

Audubon Center of the North Woods Change of Authorizer Application Guide

Introduction

The Audubon Center of the North Woods (ACNW) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) residential environmental learning center and green conference/retreat center located near Sandstone, MN. ACNW envisions a healthy planet where all people live in balance with the Earth. Its mission is to instill a connection and commitment to the environment in people of all communities through experiential learning. To support its mission and vision, ACNW became an approved authorizer of charter schools in Minnesota. The ACNW Charter School Division (CSD) is located in Minneapolis and carries out ACNW authorizing activities.

The authorizing mission of ACNW is to ensure quality academic and environmental literacy outcomes for students in Minnesota by conducting effective oversight and evaluation of its authorized schools, providing strategic support to schools, and making informed and merit-based decisions about its portfolio of charter schools. The authorizing vision of the ACNW is to authorize a portfolio of high performing charter schools that instill a connection and commitment to the environment in their school communities, while working towards a healthy planet where all people live in balance with the Earth.

ACNW is interested in authorizing quality charter schools in terms of academic, financial, and operations performance, and will only approve transfer applications for schools that have demonstrated success in providing all students with a high quality education, ensuring efficient use of public resources, and meeting compliance requirements. Moreover, in order to fully realize the organization’s mission and vision, ACNW requires that authorized schools implement robust environmental education and sustainability strategies and practices. As such, ACNW will only approve transfer applications for schools that present plans or demonstrate, through the school’s education program, financial planning, and operational decisions, the commitment and ability to develop the environmental literacy of students.

Timeline

The timeline for the change of authorizer process is flexible. While authorizer transfers generally would take place at the end of a school’s existing contract (typically June 30), an authorizer’s withdrawal from its role as an authorizer could lead to a different timeline. Therefore, the timeline may be adjusted depending on the proposed date of transfer of authorization. The dates indicated below represent the final deadlines for a school seeking to transfer to ACNW beginning July 1. Failure to meet the deadlines may result in disqualification of the application. If a deadline falls on a weekend or non-business day, the deadline moves to the following business day.

Activity	Date
Notice of Intent to Apply (NOI) due to ACNW.	Preferred submission date: June 1 Final deadline: September 1
Invitation to submit full application (or lack thereof) communicated to school.	15-30 days after receiving NOI
Full application due to ACNW.	Preferred submission date: September 1 Final deadline: November 1
Final decision by ACNW Board of Directors and notification to applicant.	Approximately 45-60 days after submission of application, but no later than January
ACNW submits Change in Authorizer Request to the Minnesota Department of Education.	Approximately 15-30 days after approval by ACNW Board, but no later than 105 business days before the end of the existing charter contract

Evaluation Process

Change in authorizer applications must be reviewed at four levels in order for a transfer to occur:

- ACNW Charter School Division (CSD)
- ACNW Charter School Committee (CSC)
- ACNW Board of Directors
- Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)

ACNW will not accept applications from schools that are designated as “Focus” or “Priority” Schools based on Minnesota’s Accountability System designed by the Minnesota Department of Education or from schools in statutory operating debt, unless the school provides compelling evidence of improving academic achievement and growth and/or greatly improved financial health. ACNW reserves the right to reject any and all applications for any reason.

Notice of Intent

Charter schools wishing to transfer to ACNW must submit a Notice of Intent to Apply (NOI) to ACNW in order for a complete application to be considered. The NOI will outline the history, vision, mission, educational approach, successes, challenges, and leadership of the school. The NOI must be submitted via e-mail to admin@auduboncharterschools.org. Applicants must use the NOI template found on the [ACNW website](#) (and as part of this document). The deadline for submission of the NOI is defined above.

NOI Feedback and Invitation to Submit a Full Application

ACNW Charter School Division staff, in consultation with the ACNW Charter School Committee, will review the NOI and determine whether to invite the school to submit the full application. This determination will be based on the school’s academic, financial, and operations performance as evidenced by performance data available from MDE, information available on the school’s website (such as annual reports), and by any other information available to ACNW. An invitation (or lack thereof) to submit a full application will be communicated to the school no later than deadline described in the timeline above. This will include specific requirements for the full application. (See ACNW Change of Authorizer NOI Review Rubric for ACNW’s criteria to determine whether to invite a school to submit a full application.)

