



Charter School Research Collaborative: Letter of Inquiry Guide

Letter of Inquiry (LOI) Application

Letters of inquiry are due [via Submittable](#) October 5, 2026, by 5:00 p.m. ET. MIT Blueprint Labs will invite selected applicants to submit full proposals 3-4 weeks after LOI submission.

Questions? Contact chartercollab@mitblueprintlabs.org.

Contact Information

Are you a current Charter Collaborative grantee applying for the next phase of your project?

- Yes
- No

If yes: Submit your LOI by completing the remaining fields. Current grantees are not required to provide budget information or a narrative at the LOI phase and will automatically continue to the full proposal stage. You will receive a notification when the full proposal opens.

Primary Investigator (PI)

- First Name
- Last Name
- PI Email
- PI Phone Number
- PI Title
- PI Organization/University
- PI CV (document upload)
- 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

The answer to this question will be used as the unique identifier for each submission.

Grant Type (select one)

- Proposal Development
- Pilot Study
- Full Research Project

Project Start Date (Start date should not be earlier than May 1, 2027. 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 April 30, 2029.)

Have you applied to a previous Charter School Research Collaborative RFP?

- Yes
- No

If yes: What has changed since your last application? (Limit: 150 words)

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)

- What are the long-term effects of charter schools?
- What is the effect of charters on non-test score outcomes? How do these effects relate to test-score effects?
- Are charter schools adopting innovative practices in ways that differ from traditional public school settings?
- How does charter performance vary across different contexts?
- How do charter school effects vary with demographic characteristics, family background, and for students receiving language and special education services?
- How do system-level factors impact charter school performance?
- How have charter sector conditions changed over time relative to traditional public schools? What factors have contributed to those changes?

Region(s) of Interest (Check all that apply)

1. *Alabama:* Birmingham
2. *Arizona:* Phoenix
3. *California:* Bay Area, Stockton
4. *Colorado:* Denver
5. *Connecticut:* statewide
6. *Georgia:* Atlanta
7. *Idaho:* statewide
8. *Indiana:* Indianapolis

9. *Louisiana*: Baton Rouge, New Orleans
10. *Missouri*: Kansas City, St. Louis
11. *New Jersey*: Camden, Newark, Paterson
12. *New Mexico*: Albuquerque
13. *New York*: New York City, Rochester, statewide
14. *North Carolina*: Durham
15. *Ohio*: Cleveland
16. *Oklahoma*: Oklahoma City
17. *Pennsylvania*: Philadelphia
18. *Rhode Island*: Providence
19. *Tennessee*: Memphis, Nashville
20. *Texas*: Austin, Fort Worth, Houston, Permian Basin (Midland ISD/Ector County ISD), San Antonio
21. *Washington*: statewide
22. *Washington, DC*
23. *Wisconsin*: Milwaukee

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

Did you find your partner through a Blueprint matchmaking event?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

If you are unsuccessful in your application, are you open to us sharing your proposal with other possible funders?

- Yes
- No

Budget

Please budget direct costs only. Applicants may request indirect costs of up to 10% of total direct costs at the full proposal stage, if selected. Indirect costs will be added on top of the requested direct costs and will not count toward the maximum direct cost amount.

Total Budget Requested

- \$10,000 maximum grant for proposal development (excluding indirects)
- \$75,000 maximum grant for pilot studies (excluding indirects)
- \$400,000 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.

If you are applying in partnership with another organization or researcher, please note that we require the organization receiving the majority of the funding to submit the application and house the grant at their institution/organization.

- 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. Applicants may request indirect costs of up to 10% of total direct costs at the full proposal stage, if selected. Indirect costs will be added on top of the requested direct costs and will not count toward the maximum direct cost amount.

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)

Proposal development:

In no more than 2 double-spaced pages (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?)
- Timeline (A brief timeline of key project events and milestones.)

Pilot studies and full research projects:

In 6 double-spaced pages (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?)
- Timeline (A brief timeline of key project events and milestones.)

