IPCSC APPLICATION GUIDANCE

Updated 1/27/2026

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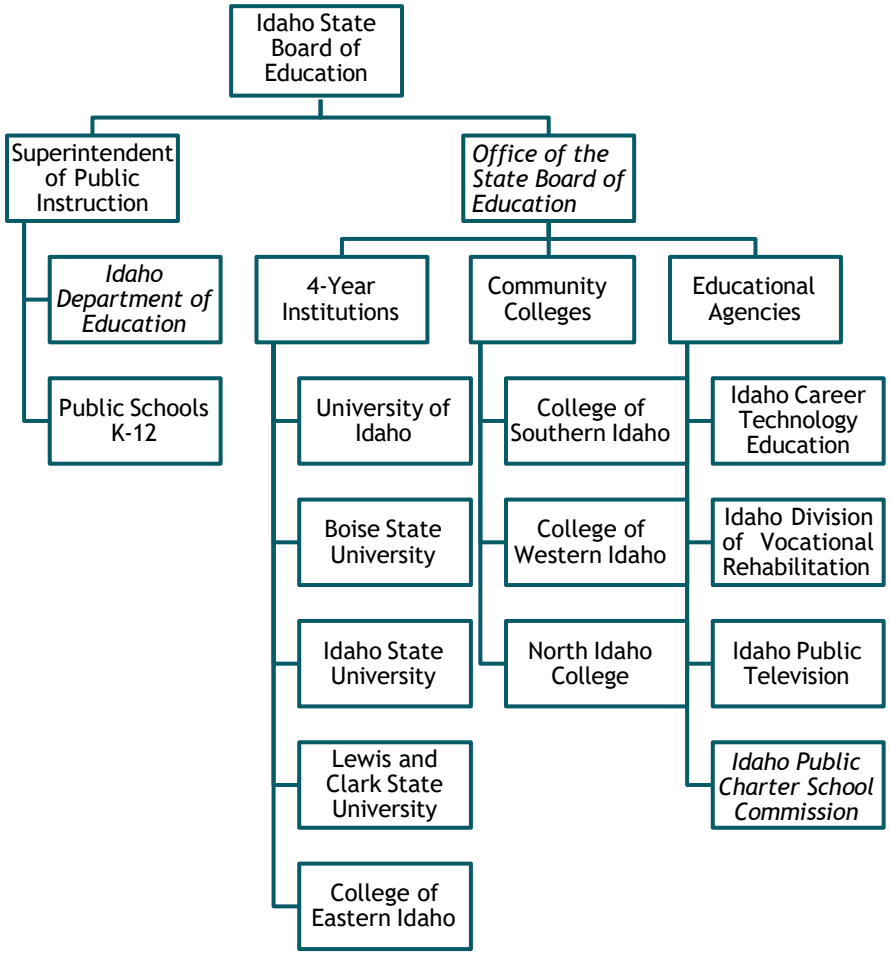
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This document has been prepared to provide guidance to charter school applicants to the IPCSC. This document is for informational and educational purposes only. To the extent anything in this document conflicts with Idaho Code Title 33, Chapter 52, Idaho Code controls. This document is not intended to substitute for professional legal advice.

AUTHORIZING

Idaho's original charter school legislation passed in 1998. At that time, only local school district boards could authorize public charter schools. The IPCSC was created in 2004 to offer a statewide option for charter school authorization. The IPCSC currently authorizes the majority of Idaho's public charter schools. In 2021, the IPCSC became an independent agency under the umbrella of the State Board of Education. In February 2024, Idaho passed the *Accelerating Public Charter Schools Act* which increased flexibility for innovation while still holding charter schools accountable for results.



Please note that charter schools interact with three educational agencies:

- The State Board of Education, which is the rule-making educational entity;
- The State Department of Education, which provides support, guidance, and training for operational schools; and
- The Charter School Commission, an oversight body that monitors compliance, evaluates risk, and manages operational contracts.

