



Charter School Direct Application Process

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is eligible to apply directly to the Charter Commission?

With the passage of Public Chapter 275, a sponsor seeking to open a public charter school can apply directly to the Tennessee Public Charter Commission (“Commission”) if one of the following criteria is met:

- The Commission has overturned a local education agency's (“LEA”) decision to deny a public charter school application on three separate occasions within a three-consecutive-year period. This allows direct application to the Commission for a five-consecutive-year period immediately following the date of the third overturned decision.
- A public institution of higher education in Tennessee seeks to open a public charter school.

What application does a sponsor use?

The State Board of Education has two separate applications, which can be found on the [State Board of Education’s Charter School Applications page](#). The Charter School Application is for new schools, while the Charter School Replication Application is for replicating an existing school. For information about replication, visit the [Charter School Replication Application Process](#).

How does a Sponsor file a letter of intent?

The letter of intent (“LOI”) must be submitted via email to the authorizer where the sponsor is applying and the Commission (if not applying to the Commission) via email at CharterSchool.Applications@tn.gov at least sixty calendar days prior to the initial application due date. If no LOI is submitted by the deadline, no application may be submitted during the cycle.

If a Sponsor intends to apply to the Commission, how is the application submitted?

The initial application must be submitted electronically using the State Board of Education state charter application form for that application cycle. All required sections, attachments, and signatures must be completed, aligned with the category indicated in the LOI. The application must be submitted to the Commission on or before 11:59 p.m., Central Time on February 1 of



the year preceding the proposed public charter school's operation start year. If February 1 falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or state observed holiday, the due date is the next business day.

Documents should be submitted via a file-sharing website (e.g., Microsoft Teams). Upon submission of an LOI, Commission staff will set up a Microsoft Teams folder for each application with clearly labeled subfolders for the required information. Required application materials include:

- Application narrative
- Required attachments
- Applicable addenda
- Operating budget template

Is there a cost to apply directly to the Commission?

An application to the Commission shall be accompanied by a fee of \$2,500. The application fee shall be made by check or money order and made payable to "Treasurer, State of Tennessee." Email CharterSchool.Applications@tn.gov for instructions on submitting payment by mail.

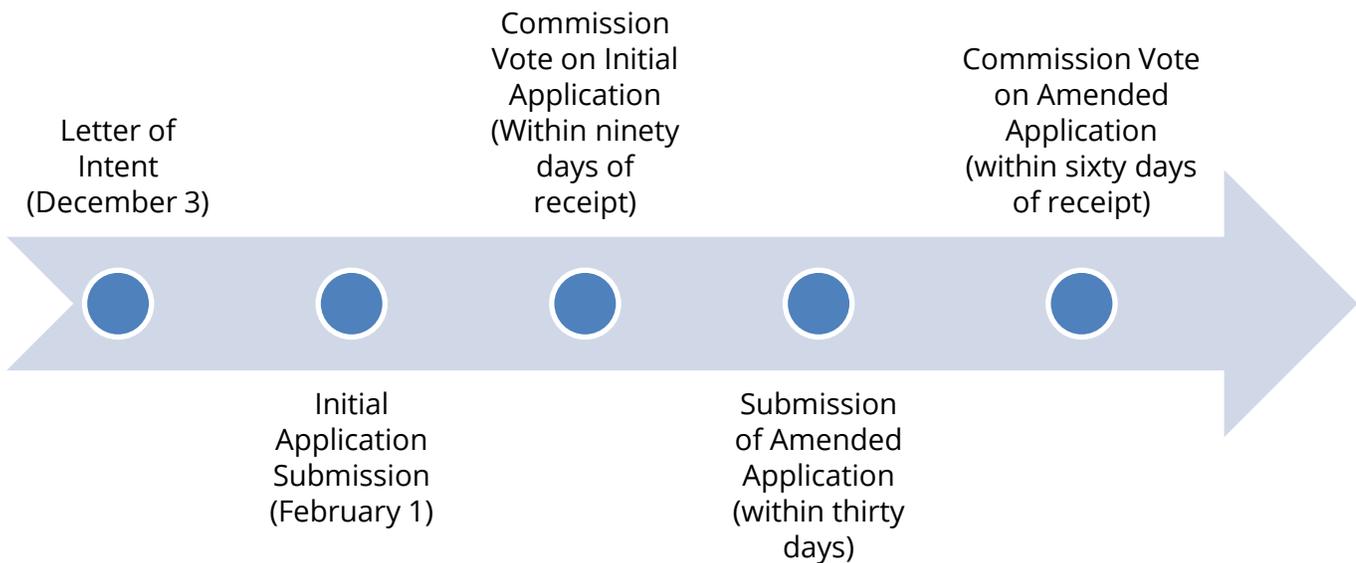
Failure to include payment of the application fee will result in the application not being accepted by the Commission. The operator will receive confirmation from Commission staff when payment has been received.

