



SELF-ASSESSMENT

Characteristics of a
Community-Centered Authorizer

THE WHAT

NACSA's Self-Assessment: Characteristics of a Community-Centered Authorizer should be used by authorizing offices to assess their systems and teams' mindset, capacity, and resources related to community-based authorizing. The information gleaned from this self-assessment serves as a basis for an authorizer to begin continuous improvement efforts. Aligned to NACSA's foundational document, [*Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*](#), this self-assessment includes criteria specific to Agency Commitment & Capacity and Application Process & Decision Making.

The criteria included in this self-assessment acknowledges the range of technical activities and transformational systems that should be in place to be an authentic Community-Centered Authorizer. Proper implementation takes time, resources, and the right conditions. As such, the self-assessment criteria are organized to assist authorizers in prioritizing improvement efforts. Criteria that are foundational and should be implemented first are in the column titled "Foundational Characteristics for Community-Centered Authorizing." Criteria that are secondary in prioritization and may be somewhat more challenging to implement are in the column titled: "Characteristics of an Emerging Community-Centered Authorizer." Advanced criteria, or criteria that highlight transformational systems, may serve as aspirational criteria that authorizers should strive for and are in the column titled: "Characteristics of a Well-Established Community-Centered Authorizer."

THE WHY

As noted in the introduction, to meet the aspirations and needs of students and families, authorizers must make Community-centered Authorizing central to all authorizing decisions. Community-Centered Authorizing (CCA) presents an opportunity for authorizers to proactively engage with communities, school applicant teams, and other key stakeholders so that the community is reflected and engaged throughout each school's life cycle (CCA Guide Outline).

The concept of CCA may or may not sound new. Your organization may already be able to note ways in which you engage your community. Regardless of your CCA journey, strong authorizers create structured and cyclical opportunities for staff reflection and self-critique on practices and systems ([*Leadership, Commitment, Judgment: Elements of Successful Charter School Authorizing; Findings from the Quality Practice Project*](#)). Self-assessments are tools to support that reflection and self-critique as authorizers drive toward continuous improvement.

THE HOW

Self-assessments should be completed with the intent to narrow your focus and take action toward improvement.

You can use the assessment to rate your organization against each of the criteria listed in the assessment below - no evidence, partially meets, meets, exceeds. It is possible that your office may meet the criteria in all of the columns — foundational, emerging, and well-established. Once complete, identify the criteria that received a rating of no evidence or partially meets — prioritizing the foundational characteristics — and determine the steps you and your organization may take to continuously improve in that area. Suggested resources to support your development have been provided in the final column.

In addition to the recommended resources listed below, Nexus at NACSA (<https://www.nexus.qualitycharters.org/>) stands at the ready to support your continuous improvement efforts.

PLANNING & COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

FOUNDATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS FOR COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZING

- Approaches their work with a community-centered mindset by recognizing the aspirations and needs of communities as core priorities of authorizing
- Ensures that clarity, consistency, and public transparency are built into their authorizing policies, practices, and decisions
- Defines community as a group of individuals who find commonality in shared experiences and interests, including but not limited to race, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomics.
- Has ongoing conversations about how community members can benefit from authorizer decisions
- Identifies the array of stakeholder groups and engages them ¹
- Ensures there are roles available for robust community engagement and actively communicates the distinct roles of the authorizer and the operator ²
- Has ongoing conversations about how community members can benefit from authorizer decisions and whether characteristics of the community are shifting or have shifted

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EMERGING COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZER

- Leverages partnerships with political or community-based organizations to build relationships with and seek input from the organizations' constituencies ³
- Conducts ongoing community analyses to determine the needs and wants of the communities they authorize; analyses may include characteristics
- Implements systems and practices from *Community-Centered Authorizing: Engaging Stakeholders Through Authentic Community Meetings* to generate information and evidence of community educational aspirations

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A WELL-ESTABLISHED COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZER

- Shares information about community needs and resources with local organizations
- Defines external relationships and lines of authority to protect authorizing functions from conflicts of interest and political influence ⁴
- Principally focuses on authorizing strong schools that serve a larger function, e.g.: filling community gaps/needs, catalyzing systemic change in public education, and/or revolutionizing authorizing ⁵

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

Notes/Evidence:

HUMAN RESOURCES

FOUNDATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS FOR COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZING

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

- Employs competent personnel at a staffing level appropriate and sufficient to carry out all authorizing responsibilities in accordance with national standards, and commensurate with the scale of the charter school portfolio
- Develops new staff members' understanding of their role, priorities for oversight, and grounding in national and local best practices in authorizing through an effective onboarding process ⁷
- Develops and retains high-quality staff members to achieve and maintain high standards of professional authorizing practice, and enable continual agency improvement ⁸

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EMERGING COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZER

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

- Includes community member/s on new hire interview panels; or recruits members of the community to fill organizational vacancies
- Intentionally strives to reflect the backgrounds, identities, perspectives, and experiences of community members in staff makeup ⁹
- Employs staff that lead relationship development/management with non-charter school external entities (e.g., other education reform organizations, community organizations, etc.)¹⁰
- Enlists expertise and competent leadership for all areas essential to charter school oversight through staff, contractual relationships, and/or intra- or inter-agency collaborations ¹¹

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A WELL-ESTABLISHED COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZER

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

- Includes community engagement responsibilities in official staff job descriptions (e.g., creates community engagement plan; establishes and drives a communication strategy; creates and maintains website content; prepares communications materials about the performance of portfolio schools, etc.)

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

Notes/Evidence:

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

FOUNDATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS FOR COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZING

- Prioritizes the needs and aspirations of the community in the deployment of financial resources across the office's portfolio
- Determines the financial needs of the authorizing office and devotes sufficient financial resources to fulfill its authorizing responsibilities in accordance with national standards and commensurate with the scale of the charter school portfolio [12](#)

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EMERGING COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZER

- Structures its funding in a manner that avoids conflicts of interest, inducements, incentives, or disincentives that might compromise its judgment in charter approval, accountability in decision making, and ability to center community [13](#)

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A WELL-ESTABLISHED COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZER

- Engages in annual analysis of expenditures to ensure they have been made equitably and in alignment with community needs and priorities

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

Notes/Evidence:

RECOMMENDED
RESOURCES

Diversifying the Profession Toolkit

PROPOSAL INFORMATION, QUESTIONS, & GUIDANCE

FOUNDATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS FOR COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZING

- Implements a charter application process that is open to all, well-publicized, and transparent, and is organized around clear, realistic processes and timelines ¹⁴
- Communicates chartering opportunities, processes, approval criteria, and decisions clearly to the public ¹⁵
- Broadly invites and solicits charter applications while publicizing the authorizer's strategic vision and chartering priorities that are aligned with community needs ¹⁶
- Provides solicitation information and supporting documentation in the common languages within the community

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EMERGING COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZER

- Collects and analyzes community data (e.g., enrollment trends and survey results from community members, and/or notes/evidence gathered from town hall meetings) to determine school choice opportunities
- Utilizes data about the community to highlight both the challenges and the opportunities/resources existing within a community so applicant teams and community members focus their support/advocacy/planning around identified data points

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A WELL-ESTABLISHED COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZER

- Integrates quantitative and qualitative community data findings (see Characteristics Of An Emerging Community-Centered Authorizer in this section) into the Requests For Applications provide information about community demographics and needs that applicants are either required or encouraged to respond to for a greater likelihood of being authorized ¹⁷
- Develops questions and criteria for Requests For Proposals leveraging the collected and analyzed community data
- Holds meetings (public hearings, focus groups, advisory councils, etc) designed to gather community input to inform authorizing practices and decisions related to the application process
- Incorporates preparation, outreach, facilitation, analysis, and follow-up into the meetings
- Considers details e.g.: convenient meeting times and locations, meeting with a variety of different interested parties (e.g., child welfare, economic development, etc.)
- Meeting participant roles are clear and articulated on an agenda, interpreters are provided, or meetings are organized in co-sponsorship with a community organization at a community site ¹⁸

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

Notes/Evidence:

**RECOMMENDED
RESOURCES**

Rethinking the New School Application Process

FAIR, TRANSPARENT, QUALITY-FOCUSED PROCEDURES

FOUNDATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS FOR COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZING

- Informs applicants of their rights and responsibilities and promptly notifies applicants of approval or denial, while explaining the factors that determined the decision [19](#)
- Views denied charter applications as an opportunity to provide reasons for denial, so that applicants can decide if they wish to revise their plans based in part on that information and resubmit in the future [20](#)

