

Call for Peer Reviewers 2022

Background

On September 28, 2022, Mississippi First was awarded a 2022 Charter Schools Program—State Entities grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of this grant is to support the growth of high-quality charter schools in Mississippi. 90% of the funds from this grant must be spent on subgrants to eligible charter schools to help them with start-up costs. Mississippi First is required to run an annual subgrant competition to award subgrants. Peer reviewers are an essential part of this competition, allowing Mississippi First to evaluate and award subgrants to the most qualified applicants.

Pool of Reviewers and Annual Need

We are seeking to build a pool of peer reviewers that we can work with over the five-year grant term. Each year, we will contact reviewers in the pool to check for availability before selecting reviewers for a particular competition. Reviewers will be selected for three-person teams that will each review the same applications to ensure consistency. Mississippi First will construct teams with an eye to a diversity of skills, experiences, backgrounds, and other relevant factors.

In 2022, we will only need three reviewers due to the small number of eligible applicants.

Qualifications of Peer Reviewers

All reviewers must demonstrate belief in the goals and purposes of CSP. Additionally, reviewers should have one or more of the following qualifications:

- Charter school start-up experience—We are seeking reviewers who have charter school start-up experience, whether as a school founding or part of a founding team, or as a support provider to start-up charter schools.
- Financial or school operational expertise—We are seeking reviewers who have financial or school operational expertise, including as a financial or operational employee of a charter or traditional public school, as an executive or employee of a nonprofit. We are also seeking financial or operational experts that work for technical assistance or back-office support providers.
- CSP or other federal grant experience—We are seeking reviewers with experience administering or working with CSP or other federal grants. This may include experience with federal grants in traditional public schools, although charter school experience is highly desired.

Conflicts of Interest

Mississippi First has a duty to guard against conflicts of interest among CSP peer reviewers. To that end, each reviewer must disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interest, including any situations that may be perceived as a conflict of interest, on an annual form so that Mississippi First can ensure that no conflicts exist between a reviewer and their assigned applications. Actual conflicts may include working for the applicant for a CSP subgrant either as an employee or contractor; having applied for a position with an applicant contingent on their approval for a charter or CSP; being married to or having a close family relationship with an applicant; being otherwise affiliated closely, such as in a financial or legal sense, with an applicant; or having written the application or provided intensive technical assistance to an applicant during the application cycle. Potential

or perceived conflicts of interest may include such situations as being a potential vendor or contractor to any approved CSP subgrantee. Having received a CSP subgrant in a previous competition is not considered a conflict provided that the reviewer is not an active applicant. Other situations than these may also constitute actual or perceived conflicts, and Mississippi First will evaluate these on a case-by-case basis.

Confidentiality

In addition to completing a conflicts of interest form, reviewers will sign a confidentiality agreement to ensure they do not disclose application materials or discuss applicants under review.

Compensation

Reviewers will be paid a flat fee of \$200 per application reviewed once review is complete. Reviewers should complete Mississippi First's payment processing form and submit a W-9 to be paid.

Timeline and Process

Before beginning review, all reviewers must complete training to ensure reviewer consistency. **Annually, reviewers will receive training in late June or early July. Reviewers will begin reading after the application deadline (mid-July annually) and will have four weeks to complete reviews, as Mississippi First aims to have final decisions within six weeks of the application deadline.** Reviewers will score applications independently according to the rubric provided by Mississippi First and may work on review in their own time, rather than coming to a review event. Reviewers should use their own computer for review and be willing and able to communicate with Mississippi First regularly via email as all review materials will be transmitted and accepted via email or electronic forms.

PLEASE NOTE: In late 2022 or early 2023, Mississippi First intends to host a special transition cycle. This review will be rolling based on when the (very few) eligible applications are submitted. Reviewers will have four weeks from receiving the application to complete review. We are tentatively planning reviewer training for mid-December 2022, based on reviewer availability.

Application to Become a Reviewer

If you are interested in entering our review pool, please email Pheron Russell, Associate Director of Special Projects, at pheron@mississippifirst.org **by December 14, 2022**, and provide a current resume and cover letter describing how you meet the reviewer qualifications. We will contact you with any questions.