CGMI · Charter Governance Maturity & Integration

Research Foundation & Design Rationale

Whitepaper

How CGMI synthesizes global maturity modeling, national accountability standards, and practitioner expertise into a purpose-built governance framework for charter schools.

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1 The Governance Gap

Charter schools are public institutions governed by volunteer boards, yet no sector-specific governance maturity framework has existed. This is not for lack of governance models in adjacent fields — corporate governance, nonprofit management, and software process improvement all have well-established maturity frameworks. The gap is specific to charter school governance, where the intersection of public accountability, authorizer oversight, volunteer board dynamics, and federal grant requirements creates a unique governance context that no existing model addresses.

Existing board assessment tools in the charter sector rely on self-reported intentions rather than behavioral evidence. They produce a single score from a survey rather than measuring governance across independent domains. None map cleanly to authorizer accountability expectations or federal grant program rubrics. And none provide a staged maturity progression with cumulative gate requirements that schools can use as a continuous improvement roadmap.

CGMI was designed to fill this gap. Rather than adopting any single existing model, the framework integrates best-in-class practices from six research domains into a purpose-built framework for charter school governance. Every domain, practice area, and gate requirement reflects real-world governance patterns validated by authorizers, school administrators, board members, and governance researchers.

2 Research Methodology

CGMI is built on a multi-layered research foundation that synthesizes six categories of source material. The goal was not to copy any single model but to identify the structural elements, measurement approaches, and governance principles that are most applicable to charter school board governance — and to adapt them into a coherent, purpose-built framework.

Global maturity modeling

Internationally recognized staged maturity methodologies used across industries — adapting the concept of progressive, gate-based capability levels to the specific context of charter school governance.

National charter accountability standards

Best practices from national charter school performance frameworks and authorizer accountability standards, ensuring CGMI ratings are legible to the organizations that oversee charter schools.

State-level governance requirements

Governance expectations from state-level charter oversight bodies, including operational frameworks, compliance standards, and renewal criteria that vary by jurisdiction.

Nonprofit board governance research

Peer-reviewed research on nonprofit board effectiveness, fiduciary responsibility, and governance lifecycle, informing the domain structure — particularly board composition, succession planning, and financial oversight.

Federal grant program rubrics

Federal Charter Schools Program criteria for governance quality, financial sustainability, and community accountability, mapped into CGMI domains so schools can use appraisal evidence in grant applications.

Practitioner-driven lessons learned

Operational governance lessons from charter school administrators, board chairs, authorizer staff, and governance consultants — ensuring criteria are grounded in what actually predicts governance quality, not theoretical ideals.

3 Source Framework Analysis

Six source frameworks were analyzed in depth to inform CGMI's design. For each framework, this section documents the key insights extracted and their specific applicability to charter school governance maturity modeling.

3.1 CMMI (Carnegie Mellon / ISACA)

Foundation model

Key Insights

- → Five-level staged progression: Initial, Managed, Defined, Quantitatively Managed, Optimizing
- → Distinguishes between Capability Levels (per practice area) and Maturity Levels (organization-wide)
- → Organizations are appraised, not certified — appraisals produce a rating, not a pass/fail
- → Key principle: organizations do best focusing on a manageable number of practice areas at a time
- → SCAMPI appraisal method with three classes: Benchmark, Evaluation, and Sustainment
- → Each level builds on the prior — skipping levels is not feasible in practice
- → Process areas have five factors: goals, commitment, ability, measurement, and verification

Applicability to CGMI

The staged 5-level structure, appraisal methodology, and practice area framework are directly applicable. The key adaptation needed: CMMI is process-focused (how you do things); CGMI must also assess outcomes (what actually happens as a result).

3.2 NACSA Performance Framework (2023)

Charter school authorizer standard

Key Insights

- → Distinguishes Compliance standards (minimum legal requirements) from Quality standards (excellence)
- → Three performance domains: Academic, Financial, Organizational
- → Governance is a sub-component of Organizational performance
- → Authorizers evaluate governance through: board minutes, conflict of interest documentation, bylaw compliance, oversight of school leadership
- → Framework is designed to be adapted by each authorizer — not prescriptive
- → Performance frameworks are the accountability mechanism at the center of the charter/authorizer relationship

Applicability to CGMI

The Compliance vs. Quality distinction is critical — CGMI separates minimum legal compliance (Level 1–2 gates) from governance excellence (Level 3+ maturity). NACSA's framework shows what authorizers actually evaluate, which directly informs what a school-side model should measure.

3.3 Weaver Governance Maturity Model

General organizational governance

Key Insights

→ Six attributes measured independently: Board Structure, Oversight, Risk Management, Reporting, Accountability, Strategy

→ Five-level scale: Initial, Repeatable, Defined, Managed, Optimizing

→ Each attribute has level descriptors — specific criteria for each stage

→ Stacked model: requirements of each level must be met before advancing

→ Maturity driven by: organizational structure, age, industry regulation, size, stakeholder expectations

Applicability to CGMI

The multi-attribute model with independent level tracking per attribute is exactly the right structure for CGMI. A school can be at different levels in different domains simultaneously — this is more accurate than a single organizational rating.