Reach out to the IPCSC staff during the application process when you have questions about procedures, timelines, or contractual obligations.

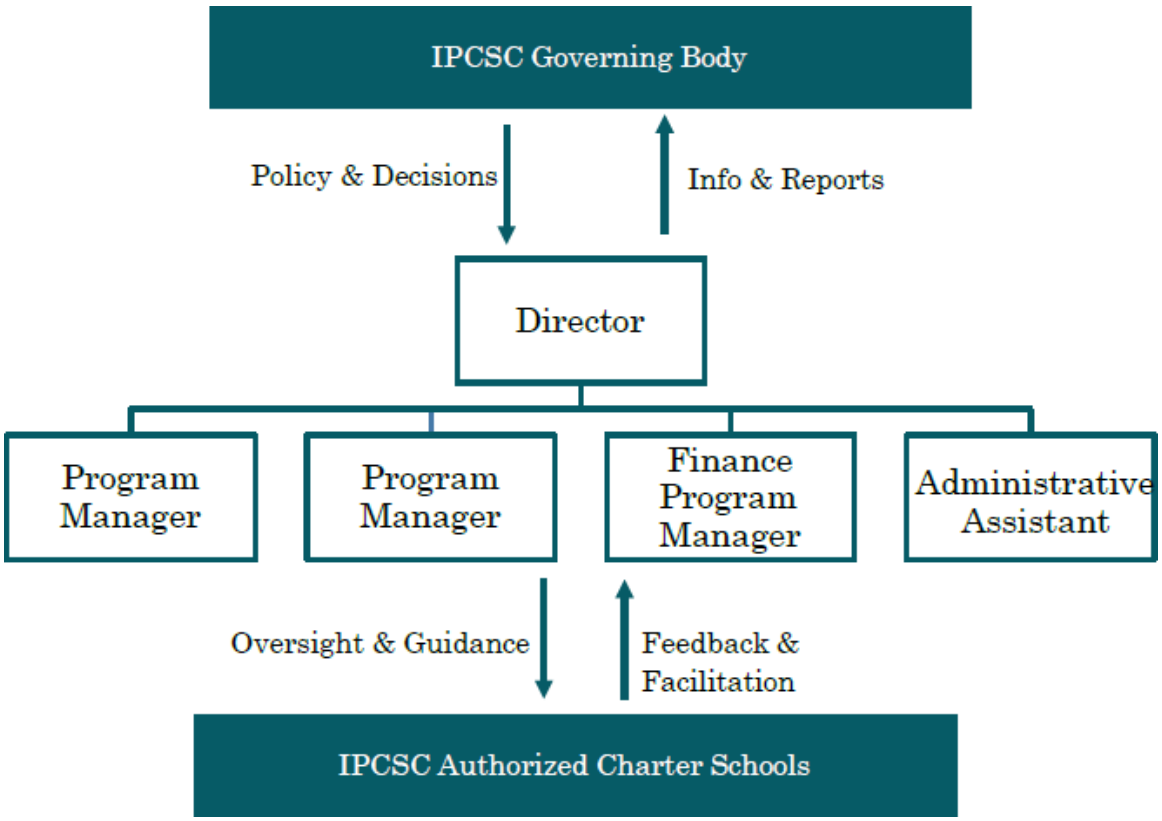
Reach out to the State Department of Education during the application process when you have questions about specific details, such as funding, curriculum, or certification.

Reach out to the State Board of Education when you have questions about policy or legislation.

IPCSC STRUCTURE

The IPCSC consists of seven Governor-appointed commissioners. Commissioners serve four-year terms and may serve multiple terms. The Commission maintains four standing committees: Finance, Strategic Planning, Application and Policy, Renewal and Performance. This committee structure is used to annually evaluate the efficacy of the tools used to inform Commission decisions. The Commission usually meets on the second Thursday of even months (e.g., February, April, etc.) and holds special meetings as needed.