How long does the application process take?

The Commission is required to render a decision by resolution, at a regularly or specially called meeting, to approve or deny a public charter school application no later than ninety calendar days after the Commission's receipt of the completed application.

If a charter school application is denied, the charter school sponsor shall have thirty calendar days from receipt of the grounds for denial to submit an amended application to correct the deficiencies. The Commission has sixty calendar days from receipt of an amended application to deny or to approve the amended application.

If the Commission fails to approve or deny a public charter school application within ninety calendar days of the initial application submission or within sixty calendar days of the amended application submission, as applicable, then the public charter school shall be deemed approved. Typically, the Commission's meeting to render a decision on an initial or amended application is near the end of the calendar day timeframe.



How will I be notified of approval or denial of the initial application?

If a charter school application is denied, the grounds upon which the Commission based the decision to deny an application shall be stated in writing and provided to the charter school sponsor within ten calendar days of the date of the decision to deny, specifying objective reasons for the denial and the deadline by which the charter school sponsor shall submit an amended application.

If the application is denied, what are my options?

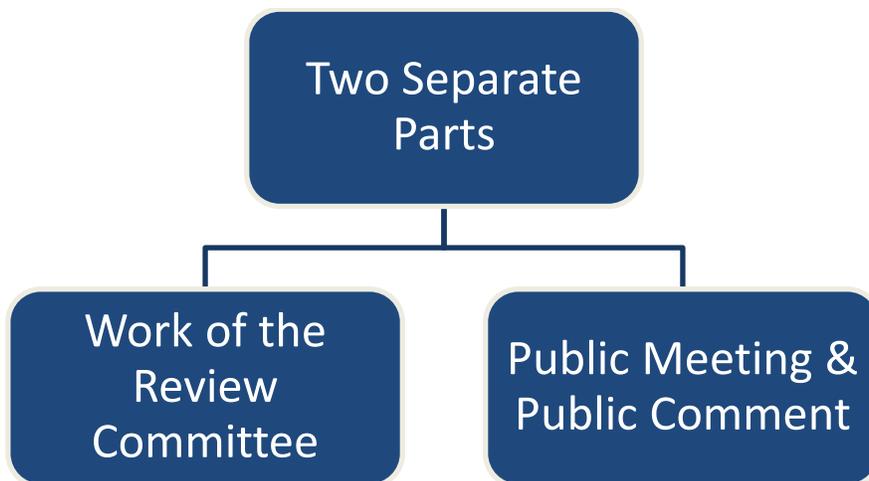
If an initial charter school application is denied, the charter school sponsor shall have thirty calendar days from receipt of the grounds for denial to submit an amended application to correct the deficiencies.

The Commission's decision on an amended application is final and not subject to appeal. If an amended application is also denied, a sponsor can submit a new application the following year to either the local board of education or the Commission, where applicable.

Who is my main contact during the application process?

Questions related to the Commission's new start application process should be sent to CharterSchool.Applications@tn.gov. Once an application has been submitted, please continue to send any questions or concerns regarding the process to this email address, and a Commission staff member will reply to the email within one business day.

What does the Commission analyze in a new start application process?