Application Evaluation

Applicants must complete required sections of the Change of Authorizer Application. Applicants are expected to review these application requirements closely. Review the [ACNW website](#) to ensure you have the most up to date version of the application.

After receipt of the application, the CSD will review the application for completeness and required formatting. If an application is found to be incomplete or incorrectly formatted, ACNW may disqualify the application and decide not to proceed with the change in authorizer evaluation.

ACNW will evaluate the change of authorizer request using ACNW’s Academic, Financial, and Operations Performance Frameworks, which are available on the [ACNW website](#). Additionally, ACNW will only approve transfer requests for schools that present plans or demonstrate, through the school’s education program, financial planning, and operational decisions, the commitment and ability to develop the environmental literacy of students. The evaluation includes a thorough review of the written application and its attachments, which includes the most recent evaluation by the current authorizer, a substantive site visit to the school, a board meeting observation, review of academic and financial data available from MDE and provided by the school, and other due diligence to examine the school’s past successes and challenges. Through the evaluation process, ACNW will determine the following:

- Is the school's learning program fulfilling the primary purpose of charter schools, which is to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement?
- Is the school financially viable and are its finances well managed?
- Is the school organization effective and is the school well governed?
- Did the school present plans or demonstrate its commitment and ability to develop the environmental literacy of students?

The CSD will produce a Change of Authorizer Evaluation Report, which compiles the findings from the evaluation. The report will contain a recommendation regarding approval of the Change of Authorizer Application and, if recommending approval, terms of the proposed contract. The CSC will review the Evaluation Report and make a recommendation to the full ACNW Board, which will make the final decision on the application. Should the ACNW Board grant approval, it will direct the CSD to use information provided in the application along with additional necessary information to submit a Change in Authorizer request on behalf of the school to MDE for final approval.

Submission of Application

An email containing an electronic version of the application must be **received** by ACNW by the designated deadline. Applicants must send an electronic copy of the application including all attachments in either Microsoft Word or PDF versions via e-mail to admin@auduboncharterschools.org.

Application Format and Organization

- 8 ½" × 11" page orientation
- 0.5-1" margins on all sides
- 11-12 point font
- Page numbers and name of school in footer on each page
- Total page limit is 45 pages. Page limits do not apply to required attachments. Suggested page length of each section is specified in the guidelines below. Please limit attachments to those that are requested.

Required Attachments

- Articles of Incorporation
- Bylaws
- Conflict of interest policy
- Lottery policy and process
- Board contact list
- Current staff list and positions (including file folder numbers for licensed staff)
- Current Organizational Chart (if not included in the application narrative)
- Job descriptions for administrative, supervisory, and instructional leadership positions
- Current school year calendar
- Current school day schedule
- Most recent financial statements including the approved budget for the current year
- Next fiscal year budget, including basic assumptions (such as enrollment)
- The three most recent financial audits
- The most recent annual report
- Current strategic plan, if the school has one
- Staff handbook
- Student/Parent Handbook
- The current charter contract
- The school's most recent evaluation from its current authorizer
- The school's management agreement or other comprehensive service agreement (if applicable)

Audubon Center of the North Woods Notice of Intent to Submit Change of Authorizer Application

An applicant must submit a Notice of Intent to Apply (NOI) to ACNW in order for a complete application to be considered. The NOI will outline the history, vision, mission, educational approach, successes, challenges, and leadership of the school. The NOI must be submitted via e-mail to admin@auduboncharterschools.org. Applicants must use the NOI template below. The NOI can be no more than six (6) pages in length (including the cover sheet).