A Program Manager is assigned to guide applicants through the process. All IPCSC staff review the application and collaborate to provide feedback. At the end of the application process, the Director makes a recommendation to the Commission to approve, approve with conditions, or deny the application. Each Commissioner conducts an independent review of the application, considers the Director's recommendation, and listens to the applicant's presentation before making the decision to approve, approve with conditions, or deny an application.



DEFINITIONS

Annual Performance Report – Each year, the IPCSC issues a performance report to each school. This report indicates how well the school is performing in relation to the measures and metrics established in the performance framework. The school's governing board is responsible for ensuring that the school meets standard on all measures. If the school does not meet standard on one or more measures at renewal, the IPCSC must consider whether the circumstances warrant a renewal with conditions or non-renewal.

Authorizer – Charter schools must receive formal authorization before they are able to draw on public funds to operate. The IPCSC is Idaho's independent charter school authorizer. Charter schools may also be authorized by a local school district or a public institution of higher learning. Authorizers are responsible for reviewing new charter applications, reviewing contract renewal applications, ensuring schools operate in compliance with all laws, rules, regulations, and policies, and holding schools accountable to the terms of their operating contract.

Charter – A charter is a grant of authority. In this case, an authorizer reviews a school's application (narrative and appendices) and if the authorizer determines that the risk to taxpayer dollars and student achievement is acceptable, it may grant a charter.

Governing Board – Before an application can be submitted a non-profit corporation must be incorporated in the State of Idaho. This non-profit must include a governing board. Once established, the board must adopt bylaws that comply with Idaho Code for an application to be eligible for consideration.

Applicants – An applying group is made up of individuals who want to start a charter school. This group is responsible for writing the application, attending required trainings, working with IPCSC staff through the revision process, and presenting the application to the IPCSC at a public hearing.

Performance Certificate – Once a charter is granted, the terms under which the school can operate are documented in an operational contract called a Performance Certificate. The certificate identifies where a school can operate, how many students and what grade levels it can serve, the instructional model it can deliver, and outlines the performance framework expectations. Initial performance certificates are issued for six (6) years, or three (3) years for approved pilot charters. Twelve (12) year terms are available only upon renewal.

Performance Framework – Charter schools are granted the autonomy to determine their own curriculum, model, calendar, etc., in exchange for agreeing to meet certain predefined outcomes. These outcomes are defined in a rubric that is incorporated into the school's performance certificate. The IPCSC's framework includes academic, operational, and financial measures.

To the extent any definition differs from the definition in Idaho Code, Title 33, Chapter 52, the definition in the statute controls.

APPLICATION TIMELINE

Idaho statute outlines the process through which the IPCSC may consider new charter applications. The application process is addressed specifically in *Idaho Code Title 33, Chapter 52*. Applicants are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the entire charter school statute to understand all requirements and expectations.

Applications are public records. It is important to be mindful of how the application is worded. Use a formal tone, write clearly, be accurate, and proofread thoroughly. Nothing about the plans can be withheld.

Deadline	Task	Notes
Prior to Submission	Incorporate	File articles of incorporation with the Idaho Secretary of State. A charter may only be issued to the governing board of a non-profit entity. The board must exist before submitting the application.
Prior to Submission	Adopt Bylaws	The application must include an executed copy of bylaws compliant with Idaho law. The board's legal counsel may assist.
Prior to Submission	Draft the Application	The structure of the application is defined in *Idaho Code*. The "Application Narrative" section of this document outlines each section and includes the standards of quality by which each section of the application will be evaluated.
Prior to Submission	Attend "Charter Start Workshop" at the SDE	At least one member of the applying team must attend the entirety of this in-person or virtual workshop. This workshop is designed to cover the basics and help complete the application. It is most useful to have a draft of the application prepared before attending.
Once application is Drafted	Submit the Application to the IPCSC	Submit the application by emailing one PDF (narrative and appendices combined) and one Excel copy of the budget template to an IPCSC Program Manager.