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EMERGING AND WELL-ESTABLISHED COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZER

- Leverages media to communicate decisions to community members identified when the authorizer began the process
- Establishes time every year in its application process to craft, refine, and evolve the application before its release to ensure it is inclusive of and aligns to the data collected from the community and lessons learned in previous cycles

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

Notes/Evidence:

**RECOMMENDED
RESOURCES**

How to Communicate Your Community-Centered Authorizing Decisions

RIGOROUS APPROVAL CRITERIA

FOUNDATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS FOR COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZING

- Requires all applicant teams (new or existing/replications) to present evidence of need and demand from the community [21](#)

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EMERGING COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZER

- Requires all applicant teams to present evidence of need and demand for the school collected from community engagement session
- Poor academic performance among the community's schools may be part of the evidence used to establish the need for the school, but is not sufficient evidence to establish parent or community demand for the school
- Accepts evidence of demand from the community collected via a variety of mediums including e.g., community hearings [22](#), surveys [23](#), evidence of confirmed partnerships (e.g., Letters of support) [24](#), or other sources of evidence presented within the written application [25](#)

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A WELL-ESTABLISHED COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZER

- Requires applicant teams to provide evidence to demonstrate how they engaged the community e.g., specific examples of input from parents, neighborhoods, and community members that is reflected in the application, or has shaped the school proposal (SPCSA) [26](#); or explanations / descriptions of how the applicant team has co-designed the proposed new schools with community members [27](#)

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

Notes/Evidence:

**RECOMMENDED
RESOURCES**

How to Supplement Your Application Evaluation Rubric

RIGOROUS DECISION MAKING

FOUNDATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS FOR COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZING

- Engages highly competent and diverse teams of internal and external evaluators with relevant community expertise for both written application reviews and applicant interviews ²⁸

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EMERGING COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZER

- Utilizes data collected from the community to determine thresholds for what constitutes community need for a new school; relies on objective information from the community to complement their due diligence efforts (see criteria #5 under Proposal Information, Questions, and Guidance)

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A WELL-ESTABLISHED COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZER

- Requires a clear description of the intended community to serve and the strategies employed to authentically engage with the community, and quantitative and qualitative evidence from their engagement with the community
- Requires quantitative and/or qualitative evidence demonstrating one or more type(s) of need for the school (academic, programmatic, access, or community)
- Requires a clear and comprehensive description of the school's plans for: student enrollment, programming, partnership, and ongoing community engagement which reflects and incorporates the needs and aspirations expressed by the community
- Requires evidence of community demand for the proposed school at a level sufficient to meet projected enrollment

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

Notes/Evidence:

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- [How to Supplement Your Application Evaluation Rubric](#)
- [How to Communicate Your Community-Centered Authorizing Decisions](#)

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

FOUNDATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS FOR COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZING

- Reviews its application process after each cycle to improve its efficiency and validity; makes typical small technical updates following each cycle, and when a need for substantial changes becomes apparent, makes such changes following the application cycle ²⁹

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EMERGING COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZER

- Engages in continuous review of application processes to consider whether current processes result in charter schools that the community wants and needs; if not, an authorizer seeks input from staff, reviewers, applicants, and the community regarding desired outcomes and makes changes to the application process accordingly ³⁰

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

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CHARACTERISTICS OF A WELL-ESTABLISHED COMMUNITY-CENTERED AUTHORIZER

- Remains connected to community members involved throughout the authorization process and seeks valuable evidence from these community members once the charter schools open

Does Not Meet / Partially Meets / Meets

Did you not meet, partially meet, or meet all of these characteristics? Consider before moving to the next column.

Notes/Evidence:

1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 17, 18, 24, 26, 27	Engaging Stakeholders Through Authentic Community Meetings https://qualitycharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Community-Centered-Authorizing-Community-Meetings.pdf
4, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 28, 26	Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing https://qualitycharters.org/principles-and-standards/
5, 10, 22, 23, 25, 29, 30	NACSA'S Quality Practice Project https://qualitycharters.org/research/quality-practice-project/
9	Closing the DEI Gap in Authorizing https://qualitycharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Diversify-the-Profession-COMPRESSED-1.pdf