

Audubon Center of the North Woods Expansion & Replication Ready-to-Open Guide

The Audubon Center of the North Woods (ACNW) is committed to working with approved charter schools to replicate or expand schools that align with ACNW's vision: 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. The period prior to implementing an expansion or replication is critical in laying the foundation for future school success. As such, ACNW has established a series of benchmarks and required actions to ensure key pieces are in place prior to opening. These indicators are aligned with ACNW's environmental education, financial, and operations performance frameworks for operating schools.

As the expansion or replication gets closer to its opening date, the school will use its checklist in consultation with ACNW to help determine readiness to open. If the school is unable to meet one or more of the required conditions, it will submit a plan detailing how the condition will be accomplished by July 1. **The planning year culminates in a final Ready-to-Open (RTO) meeting approximately 12 weeks prior to the start of the expansion or replication's first operational year (and typically no later than June 1).**

The RTO meeting will allow the school to demonstrate work that has been done and will also serve as a checkpoint to ensure that the RTO benchmarks have been met. In the event that the school is unable to satisfy the RTO benchmarks, the school must provide a plan to fulfill the RTO requirements in a timely fashion or postpone the expansion or replication by one year.

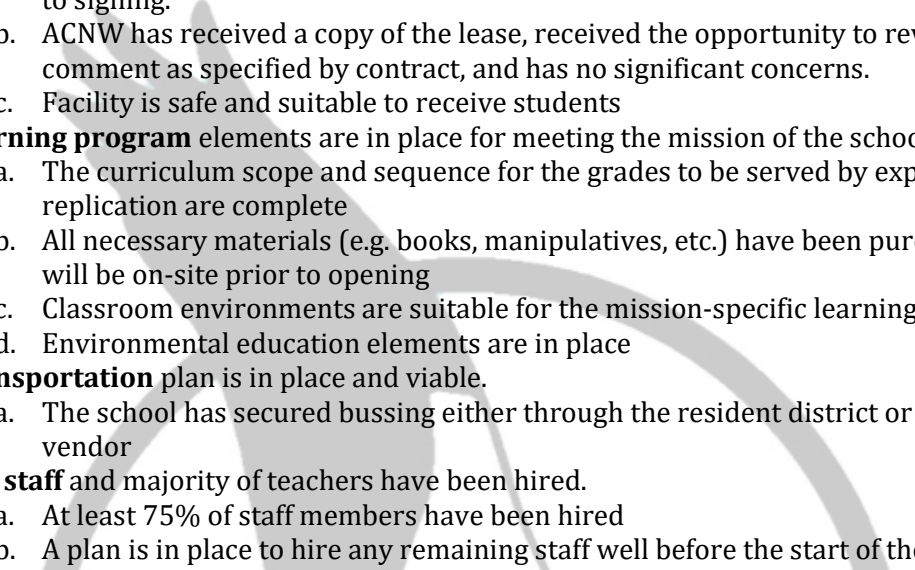
Start-Up Process

Prior to the RTO meeting, oversight for ACNW-approved expansions and replications is provided via a detailed checklist designed to walk schools through the processes of developing their learning program for the new grade levels or site, reaching out to potential students, securing facilities, creating additional or revising existing policies (as appropriate), and ensuring compliance with the law. The checklist is intended to provide guidance on completing the tasks necessary to fulfill ACNW's requirements for opening an expansion or replication. It is not an exhaustive list and the timeline is recommended – some tasks may be added or removed and the timing of some items changed depending on the specific needs of your school. Progress in completing checklist activities is monitored by ACNW staff through phone meetings held with school leadership (at least the director and / or board chair) on at least a monthly basis. The checklist encompasses the RTO benchmarks as well as numerous other tasks that require completion during the pre-operational period. Ultimately it is the school's responsibility to ensure it is ready to open and ACNW will work with the school to determine whether it meets the Ready-to-Open requirements.

Ready to Open Benchmarks

The RTO benchmarks consist of eight areas of critical importance that are aligned with the detailed checklist used during the pre-operational period. In order to open, the school must demonstrate its satisfaction of each area. The benchmarks are as follows, see Appendix A for a full description of each item and required documentation:

- 1) **Enrollment** is sufficient to allow for financial viability and programmatic integrity.

- 
- a. Confirmed enrollment is at or above the minimum number acceptable per the school's contingency budget for lowest possible operating enrollment
 - 2) **Board governance** is competent and compliant with law.
 - a. Necessary board policies, procedures, and bylaws are in place and approved by the board
 - b. Appropriate insurance is in place
 - 3) **Appropriate school site** has been acquired and the lease signed.
 - a. The school had the lease reviewed by legal counsel or other relevant expertise prior to signing.
 - b. ACNW has received a copy of the lease, received the opportunity to review and comment as specified by contract, and has no significant concerns.
 - c. Facility is safe and suitable to receive students
 - 4) **Learning program** elements are in place for meeting the mission of the school.
 - a. The curriculum scope and sequence for the grades to be served by expansion or replication are complete
 - b. All necessary materials (e.g. books, manipulatives, etc.) have been purchased and will be on-site prior to opening
 - c. Classroom environments are suitable for the mission-specific learning program.
 - d. Environmental education elements are in place
 - 5) **Transportation** plan is in place and viable.
 - a. The school has secured bussing either through the resident district or an alternative vendor
 - 6) **Key staff** and majority of teachers have been hired.
 - a. At least 75% of staff members have been hired
 - b. A plan is in place to hire any remaining staff well before the start of the year

Ready to Open Meeting

Attendees

The following persons must attend the RTO meeting.