No application submission deadline.		If the application is received before September 1, the school may be considered for opening the following fall. **If the application is received after September 1, the school may be considered for opening in a future year.**
Within 1 week of submission	IPCSC will issue a notice of receipt	Within a week of submitting the application, a notice of receipt that outlines next steps and important deadlines will be issued by IPCSC staff. If this is not received within 1 week of submission, please contact our office at (208) 332-1561.
30 days after submission	IPCSC will issue a first application evaluation report	This report is intended to assist applicants with the revision process, and contains feedback based upon the IPCSC Standards of Quality. The applicant will have 14 days from issuance of this report to provide additional materials to address any identified deficiencies in the report.
Before revisions are due	Attend governance capacity interview	While applicants work on revisions, IPCSC staff will conduct an interview with (only) the governing board. Should the application be approved, the governing board and the IPCSC will be parties to the operational contract. As the board will be the party accountable to meet the terms of the contract, the interview provides the IPCSC insight into the board's capacity to govern an Idaho charter school well. Members of the applying group who are not board directors will not participate in the interview. A summary of the interview will be incorporated into the final application evaluation report.
14 days after issuance of first application evaluation report	Final revisions due to the IPCSC	IPCSC staff will conduct a final evaluation of the application and revise the application evaluation report accordingly.
14 days prior to the IPCSC meeting	IPCSC will issue a final application evaluation report with the Director's recommendation	IPCSC staff will issue the final application evaluation report which will include the Director's recommendation to approve, conditionally approve, or deny the application.

No later than 90 days after the application is submitted	IPCSC Recommendation to the Board of the Idaho Public Charter School Commission	The application will be heard at the next regularly scheduled meeting after receipt of the Director's recommendation. Applicants may prepare a 15-minute presentation, which should be led by the governing board. At the hearing, the IPCSC Board may approve, approve with conditions, or deny the application.

APPLICATION OUTLINE

A completed application consists of one PDF and one Excel Budget Template. The PDF must include the cover page, executive summary, all narrative sections, and all required appendices. The Budget must be submitted as part of the PDF for the public record, and as an Excel Spreadsheet to facilitate thorough evaluation.

Cover Page

The cover page needs to include the following:

- Name of proposed school;
- Name of non-profit that will serve as the charter holder (if different from school);
- Proposed opening year;
- General location (city, county, address if known);
- Contact information for the applicant who will serve as primary contact; and
- Contact information for the board chair (if different).

Table of Contents

Organize the application by narrative section, with all appendices at the end. Appendices are not incorporated into the contract and will ultimately be removed.

Executive Summary

Provide an executive summary of your proposed charter school. Be sure to include the following information:

- The proposed school's mission statement (concise and narrow in scope).
- Identify the instructional model.
- List the intended grades served when the proposed school is at full capacity.
- Identify the intended impact.
- Remember, a mission statement is not a paragraph. Keep it focused and limited to what is true for the school every day and guides every decision.

Required Narrative Sections

There is no page limit. Use the checklists provided for each narrative section and organize the application according to the required sections below.

- Student Demand and Primary Attendance Area
- Educational Program
- Board Capacity and Governance Structure
- School Leadership

- Education Service Provider
- Facilities Plan
- Finance
- Virtual and Blended Schools (if applicable)

Appendices

Some appendices are required, and additional documentation may be included with no page limit. A list and description of all appendices is provided.

Formatting

- Please use 11 or 12 pt. font and double space throughout
- Ensure the entire document is continuously paginated.
- Verify that all pages are legible (e.g., check for blurry images information that might be cut off in a spreadsheet cell, etc.).
- Verify that the table of contents is present and accurate.
- Proofread everything.

Public Record

Charter school applications submitted to the IPCSC constitute public records under Idaho law and are subject to public disclosure. Applicants are responsible for ensuring that submitted materials do not contain confidential, proprietary, or sensitive personal information. Application materials may be shared publicly and used in IPCSC review, public meetings, hearings, and other official authorization activities.

