



# MAKING IT COUNT: ASSESSING THE CAPACITY OF APPLICANT TEAMS

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# INTRODUCING THE PANEL

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- **Marian Schutte** – Executive Director, Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board

# AGENDA

- NACSA's 12 Essential Practices
- Building a High Quality Interview Process
- Capacity Interviews
- External Review Panels

# NACSA'S 12 ESSENTIAL PRACTICES

1. Mission
2. Staff
3. Contracts
4. Application Criteria
5. Application Timeline
6. Interview\*
7. External Expert Panel\*
8. 5-Year Term
9. Financial Audit
10. Renewal Criteria
11. Revocation Criteria
12. Annual Report

The cornerstone of these practices is NACSA's Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing, first published in 2004 and regularly updated as the field evolves.

# CRUCIAL COMPONENTS

**CAPACITY  
INTERVIEW**

**HIGH QUALITY  
AND  
RIGOROUS  
APPLICATION  
PROCESS**

**EXTERNAL  
REVIEW  
PANELS**

Questions and Answers

Diving into the Details

Experience Matters

## Think about:

- What prevents your capacity interviews from giving you a clear approval/denial recommendation?
- What unique information can you glean from the interview process?
- What's your biggest challenge when trying to assemble a balanced review team?

# DO THEY HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?

**WHY ARE INTERVIEWS IMPORTANT?**

Determine Capacity and Collect Evidence

**CAPACITY INTERVIEWS**

Focus on the Important Pieces

**HOW DO YOU CONDUCT A STRONG INTERVIEW?**

What You Need in Place

# WHY CONDUCT INTERVIEWS?

- Assess the applicant's understanding and capacity to implement the program successfully
- Gauge the applicant's familiarity with the community the school will serve
- Resolve major questions not answered in the written proposal
- Provide additional evidence to either support or deny an application



# HOW TO CONDUCT A STRONG CAPACITY INTERVIEW



# BEFORE THE INTERVIEW



# BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- Do your homework
- Identify questions, concerns, and gaps
- Prioritize issues and questions
- Develop your game plan

# CRAFTING GREAT QUESTIONS

- Focus on the big picture
- Use your team
- Find a critical friend
- Don't aim for “gotcha”

# WHO SHOULD BE IN THE INTERVIEW?

## Evaluation Team

- 4-6 evaluators with a range of expertise
- Authorizer staff

## Applicant

- Depth & breadth of expertise
- Representatives from management organization (if applicable)
- Not too many! (approx. 5)

# DURING THE INTERVIEW



# APPROACH

**Be direct**

**Probe**

**Be nice**

**Assess the team**

# RED FLAGS

- Applicant has difficulty answering questions
- One person dominates the conversation, answering all the questions
- Potential conflicts of interest are disclosed
- Disagreement among respondents
- Applicant raises new plans not included in the proposal
- Responses are largely anecdotal



# AFTER THE INTERVIEW



# INTERVIEW DEBRIEF

- What questions were sufficiently addressed?
- What questions remain?
- What critical questions were raised?
- Check for bias

# USING EXTERNAL REVIEW PANELS



# BUILDING THE STRONGEST TEAM

WHY ARE  
THEY  
IMPORTANT?

Expertise, Transparency,  
Objectivity

EXTERNAL  
REVIEW  
PANELS

Using a Flexible Resource  
Approach

HOW DO I  
ASSEMBLE  
A STRONG  
PANEL?

Recruiting and Developing  
Talent

# WHY USE EXTERNAL REVIEWERS?

- Objective, 3rd party input
- Provides expertise where it's lacking
- Bolsters the integrity of the application process
- Ensures process remains independent of political connections or factors unrelated to the merit of the proposals
- **Bonus!** Provides feedback on your process as an authorizer

# ROLE OF EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

- Thorough read of all application materials
- Review the application against the authorizer's evaluation rubric
- Review due diligence information
- Participate in team calls and the interview
- Submit all information to the team lead to assist in informing a recommendation

# COMPOSITION OF THE TEAM

- Team lead
- Reviewers
  - Staff with some external reviewers
  - All external reviewers
- Develop a process!
  - Recruitment plan
  - Required qualifications
  - Selection process
- Some authorizers do use only internal reviewers

# Assembling a Strong Team





# ASSEMBLING THE TEAM

Necessary areas of expertise	Specific models
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Curriculum</li><li>○ Instruction</li><li>○ Management</li><li>○ Law</li><li>○ Finance</li><li>○ Business</li><li>○ Special education</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Blended/Virtual</li><li>○ Dropout Recovery/Alternative</li><li>○ STEM/STEAM</li><li>○ Expeditionary Learning</li></ul>

# ASSEMBLING THE TEAM

## Types of individuals to tap:

- Current/former teachers
- Lawyers
- Charter school leaders, founders, or board members
- Financial experts from schools, districts, or networks

# WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN EXTERNAL TEAM MEMBERS

- Professional experience in the relevant field
- Superior eye for detail
- Superior writing skills (for team leads)
- No conflict of interest
- Excellent interpersonal skills
- Sensitivity to local community/national perspective

# TRAINING EXTERNALS

- Clear expectations of work product
- Disclose conflicts via conflict form
- Let them know what resources are available (e.g., tools, data)
- Be clear about the information they can and cannot consider
- Show how to use online system (if using)
- Run a calibration exercise
- All team members must read the whole proposal

# Resources



Any questions?

