1. <u>Does the Institute have a template that might be helpful in writing the charter proposal?</u>

   The Institute does not require the use of any specific template. Any styling may be selected so long as it maintains the ordering of the application criteria and aligns to the requirements outlined by the SC Department of Education for submission. To assist groups seeking a reference point, two sample charter proposals will be provided to all groups with the next Q&A distribution.

2. <u>What is the difference between a Letter of Intent to Enroll, a Letter of Support, and a Partnership?</u>

   A Letter of Intent is a statement of purpose completed by families with eligible children who wish to enroll in the program if approved. This document often includes child-specific information (current grade, current school, etc.) that helps to inform projected enrollment and anticipated demographic composition in Year 1.

   A Letter of Interest reaches beyond eligible students, and is often used to collect contact information for continued outreach at local meetings or community events.

   A Letter of Support is specifically written by members of the community (families, local businesses, legislators, etc.) that aim to endorse the specific proposal.

Partnership refers to any documentation that reflects the formalization of community partnerships that are outlined or referenced in the proposal. These might include local organizations or businesses, and vary in range, depth, and commitment. Examples include social service agencies, libraries and museums, or even colleges and universities. Potential partners can offer resources ranging from use of facilities, access to speakers or mentors, expertise in program-specific needs, internship or work study opportunities, and support in recruitment. It is important in the application to specify the nature, scope, and terms of proposed partnerships, as well as include any evidence to validate the information (such as an MOU or Letter of Support outlining specifically described terms).

3. What are you looking for with goals and objectives?

Often overlooked, your goals and objectives become some of the specific criteria used by an authorizer to fulfill its oversight and evaluation responsibilities in monitoring the academic progress of your school. These also reflect some of the most important promises you are making to the students and families your proposed school will serve. Some essential look for's:

- This is another opportunity in your application to demonstrate an understanding of your *target population*. It is helpful to consider the current levels of performance of your anticipated student body in development.
- Don't *arbitrarily* choose your figures or increases. Consider differentiation by subject, by year, or between groups. Factor in your sample sizes—how many students does 2% really reflect movement of between years, and is this sufficient?
- Consider Institute and State *expectations*. Your school will be annually evaluated and rated against state and Institute standards. Familiarize yourself with these measures, metrics, and terminology. It may be helpful to align some of your development to these systems.
- Don't hesitate to incorporate measurable goals that demonstrate the effectiveness of your *specific mission and vision*. If you're implementing a specific model (e.g. early college or language acquisition, for example), what will you use to determine the fidelity of implementation and success of these core components (e.g. dual enrollment or language proficiency rates, for example).

2019-2020 APPLICATION CYCLE

1. <u>Reminder on delegate and district notifications. For virtual, hybrid, or multi-site proposals, do we need to notify every district and delegation?</u>

Alongside submission of your charter application, your group must provide evidence that you have given notice to the local school board of trustees in which the charter school will be located. This is for information purposes only. You must also notify the local delegation of a county in which a proposed charter school is to be located, and upon request by a member of the local delegation, provide a copy of the charter application. Evidence of both notifications must be submitted as Appendix B of your application. Failure to provide this evidence shall render the application incomplete. These notifications are required by law (Section 59-40-70(A)(3)) and the South Carolina statewide process (2020 Application, pg. 5).

For brick-and-mortar school proposals, you should send your notifications via certified mail, and present a copy of the receipt with your materials.

For schools with a multi-district presence (either because you are virtual, hybrid utilizing multiple campuses, or multi-site), the SC Department of Education has confirmed that electronic notification will suffce, rather than certified mail. You should send copies of your email, as well as read receipts. Your area selection process may be done using one of three methods:

- You may notify all eligible service areas statewide
- You may notify all eligible service areas where a facility or office is anticipated
- You may use the zip codes from any letter of interest/intent to determine notification regions (example: if the largest proportion of your interested families are coming from Richland 1 and Greenvile equally, for example, you could contain your notifications to those specific regions).

