



Building Your Team

Mainstream Applicants (Wave 15)

Private & Confidential

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1. Introduction

This resource has been designed to support mainstream free school proposers with building their team in preparation for their application to the Department for Education (DfE).

This document can be used by both existing academy trusts and other applicants for guidance. We are aware that building your team will be a different process for existing academy trusts, therefore we have separated this document into various sections, relevant to different types of applicants.

2. Existing Academy Trusts

Writing a successful free school application can take a significant amount of time, and involves several phases of planning, drafting, refining and reviewing. It is therefore important that you have a dedicated team within your trust to take ownership for different sections of the application.

A project lead should be nominated to oversee the application, pull together the various sections, and lead on the administrative elements of submitting the bid. If you are working with a Premier Advisory Group advisor, they should also be the main point of contact. Depending on the size and structure of your trust, the project lead could be any of:

- Executive Head: If you are in a small trust, the Executive Headteacher may be best placed to fulfil this role.
- Headteacher: Often the headteacher of an existing trust school will act as the project lead, particularly if you are replicating an existing school within your trust.
- Head of Development/Growth or equivalent: Use the designate growth member of your team to benefit from their expertise.

This resource breaks down which team members you should consider involving for each section of the application.

2.1 Need (section B)

At least one staff member should take the lead on researching and developing the need case; this will typically be the project lead. Support may be given by other administrative staff, particularly for online research. As part of section B, you will be expected to meet with the local authority; this should be led by a senior member of the trust.

2.2 Vision (section C)

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or Executive Headteacher of the trust should have input into this section, even if it is written by another member of staff. This section should explain how the free school will fit in with the wider vision and ethos of your trust, as well as provide an overview of the trust's growth strategy. The CEO/Executive Headteacher will be able to articulate this in line with other trust documentation.

2.3 Education plan (section D)

Your education plan will involve a number of team members. It is beneficial to engage with Heads of Departments or Subject Leaders. You may also want to involve any staff who will be working alongside you, ensure your curriculum is accurately representing your vision and predicted cohort.

2.4 Capacity (section E)

The capacity section is largely operational, so you will want a team member with adequate experience of designing, managing and delivering staffing and curriculum plans to write this. If you have Deputy Headteachers with responsibility for curriculum and/or assessment, or Curriculum Directors within your trust, they may want to provide oversight for this section to ensure the plans align with your current offer.

If you are proposing a new type of provision (compared to other schools in your trust), you must have evidence of expertise in this type of provision within your team. For instance, if you are a mainstream trust proposing a special school, the team member with SEN experience should lead on the curriculum and assessment plans. If you do not have this experience within the team, you must seek it externally; e.g., through a partnership.

Your finance lead (usually Chief Financial Officer or equivalent) should review the staffing plans to ensure they align with your financial template.

2.5 Finance (Section F)

The Chief Financial Officer should lead on this section, though in larger trusts, the financial template may be delegated to more junior members of the finance team. You will be required to provide a summary of the trust's financial health and outline the central services covered by the school's income.

2.6 Interview

If you are invited to an interview with the Department for Education or Local Authority, you will usually be allowed to bring up to five people. Ideally, this should include:

- the CEO/Executive Head of the trust
- the Chair of Trustees
- Chief Financial Officer or equivalent

- Any other core team members who have supported the application – often the head of an existing school from the trust, and in larger trusts, any role responsible for development or similar.

2.7 Pre-opening

The pre-opening phase will require a number of additional team members with knowledge of areas such as:

- Project management
- Marketing and communications
- Estates and capital projects

You may have this support in-house, or you can procure additional expertise using the Project Development Grant provided by the DfE. Speak to your PAG Advisor to find out how PAG and our partners may be able to assist.

3. Other applicants

If you are not an existing academy trust, you will need to ensure your team has the requisite skills and capacity to develop an application, set up a new school and run it effectively.

3.1 Areas of expertise required.

The three key areas of expertise needed to put the application form together are as follows:

- **Education:** you will need expertise in the phase and type of school that you are proposing (secondary/primary/alternative provision/special etc.). The Department for Education will expect to see experience in the state sector and a proven track record in school leadership – i.e., a current or former headteacher of a Good or Outstanding state school. It will also be important to demonstrate experience of improving outcomes for young people of a similar demographic to the pupils who will be attending the free school.
- **Finance:** You will be expected to put together a detailed financial plan for the school and will require someone with expertise of managing academy finance, ideally at Chief Financial Officer (CFO) level. If you are planning to establish a new trust, you should familiarise yourself with the guidance around the complex duties and responsibilities of a CFO.
- **Governance:** You will be required to describe your governance structures and processes as part of your application, so if you plan to establish a new trust, you will need experience and high-level knowledge of academy trust governance. This could be a former Chair of Trustees.

The DfE's How to Apply Guide lists a number of other skills that you will be required to fill during the pre-opening phase; however, the more of these you are able to list in your application, the more confidence your assessors will have in your ability to put together a credible pre-opening team. Remember that the free school process is competitive, and you will be bidding against academy trusts with in-house experience.

Other areas of expertise include:

- Marketing and communications
- HR
- Safeguarding; health and safety

- Estates and capital projects
- IT

You should be aware that there is no funding available from the Department to cover the costs of applying for a free school. While some funding is available during pre-opening, this will not be sufficient to cover full-time salaries for the free school team. Therefore, all team members will be required to support the project on a voluntary basis.

If you would like further information regarding building your team, please get in touch with one of our advisors at Create: Schools.