The Commission shall conduct a complete review of the initial and amended charter applications, and the substantive review of the application by the Commission is done in two distinct parts. Both parts come together to inform the Executive Director’s Findings and Recommendation Report that is presented to the Commission. The Commission considers, but is not bound by, the Executive Director’s Recommendation.¹ The recommendation report is based on the following:

Part 1: Work of the Review Committee:²

The Commission assembles a charter application review committee (“Review Committee”), comprised of both internal and external evaluators, to review the initial and amended charter school application. The Review Committee is trained by the Commission staff to ensure consistent standards and fair treatment of all applications, and all Review Committee members complete a conflict of interest disclosure form before beginning any reviews. The Review Committee’s work consists of three key parts, outlined below, and is separate from the public hearing.

Additionally, the Commission staff may conduct due diligence on the applicant, including but not limited to outreach to current authorizers or a review of state and nationally normed internal assessment data.

¹ Commission Policy 3.010 – Charter School New Application Review

² Commission Policy 3.010 – Charter School New Application Review

Evaluation of the Application:

The Review Committee is responsible for conducting a review of the initial and amended applications. The Review Committee scores the application based on the State Board of Education’s Application Scoring Rubric.³

Capacity Interview:

After an initial review of the application, the Review Committee conducts a ninety-minute capacity interview with the proposed school leaders and officers of the governing board virtually. Additional information about the interview is contained in Commission Policy 3.010 – Charter School New Start Application Review. The capacity interview is conducted only during the initial review process and is not part of the amended application review.

Review Committee Report:

After reviewing the application and holding the capacity interview(s), the Review Committee develops a consensus rating for each of the main sections of the application and provides a recommendation to the Executive Director on the application. Applicants must receive a “Meets Standard” in the academic, operational, financial, and past performance sections, if applicable, for the Review Committee to recommend approval.

Part 2: Public Hearing and Public Comment:

The Commission holds a public meeting on the charter application during the ninety calendar days that the Commission is considering an initial application.⁴ The public meeting is held in the local school district in which the applicant proposes to operate and provides an opportunity for the members of the specific community to be heard as it relates to the charter school application. The Commission will notify the local board of education in the geographic LEA where the sponsor proposes to locate of the date and time for the public meeting. The sponsor is responsible for assisting the Commission in identifying and securing a location for the public meeting. Specific details regarding the meeting can be found in Commission Policy 3.010 – Charter School New Application Review.

Oral Public Comment:

³ Rubric is available on the State Board of Education’s [website](#).

⁴ T.C.A. § 49-13-137 and Commission Policy 3.10 – Charter School New Application Review

The Executive Director reserves forty minutes for oral public comment during the public meeting. Additionally, any comment submitted by a member of the public is considered a public record and may be provided in response to a public records request.⁵

Written Public Comment:

The public may submit written comments to the Commission for consideration in the Executive Director's Recommendation until the deadline set by the Commission. The Commission staff will set a deadline by which no further written comment is accepted, and this deadline is stated on the public meeting agenda and the Commission's website.

Are all components of the application process considered equally in the Executive Director's Recommendation?

The initial and amended applications are the foundation of the record before the Commission and serve as the foundation of the Executive Director's Recommendation. The Executive Director's Recommendation summarizes all parts of the application process: the new start application, the Review Committee Report, information presented at the public meeting, and public comment.

Can a sponsor make changes or corrections to the initial application?

In accordance with Commission Policy 3.010 – Charter School New Start Application Review, if a charter school application is denied, the charter school sponsor shall have thirty calendar days from receipt of the grounds for denial to submit an amended application to correct the deficiencies. The sponsor shall highlight/track any adjustments to areas where the application is changed. Additionally, the sponsor may submit a table or brief summary of changes made to the application as part of the new start application submission.

When is the Executive Director's Recommendation published online?

The Executive Director's Findings and Recommendation Report is posted on the Commission's website prior to the Commission meeting, and sponsors are notified by Commission staff when the recommendation is posted.

What is the Commission's decision-making process?

⁵ Any personally identifiable information is removed prior to responding to a public record request. Please note: first and last name, email addresses, and phone numbers are not considered personally identifiable information.