2. Is the Institute subject to a Desegregation Order (Appendix S)?

As a statewide body, we are not currently subject to a Desegregation Plan/Order. That requirement applies to some traditional school districts that manage a specific geographic region. However, charter schools are specifically subject to ensuring the racial composition of their student body rests within 20% of their target district(s). [note: for virtual schools, this is currently defined as the statewide averages, but may evolve to a be a weighted composite of student residence] The plan and assurance for compliance with this requirement are captured in the Institute's Racial Composition addendum (attached again for reference).

3. Will you provide a Letter of Agreement regarding compliance with S.C. Code Ann. 59-25-410 et seq (2004)? [Appendix Item R]

Absolutely. The version we currently have is a bit outdated; the Institute leadership team is working to incorporate some minor revisions. Once that is final, it will be circulated to all cohort groups for inclusion with your materials. For reference, that statute may be found using the following link: https://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/t59c025.php

4. What contracted services does the Institute provide? Is there a specified cost? Do you have a sample agreement?

Currently, the Institute has an MTSS/School Psychology shared service pilot underway. This position is currently filled through the Institute by a certified school psychologist. For the 2019-2020 school year, the MTSS portion of this position was available to all portfolio schools interested in this shared service for $2,000. It should be noted that the funds used to pay for this position could not come from IDEA due its categorization as a general education initiative. For the four schools that opened in Fall 2019, *both* the MTSS model and the psychological services were shared in pilot form. To participate in both, the school cost was $4,000 ($2,000 for MTSS and an additional $2,000 for the school psych model).

This pilot programming is currently being reviewed for expansion and long-term feasibility for schools currently in the pre-opening phase of their charter life cycle and future new schools. It is the vision of the Institute to continue offering these supports, but it is, of course, not guaranteed for future years until the full review has been conducted. These should not be considered yet in your budget development until the Institute can officially adopt the model.

Attached in the zip MTSS Folder is a copy of a document titled Institute Philosophy. This is a summary of Institute supports, and services with specific costs are specified. This folder also contains an overview of this current pilot, as well as the signed agreement form completed by participating schools.

5. Our group is unsure about current and proposed structuring of programming and operations with the religious institution we are currently affiliated with. Could we complete the Church and State addendum early and give it to you for feedback?

Although the Institute is unable to give feedback on narrative quality against rubric standards (which would constitute a pre-review, for example), we could absolutely provide some feedback from a feasibility lens if the group is still working to determine viability of conversion or start-up as it relates to the religious institution. If the questions or findings go beyond the boundaries of our scope and role, we'd also encourage consulting with legal counsel for review of the proposal against legal requirements and could also connect you with relevant personnel at the State or the Alliance who might be able to more directly support navigating those elements of your proposal design.

6. Is the link (and any instructions for uploading our application) ready to be accessed? If so, are you able to share? And if not, when do you think it will be available?

The link is not yet ready for access. Our office is in regular communication with the Office of School Transformation at the Department of Education. As soon as we have an update or anticipated date (as well as any resources, such as a user guide), we will be sure to circulate to our cohort.

7. As we work to pinpoint our ideal service location, are you able to provide any information on the greatest areas of need in South Carolina?

In future years, the Institute plans to utilize a process for identifying specific need. This often takes the form of a Call for Applications or a Request for Proposals. A document such as this is released in advance of the annual submission cycle and contains detailed information

about specific need in the state that that the authorizer may be seeking dedicated committee groups to respond to. This often ranges from a geographic location (where students may currently be underserved) to a specific model (such as an alternative education campus). If applicant groups are interested in learning more about statewide need for this year's review cycle, the Institute is happy to share state resources that detail current levels of performance and student composition throughout the state. Examples of this include:

- The State Report Cards: https://screportcards.ed.sc.gov/

  These documents and files detail the current levels of achievement, growth, readiness, and satisfaction for all eligible schools and districts in the State. The public may access a single school, or download the data file for researchers, which contains all statewide data.