Name of school:	
Name and title of primary contact person:	
Email:	
Phone:	
Mailing address:	

Names, roles, and current employment of all current board members (add lines as needed):

Full Name	Current Job Title and Employer	Position on the Board

Names and roles of all persons in leadership positions at the school (add lines as needed):

Full Name	Position at the school

Grade levels currently served by the school:	
Number of students currently served by the school:	
Does the school contract with a charter management organization or educational management organization for school management or operation? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	If yes, identify the charter management organization:

Items to address in the Notice of Intent:

1. Provide a description of the school including a brief history of the school.
2. Describe the unique characteristics this school provides to students that distinguish it relative to other education options available to students in the area.
3. Explain why the school seeks to be authorized by the Audubon Center of the North Woods.
4. Describe how the school integrates (or will integrate) environmental education and sustainability values and strategies into the educational program and operations of the school.
5. Briefly summarize the school's academic performance for at least the past three years.
6. Briefly summarize the school's financial performance for at least the past three years.
7. Summarize the successes and challenges experienced by the school in the past two to three years, including any major operational or compliance issues faced by the school
8. (Optional) Provide any other information you deem useful for this Notice of Intent. Do not exceed the six (6) page limit.

Board members present at the meeting at which this Notice of Intent was approved must sign below (add additional lines as necessary).

*By our signatures below, we affirm that this Notice of Intent to submit a change of authorizer application was approved by majority vote of the board in public session on **DATE**.*

Board Member Signature

Submit to admin@auduboncharterschools.org by the preferred submission date of June 1, but no later than the final deadline of September 1. If the deadline falls on a weekend or non-business day, the deadline moves to the following business day. An NOI received after the deadline may result in disqualification.

Board Chair Signature

School Leader Signature

Audubon Center of the North Woods Change of Authorizer Application Cover Page

Name of school:	
Name and title of primary contact person:	
Email:	
Phone:	
Mailing address:	

Names, roles, and current employment of all current board members (add lines as needed):

Full Name	Current Job Title and Employer	Position on the Board

Names and roles of all persons in leadership positions at the school (add lines as needed):

Full Name	Position at the school

Grade levels currently served by the school:	
Number of students currently served by the school:	
Does the school contract with a charter management organization or educational management organization for school management or operation? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	If yes, identify the charter management organization:

Board members present at the meeting at which this application was approved must sign below (add additional lines as necessary).

*By our signatures below, we affirm that this change of authorizer application was approved by majority vote of the board in public session on **DATE**.*

Board Member Signature

Submit to admin@auduboncharterschools.org by the preferred submission date of September 1, but no later than the final deadline of November 1. If the deadline falls on a weekend or non-business day, the deadline moves to the following business day. An application received after the deadline may result in disqualification.

By approval and submission of this application, the school agrees to the terms of the base charter contract (no exhibits) without modification. The base charter contract is available on the [ACNW website](#).

Board Chair Signature

School Leader Signature

Audubon Center of the North Woods Change of Authorizer Application

Directly address each section below that is required for your transfer request as indicated by ACNW's response to the school's Notice of Intent to Submit Change of Authorizer Application. Responses should be concise and comprehensive.

Part A. School Summary (1-2 pages)

1. Provide a description of the school including a brief history of the school.
2. Describe the unique characteristics this school provides to students that distinguish it relative to other education options available to students in the area.
3. Explain why the school is seeking to be authorized by the Audubon Center of the North Woods.
4. Indicate whether you have submitted or will submit a substantially similar application to another authorizer for a change in authorizer request. If so, provide the name of the authorizer, the date (or intended date) of submission, and the status of the application.

Part B. Vision and Mission (2-3 pages)

1. State the vision of the school. This should be a clear, concise, and compelling vision statement that articulates the long-term change you hope to see as a result of the school's success.
2. State the mission of the school. This should be a clear, concise, and compelling mission statement that articulates the school's purpose or desired results, and how it plans to achieve the desired results.
3. Describe how the school evaluates whether its mission is being accomplished and its vision realized.
4. Describe how the school utilizes (or will utilize) environmental education values and strategies to fulfill its vision and mission. Explain how your mission and vision aligns with the mission and vision of ACNW.