The Commission meets at a special-called meeting or a regularly scheduled quarterly meeting to render a decision within ninety calendar days of receipt of an initial application and within sixty calendar days of receipt of an amended application. The Commission discusses the Executive Director’s Recommendation prior to the vote on the agenda item, regardless of the type of meeting.⁶ All Commission meetings are livestreamed and open to the public, and the link is available on the Commission’s website.

Is there time for public comment on the application at the Commission meeting?

Requests for public comment at Commission meetings are governed by Commission Policy 1.200 - Commission Meetings. In accordance with Commission policy, each meeting of the Commission shall reserve at least thirty minutes for in-person, oral public comment. The public may sign up to give a comment at the Commission meeting by visiting the meeting page of the Commission’s website. Additionally, the Commission accepts written public comments, submitted through its website, on any agenda item before the Commission for consideration.

What happens after the Commission renders a decision?

The sponsor is notified via email of the Commission’s decision. If a charter school initial application is denied, the grounds upon which the Commission based the decision to deny an application shall be stated in writing and provided to the charter school sponsor within ten calendar days of the date of the decision to deny, specifying objective reasons for the denial and the deadline by which the charter school sponsor shall submit an amended application. If a charter school’s initial application is denied, the charter school sponsor shall have thirty calendar days from receipt of the grounds for denial to submit an amended application to correct the deficiencies.

Can the Commission’s decision be appealed?

The Commission’s decisions on amended applications are final and not subject to appeal.⁷

If the Commission denies the application, can the sponsor apply in the following year?

Yes, the sponsor can submit a new application the following year to either the local board of education or the Commission, where applicable.

Whom should I contact with additional questions?

⁶ Commission Policy 3.010 – Charter School New Application Review

⁷ T.C.A. § 49-13-137(b)(4).



Please contact the Commission at CharterSchool.Applications@tn.gov.

What can a sponsor expect if authorized by the Commission?

If an application is approved by the Commission, the Commission becomes the authorizer of the charter school. The school is then evaluated and held accountable to the Commission's Charter School Performance Framework – Commission Policy 3.700.

The Commission's mission is to "provide access and support to excellent charter schools through rigorous oversight, transparency, and accountability."⁸ The Commission aims to have a positive impact on the quality of Tennessee education, empowering every student to achieve their full potential. The Commission serves as the LEA for its authorized charter schools and is responsible for fulfilling the same obligations as other school districts in Tennessee, in addition to its authorizing responsibilities.

As an authorized charter school, you will be subject to an annual authorizer fee. This fee is 3% of the public charter school's per pupil state and local funding as allowed under T.C.A. § 49-13-112(a). The Commission uses these fees to fulfill its obligations as a charter school authorizer and as an LEA.

Commission-authorized charter schools are responsible for using the Commission's instance of PowerSchool as the student information system. This system is crucial for managing student data, academic progress, and reporting requirements.

Regarding special education services, Commission-authorized charter schools are required to provide access to a free appropriate public education to all children with disabilities. This means they must ensure that all students with disabilities receive services to meet their unique needs and that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents are protected. While the Commission oversees and monitors compliance with special education laws and policies, it does not directly provide special education services. Instead, authorized charter schools are responsible for carrying out a comprehensive screening and assessment plan, using Individualized Education Program ("IEP") teams, providing IEPs designed for unique needs, and continuously evaluating student progress. The charter school is also responsible for any and all costs associated with the external placement of a student if the IEP team determines it is necessary.

How will a school receive funding when authorized by the Commission?

⁸ Tennessee Public Charter School Commission Strategic Plan 2025-2028



Once your charter school application is approved by the Commission, that school becomes a Commission-authorized charter school, and the Commission serves as your LEA. This means the Commission is responsible for allocating your school's funding.

The Tennessee Department of Education calculates and provides funding for the Commission and its authorized charter schools. Your school's allocation is based on 100% of the per-student state and local funds received by the LEA, as well as all appropriate federal allocations.

Initial allocations for new or expanding charter schools are typically based on anticipated enrollment as outlined in the charter agreement. For existing schools, funding is generally based on prior-year enrollment. All charter schools are funded based on the timelines and rules outlined in State Board of Education Rule 0520-14-01-.03.