3.4 KnowledgeLeader Nonprofit CMM

Existing nonprofit governance CMM

Key Insights

→ The only existing nonprofit-specific governance CMM — confirms the category exists but is underdeveloped

→ Covers: governance structure, board oversight, financial management, risk management, compliance

→ Simple 5-level structure without the depth or charter school specificity needed

→ Primarily a self-assessment checklist rather than an appraisal framework

Applicability to CGMI

Confirms CGMI is not creating a concept from scratch — it is creating the most rigorous and charter-school-specific version of something that exists in rudimentary form. The gap is the depth, the sector-specificity, and the appraisal methodology.

3.5 NC OCS Operational Performance Framework

Charter school operational standard

Key Insights

→ Five indicators: Governing in the Public Interest, Creating Great Places to Work, Student Rights, Education Program, Reporting

→ Governance evaluated through: board minutes, assurances of compliance, conflict of interest, oversight of management

→ Authorizers verify compliance through documentation analysis

→ Two-tier evaluation: Compliance (minimum) and Quality (exceeds minimum)

→ Framework identifies schools in or trending toward structural difficulty

Applicability to CGMI

Provides the regulatory floor that CGMI Level 1 must satisfy. Everything above Level 1 goes beyond what authorizers require — it represents governance excellence that schools voluntarily pursue.

3.6 Board Maturity Models (Umbrex / IIA Norway)

Corporate and institutional board frameworks

Key Insights

- → Maturity models emerged from CMMI and moved into board governance — well-established in corporate context
- → Key dimensions: board composition, strategic oversight, risk governance, information quality, decision rights, culture
- → Behavioral dependency is a key limitation — maturity scores must translate into behavioral change
- → External calibration needed to prevent self-assessment bias
- → Best used as continuous improvement tool, not one-off audit
- → Especially powerful for mission-critical nonprofits with significant stakeholder scrutiny

Applicability to CGMI

The behavioral dependency finding is critical for CGMI design — the model must assess what boards actually do, not just what policies exist. Platform-based data collection (meeting compliance records, training scores, engagement metrics) makes behavioral measurement possible in ways that survey-based models cannot achieve.

4 Synthesis: What CGMI Adopted from Each Source

No single source framework was adopted wholesale. CGMI selectively integrated the strongest structural elements from each source, adapting them to the specific governance context of charter school boards. The table below maps each CGMI design element to its source.

CGMI Design Element	Primary Source	Adaptation
5-level staged progression	CMMI	Level names changed from software process terminology to governance-specific language (Emerging through Exemplary)
Dual rating: overall level + capability profile	CMMI + Weaver	CMMI's Maturity Level vs. Capability Level distinction combined with Weaver's independent attribute tracking
5 governance domains	NACSA + NC OCS + Weaver	Domains derived from what authorizers actually evaluate (NACSA/NC OCS) structured as independent attributes (Weaver)
4 practice areas per domain	CMMI process areas	CMMI's 22 process areas distilled to 20 charter-specific practice areas organized within 5 domains
Cumulative gate requirements	CMMI + NC OCS	CMMI's stacked levels combined with NC OCS's compliance/quality distinction to create behavioral gates
Compliance vs. Quality separation	NACSA + NC OCS	Levels 1–2 map to compliance standards; Levels 3–5 map to quality and excellence standards
3-tier appraisal system	CMMI SCAMPI	CMMI's 3 appraisal classes (A/B/C) mapped to Certified/Guided/Self-Assessment with level caps per tier
Behavioral evidence standard	Umbrex / IIA Norway	The behavioral dependency finding drove the requirement for objective evidence over self-reported data
Authorizer legibility	NACSA + NC OCS	Domain structure and practice areas explicitly mapped to NACSA performance framework and CSP rubric sections
Continuous improvement model	CMMI + Umbrex	CMMI's optimizing philosophy combined with Umbrex's finding that maturity models work best as continuous tools

5 Key Design Decisions

Several significant design decisions were made during CGMI's development. Each decision was driven by the specific requirements of charter school governance and the lessons learned from the source framework analysis.

Why staged representation, not continuous

CGMI uses staged representation (like CMMI v1.3) rather than continuous. The overall maturity level is determined by the lowest domain score — a school cannot be Level 4 overall while Level 1 in any domain. This was a deliberate choice to force holistic governance improvement. In the charter context, a board with excellent financial oversight but no meeting compliance is not a mature governance body — the staged model reflects this reality.

Why five domains, not three or seven

Five domains emerged from the intersection of what authorizers evaluate (NACSA, NC OCS), what governance researchers measure (Weaver, Umbrex), and what practitioners report as the critical dimensions of board effectiveness. Three domains would collapse important distinctions (financial governance and compliance processes are fundamentally different activities). Seven or more would create measurement burden without proportional insight.