- Pupil Membership Files: https://ed.sc.gov/finance/financial-services/student-data/membership-counts/

  These files provide information on funding counts for many student composition variables, including special education, language proficiency, poverty, giftedness, etc. Although these may not be absolute in terms of proportion (due to duplicate counting in some instances), this information does give some sense of school and district student composition. Headcounts that include race and ethnicity can be found using this link: https://ed.sc.gov/data/other/student-counts/active-student-headcounts/

8. Does the Institute have a template that might be helpful in writing the charter proposal?

Sample applications submitted in previous years may be found at the following link: https://erskinecharters.org/our-schools/. These may be helpful to groups from a formatting or template lens. It is important to note two things:

- Charters and contracts are approved for 10-year terms. For mature schools, this means that the original application linked here may have been written more than a decade ago. Keep in mind that requirements and review standards were likely different.

- We are providing this link only as a resource for formatting. Please remember that if you utilize information, materials, or policies from another school or district, you must both adapt that information for your own proposal, and you must give credit to the author of that work. As noted in our training, we review for plagiarism, and it can lead to ineligibility for review.

1. <u>We do not see anything statutorily that dictates an enrollment cap. We want to ensure there will not be an enrollment cap placed in our charter's contract.</u>

There are some specific requirements related to enrollment that must be satisfied. Some of these include:

- A requirement that the racial composition of the school is within 20% of the resident district or target population within the resident district;
- A requirement to notify the sponsor of enrollment procedures and timelines no less than 60 days before the first date of its enrollment period;
- A requirement to maintain on file with the sponsor a current record of enrollment procedures and relevant policies;
- A requirement to include enrollment projections in your application.

It is important to emphasize this last bullet. Your proposal should be built around your estimated enrollment projections; this affects nearly every component of your school plan. In the event of approval, these projections translate to our monitoring processes in two ways:

1. These multi-year estimates become memorialized as part of your charter. They can be modified, but it must be done through a charter amendment that requires approval of the Institute Board. Small discrepancies are nominal enough to bypass this need (e.g. 10% variance), but significant variation up or down must be formalized, and will likely require subsequent modifications to other areas of the charter affected by the budget.
2. The school must demonstrate progress towards those enrollment benchmarks prior to opening in order to ensure overall readiness and viability (in budget, staffing, operations, and programming). Failure to satisfy these pre-opening benchmarks or meet estimated projections may result in delays or the inability to open the school. They may also impact

the overall Institute budget, which is developed each year using school-provided estimates and statistical techniques that help ensure accuracy.

It is also worth noting that in alignment with statute, the Institute must take appropriate corrective actions or exercise sanctions short of revocation in response to deficiencies in school performance or legal compliance (Section 59-40-55(A)(8)). In some situations where compliance is persistent or significant, this may warrant a cap or pause in the school's enrollment.

2. <u>We received the MTSS Signature Form in Friday's email. We want to confirm that you do not need us to submit the form at this time.</u>

This form does <u>not</u> need to be submitted. It was provided as a sample at the request of an applicant group inquiring about possible shared services.

3. <u>Will you provide a Letter of Agreement regarding compliance with S.C. Code Ann. 59-25-410 et seq (2004)? [Appendix Item R]</u>

Attached is a copy of the document utilized in prior years to satisfy Appendix R requirements. For reference, that statute may be found using the following link: https://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/t59c025.php

4. <u>We are probably not going to be ready to submit an application by February 1st. Do we need to withdraw?</u>

If your committee decides this is not the best time to pursue a charter, and you are not planning to submit an application in February, please do let me know. I am more than happy to keep any contact information on our listserv so that you still have access to any resources shared. We are also working to initiate a 2-year cohort (for applicant groups interested in submitting their application in February 2021 for an anticipated start date in Fall 2022). This will allow us to provide additional and ongoing technical assistance to working groups and committees as they think through and design their proposals. If you're interested in this pathway, please let me know, and I'll be happy to begin coordinating that with your group.

