbox)

Administrative Contact

- First Name
- Last Name
- Administrative Contact Email

Grant Contracting Contact

- First Name
- Last Name
- Grant Contracting Contact Email

Project Overview

Project Title (Limit: 300 characters)

Grant Type (select one)

- Proposal Development
- Pilot Study
- Full Research Project

Project Start Date (Start date should not be earlier than August 1, 2025. Proposal development and pilot studies are one-year grant periods. Full projects are one- to three-year periods.)

Project End Date

Project Summary (100-150 word description of the research project that outlines the research questions, general methodological approach, data access, type of proposal, and connections to the Collaborative's research agenda.)

What research question(s) does your project address? (Checkbox)

Region(s) of Interest (Checkbox)

How did you hear about the Charter School Research Collaborative? (Limit: 150 words)

Did you find your partner through a Blueprint matchmaking event? (Checkbox)

Budget

Please budget direct costs only. Indirects will be 10-15%, depending on the final funding source, and we will coordinate individually with selected grantees.

Total Budget Requested

- $10,000 maximum grant for proposal development (excluding indirects)
- $75,00 maximum grant for pilot studies (excluding indirects)
- $500,000 maximum grant for full research projects (excluding indirects)

Brief Explanation of Costs

Limit: 150 words. Summarize your general budget categories and the approximate total for each category (e.g., staff, travel, materials, data). Applicants invited to submit full proposals will complete a budget spreadsheet.

- Allowable expenses include:
    - Salaries (PI, Co-PI, Postdoctoral Research Assistant, Graduate Student, Researcher, Undergraduate Researcher, Other Research Staff, Other Staff)
    - Benefits (PI Benefits, Co-PI Benefits, Researcher Benefits, Other Staff Benefits, Tuition/Fees)
    - Other Collaborator (Independent Consultant, Advisor)
    - Travel (Project Travel, Conference, or Dissemination Travel)
    - Equipment and Software (Equipment, Software)
    - Project Expenses (Supplies, Participant Stipends/Costs, Data, Communication, Transcription)
    - Other (This should only be used for expenses not covered in the choices above)
    - Indirect rate
    - Please budget direct costs only. Indirects will be 10-15%, depending on the final funding sources. If selected to receive funding, we will provide you with the maximum indirect rate to use. Indirect expenses will be added to the total grant received in your final budget. For example, if you submit a $10,000 request and receive an indirect rate of 10%, you will submit a final budget for $11,000.

Narrative

Letter of Inquiry Narrative
File upload (Acceptable file types: .doc, .docx, .pdf)

In 6 double-spaced pages (for pilot and full projects)[*] (12-point font, 1-inch margins), please include:

- Project summary (Research questions, methodological approach, and connections to the Collaborative's research agenda)
- Data access (What agreements are needed and what data agreements do you already have in place?)
- Policy relevance (How will this work contribute to the larger field?)
- Research contribution (How does this study build on or complement the existing body of research on the topic?)
- Risks to success (What barriers do you foresee and how will you overcome them?)
- Timeline (A brief timeline of key project events and milestones.)

Project Team

Fill out the following information for each team member:

- Name, Organization, and Title
- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity
- Is/was this team member a first-generation college student?
- Is this team member within the first seven years of their career starting or completing a terminal degree?

Upload the Primary Investigator's (PI) CV

Additional Application Guidance

Geographic priority areas

Projects that examine one of the Collaborative's geographic areas of interest are preferred and will be given priority over similarly evaluated projects. However, projects that fall outside these areas of interest that receive high marks on all other criteria will be competitive.

- Baton Rouge, LA
- Camden, NJ
- Colorado state
- Connecticut state
- Georgia state
- Indianapolis, IN
- Kansas City, MO
- New Orleans, LA
- New York City, NY
- Newark, NJ
- Oakland, CA
- St. Louis, MO
- Stockton, CA
- Tennessee state
- Texas state
- Washington, DC
- Washington state

[*] Proposal development narratives do not require the same level of detail as a pilot study or full research project narrative and should be limited to around 2 double-spaced pages.

Review Process

The Blueprint Labs team will review each letter of inquiry to assess alignment with the Collaborative's priorities and research agenda, as well as project viability. Invited full proposals will be evaluated by the Collaborative's Executive Committee. The Committee is composed of leading charter school researchers, practitioners, and policymakers and will review all full proposals. The committee will be divided into two subcommittees: a research subcommittee and a policy/practice subcommittee. The committees will be asked to review proposals on the following indicators:

1. Methodological rigor (researchers on the EC only)
2. Policy relevance
3. Project viability
4. Research agenda alignment
5. Research contribution (researchers on the EC only)

Project Criteria

Note: criteria differs for each application type.