Part C. Need and Enrollment (1-2 pages)

1. Provide enrollment history by grade level for the past five years for the school. Include information on demographics and special populations.
2. As appropriate, discuss any challenges meeting enrollment targets and how the school has addressed or will address these challenges.
3. Provide information on the school's enrollment projections by grade level for the next three years.

Part D. Purpose (2-3 pages)

As articulated in MN Stat. 124E.01, Subd. 1, the primary purpose of a charter school is to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement.

1. Describe how the school meets the primary purpose of a charter school as defined in statute, how this aligns to the school's mission and vision, and how the school reports on its progress towards meeting this purpose.

As articulated in MN Stat. 124E.01, Subd. 1, additional purposes include to:

- (1) increase learning opportunities for all pupils;
 - (2) encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
 - (3) measure learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes;
 - (4) establish new forms of accountability for schools; and
 - (5) create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site.
2. Identify the additional purpose(s) that the charter school meets. Describe how the school meets the identified purpose(s), how the identified purpose(s) align(s) to the school's mission and vision, and how the school reports on its progress towards meeting the identified purpose(s).

Part E. Goals, Student Performance, and Evaluation Plan (4-6 pages)

1. Outline the school's current contractual goals and report on the school's progress towards meeting those goals.
2. Include additional information about school or student academic and non-academic performance that provides a complete picture of the school's performance.
3. Describe how the school uses assessment data to monitor student achievement and progress towards meeting goals and affect teaching and learning to improve student achievement.
4. Describe how the school will assess students' progress in demonstrating the awareness, knowledge, skills, and attitudes to work individually and collectively toward sustaining a healthy natural environment.

Part F. Educational Program (6-9 pages)

1. Describe the guiding educational philosophy of the charter school.
2. Describe the key aspects of the school culture that promote student academic achievement and social/emotional wellness.
3. Describe the educational program, including instructional methodology, curricula, and instructional techniques. Describe how the program is designed to achieve the desired outcomes for the student body. Include information about the major subject areas of reading, math, science, and social studies. Identify how the education program is designed to engage students in ways that are culturally and linguistically appropriate, responsive, and relevant. In addition, describe how students receive a comprehensive education that includes but is not limited to the arts, physical education, 21st century skills, and social/emotional/physical wellness. Include information about alignment to Minnesota Academic Standards.
4. Describe how the school offers both remediation and acceleration where appropriate based on student need.

5. *Special Education*: Describe how the school provides access to students with disabilities to a free appropriate education in the least restrictive environment in compliance with all laws.
 - a. Describe the school's Child Find Process.
 - b. Describe the methods and strategies for serving students with disabilities, including: kinds and types of services provided directly by the school, distinguished from services provided by third-party contracts; the personnel the school devotes to special education and their associated administrative responsibilities; how the school assesses/reviews/revises and implements IEPs; and how the school provides accommodations for students.
6. Students with *Limited English Proficiency*: Provide a description of the program design, methods, and strategies for serving students who are English Learners (ELs). Include identification processes, monitoring, instructional strategies, assessment, professional development of staff, exit criteria, and staffing.
7. Describe the instructional leadership structure at the school.
8. Describe how the school provides teacher professional development. Include how the quality of instruction is monitored and improved.
9. Describe how environmental education is (or will be) integrated into the core curricula or used as an integrating theme across the curriculum. Include a description of how environmental education is (or will be) used as a strategy to teach about the environment (concepts related directly to the natural environment), with the environment (hands-on or interdisciplinary methods using real-life materials, objects, or situations), or in the environment (place-based and/or experiential learning opportunities outside the classroom). Describe how the school engages (or will engage) students in nature-focused outdoor experiences that enhance in-classroom learning. In addition, describe the plan for providing professional development to staff in support of this approach.
10. Describe the skills and experiences of the school's educational staff to efficiently and effectively carry out the educational program model. Include the school's approach to recruiting, training, and retaining high quality staff.
11. State whether the school offers or intends to offer any single-sex programming (classrooms, advisories, etc.). If so, describe how the school will ensure compliance with [Title IX](#) requirements.
12. If the school offers early childhood health and developmental screening, an instructional preschool program, and/or an instructional prekindergarten program, describe the program(s) including the date(s) of official recognition from MDE.
13. If the school provides any out-of-school time programs, describe those programs.