1. **Is there a place to read through high school requirements for diploma-granting institutions?**

There are some requirements and resources specific to high school programming. These are detailed on the South Carolina Department of Education website using the following links:

- Requirements Summary: https://www.ed.sc.gov/districts-schools/state-accountability/high-school-courses-and-requirements/
- Adult Education: https://www.ed.sc.gov/instruction/adult-education/
- Assessment: https://www.ed.sc.gov/tests/high/
- Career and Technical Education: https://www.ed.sc.gov/instruction/career-and-technical-education/
- Content Standards: https://www.ed.sc.gov/instruction/standards-learning/
- Diploma Pathways: https://www.ed.sc.gov/instruction/standards-learning/additional-information/
- Grading: https://www.ed.sc.gov/instruction/standards-learning/uniform-grading-scale/

If there are any specific requirements you are interested in finding resources on, let me know, and I'll assemble those specific items.

2. **Will the Committee Form be shared publicly?**

No, it will not. This form is for internal purposes only. We understand if your committee is not fully formed, we understand changes may occur prior to submission, and we also understand that some of your committee members have wished for confidentiality through the drafting process. The primary purpose is to inform our review cycle. Each member of our team, as

well as any external reviewers joining our cycle, will engage in a standard conflict of interest process. This is to ensure we don't assign anyone as a reviewer who may have a direct or indirect conflict with any applicant group. Knowing we are a handful of weeks from application submission, it is important to us to engage in that level of screening and solidify our review plans as soon as possible. This will help us to minimize changes during the completeness check window in February.

1. **Are you going to send the SCDE per pupil estimate review or do we need to contact the SCDE? (If we do need to contact the SCDE, whom should we contact?)**

   The Per Pupil Estimate Review is a table that is provided directly from the Department of Education. The contact for that is Desiree Williams. Her email address is DAWIlliams@ed.sc.gov. If you have any trouble connecting, please let me know.

2. **Are you going to provide us with a letter about the desegregation status to include in our application? Or do we simply need to include a document that says this is not applicable?**

   You simply need to note that the desegregation status does not apply to your application with the Charter Institute at Erskine. This is contained only to traditional school districts that may be under an order through the Office of Civil Rights.

3. **You noted previously on enrollment that the Institute utilizes a 10% variation before an amendment is required by schools in updating enrollment projections. Is there any leniency in this?**

   The 10% cited in the previous Q&A was used as an example. It is the anchor in our reviews, but it may certainly vary for schools based on size and model. Each year we work with our portfolio schools around their enrollment projections, so it is absolutely something we revisit annually as part of the larger budgeting process.

If a significant variation is flagged, we then work with our schools through the amendment process, which is not difficult or cumbersome. It is simply a formal way for both parties to maintain accuracy in the material terms of the charter and contract. Its objective is to ensure that the school and the Institute have together reviewed the changes and any impact it may have on the other areas of the school (org chart, staffing, certification thresholds, programming, services, facilities, vendor agreements, racial composition, exceptional student counts, etc.).

The impact from a change in enrollment (up or down), as you mentioned, is certainly going to vary by school, but it is still important from our perspective that both groups have done their due diligence when making a shift from the founding documents. And it is important to consider that the impact may not be the school alone—if there are large shifts in size or composition, for example, it may indirectly impact the Institute's budget request to the legislature, our own staffing model and plans, our shared services planning, our plans and ranking methodologies for allocating title monies across schools, etc. These are things we believe it's important to monitor and plan for as much as possible.

4. Did the Institute mention that they would do a pre-read of application materials?

No need to submit for a pre-read. We do conduct a completeness check upon submission to ensure all indicators have been addressed. Once in a while, a group will accidentally leave a section or addendum out. If that's the case, groups have 48 business hours to provide those pieces. However, the State's system really mitigates that sort of hiccup with the electronic submission process.

