MAKING IT COUNT: ASSESSING THE CAPACITY OF APPLICANT TEAMS

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INTRODUCING THE PANEL

- **Mikayla Lytton** – Senior Manager of Finance and Strategy, D.C. Public Charter School Board

- **Theda Sampson** – Compliance Manager, Thomas B. Fordham Foundation

- **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
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.

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
CRUCIAL COMPONENTS

CAPACITY INTERVIEW

Questions and Answers

HIGH QUALITY AND RIGOROUS APPLICATION PROCESS

Diving into the Details

EXTERNAL REVIEW PANELS

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

DURING THE INTERVIEW

AFTER THE 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

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<th>Necessary areas of expertise</th>
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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
Any questions?