Hyperlinks

Be sure any links included are supplementary and verify that they work. All required information must be embedded in the application, not linked. Links can change over time, but the application remains public record permanently. Do: provide a link to more information about the chosen curriculum. Do not provide a Dropbox link to the budget template. Instead, merge the budget template into the final PDF.

Transparency

Because an application is a request to access millions of dollars of public funds each year it is crucial that the application is transparent about how those dollars will be spent. If the school will partner with an Education Services Provider, thoroughly disclose the intended relationship and proposed fees. If the school will partner with a facility developer, provide documentation about the developer. Draft contracts and services agreements are required appendices.

Application Evaluation

Standards of Quality. All applications are evaluated against an established set of standards referred to as Standards of Quality. Review the application to ensure that all the standards are sufficiently addressed for each application section. Any concerns with reference to these standards will be noted in IPCSC staff application evaluation reports. Each section of the application narrative has a specific set of standards against which it is evaluated. The following standards are customized and applied to each section of the application narrative:

- **Thorough and Compliant**
- **Supported and Credible**
- **Connected and Cohesive**

Marking Revisions

Applicants are allowed to revise the application and submit a final draft after receiving the first application evaluation report. However, all changes made from the first draft to the final draft must be in the application as part of the permanent public record. Anything that is deleted must be included in the final application as strike-through text. Anything added to the final application must be underlined. Track-Changes in Microsoft Word or legislative formatting may be used for this process. See The Idaho Rule Writer's Manual, section II.4, for instructions in the proper use of legislative format. If the final draft does not show a revision mark-up, it will not be accepted. The application on file with the IPCSC staff as of the meeting materials' due date for the scheduled hearing is the version that will be presented to the IPCSC.

CHECKLIST FOR NARRATIVE SECTIONS

Idaho Code identifies the sections required in an application. The IPCSC has established a checklist and standards of quality against which each section is evaluated.

Section I - Student Demand and Primary Attendance Area

Consideration of Existing Schools and Market Capacity

In evaluating student demand and the proposed primary attendance area, the IPCSC will assess the proposed school's location in relation to existing public schools, including IPCSC-authorized charter schools serving similar grade levels or instructional models, considering enrollment trends, capacity, proximity, and demonstrated demand.

The IPCSC may find that a proposed school does not demonstrate sufficient unmet demand if the area is already served by multiple schools with available capacity.

1. What is the proposed school's primary attendance area?
2. Describe the population of students that the proposed school intends to serve.
3. Describe the assessment of the community needs in the proposed school's target community.
    a. Include any objective market research, surveys, or other measures of local demand for the proposed educational program.
4. Provide a list and a description of the district, public charter, and nonpublic schools that are currently educating students in the proposed school's primary attendance area.
5. Describe how the proposed school will be different than existing options. Be sure to include how it will meet an unmet need or otherwise diversify educational options in the proposed school's primary attendance area.
6. Describe any efforts to engage current and prospective families, community members, and educators in planning the proposed school.
7. How does the school plan to ensure that citizens in the primary attendance area of the proposed school will be made aware of the enrollment opportunities and deadlines?
8. Describe the proposed arrangements for pupil transportation.
9. Complete the enrollment chart in Appendix A.

Section II: Educational Program

10. Provide a description of the educational philosophy, the proposed school's approach to delivering instructional materials, and any planned use of different and innovative teaching methods.
11. Explain how the educational program is expected to improve academic achievement in the proposed community.
12. Provide a description of the student assessment plan, including academic proficiency and growth standards, and the measurement methods for each.
13. Provide a list of any mission-specific standards that may be unique to the proposed school.
14. Describe the strategies that will be used to identify and meet the needs of all of the following student populations:

a. students with disabilities,
b. students who are English language learners,
c. at-risk students,
d. special education students, and
e. gifted and talented students.

