



Mississippi First

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

MS Charter School Sector Developer Recruitment

Release Date: February 27, 2026

Background

Mississippi First is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization committed to championing transformative policy solutions that ensure educational excellence for every Mississippi child. Central to this mission is the belief that every child, regardless of zip code, deserves access to a high-quality public school that prepares them for long-term success.

Public charter schools are tuition-free public schools that operate with greater flexibility in exchange for strong accountability. In Mississippi, charter schools may only open in specific eligible communities and must be approved by the state authorizer.

Mississippi First is working to strengthen the state's charter sector by:

- Increasing the number of high-quality charter schools
- Supporting strong school founders
- Improving the likelihood that new schools open successfully and remain sustainable

A key barrier to charter growth is the limited pipeline of prepared, high-capacity school founders. Launching a successful charter school requires instructional expertise, operational skill, community engagement, and the ability to navigate state policy and authorization requirements.

This RFP seeks a partner to help identify and recruit exceptional leaders who have the potential to found high-quality charter schools in Mississippi.

About the Project

Mississippi First seeks to partner with an experienced organization that specializes in:

- Identifying and attracting high-capacity education leaders
- Conducting rigorous screening and assessment
- Recommending candidates who are ready to enter the next phase of development

Selected candidates will move into Mississippi's broader charter ecosystem and may become eligible for structured incubation, charter application support, and pre-opening planning assistance available in the state.

These supports help prospective founders strengthen:

- School design and academic programming
- Governance and board development
- Financial modeling and sustainability planning

- Community engagement strategy
- Charter application quality

The goal is to ensure that individuals entering the charter application process are not only promising leaders but prepared to navigate authorization and open strong, sustainable schools.

SCOPE OF WORK

The selected Contractor will work from April–June 2026 and report to Mississippi First’s Director of Special Projects.

A. Recruitment Strategy

The Contractor will:

- Develop and execute a comprehensive recruitment strategy aligned to Mississippi First’s charter growth goals in both rural and urban eligible communities
- Conduct on-the-ground recruitment efforts to source candidates from viable recruitment sources (e.g., universities, education networks, nonprofit organizations, leadership programs)
 - The Contractor will use official Mississippi First materials (slide decks and fact sheets) in all recruitment efforts.
- Include both traditional and non-traditional leadership pipelines to recruit a diverse group of leaders
- Establish clear milestones and recruitment benchmarks

B. Candidate Screening & Vetting

The Contractor will:

- Screen candidates using Mississippi First’s Ideal Candidate Profile (see Appendix)
- Provide candidates with clear information about available charter-sector supports and pathways, with the goal of preparing and directing qualified individuals into established charter school developer pipelines.
- Provide written summaries for each interested candidate, highlighting key strengths, documented evidence of impact, and an evaluation aligned to the Mississippi First Ideal Candidate Profile.

Communication

- Participate in regular check-ins with Mississippi First to share progress, challenges, pipeline data, and emerging needs (e.g., biweekly check-ins, with additional meetings as needed).

REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS

Proposals will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- Demonstrated expertise in recruiting and assessing education leaders

- Demonstrated knowledge of Mississippi’s education landscape and charter policy context, including familiarity with state accountability systems, authorizing structures, regulatory requirements, and the rural and urban community dynamics that impact charter school development,
- Quality and clarity of the proposed recruitment strategy
- Relevance of the proposal to scope of work and project rationale,
- Descriptions and samples of previous work, and
- Timeline feasibility and cost of services.

INFORMATION TO BE PROVIDED BY THE CONTRACTOR

Provide a quote fulfilling the scope of work to include, at a minimum, the following:

- Background information and qualifications for the expert or experts to fulfill the contract.
- Descriptions of previous relevant work, including any samples.
- A detailed description of the services to be provided, including a timeline, persons responsible, and key deliverables.
- A minimum of three (3) references.
- A proposed budget for services, including all expected costs and the expected number of hours devoted to the contract.

CONTRACTING

Awards will be made to prospective Contractors that best meet Mississippi First’s needs and requirements. All aspects of the evaluation criteria will be taken into consideration in awarding this contract—i.e., Mississippi First uses a “best value” standard rather than a “lowest bid” standard. As this project will be funded through federal funds, federal procurement rules for a request for quotes and a contract are in effect.

INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR

The Contractor shall perform all services as an independent Contractor and shall at no time represent that the Contractor is an employee of Mississippi First.

NEGOTIATION AND REJECTION

Mississippi First reserves the right to reject any and all proposals, to waive any informality or irregularity, to define equals, to negotiate with the best proposed offeror to address issues other than those described in the proposal, to award the contract to one other than the low offeror, or to not make any award if it is determined to be in the best interest of Mississippi First.

TIMELINE

- Prospective respondents may ask questions via email until the proposal deadline of March 31, 2026
- Quotes will be reviewed by Mississippi First staff in the 5 business days following the deadline.
- Respondents may be asked to respond to clarifying questions in writing during the first 2 days of the review period.
- Mississippi First will offer the contract within 10 business days of the deadline, if at all feasible.

SERVICE PERIOD AND TERMS

The contract will be from the date of the award until June 2026.

QUOTE CONDITIONS & INFORMATION

Quotes will be received by Mississippi First until March 31, 2026. Quotes must be submitted via email. Please use "RFP-Developer Recruitment" as the subject line of the submission e-mail. Questions regarding this request for quotes can be submitted to Pheron C. Russell by e-mail at pheron@mississippifirst.org.

Contact:

Pheron C. Russell

Director of Special Projects

125 S. Congress St., Suite 1510

Jackson, MS 39201

pheron@mississippifirst.org

(601) 398-9008

APPENDIX

Ideal Candidate Profile

Mississippi First seeks charter founders who demonstrate measurable impact, leadership capacity, and readiness to launch and sustain a high-quality public school.

NON-NEGOTIABLE Competencies

1. Strategic Vision & Execution

- Led or founded an initiative that improved student achievement, enrollment, growth, or stability
- Successfully launched or turned around a school or program
- Developed and executed a multi-year plan that produced measurable results
- Aligned mission, strategy, and daily practice

2. Instructional Leadership

- Led or coached teams that improved student achievement
- Designed or implemented standards-aligned curriculum
- Improved instructional quality through coaching and feedback

3. Stakeholder Engagement

- Built trust with families, communities, and governing bodies
- Increased enrollment, satisfaction, or advocacy
- Navigated conflict while maintaining relationships

4. Innovation & Problem Solving

- Solved complex challenges (e.g., staffing shortages, academic gaps, culture issues)
- Used data to adjust strategy
- Successfully pivoted from ineffective approaches

5. Resilience & Commitment

- Sustained leadership through adversity
- Demonstrated long-term commitment to communities served

6. Equity-Centered Leadership

- Achieved results with historically underserved students
- Demonstrated culturally responsive leadership
- Designed programs responsive to community needs

Competencies That Can Be Developed

7. Public School Systems Knowledge

- Experience navigating accountability systems and federal programs
- Maintained compliance while achieving strong outcomes

8. Operational & Financial Management

- Built or improved systems for budgeting, staffing, scheduling, enrollment, or facilities
- Managed budgets responsibly
- Opened or scaled initiatives within budget and timeline

9. Team Building

- Built and retained strong teams
- Developed staff into leaders
- Improved morale and performance

10. Governance Leadership

- Worked effectively with boards
- Maintained healthy governance relationships