

RI League of Charter Schools - How we help.

Charter schools show much promise for the future of education. Serving as a consulting body the RI League of Charter Schools provides technical assistance and information about Rhode Island charter school issues. As a think-tank organization that brings charter schools and their proponents together, the RI League of Charter Schools is in a unique position to help educators turn ideas into reality.

But best of all, our participants come from every point in the process: from a group of educators with a great idea, to those in the application process, to fully established, successful schools. And everyone benefits.

- Active charters meet monthly in a critical friends group to share what's working, what's not.
- Groups seeking charters meet to share experiences and information so that charter planning groups can actively seek and profit from contact with similar organizations a more beneficial arrangement than working in isolation.
- We offer policy recommendations to leading educators and state officials. The League is recognized as a leading authority in the RI charter movement. Our counsel is sought and valued by many groups in the state and around the country.
- Professional development opportunities are provided for participating schools. The League paid for member schools to be trained in the Principles of Learning by the University of Pittsburgh and has begun an annual Consortium meeting in partnership with the RI Foundation and the Dunn Institute
- We conduct public engagement on legislative issues, speak at government and educational forums.
- Conference, meeting space and resource materials are available for groups authoring charters.
- League members enjoy group buying power, human resource sharing, collaborative funding opportunities and basic networking.

The League's Mission and Core Values

Our Mission: The League exists to expand the role of charters in Rhode Island public education by serving its member schools and through leading an engaged dialogue promoting public school choice.

Core Values: The League holds these principles as guiding statements for institutional sustainability.

1. Charter Schools provide an important function in the democratization of public schools; inclusive governance and public ownership by whole school communities moves us closer to true public education.
2. Public schools work best when they are: self-governing, fiscally autonomous, subject to closure, free of bureaucratic restraints, mission driven, adaptive and accountable.
3. Charters need a mechanism by which to form a community; that mechanism is the League. No group will be denied full access to the League or its benefits because of budget constraints.
4. The League's active members have a responsibility to aid and assist approved and applicant members.
5. As research and development laboratories, charters have a responsibility to engage each other in an active sharing of best practices and the League shall support these endeavors.
6. As a League of public charters we recognize our statutory responsibility to disseminate our best practices to the larger districts and teacher unions for whom we serve a research and development function.

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What is a charter school?

The Charter Public School Act of Rhode Island, first passed in 1995 and amended in 1998, 1999 and 2008, guides the establishment of Charter Schools in our state. Their purpose, the law states, is to provide an alternative within the public education system by offering opportunities for organizations to establish and maintain a public school program under the terms of its charter. As public schools that operate independently, charter schools aim to:

- Improve learning by creating schools with rigorous academic standards in all basic areas of instruction;
- Increase learning opportunities for all pupils, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for pupils who are identified as educationally disadvantaged and at risk;
- Encourage the use of innovative teaching methods;
- Create opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site;
- Provide parents and pupils with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities available;
- Be accountable for meeting publicly promulgated, measurable, state and charter-based pupil academic results, and provide the schools with a method to implement performance-based and/or student-based accountability systems; and
- Encourage parental and community involvement with public schools.

Who recommends a charter school application?

The commissioner of elementary and secondary education and/or the school committee where the charter public school is to be located, are authorized to respond to an application. They may recommend to the board of regents the granting of a revocable charter that authorizes the operation of a charter public school for up to five years, subject to renewal for additional five-year periods. The RI Board of Regents for elementary and secondary education is the charter granting entity.

Who can submit an application to establish a charter school?

- Existing public schools.
- Groups of public school personnel.
- Public school districts or a group of school districts.
- Established Rhode Island nonprofit organizations that have existed for at least 2 years and exist for a substantial reason other than to operate a school.
- Elected officials who qualify under the "Mayoral Academy" umbrella.
- Colleges and universities within the state of Rhode Island.