- Board chair
- Financial manager
- School leader
- Operations manager/Start-up Coordinator
- ACNW representatives

Additional board members are welcome to attend; however, please be aware of Open Meeting Law requirements with respect to quorum. Representatives from MDE may be invited to attend and participate in the meeting.

Location and format

The RTO meeting will be held at the school site and will commence with a brief tour of the school facility followed by an opportunity for the school to demonstrate how each benchmark has been satisfied. The final portion of the meeting will be reserved for discussion of the school's progress. A RTO meeting will typically take 2-3 hours, but may require additional time if the school is facing numerous or complex issues.

Final Decision

ACNW will issue a Final Determination of Readiness to Open within two weeks of the RTO meeting. Schools unable to satisfy all criteria will be required to provide a plan to fulfill the RTO requirements in a timely fashion.

ACNW reserves the right to delay the charter expansion or replication at the time of the Final Determination if it is clear that significant deficiencies exist that lead ACNW to question the viability of the program. Those deficiencies will be outlined in the Final Determination correspondence.



Appendix A
Ready to Open Rubric

Benchmark	Criteria	Documentation	Submission Timeline
1) Enrollment is sufficient to allow for financial viability and programmatic integrity.	a. Enrollment is at or above the minimum number acceptable per the school’s contingency budget for lowest possible operating enrollment.	a. Current draft budget being considered by the board for upcoming school year	a. Submit to ACNW at least two weeks prior to RTO meeting.
		b. Current enrollment figures (based on families who have completely filled out enrollment forms—those who have indicated interest but have not formally enrolled may not be counted). Please supply roster information so that enrollment can be confirmed.	b. Submit to ACNW at least two weeks prior to RTO meeting. Bring copies of most updated figures to RTO meeting if changes have occurred.
2) Board governance is competent and compliant with law.	a. Necessary board policies, procedures, are in place and have been approved by the board.	a. Revised existing or newly created policies, and board meeting minutes reflecting approval of those policies	a. Submit to ACNW at least two weeks prior to RTO meeting
	b. Necessary insurance is in place	b. Insurance policy	b. Submit to ACNW at least two weeks prior to RTO meeting
3) Appropriate School Site acquired/Lease signed	a. ACNW possesses a copy of the lease, received the opportunity to review and comment as specified by contract, and has no significant concerns.	a. Signed lease ACNW observation of site and discussion of improvements completed and underway.	a. Submit to ACNW at least two weeks prior to RTO meeting.
	b. Facility is safe and ready to receive students.	b. Certificate of Occupancy and Fire Inspection Report are included in Lease Aid Application.	b. No later than August 31
	c. Lease aid application submitted to MDE.	c. Submit Lease Aid Application to ACNW via Epicenter.	c. No later than August 31

4) Learning program elements are in place for meeting the mission of the school.	a. The curriculum scope and sequence for the grades to be served by the expansion are complete.	a. Curriculum scope and sequence document.	a. Submit to ACNW at least two weeks prior to RTO meeting
	b. School has a plan for purchasing all necessary materials (i.e.: books, manipulatives, etc.) and materials will be onsite prior to opening.	b. List what has been procured to date and what will be purchased prior to the start of the school year, and a timeline for procurement	b. Submit to ACNW at least two weeks prior to RTO meeting
	c. Classroom environments appear safe and suitable for the mission-specific learning program.	c. ACNW will observe during RTO meeting.	c. N/A
	d. Environmental Literacy Plan (ELP) is developed.	d. Submit a first draft of the Environmental Literacy Plan for expanded grade levels or new site.	d. Submit to ACNW by June 30.
	e. Teacher professional development plan is developed.	e. Outline or narrative description of teacher professional development plan.	e. Submit to ACNW at least two weeks prior to RTO meeting
5) Transportation plan is in place (and viable).	a. The school has secured bussing either through the resident district or an alternative vendor.	a. Signed contract with vendor or resident school district agreement verification (or if using Metro Transit a clear plan in place).	a. Submit to ACNW at least two weeks prior to RTO meeting
6) Key staff and majority of teachers have been hired.	a. At least 75% of staff members have been hired.	a. Complete teacher licensure verification form attached as Appendix B.	a. Submit to ACNW at least two weeks prior to RTO meeting
	b. Plans are underway to hire any remaining staff well before the start of the year.	Include an all-staff listing with titles and positions remaining vacant	

Appendix B
Teacher Licensure Verification

Teacher Name	File Folder No.	Subject or Specialty	Courses Taught	Grades(s) Taught	License Details
Sally Sample	426777	Math	Algebra I, Geometry	6-7	El-Ed K-6 and Math 5-8 (expires 6/30/2021)