



Charter School Research Collaborative Pilot Study Application Guide

Contact information, grant basics, and the project team will be carried over from the LOI. If you need to update this information, please email chartercollab@mitblueprintlabs.org.

Full Proposal

Full proposals are due December 2, 2026 by 5:00 p.m. ET.

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

- Yes
- No

If **yes**: Please share a brief summary of what you've accomplished to date on the project. What is new about this proposal? (Limit: 150 words)

Grant Type

Please confirm the grant type you are applying for, which may be different from your letter of inquiry.

Please list the full names and organizations of all project team members. (Limit: 500 words)

Narrative Upload

In an 8-10 double-spaced page PDF (2000-2500 words), please include:

- A description of the project and the project's significance. This includes a summary of the relevant literature, the relationship of the proposed research to that literature, and the policy and academic relevance expected to result from the proposed research.
- A description of the proposed research methods, study subjects/participants, and data collection instruments (if applicable).
- A description of the data and data sources needed for this project and the status of the required data use agreements (e.g., in conversation with the data partner, data use agreement signed). If any required DUAs are *not* secured by the time of application, please outline your plans to secure them during the course of this grant.
- A brief timeline of key project events and milestones. Proposals should demonstrate viability regarding data access, timeline, and other potential obstacles.
- A description of what risks to success you anticipate (e.g. data access, privacy, IRB approval).
- A description of other funding in-hand and pending for this project.
- A description of the relationship with your research partner(s).
- A demonstration of research agenda alignment.

Narrative FAQs

- This narrative may not exceed 10 pages double spaced.
- Your reference list should follow your narrative in the same pdf file and will not count toward the 2500-word or 10-page limit. Footnotes will also not count towards the word limit.
- The text should be double-spaced and in 12-point font. APA style is preferred.

- Tables and other figures can be included in the text of your proposal, where appropriate, provided they are used sparingly. The text contained in any tables and figures will not count toward the word limit. However, it is important that you describe or explain any tables or figures in the narrative portion of your proposal, which will contribute to your word count. Do not assume that tables and other figures are self-explanatory. Tables and figures do not count toward the 10-page or 2500-word limit.

Budget

Detailed Budget (Document upload)

Pilot Study maximum budget: \$75,000 (direct costs only)

- [Template – You are required to use this template](#)

Budget justifications for each line-item must be included in the appropriate budget column.

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.

If you plan to pay personnel that are not employees of the primary organization using grant funds, please list these costs in your budget as a subaward or subcontract.

Subawards/subcontracts must make up less than 50% of the total direct costs of the award.

Allowable expenses include:

- Salaries (PI, Co-PI, Postdoctoral Research Assistant, Graduate Student, Researcher, Undergraduate Researcher, Other Research Staff, Other Staff) - personnel of primary organization only
- Benefits (PI Benefits, Co-PI Benefits, Researcher Benefits, Other Staff Benefits, Tuition/Fees) - personnel of primary organization only
- Other Collaborator (Independent Consultant, Advisor) - list all subawards/subcontract costs here
- Travel (Project Travel, Conference, or Dissemination Travel) - Grantees are encouraged to budget for expenses associated with presenting their findings to researcher and/or practitioner audiences. If you are applying for a pilot study or full research project and your grant will be active from January - June 2028, please budget for one principal investigator from your team to travel to a 2-day conference at MIT, in addition to any other planned 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 costs: Applicants may request indirect costs of up to 10% of total direct costs. If your organization's approved indirect cost rate is lower than 10%, you must use the lower rate. Indirect costs will be added on top of the requested direct costs and will not count toward the maximum direct cost amount. For example, you may request up to \$75,000 in direct costs for a pilot study, for a total budget of up to \$82,500 including indirect costs.

What current and pending financial support do you have for this project? (Limit: 500 words)

Include the funder name(s) and dollar amount(s) received/requested, if applicable. Otherwise, write N/A.

Supporting Documentation

What is the status of all necessary data use agreements (DUAs) required for this project?

Will the activities proposed in this application involve human subjects research?

Please answer based on the project phase for which you are applying, not potential future phases.

- Yes
- No

Do you have IRB approval for this project?

- Yes
- No

Proof of Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is not required at the time of proposal submission. If your project is chosen for funding and IRB approval is needed, **your organization will be responsible for obtaining IRB review and approval** in accordance with both your institution and MIT policies and applicable law.

If yes: IRB Approval or Exemption Letter (Document upload)

Other Supporting Documentation (Document upload)

Use this optional section to upload additional relevant documentation such as graduate student letters of faculty support, letters of collaboration, data use agreements, project team bios, or interview protocols.

Pilot Study Project Criteria

Proposals 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?

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.

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| 1. <i>Alabama:</i> Birmingham | 7. <i>Idaho:</i> statewide |
| 2. <i>Arizona:</i> Phoenix | 8. <i>Indiana:</i> Indianapolis |
| 3. <i>California:</i> Bay Area, Stockton | 9. <i>Louisiana:</i> Baton Rouge, New Orleans |
| 4. <i>Colorado:</i> Denver | 10. <i>Missouri:</i> Kansas City, St. Louis |
| 5. <i>Connecticut:</i> statewide | 11. <i>New Jersey:</i> Camden, Newark, |
| 6. <i>Georgia:</i> Atlanta | 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 review process will take two months from the full application deadline date. 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)

Each full proposal will be peer-reviewed by at least one member of the research subcommittee and one member of the policy/practice subcommittee. The Executive Committee will then meet to discuss the proposals, and final funding decisions will be made by Blueprint's Directors.

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).

Applicants who receive a grant will be subject to the following requirements:

1. IRB approval or exemption before MIT can establish a subaward agreement to setup funding.
2. MIT requires an official acceptance of the proposal and budget by your institution to set up the subaward. Applicants are encouraged to submit the proposal to their office of sponsored programs or contracts department prior to the award decision to avoid delays and ensure that your institute will accept your proposal and proposal budget.
3. Once all materials have been received, it can take up to 60 days to establish the subaward. The award is paid on a cost reimbursable basis, and spending can usually be backdated through the date of the Blueprint award letter or date of IRB approval (whichever comes later). Funds are to be used for the purposes described in the proposal narrative and proposal budget. Significant changes to the project scope, design, or budget must be pre-approved by Blueprint Labs.

4. The terms of the award will be further specified in the award letter and in any subaward established with MIT. Acceptance of funding from Blueprint Labs signals your consent to these requirements. Non-compliance with these requirements could affect your eligibility for future funding from any Blueprint Labs Collaborative.
5. Grantees will be required to submit a brief annual progress report including financial data.
6. Grantees will be required to submit a final narrative and financial report after the conclusion of their award. Pilot study and full research project awardees must also submit a non-technical write-up of their findings (e.g., a policy brief).

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.