



Charter School Research Collaborative: Letter of Inquiry Guide

Letter of Inquiry (LOI) Application

Letters of inquiry are due [via Submittable](#) February 5, 2026, 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, 2026. Proposal development and pilot studies are one-year grant periods. Full projects are one- to two-year periods.)

Project End Date (End date should not be later than August 31, 2028.)

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)

If you are unsuccessful in your application, are you open to us sharing your proposal with other possible funders? (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)
- \$75,000 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 – applicant will need to select a grant type before uploading the narrative (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

Disclosure of PI and/or co-PIs’ connections to the Executive Committee

Write in

Briefly note any connections you have to the committee members. If not applicable, write N/A. Please note any recent (within 2 years) connection to Executive Committee members. Connections are defined as a direct co-authorship, advisor, or financial relationships.

The current Executive Committee members are: Carycruz Bueno (Wesleyan University), Christopher Campos (University of Chicago Booth School of Business), Sarah Cohodes (University of Michigan), Sharada Dharmasankar (MIT), Drew Jacobs (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools), Constance Jones (Noble Schools), Lauren Morando Rhim (Center for

* 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.

Learner Equity), Jack Mountjoy (University of Chicago Booth School of Business), and Karega Rausch (National Association of Charter School Authorizers).

Additional Application Guidance

Geographic priority areas

Projects that examine unexplored topics in one of the Collaborative's geographic areas of interest may be given priority over similarly evaluated projects. However, projects will first and foremost be judged based on the evaluation criteria, regardless of location.

- 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

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?
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Eligibility Criteria

Emerging and established researchers from a range of disciplines are invited to apply. Teams should be led by principal investigators who have some demonstrated success in conducting research, as demonstrated by their educational training (e.g., in economics, public policy, political science, education policy) or publications. They should also have an interest in education policy, broadly conceived, and they should be affiliated with an eligible nonprofit organization, such as an academic institution, public entity, or state or local government agency. We do not award grants to individuals.

See below for more details about eligibility for specific groups:

1. Graduate students

Graduate students in economics, public policy, and related fields are also encouraged to apply for funding and should include a letter of support from a faculty sponsor if invited to submit a full proposal. The total amount of funding for graduate students is capped at \$75,000.

2. Funders

Funders may be part of a team applying for funding, but their engagement in the partnership must be to exclusively support the research. The project must be researcher-led, meaning that the researcher leads the development of the research questions and methodology. Funders are defined as any organization that provides direct or indirect financial support to charter schools, charter management organizations, and related work, including but not limited to: private foundations (e.g., independent, family, and operating), community foundations, and donor-advised funds (i.e., this includes both private foundations and grantmaking public charities).

3. Lobbying

Individuals or organizations are not permitted to use any funds received through this grant for lobbying purposes.