Part G. Governance, Management, and Administration (4-6 pages)

1. Describe the management and leadership structure at the school, including whether the school has a management or other comprehensive service agreement/contract. Include a rationale for the management and leadership structure.
 - a. Provide an Organizational Chart (either in the application narrative or as an attachment).
 - b. If applicable, provide a copy of the school's fully-executed management agreement or other comprehensive service agreement (as an attachment).

2. Describe the level of authority the governing board conveys to the school's administrator/leader or administrative/leadership team. Include a description of the relationships and separation of duties between the Board of Directors and the School Leadership.
3. Describe the qualifications for all persons that hold administrative, supervisory, or instructional leadership roles at the school. (Provide job descriptions for these positions as an attachment.)
4. Describe the evaluation process for all persons that hold administrative, supervisory, or instructional leadership roles at the school.
5. Describe how the school ensures initial and ongoing training of board members. Include how the school brings on new board members.
6. Explain how the governing board creates and adopts board policies.
7. Outline the school's recent successes and challenges related to governance, management, and administration.

Part H. Financial Management (2-3 pages)

1. Describe the process the school uses to do the following, highlighting the role of the board and school administration:
 - a. Develop and approve the annual budget;
 - b. Monitor the school's expenditures and revenues in relation to the budget;
 - c. Develop and implement appropriate financial policies and practices, including but not limited to purchasing, accounting, and payroll; and
 - d. Maintain strong internal controls.
2. Outline the school's recent successes and challenges related to financial management and health.
3. Provide the most recent current year financial statements for the school which include the approved budget with enrollment assumptions (as an attachment).
4. Provide a projected budget for the next fiscal year including basic assumptions (as an attachment).

Part I. Operations (2-4 pages)

Facilities

1. Describe the school's current facilities. Include information on building capacity and any plans for changes to facilities.
2. Describe how the school facility supports (or can support) implementation of environmental education curriculum and environmentally sustainable practices.

Transportation

3. Describe the school's transportation arrangements.

Food Service

4. Describe the school's food service program.

Environmental Sustainability

5. Describe how the school's purchasing choices and operational decision-making reflect (or will reflect) a commitment to environmental sustainability and how the school implements waste reduction and recycling programs.