There was also reference made to our desire to initiate a 2-year application track. Some groups that submitted a Letter of Intent were still in their brainstorming and design phase. In those situations, we can sit down with them and talk through ideas, as well as connect them with resources for writing and pre-reading support, but even then, we wouldn't do a soft review that compromises the standardization of our full review process.

5. Section 1, Part 4 of the application references comparative data. Is there an option to explain that we will establish a baseline once we open our school? If so, will that be sufficient?

We do strongly encourage applicants to set numeric targets, even if there is anticipated revision or calibration needed as baseline data are attained in Year 1. The process of selecting targets creates a good opportunity to demonstrate an understanding of the current levels of performance and/or academic needs of the specific target population. In a multi-site or statewide situation, you could absolutely look to statewide figures of the students you anticipate serving. I could also be a benefit to consider other indicators that may align to an alternative education campus if that is the specific model—this could span things like student engagement, as well as transition or post-completion success measures. You could also draw from national data samples as an anchor for targets in this instance (as statute specifies looking at comparative or normed samples for accountability purposes for AECs). You could also speak to establishing a baseline of target-setting in the description of your process for collecting, reviewing, analyzing, and using data. But we do like to see numeric goals and objectives, because it helps us get a sense of established expectations and connects the inputs to the outcomes from the lens of the Committee.

6. As an anticipated alternative education campus (AEC), we are seeking clarification on how to address the AEC numbers that might differ from local school districts. Are we able to explain that we will establish this once we open our school and have our enrollment?

Designation as an AEC is granted by the sponsor. The Institute implements a designation review process periodically throughout the life cycle of a charter school to ensure the high-risk attribute thresholds are satisfied and maintained. Otherwise, designation may be removed. Because this threshold is statutorily required, AECs have additional flexibility with their enrollment preferences. Adding a preference along those high-risk criteria (such as eligibility for an IEP or pregnant/parenting teens) is allowable, but must be documented as part of the charter, and as part of the enrollment policies and procedures.

7. <u>I understand the next step in the application process is for our committee to participate in a Capacity Interview. Do you anticipate this taking place in February or in March?</u>

I plan to share a prospective review timeline with applicant groups by the end of next week. We're outreaching to many of our prospective applicant groups that have not been actively engaged to get a sense of their likelihood of submission. Once we have the anticipated volume of groups, we will map our timeline for the interviews. Scheduling 10 groups, for example, may generate more timeline flexibility than scheduling 24 groups.

8. <u>Could we get clarity around when an official decision will be made—May 1 or later?</u>

Decisions on applications must be made within 90 days of their submission. Institute decisions will be made by May 1st.

9. <u>Where will the meetings be held—in Columbia or in Due West?</u>

The capacity interviews take place between Institute staff and the Committee, so these are held in Columbia at our office. The application hearing with the Institute Board will take place in Due West.

10. <u>Can you provide guidance around whether/how to use an existing non-profit that may have religious affiliation for starting the charter school?</u>

The Institute connected with other charter agencies in the state to see whether guidance was available on this topic. It was confirmed that guidance for the design of a charter school within an existing non-profit may be best directed to a Committee's legal counsel. This will ensure that all legal requirements and separations or distinctions needed within that design have been considered through that professional lens. Specific questions in this arena may certainly be directed to the Public Charter School Alliance, but the scope of the Institute's role during the review cycle is contained primarily to process and criteria. We are certainly happy to answer questions on the church/state addendum that helps assemble information on potential affiliations with religious institutions.

1. ## Can any of the money received from the state be used for facilities?

   Your Proviso and EFA funding can be used towards facility costs. I should note there is a requirement that 85% of those general funds must go towards directly serving/instructing students, so there is a bit of an unnamed restriction on facility costs. If costs exceed this, then typically soft funds are used to supplement (fundraising, in-kind contributions, donations, independent grants, etc.). Our Director of Finance noted that we typically see facility costs at 8-9%, and anything over that usually involves some additional assumptions and monitoring.