Section III: Board Capacity and Governance Structure

15. Describe the qualifications and contributions of the members of the governing board.
16. How will the governing board ensure that it provides effective oversight of the proposed school?
17. Provide an overview of the relationship between the governing board, school leadership, and any education service provider, and an organizational chart.
18. Attach a copy of the Articles of Incorporation and corporate Bylaws as Appendices B and C.

Section IV: School Leadership

19. Has a school leader been identified? Provide evidence of that leader's capacity and track record driving academic achievement and growth among students similar to the proposed student population the school will serve.
20. If a leader has not been identified, what are the proposed school's criteria and timeline for selecting a leader?
21. Provide a summary of the plan for the school leader and staff development, evaluation, and retention.

Section V: Education Service Provider

22. If applicable, provide the name of the proposed Education Service Provider (ESP).
23. Provide a high-level overview of the fees and terms of the draft contract with the proposed ESP and attach a copy of the contract as Appendix D.
24. Attach a copy of any additional recent contract the ESP has executed with other charter schools as Appendix E.
25. Has this ESP been involved in any schools that have closed or programs that have been discontinued (i.e. the contract was not renewed) in its history? Provide the name of the schools, the reason for closure or non-renewal of the contract, and the years that the school contracted with the ESP.
26. Provide state-level academic data for all schools that currently contract with the proposed ESP. NOTE: This should not be a summary of the data but raw data numbers from the state.

Section VI: Facilities Plan

27. Provide the location of the proposed physical facility and describe the facility.
28. Describe any purchasing or leasing arrangements that will be needed, including anticipated budget, costs, and financing arrangements.
29. If applicable, describe any construction that will be necessary prior to opening. Provide a detailed timeline of the construction project, including the timeline for obtaining any necessary permits, and the anticipated date of project completion (including any required site inspections and final certifications).

    a. Provide a budget for the construction project as Appendix F1.
30. Facility Option 1 and Facility Option 2 as appendix F2.

Section VII: Finance

31. Describe the plan for meeting financial needs if the anticipated enrollment is not met or revenues are lower than expected.
32. Will the proposed school operate as its own LEA?
33. Financial Summary, Pre-Opening Budget, Break-Even & Three-Year Operating Budget, Cash Flow Projection for Year 1 (template provided) as Appendix G.

Section VIII: Virtual and Blended Schools (if applicable)

34. Describe the learning management system by which courses will be delivered.
35. Describe the role of the online teacher, including the consistent availability of the teacher to provide guidance and course material, methods of individualized learning in the online course, and the means by which student work will be assessed.
36. Describe the plan for the provision of professional development specific to the public virtual school environment.
37. Describe the means by which public virtual school students will receive appropriate teacher-to-student interaction, including timely and frequent feedback about student progress.
38. Describe the means by which the public virtual school will verify student attendance and award course credit. Attendance at public virtual schools shall focus primarily on coursework and activities that are correlated to the Idaho state thoroughness standards.
39. Describe the plan for the provision of technical support relevant to the delivery of online courses.
40. Describe the means by which the public virtual school will provide opportunity or student-to-student interaction.
41. Describe any financial agreement that will require an education service provider to assume a virtual school's financial risk when the virtual school does not have sufficient residual funds to pay the education service provider, to the extent there is such an agreement.
    a. Such financial agreements will be favorably considered during the application process. When applicable, the education service provider shall make its audited financial statements available unless the education service provider already makes such audited financial statements publicly available for compliance with other federal or state laws.
42. Describe the plan for ensuring equal access for all students, including the provision of necessary hardware, software, and internet connectivity required for participation in online coursework, and utilization of remote testing, proctoring, and administration procedures for state-required assessments.