Health Services

6. Describe the school's approach to providing required health services.

Student Discipline

7. Describe the school's discipline policy and practices. Provide the Student/Parent Handbook (as an attachment).

Community and Parent Involvement

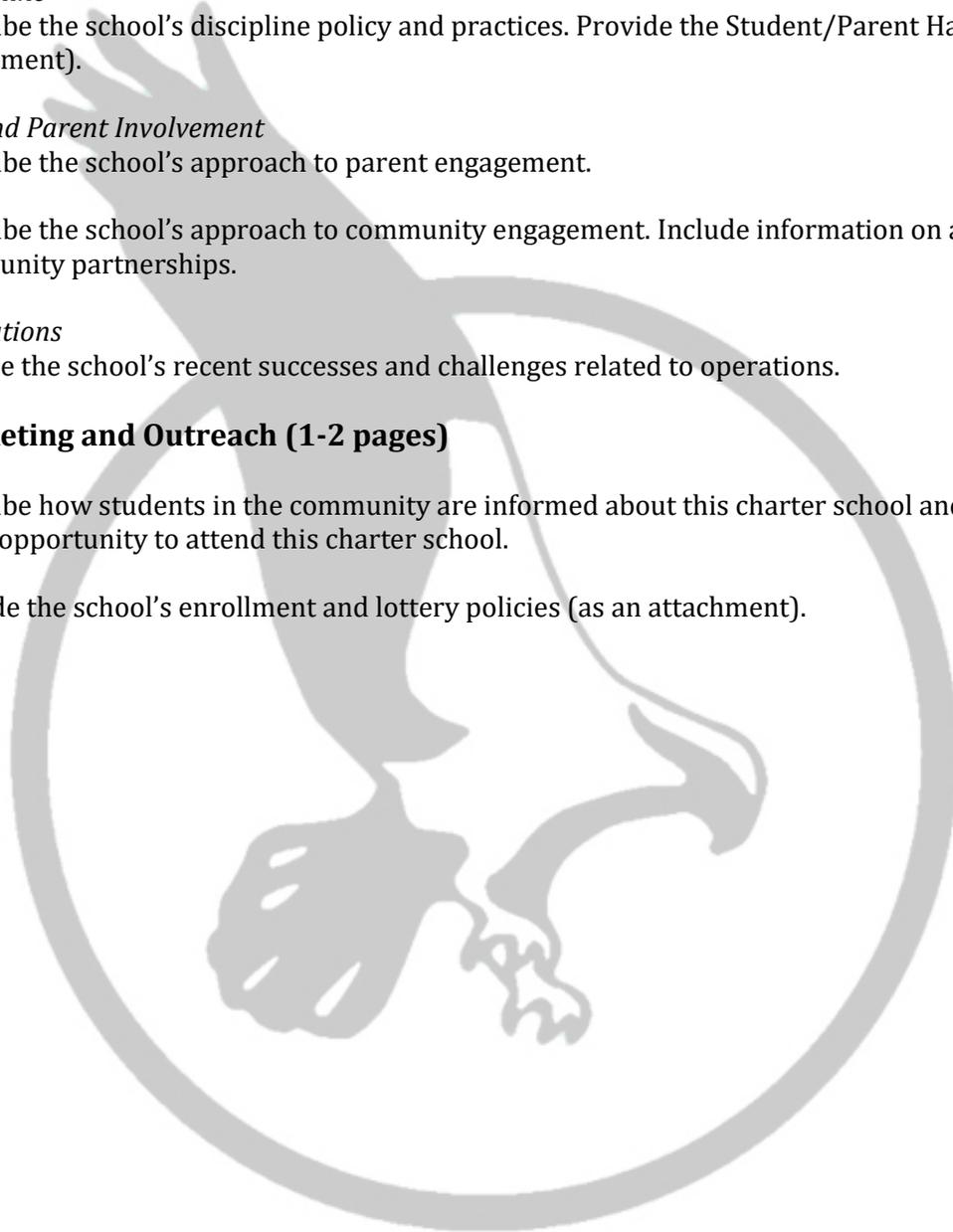
8. Describe the school's approach to parent engagement.
9. Describe the school's approach to community engagement. Include information on any significant community partnerships.

General Operations

10. Outline the school's recent successes and challenges related to operations.

Part J. Marketing and Outreach (1-2 pages)

1. Describe how students in the community are informed about this charter school and are given an equal opportunity to attend this charter school.
2. Provide the school's enrollment and lottery policies (as an attachment).



**Audubon Center of the North Woods
Notice of Intent to Submit Change of Authorizer Application
Review Rubric**

Upon receipt of the Notice of Intent to Submit Change of Authorizer Application (NOI) by a school, ACNW Charter School Division staff will review the NOI and other information available to ACNW to determine whether to invite the school to submit a full application. Should the school not meet the required threshold in any area below, it will not be invited to submit a full application.

Performance Area	The school does not meet this threshold. The school will not be invited to submit a full application.	The school must provide additional information in the full application.	The school meets this threshold. No additional information is needed in the full application.
Academic: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school does NOT have a designation of “Focus” or “Priority,” or if it does, the school has provided compelling evidence of improving academic achievement and growth. • The school demonstrates that it meets the statutory purpose of improving all pupil learning and all student achievement. 			
Environmental Education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACNW has evidence of current practices or the intent to implement practices consistent with ACNW expectations for environmental education. 			
Financial: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school is NOT in statutory operating debt, or if it is, the school has provided compelling evidence of improved financial health. • The school demonstrates strong financial health and management. 			
Operations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACNW has evidence that school operations are effective, the school is well-governed, and has no major compliance issues. 			