In addition, the law states, no existing public school can be converted into a charter public school unless a majority of the parents and/or guardians of the students and two-thirds of the certified teaching personnel currently assigned to the school approve the proposed charter. And, no private, for-profit or parochial school

is eligible for charter school status. Any charter school authorized by the charter school law shall be nonsectarian and nonreligious in its programs, admissions policies, employment practices and all other operations.



Getting Started

While the RI Charter School law outlines the approval process, there's much to do before you submit an application. We've summarized common stages in the development process below. We have added an extensive list of helpful links on our web site at www.richarterschools.com to assist you along the way. For additional details and helpful links, visit www.uscharterchools.org.

Phase I. Exploration: Surveying the Scene and Laying the Groundwork

This phase includes exploring your reasons for choosing to start a charter school, gathering basic background information on charter schools in your state, and assembling a school design team and framework. It is also prudent to survey your community's readiness for a charter school.

Some charter developers begin the process somewhat informally, while others are more deliberate in their efforts--developing a strategic or business plan. Many charter school developers begin by gathering start-up funds from public or private sources, or their own pocket. Start-up funds can be obtained from federal or state planning grants or private foundation or corporate grants.

1. Investigate State Laws and Policies - carefully review RI's legislation early in the exploration process. Since existing charter legislation may be under revision or new laws proposed, you might want to investigate the status of pending legislation related to charter schools. Note which agencies are empowered to grant charters, what the required components of the charter application are, and what the applicant's responsibilities are.

2. Review Chartering Agency Policies- RI charter law defines who may grant a charter: the RI Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education.

3. Assemble a Core Founding Group and Access Experts - The core founding group (design team, organizing committee) moves the charter school from dream to reality. They plan it, they write it, and some of them may operate it. This work requires a great amount of time and a wide variety of skills; thus your core team's expertise should be broadly based, but team members' vision should be narrowly focused on a shared educational mission. Expertise in the following areas are key:

- Curriculum and instruction
- Community relations and marketing
- Finance and fundraising
- Governance and management
- Legal issues, educational law
- Real estate
- Student assessment
- Writing charter school documents

When recruiting people to join the core founding group, you may want to look for entrepreneurs; educators; lawyers; accountants; key community members; business people with personnel, management, and marketing

experience; and visionaries. You will need people with strong organizational skills, potential charter school parents, and others. The expertise you don't find within your core group may be found through the local business community, colleges/universities, parents, and other community members. In addition, you may want to pursue state-level agencies and regional service providers for assistance.

4. Design a Comprehensive School Plan - Many charter school developers come together with an idea already in mind for what they want to accomplish. This idea needs to be fleshed out as a comprehensive school design framework, based on solid educational thinking and research, and including the following:

- A clear and agreed-upon mission and vision
- An overview of the instructional program
- A description of school governance and administrative structure
- A staffing plan
- A statement of facilities needs and facilities acquisition plan.
- A 5-year realistic budget.

Phase II. Application Drafting

This phase includes writing and negotiating the terms of an actual charter document.

1. Drafting the Charter - A RI charter is a legal document granting permission to a group or individual to own and/or operate a public school. The purpose, content, and format of charter documents are outlined in the law. Consult RI law and draft your document to address the statute. You can find a copy of the law at www.rilin.state.ri.us/Statutes/TITLE16.

Generally, the key components of a strong charter application include the following:

Key Components of a Strong Charter Application

- Clear mission statement
- Statement of why the school is needed
- Description of the research-based educational program
- Learning objectives for students
- Methods for student assessment
- Financial plan and 5 year budget projection
- Governance and organizational model
- Personnel policies
- Student enrollment and discipline policies
- Facilities information
- Insurance (as applicable)
- Compliance with state and federal regulations, as well as with any other requirements
- Reference to a pre-determined monitoring, evaluation, and renewal process

RI's Chartering Process - the big picture

Twelve months before application deadline:

Design Team



Proposal Writing



By December 1:

Submit Application to Commissioner



Over the next seven months:

Internal Review at RIDE and External by educators, parents, businesses



60-day comment period:

Two Open Public Meetings



Within 90 days after public meetings:

Commissioner's Recommendation to Board of Regents Policy Committee



Commissioner's Recommendation to Full Board of Regents



Conditional Approval or Approval by Board of Regents



Planning/Implementation/Facilities Acquisition



If all conditions met:

Opening as a Public Charter School

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Getting Approved - Route to Establishing a Charter School

As you can see from our flow chart, establishing a charter school can take two years or longer, from initial idea to opening the doors.

