New York State Board of Regents
State Education Department

Virtual Capacity Interview Expectations and Tips

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New York State Education Department Virtual Capacity Interview Expectations and Tips[1]

Capacity interviews are a critical component of the New York State Education Department's (NYSED) charter school new school application review processes. These interviews often provide crucial opportunities to secure information needed to address or confirm questions that arise from the detailed review of written applications.

The quantitative and qualitative data collected during an interview helps answer vital questions, such as:

- Are the applicant's academic, organizational, and financial plans for the proposed school reasonable, feasible, and achievable?
- Do applicant group members demonstrate the diverse and necessary capabilities to execute its plans successfully?

These key findings enable NYSED, in the context of the standards and criteria of the new school RFP, to make appropriate recommendations for or against approval of new school applications and ensure only well-prepared groups with strong likelihoods of success open new charter schools.

BACKGROUND

As the world navigates the COVID-19 pandemic, capacity interviews for applicant groups responding to the NYSED 2020 new charter school RFP, will be held remotely. This guide is designed to help applicant groups adapt to capacity interview protocols in a remote environment as the same rigorous standards enumerated in the new school RFP will still be used to evaluate applicant groups.

Meeting virtually is a learned behavior. It can take time for all parties to get comfortable working this way and to effectively leverage the limited time available during capacity interviews.

VIRTUAL PLATFORM

NYSED will use the Zoom platform to hold all virtual capacity interviews and applicant groups should familiarize themselves with this platform prior to the capacity interview.

Some participants may not have reliable or strong internet access or webcam-enabled computers. While applicant groups do have the ability to participate in interviews via audio, video is preferred.

[1] Adapted from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers Guide to Virtual Capacity Interviews.

Tutorials on how to use the Zoom platform can be found at https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/115004954946-Joining-and-participating-in-a-webinar-attendee-.

Practice: Applicant groups should create opportunities for a dry run ahead of time through the Zoom platform (accounts are available at no cost by visiting https://zoom.us/).

Protect: Data security and safety is a key priority of NYSED. As such, to promote strong data security, NYSED will use a separate meeting link for each applicant group interview, and will utilize platform functions such as virtual waiting rooms to ensure only expected participants join. NYSED asks that applicant groups not share the link to the capacity interview outside of the participants expected to attend.

Time: Additional time will be allotted for each applicant group, as virtual meetings and interviews can often take longer than those conducted face to face. Virtual meetings require individuals to speak one at a time and NYSED encourages applicant groups to practice protocols for presenting and speaking in a virtual environment. Applicant groups should also practice ensuring that all participants have opportunities to demonstrate their expertise. Applicant groups should schedule 2 hours for the capacity interview.

Group size: To maximize participation in an effective virtual interview, applicant groups are asked to only invite the prospective board, in its entirety, and prospective school leaders, if applicable. Whether for in-person or virtual capacity interviews, participation should be limited to those prepared to actively contribute during the interview and to those who represent vital roles and perspectives.

Viewing Mode: NYSED finds that using the "gallery mode" in Zoom best approximates a face to face interview or meeting scenario. We encourage applicant groups to utilize this function during the capacity interview.

Breaks: While there will not be a break for participants during the time allotted for the capacity interview, applicant group members that need to take a break, or need to have a conversation off-camera should turn off their video and muting audio functions during those time. Again, active participation is required for all capacity group participants and having conversations or engaging in activities off-camera is highly discouraged.

Perform: The most significant weakness of virtual interviews, particularly when each participant is in a separate location. However, this simulates the realities of operating a school board during the pandemic.

A performance task continues to be a key aspect of the NYSED capacity interview protocol. This provides an opportunity to observe group dynamics, the ways in which each group reaches consensus in the face of challenge, how and what information they analyze, and overall levels of engagement. Integrating educational continuity or other timely topics into the scenarios may occur. To facilitate performance tasks during the virtual interview, NYSED will share all of the necessary materials via the Zoom portal, will provide instructions or verbal guidance, set an appropriate

amount of time, and then mute NYSED staff and turn off NYSED staff cameras in order to observe and take notes on the group discussions as unobtrusively as possible to minimize distractions.

SETTING NORMS

While norms are always helpful to streamline capacity interviews and keep attention on the substance of the discussion, pivoting to the virtual environment requires some additional norms.

Display names: All participants must display their full names as well as the role they served in application development and/or will play in the proposed school through the Zoom platform. This helps everyone be clear about who is speaking, and the skill sets they represent.

Speak up: The mic mute function is a necessity when background noise is an issue but should be used sparingly otherwise. To accomplish capacity interview objectives, establish a tone of contribution, not passive, muted listening.

Share cameras: Aall participants are strongly encouraged to share their camera. The ability to see one another throughout the entire interview is crucial to establish and maintain a sense of continuity and community between (and among) the review panel and the applicant team. While social distancing requirements remain in place, video conferencing and camera sharing are the best ways to accomplish this. Barring special circumstances (such as the lack of technology), all participants should be visible.

Focus: Ask all participants to turn off notifications and minimize other distractions that may exist in their locations, as much as possible.

Signal: There is usually more ground to cover than time available during capacity interviews. Applicant groups should establish and share a visual cue to ensure participants share the floor, such as a raising a hand. Similarly, NYSED will notify applicant groups when shifting to new questions or topics.

Record: NYSED will record all capacity interview meetings via the Zoom platform.

Opening Remarks: At the beginning of the capacity interview, the applicant team will be asked to introduce themselves and make an opening statement if they so choose.

QUESTIONS

If the applicant groups has any questions regarding the capacity group process they are strongly encouraged to email NYSED with sufficient time prior to the capacity interview at CharterSchools@nysed.gov. NYSED will be monitoring that email inbox on a regular basis. Any technical issues with the Zoom platform should be directed to Zoom at https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us, not to NYSED.