CHECKLIST FOR APPENDICES

Appendix A – Required

- Enrollment Chart

Appendix B - Required

- Articles of Incorporation

Appendix C - Required

- Bylaws

Appendix D – If Applicable

- ESP Contract

Appendix E – If Applicable

- Additional recent contracts the ESP has executed with other charter schools

Appendix F Series – Required (F1 - If Applicable)

- Appendix F1 - Construction Budget (if applicable)
- Appendix F2 – Facility Options 1 and 2 (template provided)

Appendix G – All Elements Required

- Appendix G – Financial Summary, Pre-Opening Budget, Break-Even & Three-Year Operating Budget, Cash Flow Projection for Year 1 (template provided)

Appendix H Series – Additional Appendices - As Needed. Many applicants choose to include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Academic achievement data from similar models and/or supporting research indicating likelihood of academic success if such does not fit well in the narrative of the application
- Letters or other documentation evidencing financial support, grants, loans, or partnerships identified in the application narrative or any of the Series A appendices.
- Evidence of board training

Charter Application Standards of Quality Rubric

Executive Summary

Criteria	Performance Level
1. Provides a clear, concise, and accurate overview of the proposed school's mission, instructional model, grades served, location, target population, and organizational structure. 2. Communicates a compelling rationale for the proposed school's existence and intended impact. 3. Summarizes key elements of the educational program and anticipated outcomes for students.	a) Exceeds Standard b) Meets Standard c) Approaches Standard d) Does Not Meet Standard

Student Demand and Primary Attendance Area

Criteria	Performance Level
1. ***Thorough and Compliant*** – The application provides verifiable data on student demand, including the proposed primary attendance area, target population, and projected enrollment by grade level. All items listed in the Checklist for Narrative Sections for this section are present. 2. ***Supported and Credible*** – The application includes supporting documentation such as surveys, letters of interest, or demographic analysis that demonstrate realistic and sufficient demand to sustain enrollment. The application demonstrates that the proposed school is responsive to unmet student demand within the primary attendance area and that enrollment projections are sustainable in light of existing public school options, including nearby IPCSC-authorized charter schools. 3. ***Connected and Cohesive*** – Enrollment projections and the primary attendance area align with the school's mission, capacity, and educational model. The plan supports equitable access and compliance with lottery and enrollment procedures under Idaho Code 33-5206(9).	a) Exceeds Standard b) Meets Standard c) Approaches Standard d) Does Not Meet Standard

Educational Program

Criteria	Performance Level
1. ***Thorough and Compliant*** – The application provides a comprehensive explanation of the intended educational program, including curriculum design, instructional philosophy, measurable student outcomes, and alignment with Idaho standards and accountability expectations. All items listed in the Checklist for Narrative Sections for this section are present. 2. ***Supported and Credible*** – The application includes supporting research, evidence of success for the proposed model, or a clear theory of action for new models. 3. ***Connected and Cohesive*** – The educational program aligns with the school's mission and vision, is cohesive across governance, staffing, and financial plans, and demonstrates capacity to meet performance certificate expectations.	a) Exceeds Standard b) Meets Standard c) Approaches Standard d) Does Not Meet Standard

Board Capacity and Structure

Criteria	Performance Level
1. ***Thorough and Compliant*** – The articles of incorporation and bylaws are compliant with Idaho Code 33-5204 and Idaho nonprofit law (Title 30, Chapter 30). The application demonstrates understanding of the board's statutory responsibilities, ethics, and oversight duties. All items listed in the Checklist for Narrative Sections for this section are present. 2. ***Supported and Credible*** – The application includes executed and filed corporate documents verifying legal status and board readiness to govern in compliance with state law. 3. ***Connected and Cohesive*** – The governing board's structure and expertise are matched to the needs of the educational program and oversight of operations. The governance narrative aligns with other application components, demonstrating cohesive organizational capacity.	a) Exceeds Standard b) Meets Standard c) Approaches Standard d) Does Not Meet Standard

