**Program Description: RQS DC**

**Overview:** Replicating Quality Schools (RQS) is an intense training program designed for operators of high-performing charter schools that are interested in growing into networks of schools or CMOs (small or large). The program, which originated out of the New York City Charter School Center and is now independently operated by Ford Research & Solutions, exposes participants to best practices related to strategic planning for growth, replication, and expansion, and to business plans and financial models that are acceptable to (and often required by) philanthropy and other sources of funding and investment capital. Program faculty include the founders, leadership, management, and other officials of high-performing CMOs (and school networks) operating throughout the United States, as well as national foundations supporting charter schools and education reform initiatives, representatives of highly regarded charter school authorizers, and other charter school sector stakeholders, including facilities-specific capital providers. As of this writing, RQS has been offered five times: twice in New York City, once in New Orleans, and twice in Tennessee (for Memphis and Nashville participants).

**Program Components**: RQS is generally offered over a period eight to nine months and consists of four components:

1. *Growth and Replication Readiness Self-Assessments* completed by all identified and proposed program participants, followed by interviews conducted by RQS program staff and representatives of local partners (Friends of Choice In Urban Schools (FOCUS)). Self-Assessments and interviews are critical features of the program because they consist of needs assessments or needs verification that will shape the program’s content and sequence, and ensure important market-specific planning issues are addressed during program training. Ideally, Self-Assessments and interviews will occur no less than two months prior to the beginning of the program’s direct training.
2. *Direct training* over a three-month period consisting of three (3) two-day sessions, generally occurring on weekends (a full day Friday, 2/3 day on Saturday). Two previous cohorts have included four weekend training sessions. Flexibility is built into the program as to delivery dates and the number of training sessions, a determination that is made in conjunction with local partners.
3. *Required “Homework” and “Pre-work”* prior to training sessions. Homework is aligned to the program’s training sequence and to standard Business Plan format and content expectations. Pre-work is tied directly to specific training topics. Participants that complete homework on a timely basis should have 80% or more of the basic requirements of a fully realized Business Plan committed to paper upon the conclusion of direct training sessions.
4. *Presentation of Business Plans and financial models* to a select group of program faculty and/or other charter school sector stakeholders. These presentations generally occur three to four months after the final training session, and include detailed feedback to Program participants.

During the period of time in which training sessions are offered, RQS faculty are available before, between, and after sessions to provide support and limited forms of technical assistance. Following the completion of the direct training, faculty are also available to provide more concerted forms of technical assistance on a separate fee basis.

**Program Expectations**: Historically, school operators participating in the RQS program have been classified in one of the following ways (classifications are determined in conjunction with local partners):

* *Full Participants* are typically cohort members who are *required/expected* to file for, and successfully be approved for, at least one school expansion, a school replication, or opening a new school model within one year of graduating from the program. (Graduation is defined as subsequent to participants’ presentation of final business plans and financial models)*.*
* *Auditors* are *expected* to grow, expand, or replicate within a reasonable period of time (though no hard timeframes have been established, often because such participants generally enter the program with known capacity or other needs, or with two or fewer years of prior operations).
* *Observers* generally consist of operators from elsewhere than the market in which the program is being offered (and/or representatives of philanthropy). For example, the most recent cohort in Tennessee included observers from Las Vegas and Phoenix/Tucson; the previous cohort in NYC included observers from Washington, DC and New Jersey.

Notwithstanding the requirements/expectations indicated above, particularly for full participants, the program is not absolute about participants, including graduates, continuing to pursue growth into a network or CMO. In short, if participation in RQS enables one or more participants to realize they are not ready to grow/replicate, or it is not in their organizational DNA, that is an acceptable outcome. Overall, the purpose of the program is to help, to the extent possible, participants determine, confirm, and/or realize their visions going forward.