

Starting a Charter School in Georgia

This overview of the charter petition process is intended to provide a limited summary of chartering in Georgia and should be reviewed **before a petitioner begins the charter process**. Much more detailed information can be found on our website, along with relevant application materials: http://www.gadoe.org/pea_charter.aspx. In particular, copies of the Charter Schools Act, the State Board of Education Rule, and the Guidance, which are referenced throughout this overview, are all linked on the website. In addition to reviewing this overview, you are strongly encouraged to review the Frequently Asked Questions list posted on the website, which answers the most common questions posed to the charter division and to review the guides and references linked on the website before contacting the Georgia Department of Education (“Department”) directly.

Under Georgia law, a charter school is a public school that operates according to the terms of a charter, or contract, that has been approved by a local board of education and the State Board of Education. The charter school may request waivers from provisions of Title 20 of Georgia state law and any state or local rule, regulation, policy, or procedure relating to schools in the school district. In exchange for this flexibility, the charter school is bound by contract and held accountable for meeting the performance-based objectives specified in the charter.

This capsule summary is divided into two sections: (1) a description of the usual timeline for the entire charter process; and (2) a discussion of applicable deadlines and procedures for submitting charter petitions and grants, and an explanation of the various grant resources available for petitioners.

I. Timeline

Listed below is a chronological look at the charter petition process, which lists the steps a typical petitioner goes through to apply for a charter

1. Submit a letter of intent to the local board of education and the Charter Division of the Department six (6) months before the petition is due to the Department. (*See* Guidance, which describes the content required in a letter of intent.)
2. Apply for a planning grant from the Charter Division of the Department. (Application materials can be found on our website.)
3. Contact the local board of education charter school liaison to discuss the petition process at the local level. When making this contact, petitioners should inquire about local deadlines, forms, and related information that must be provided in the charter petition application. All petitioners are encouraged to work cooperatively with the local districts from the beginning of the charter process.
4. Submit a completed petition to the local board of education in which you plan to locate, along with any required forms, templates, and appendices.

5. The local board has sixty days to vote on the charter petition unless the petitioner consents to extend that period.
6. If the local board approves the charter petition, that petition must be submitted to the Department, along with the appropriate cover sheets and checklist. (The coversheets and checklist can be found on our website.)
7. If the local board denies the charter petition, it must provide a written explanation setting forth its reasons for the denial. A denial does not prevent a petitioner from resubmitting a revised petition.
8. If the local board denies the charter petition, the denied petition and denial explanation letter can be submitted to the Georgia Charter Schools Commission for approval.
9. A petition can be sent directly to the Charter Schools Commission if it plans to enroll student from more than five counties.
10. Once the Department reviews the approved petition, it will make a recommendation to the State Board of Education (“SBOE”). Thereafter, the SBOE will vote on the petition. A charter can only be granted if the SBOE votes to approve the petition. (Note that a charter petition cannot be altered in any way after being approved by a local board; if any changes are made, it must be resubmitted to the local board for another vote before being submitted to the SBOE.)
11. After approval, the petitioner will receive a copy of a charter contract that must be executed by the charter school, the local board of education, and the SBOE. This will be the governing charter contract and will incorporate the terms of the petition and any other agreement that might be reached between the petitioner and the local board of education.
12. Once approved, a petitioner may apply for a competitive implementation grant. (Application materials can be found on our website.) It is highly recommended that the petitioner complete the implementation grant application within four (4) weeks of charter approval.
13. Once operational, a charter school may apply for competitive facilities grants on an annual basis. (Application materials can be found on our website.) These grants are awarded annually after an appropriation from the legislature. The Department will announce when the facilities grant process is initiated each year.
14. After three years of consecutive operation, a charter school may apply for a competitive dissemination grant, provided the Department announces a dissemination grant initiation. (Application materials can be found on our website.)

II. Applicable Deadlines and Grant Descriptions

Planning Grants

All planning grant applications that meet grant requirements will be considered at one of two State Board of Education (“SBOE”) meetings – the August meeting or the January meeting. To ensure that Department staff and the SBOE have sufficient time to consider the grants, all grants must be submitted by July 1 to be considered at the August SBOE meeting and by December 1 be considered at the January meeting. Keep in mind that the Department has limited Planning Grant funds, so it is advisable to submit your application early in the grant cycle. This timeline is reflected below:

<u>Round</u>	<u>Grant Application Due</u>	<u>To SBOE for Approval</u>
1	July 1	August Board meeting
2	December 1	January Board meeting

Amount: \$8,000
Fund Source: State Funds
Carry-over: No, funds must be expended in the FY in which they are granted.

Petitions and Implementation Grants

<u>Charter</u>	<u>Letter of Intent Due</u>	<u>Petition Due</u>	<u>To SBOE for Approval</u>	<u>Implementation Grant Application Due</u>
Start-ups (including LEA Start-ups and Career Academies)	February 1	August 1	December Board meeting	1 month after approval
Conversion and Charter Systems	May 1	November 1	March Board meeting	1 month after approval
Renewals	N/A	November 1	March Board meeting	N/A

Amount¹: Up to \$600,000 depending on the strength of the application.
Fund Source: Federal Funds
Carry-over: Yes, funds are eligible to be spent on qualified costs over a two-year period.

¹ Note that the amounts listed are for implementation grant awards.

Facilities Grants

The deadlines for Facilities Grant applications vary from year to year and will be announced by the Department at the initiation of the application process. The current deadline is August 15 and only approved charter schools may apply.

Amount: Discretionary based on need, but historically awards have typically ranged from \$20,000 to \$200,000
Fund Source: State Funds
Carry-over: No, funds must be expended in the FY in which they are granted.

Dissemination Grants

The deadlines for Dissemination Grant applications vary from year to year and will be announced by the Department at the initiation of the application process.

Amount: Discretionary based on demonstrated success of model
Fund Source: Federal Funds
Carry-over: Yes, funds are eligible to be spent on qualified costs over a two-year period.