School Leadership

Criteria	Performance Level
1. ***Thorough and Compliant*** – The application clearly describes the school's leadership structure, roles, and qualifications of key personnel, including administrators and instructional leaders. All items listed in the Checklist for Narrative Sections for this section are present. 2. ***Supported and Credible*** – The leadership team's experience, capacity, and qualifications demonstrate readiness to operate a public charter school in compliance with state law. 3. ***Connected and Cohesive*** – The leadership and management approach align with the educational program, governance model, and financial plan, ensuring accountability and operational effectiveness.	a) Exceeds Standard b) Meets Standard c) Approaches Standard d) Does Not Meet Standard

Education Service Provider (if applicable)

Criteria	Performance Level
1. ***Thorough and Compliant*** – The application provides a clear and complete description of any proposed relationship with an education service provider (ESP), including the scope of services, fee structure, and terms of the management contract. The contract ensures the governing board retains full legal and fiduciary responsibility in accordance with Idaho Code 33-5206(8). All items listed in the Checklist for Narrative Sections for this section are present. 2. ***Supported and Credible*** – The application includes executed or draft contracts, documentation of the ESP's prior experience and performance with other schools, and evidence that the arrangement aligns with Idaho's nonprofit governance requirements. 3. ***Connected and Cohesive*** – The ESP relationship aligns with the school's mission, educational program, and financial plan, supports transparency and accountability, and clearly defines roles and responsibilities between the board and provider.	a) Exceeds Standard b) Meets Standard c) Approaches Standard d) Does Not Meet Standard

Facilities Plan

Criteria	Performance Level
1. ***Thorough and Compliant*** – The application identifies viable facility options with clear timelines, costs, and financing structures. Plans address safety, accessibility, compliance with building codes, and capacity to serve the proposed enrollment. All items listed in the Checklist for Narrative Sections for this section are present. 2. ***Supported and Credible*** – The facility plan includes letters of intent or lease/purchase options, budget alignment for maintenance and operations, and demonstrates the applicant's financial capacity to secure and maintain the site. 3. ***Connected and Cohesive*** – The proposed facilities plan is appropriate for the educational model and student population and is financially feasible within the overall budget and revenue assumptions.	a) Exceeds Standard b) Meets Standard c) Approaches Standard d) Does Not Meet Standard

Finance

Criteria	Performance Level
1. ***Thorough and Compliant*** – The financial plan and budget evidence a full understanding of federal and state funding mechanisms, cost structures, and operational needs. Revenue projections are realistic and restricted funds are used appropriately. All items listed in the Checklist for Narrative Sections for this section are present. 2. ***Supported and Credible*** – The application provides documentation, assumptions, and data demonstrating the accuracy and validity of revenue and expenditure estimates. 3. ***Connected and Cohesive*** – The financial and facilities plan aligns with the academic program and intended student body; the budget narrative and template are internally consistent and responsive to the school's educational model.	a) Exceeds Standard b) Meets Standard c) Approaches Standard d) Does Not Meet Standard

Virtual and Blended Schools (if applicable)

Criteria	Performance Level
1. ***Thorough and Compliant*** – The application addresses all required components for virtual schools, including learning management systems, teacher availability, student attendance verification, and technical support as required by Idaho Code 33-5205(3). The application describes the blended learning model, including how online and in-person components will integrate to meet Idaho's thoroughness standards. Attendance, grading, and instructional delivery systems are clearly defined. All items listed in the Checklist for Narrative Sections for this section are present. 2. ***Supported and Credible*** – The application includes evidence or plans demonstrating effective instructional delivery, student engagement, and assessment in an online environment. The application demonstrates that the blended model is supported by credible evidence or a proven track record of success, includes staffing and technology plans, and ensures equitable access for all students. 3. ***Connected and Cohesive*** – The virtual model aligns with the school's mission, capacity, and academic goals, ensuring equitable access, compliance with Idaho standards, and sustainable operations. The blended learning approach aligns with the educational philosophy, staffing model, and financial resources, ensuring academic rigor and operational feasibility within Idaho's statutory framework.	a) Exceeds Standard b) Meets Standard c) Approaches Standard d) Does Not Meet Standard