Proposal Development Criteria

Proposal development grants are intended to be used for early-stage research activities. See here for additional guidance and example projects.

Proposals will be evaluated on the following criteria.

- **Project viability:** Proposals should demonstrate a clear plan to determine whether a pilot or full research project is feasible (e.g., in regard to data access).
- **Policy relevance:** The proposed work should help foster a relationship between the researcher and the research partner. Proposals should answer questions of pressing interest to policymakers and practitioners.
- **Research agenda alignment:** Proposals should align with at least one of the questions in the Collaborative's research agenda (see here). All projects should focus on US charter schools.

Pilot Study Criteria

1. **Methodological rigor:** Proposals should outline a clear research design. Projects can be causal, descriptive, mixed methods, or qualitative. For example, causal investigations can examine how particular schools, sectors, governance arrangements, and institutions affect student outcomes. Descriptive questions can aim to fill holes in background knowledge by characterizing, for example, features of school or leadership practice. The research question of interest should drive the methodology.
    a. Does the proposal clearly explain how the study design will enable the research to answer the proposed questions?
    b. If answering a question of causal inference, is there a clear and well-justified approach if randomization is not used?

    c. What are the key threats to the validity of the study? Does the proposal address these?
2. **Policy relevance:** Proposals should answer questions of pressing interest to policymakers and practitioners.
    a. How can the research findings be used to inform policymaker and/or practitioner decision-making?
    b. How can the findings from this study be more broadly applied beyond the specific context examined?
3. **Project viability:** Proposals should demonstrate viability regarding data access, timeline, and other potential obstacles.
    a. Is there a clear and reasonable proposal for securing data access from the research partner? If a data agreement is not already secured, letters of support with a commitment from a data provider or a history of collaboration will bolster the application.
    b. Is the timeline realistic to complete the proposed study?
    c. Are there any logistical or political obstacles that might threaten the completion of the study (e.g., multiple data use agreements required, sign-off from government officials)?
    d. Does the proposal outline a clear process for researchers to incorporate their research partners' interests (e.g., through research question generation, dissemination, etc.)?
4. **Research agenda alignment:** Proposals should align with the Collaborative's research agenda. All projects should focus on US charter schools.
    a. Does the proposal align with at least one of the research questions in the Collaborative's research agenda (see here)?
5. **Research contribution:** Proposals should aim to generate new knowledge that advances the state of research on charter schools and education more broadly. We expect most projects will lead to a peer-reviewed study, though there may be some exceptions.
    a. How does it build on or complement the existing body of research on the topic?

Full Research Project Criteria

1. **Methodological rigor:** Proposals should outline a clear research design. Projects can be causal, descriptive, mixed methods, or qualitative. For example, causal investigations can examine how particular schools, sectors, governance arrangements, and institutions affect student outcomes. Descriptive questions can aim to fill holes in background knowledge by characterizing, for example, features of school or leadership practice. The research question of interest should drive the methodology.
    a. Does the proposal clearly explain how the study design will enable the research to answer the proposed questions?
    b. If answering a question of causal inference, is there a clear and well-justified approach if randomization is not used?
    c. What are the key threats to the validity of the study? Does the proposal address these?

2. **Policy relevance:** Proposals should answer questions of pressing interest to policymakers and practitioners.
    a. How can the research findings be used to inform policymaker and/or practitioner decision-making?
    b. How can the findings from this study be more broadly applied beyond the specific context examined?
3. **Project viability:** Proposals should demonstrate viability regarding data access, timeline, and other potential obstacles.
    a. All required data use agreements should be executed and signed.
    b. Is the timeline realistic to complete the proposed study?
    c. Are there any logistical or political obstacles that might threaten the completion of the study (e.g., multiple data use agreements required, sign-off from government officials)?
    d. Does the proposal outline a clear process for researchers to incorporate their research partners' interests (e.g., through research question generation, dissemination, etc.)?
4. **Research agenda alignment:** Proposals should align with the Collaborative's research agenda. All projects should focus on US charter schools.
    a. Does the proposal align with at least one of the research questions in the Collaborative's research agenda (see here)?
5. **Research contribution:** Proposals should aim to generate new knowledge that advances the state of research on charter schools and education more broadly. We expect most projects will lead to a peer-reviewed study, though there may be some exceptions.
    b. How does it build on or complement the existing body of research on the topic?