How the RI Process Works

1. Any eligible group applies to the commissioner of elementary and secondary education and the district's school committee.
2. After receiving a satisfactory application, the commissioner of elementary and secondary education will provide for a public comment period of not less than 60 days, during which they will hold at least two public hearings on the application.
3. The completed application is sent for internal review at the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and for external review by public educators, businesses, university professors and parent's organizations.
4. The commissioner and the local school committee each decide on whether or not to recommend the granting of the charter within 90 days after the conclusion of the public comment period.
5. If the commissioner or local school committee recommends granting the charter school petition, the matter is referred to the full Board of Regents for a decision on whether or not to grant a charter. The final decision rests with the Board of Regents. Their decision, complete with reasons and conditions, is made available to the public and to the applicant.
6. The commissioner, with the approval of the board of regents, may grant a variance to any provision of the charter school law, and to any DOE regulation and to any school district regulation which does not affect the health and safety or civil rights of pupils in charter public schools.
7. All charter applications are public record.
8. Once the Board of Regents grants approval, you begin the process of becoming an independent public school serving your constituents.
9. In some cases there may be a period of conditional approval where the planning group can obtain funding in order to begin work on their "readiness criteria"

Fundraising - Where does the money come from?

There are four main areas of funding for charter schools: city, state, federal and foundations. Some start-up funds can be obtained from federal or state planning grants, or private foundation or corporate grants, many times from the founder's own pocket.

State funding

Under current Rhode Island Charter Law, tax dollars are allocated to charter schools on a per pupil basis. The amount per pupil varies from district to district. The state pays a share based on a pre-established share ratio.

Actual allocations to schools may vary, however, based on interpretations or negotiations with state, district, or sponsoring agencies over administrative costs and other fees.

Federal funding

Federal funding is available for charter schools through a variety of categorical programs. These formula grants generally are channeled through the RIDE, which then makes subgrants.

Because RI is a state that recognizes a charter school as an independent Local Education Authority (LEA), RIDE may award funds directly to those charter schools that meet federal eligibility requirements. If the school falls within an existing LEA, such as a local school district or other sponsoring agency, RIDE distributes federal funds through federal charter grants.

There are also federal discretionary grants available to charter schools to support school activities such as after-school programs, parent literacy initiatives, social services, and professional development. For a complete listing of federal grant opportunities, visit www.ed.gov.

Private fundraising

To provide the programs that make charter schools different, such as low teacher:student ratios, night school and job placement, private fundraising is also necessary.

Working with the private and non-profit community can yield additional financial support for charter schools and can lead to increased support for the school within the community. Some charter schools have found that rather than applying for cash awards, there are other, sometimes more productive strategies for receiving support, such as building partnerships with local businesses and organizations.

For example, to solve their facilities problems, some charter schools have established partnerships with community organizations like the YMCA or local institutions of higher education in order to take advantage of under-utilized space during the day.

Many charter schools also identify student use of technology as an important goal, focusing fundraising or partnership-building activities in this area. Because of the high visibility of technology in education, there are many opportunities for Technology Funding.

RI charter schools must obtain 501(c) 3 non-profit status, which opens many fundraising avenues including United Way.

Other types of private fundraising include:

- Corporate, which allows for naming opportunities and targeted gifts. Donors can clearly see their gifts making a difference.
- Non-profit foundations, like the Rhode Island Foundation, United Way, Nellie Mae Educational Foundation.
- Family foundations.