Project Team

Fill out the following information for the PI:

- Is/was the PI a first-generation college student?
- Is the PI within the first seven years of their career starting or completing a terminal degree?
- PI Gender
- PI Race/Ethnicity

Fill out the following information for each additional team member:

- Name, Organization, and Title
- 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?
- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity

Administrative staff do not need to be included. The Charter School Research Collaborative collects demographic information to better understand the diversity of our applicant pool. Responses to these questions are for reporting and evaluation purposes only and do not influence funding decisions.

Disclosure of Connections to the Executive Committee

Please note any recent (within 2 years) connection between the PI/Co-PIs on the project and 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 Learner Equity), Jack Mountjoy (University of Chicago Booth School of Business), and Karega Rausch (National Association of Charter School Authorizers).

Briefly note any connections the PI and/or Co-PIs have to the committee members. If not applicable, write N/A. (Limit: 500 words)

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.



1. *Alabama*: Birmingham
2. *Arizona*: Phoenix
3. *California*: Bay Area, Stockton
4. *Colorado*: Denver
5. *Connecticut*: statewide
6. *Georgia*: Atlanta
7. *Idaho*: statewide
8. *Indiana*: Indianapolis
9. *Louisiana*: Baton Rouge, New Orleans
10. *Missouri*: Kansas City, St. Louis
11. *New Jersey*: Camden, Newark, Paterson
12. *New Mexico*: Albuquerque
13. *New York*: New York City, Rochester, statewide
14. *North Carolina*: Durham
15. *Ohio*: Cleveland
16. *Oklahoma*: Oklahoma City
17. *Pennsylvania*: Philadelphia
18. *Rhode Island*: Providence
19. *Tennessee*: Memphis, Nashville
20. *Texas*: Austin, Fort Worth, Houston, Permian Basin (Midland ISD/Ector County ISD), San Antonio
21. *Washington*: statewide
22. *Washington, DC*
23. *Wisconsin*: Milwaukee

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

Project Criteria

Note: criteria differs by 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 and Full Research Project Criteria

Pilot studies help researchers conduct a small-scale or early-stage study to determine whether a full-scale study is possible. The typical award size is \$75,000. Projects should be completed within one year.

Full research projects have a wide range of award sizes (typically between \$75,000 – \$400,000). Project length will vary from one to two years.

Pilot and full research projects will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- 1) **Policy relevance:** Proposals should answer questions of pressing interest to charter sector policymakers and practitioners.
 - a) How can the research findings be used to inform charter sector policymaker and/or practitioner decision-making?
 - b) How can the findings from this study be more broadly applied across the charter sector or inform charter policy more broadly?
- 2) **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.
 - i) Note: for full research projects, 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.)?
- 3) **Research agenda alignment:** Proposals should align with the Collaborative's research agenda. All projects should focus on US charter schools.
 - a) Does the project specifically examine policies, practices, or issues that are unique to or distinctly shaped by the charter school context?
 - i) *Note: We are fundamentally interested in research that advances understanding of the charter sector itself, **not** research on general education policies or practices that happen to take place in charter schools.*
 - (1) *Examples of charter-specific issues might include: governance structures and autonomy, charter authorization and accountability, charter labor market dynamics,*

charter school spillovers or competitive effects, or organizational practices that emerge from charter specific contexts.

- b) Does the proposal align with at least one of the research questions in the Collaborative's research agenda ([see here](#))?
 - c) *Note: Please focus on alignment with research agenda questions. We will discuss alignment with the geographic areas of interest when we meet to review top applications.*
- 4) **Methodological rigor (researchers only review):** 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?
- 5) **Research contribution (researchers only review):** 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 specifically on charter schools? (Rather than contributing to general education research that occurs in a charter school setting.)
 - b) Is there clear potential for a peer-reviewed publication or research output (e.g., data set) that contributes to charter-school-specific knowledge?
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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.