2. ## What do on-site licensure requirements look like if most core content subjects are taught virtually?

   A response from our Director of State and Academic Programs—'The school must have 1 certified or experienced person designated as the "School Leader." The virtual teachers would contribute to teaching certification requirements. I would view the administrator similar to a school with multiple campuses and 1 leader who covers all divisions/campuses but would not be present 100% of the time at any given campus. If they have a certified/experienced school leader and reasonable protocol/procedures in place for any on-site personnel, I think that could work.'

3. ## Will the Board of Directors receive a salary?

   Service on the board of directors of a charter school is a volunteer position. The Board would likely have policies in place related to board expenses (such as reimbursement for travel) or service provision (conflict of interest, procurement and contracting, even nepotism). These sorts of policies tend to vary slightly for each school, but they would more specifically define any financial parameters of board service. I should also note that as board members of non-

profit entities, charter board members are also subject to the state code of ethics for non-profits.

4. What is documentation of "soft funds"?

Documentation of soft funds would be anything related to donations, fundraising monies, or non-awarded grants that the school is anticipating and including in the budget. Often, these are not guaranteed sources of revenue, so it's important to include information on commitment of funding in those "softer" areas.

5. What is the insurance documentation?

The insurance appendix beyond the required application narrative is typically a draft insurance quote from a prospective provider.

6. Should we send the application to you for approval before we send it in to the State?

You will submit your application through the online SCDE portal. Once submitted, we are able on the sponsor end to review the materials for completeness and pull them down for review. There is no need to submit directly to me. Some applicants prefer to submit a full pdf copy to me to ensure receipt, so if that would give you an added layer of comfort, absolutely feel free to do that.

7. Do I send materials to you to make sure I have everything?

No need to send materials to the Institute in advance. You certainly may send a full pdf copy for duplication, but we'll conduct a completeness check through the SCDE portal when it closes after February 1st. I'll be reviewing applications for completeness, and either marking them complete, or outreaching to applicant groups with missing items. The groups will then have a short window to submit any missing components through the portal. I will note that this sort of 'completeness check' is only a check for presence, rather than quality. The quality reviews will begin after applications are deemed complete. At that time, we'll also outreach to schedule capacity interviews.

8. Virtual question: Our Committee organized emails for all delegate groups statewide. Additionally, we made three attempts, and sent any bounced back but verified emails twice. We want to ensure that this covers our notification requirement. Can you confirm?

I think the attempts described are certainly sufficient. Do you have an idea of a count or proportion that were not kicked back and/or received? I think providing a sense of breadth will really help solidify the evidence component.

For example, if you are able to state:

'The notice was sent to 85 superintendents throughout the state. 6 were returned as undeliverable, with second attempts made.' Having that sort of information helps us to determine the likelihood that 93% were likely reached. That's significantly different than saying '85 were sent; we can confirm 2 were received.' Having some numbers behind it helps both you and the Institute stand up to any inquiry or pushback on notification.

9. The application requests a "five-year detailed budget (an excel spreadsheet showing realistic assumptions and their basis, a cash-flow projection of operation, minimum enrollment needed for solvency, and adequate staffing that fits with the application narrative in educational plan and other related sections)." We believe we are fulfilling this request by providing the five-year budget accompanied by the narrative that address underlying assumptions and cash flow considerations. Can you please confirm?

I can't confirm breadth, depth, or quality of the information submitted, but I can assure you that we will cross-check the budget template itself with the narrative section of the application. So if you have covered the application requirements laid out on pages 36-38 of the 2020 Charter Application between those two documents (as well as the Enrollment Projection form and appendices W, Y, Z, and AA where relevant based on model), then I can confirm (from a presence lens) that you have satisfied the application requirements.