

Blueprint for State Infrastructure

The Center for Education Reform 1/03

There are four major categories of work to be done that every state's charter schools need and which transcend state differences. The following Blueprint outline assumes one unified structure in a state, with four main divisions of work. Each of those divisions intersect and are related. The question is, how does a particular state unite these functions best, in order to meet the needs and demands of charter schools and ensure healthy growth of quality schools that are politically strong and publicly responsive?

Technical Assistance: This is defined as consistent, ongoing, planned-out support to schools on all school-based operations, and a degree of technical trouble shooting. Following is a list of products and services that should be conducted in this area.

- Provide model programs, policies and procedures
- Provide assistance regarding management procedures (i.e. how to handle a board interview, setting up meetings with local political leaders, generating parent interest)
- Governance/Board Training
- Back room nuts & bolts
- Provide support for schools to collect, manage and report their school/student data
- Start-Up Assistance:
 - Coordination of task list
 - Information on and referral to facilities services (maintain lists and contacts)
 - Information, referral, and (where necessary) establishment of staffing process
 - Information and (where necessary) establishment of student recruitment process
 - Information and referral for 2nd tier activities such as food service, transportation, textbooks, student records, etc.
- Program Implementation: Behavior Management, Curriculum, Instructional practice, Title I & NCLB, Special Education
- Provide regular facilities financing guidance and expertise
- Identify and announce public and private grant information

- Create a charter specific, members-only extranet that would serve as a place where designated state leaders only can go to exchange updates, ideas, and get information from colleagues pursuing similar issues
- Intervention into school troubles, especially those concerning financial or academic deficiencies
- Support to correct deficiencies
- Communication with authorizer on positive and trouble spots

Advocacy: This is where all external affairs are placed, including but not limited to communications and PR, sales and marketing of issues and ideas, legislative development and advancement, and grassroots support and development.

- Data Collection: Create a massive index on each school, including specific research about and data points on charter schools
- Student achievement progress data (standardized testing data as well as other data marking school success and progress); b) demand information (enrollment figures, waiting list data,, other); and c) parental satisfaction data (annual, parent survey data).
- Design and conduct a three-year plan for strategic and political alliances that define contact among schools and community, opinion and political leaders
- Research all charter stakeholders, including pro- and con- groups.
- Identify and analyze all existing education groups, academicians, think tanks, etc and their stances on charter schools; publish and regularly update all existing their positions
- Identify institutions that serve minorities the best by region
- Coordinate outreach efforts with local, state and national BAEO efforts
- Develop a program connecting supportive minority individuals with legislators
- Provide "cover" for choice-friendly legislators
- Sponsor "road trips" to state where institutions have existing charter partnerships. Create interstate links with these groups where they are present in several states.
- Create a strong coalition around public school educators supportive of charters
- Conduct educational workshops for teachers, school board members and superintendents
- Legislative Activity:
 - Publish voting records relevant to charter schools

- Legislative and Administrative analysis and lobbying (Develop strategies for individual legislators who can be targeted)
- Create a calendar for dropping specific news items, letters, etc, in and around the legislative calendar
- Conduct special luncheons/receptions with key in-state or out of state business leaders to influence state leaders
- Accompany willing business leaders to legislative hearings and meetings with policymakers
- Create relationships with executive branch officials to ensure that schools receive fair treatment for grant funding.
- Identify opportunities to enhance and/or develop favorable legislation or procedures for creating charter facilities
- Review and generate customized reports of specific lobbying strategies engaged in the past with detailed analysis of results
- Research and provide background for lobbyists who oppose or support charter school movement.
- Provide research on legislative provisions that either help or inhibit development of facilities for charter schools
- Public Relations:
 - Develop a clear set of messages/themes and market to groups, opinion leaders, policymakers, etc.
 - Generation of descriptive and pro-charter material
 - For individual schools (calendar of events to publicize, writing of releases, op-ed pieces and letters to the editor.)
 - Cultivation of media relationships (At the state and school level.)
 - Charter school events and forums
 - Policy Analysis (Generate material that can be used for pro-charter public relations.)
 - Create NCSW agenda/activities
- Grassroots Organizing:
 - Relationships with legislators at the school level (This must be actively managed.)
 - Outreach to the decision-makers in the community
 - Publicize success stories
 - Create profiles on what makes a great school
- Media Relations:
 - Analyze editorial board views and reporter coverage towards charters
 - Pitch specific stories, results of focus groups, etc.

- Provide media training for all likely and potentially strong spokespeople
- Connect legislators/business people to editorial board meetings once people are organized
- Identify new, non-traditional media in minority communities and make direct pitches to these media with minority spokespeople

New School Development: This division is responsible for identifying needs by community and working to match those with proven models and interested applicants to invite their possible application to the state, as well as to help new applicants be strong and aligned to critical demands from the start.

- Create and maintain data on all applicants to the state and compose experts list for referral to potential new applicants
- Work individually with applicants to fulfill requirements of a strong application process and to combat potential authorizer obstacles
- Facilitate communication with authorizers to ensure alignment of goals of applicant with authorizer
- Coordinate workshops on how to complete an application
- Review and provide guidance for the draft applications
- Research and engage in discussions with successful charter schools
- Generation of supportive media for applicants
- Proactive and constant recruitment of applicants
- Host pro-charter events
- Reach out to community based organizations
- General and detailed training for operators.
- Facilitate the sharing of best practices among the most successful charter schools
- Provide models and contacts for the purpose of adopting curriculum, training, standards alignment, financial reporting.
- Develop new membership category in organization, to provide special place and set of contacts for new applicants
- Network with other states and attend conferences to make contacts

Parent Network: While the role of advocacy involves organizing, parents are unique in their needs and ability to help schools advance their agendas. Parents must be more informed first and foremost about what it means to have a child in a charter school and schools need to better understand motivations of first-choice parents. Parents with information can be trained and organized, to support their school and to advance its cause politically.

- Develop databank of parents, parent groups, history of interaction among various groups and public officials
- Train schools to organize parents
- Design education/informational workshops and user-friendly tools (for multiple audiences) that introduce individuals to appropriate guides and "how to" resources/books.
 - "What is a Charter School?"
 - "How to Choose Your School?"
 - Generic statistics
 - Material that describes myths and realities relating to charter schools
- Research and develop a customized - easy to read newsletter (ex: "Did you know" format, etc. targeted to parents about both specific and more general charter school issues)
- Collect and disseminate data on existing parent groups
- Set up booths at fairs and community events
- Help parents establish school-based associations and connect them with other home-school, PTA or PTO organizations among all charter schools
- Identify family magazines and weekly newspapers which parents read to identify local events and school-related news, etc.
- Provide parent-only tools to use, distribute and write:
 - Letters to the editor
 - Questions for policymakers
 - School checklists
- Organize leadership training for parents on waiting lists or parents who want to advocate for charters
- Organize Lobby Day at the Capitol
- Send regular monthly testimonials about children successes to lawmakers

- Identify the critical "legitimate" leaders of parental groups