Why four practice areas per domain

Four practice areas per domain (20 total) provides sufficient granularity to identify specific governance gaps while remaining manageable for both self-assessment and formal appraisal. CMMI's 22 process areas validated that approximately 20 measurement units is the right scale for a comprehensive maturity model.

Why evidence-based rather than self-reported

Every prior governance assessment model identified in the research relies on self-reported data. The behavioral dependency finding from the Umbrex/IIA Norway research was unambiguous: maturity scores must assess what boards actually do, not what they say they do. CGMI was designed from the ground up to use objective evidence — meeting compliance records, training completion data, policy audit findings, financial metrics — as the basis for ratings.

Why three appraisal tiers with level caps

CMMI's three-class appraisal structure (Benchmark, Evaluation, Sustainment) maps directly to the charter governance context. However, CGMI adds level caps per tier: Self-Assessment is capped at Level 2, Guided Appraisal at Level 4, and only Certified Appraisal can award Level 5. This ensures that the highest ratings require the highest rigor — and creates a natural services ecosystem around the Certified Appraiser credential.

Why GMS becomes a gate at Level 3

At Levels 1–2, schools are focused on establishing basic compliance processes. A composite score is useful as a diagnostic but should not be a barrier to recognizing compliance-level governance. Starting at Level 3, the GMS becomes a formal gate requirement because quality governance requires demonstrated strength across all domains simultaneously. The threshold escalates: ≥ 70 at Level 3, ≥ 80 at Level 4, ≥ 90 at Level 5.

6 Structural Comparison: CGMI vs. CMMI

CGMI is explicitly inspired by CMMI but designed for a fundamentally different context. This table documents the structural parallels and the key adaptations.

Dimension	CMMI (ISACA)	CGMI	Key Difference
Number of levels	5 (Initial through Optimizing)	5 (Emerging through Exemplary)	Direct parallel — charter-specific language
Level progression	Sequential — cannot skip	Sequential — gates at each level	Same principle — governance builds incrementally
Organizational unit	Organization or division	Charter school board	More specific — measures board governance, not whole school
Practice areas	22 core process areas	5 domains × 4 PAs = 20	Comparable scope, domain structure matches charter governance
Level factors	Goals, commitment, ability, measurement, verification	Existence, consistency, documentation, measurement, improvement	Adapted for governance context
Appraisal types	Class A (Benchmark), B (Evaluation), C (Sustainment)	Certified, Guided, Self-Assessment	Direct structural parallel with level caps added
Appraiser role	Certified Lead Appraiser for Class A	CGMI Certified Appraiser for CA	CGMI certifies appraisers — creates services ecosystem
Rating output	Maturity Level or Capability Profile	Level Rating + Domain Capability Profile	Both options in every appraisal
Focus	Process capability and repeatability	Governance quality, behavioral evidence, regulatory compliance	CGMI adds outcome evidence (compliance rates, training scores, financial metrics)
Self-assessment	Not officially recognized	Tier 1 — continuous, built into platform	CGMI advantage — continuous data removes self-report bias
IP model	ISACA-owned, partner network	CGMI-owned, appraiser licensing	Same commercial model — services ecosystem

7 What Makes CGMI Different

Three fundamental attributes distinguish CGMI from every governance assessment model that preceded it. These are not incremental improvements — they represent structural differences in how governance is measured and why.

Charter-school-specific

No existing maturity model is built for the unique governance context of charter schools — public institution accountability, authorizer relationship, CSP grant requirements, Open Meetings Law compliance, volunteer board dynamics, charter renewal cycles, and the distinction between governance and management that is uniquely acute in charter schools where boards oversee a single school rather than a large institution. CGMI is built from this context up. Every domain, practice area, and gate requirement is specific to charter governance. The five domains were derived from what authorizers actually evaluate (NACSA, NC OCS) and what research identifies as the critical dimensions of charter board effectiveness.

Behavioral, not self-reported

All prior governance assessment models rely on self-assessment surveys. Boards rate themselves on a scale, and the results reflect intentions rather than actions. CGMI uses objective evidence as the basis for ratings: meeting compliance records (were notices posted on time?), training completion data (did members actually complete certification?), policy audit findings (are policies current and compliant?), financial metrics (was the audit completed? is the fund balance healthy?). This eliminates the primary flaw identified in the Umbrex/IIA Norway research: that maturity scores must translate into behavioral change, and self-reported data cannot verify whether that change has occurred.

Continuous + formal appraisal tiers

CMMI requires formal (expensive) appraisals. Traditional board assessments are one-time snapshots. CGMI provides three tiers: Self-Assessment for schools beginning their governance journey, Guided Appraisal for annual structured evaluation facilitated through governance platforms, and Certified Appraisal for formal human-appraised ratings. Three tiers for three budgets, three levels of rigor, and three stages of governance maturity. Level caps per tier ensure that the highest ratings require the highest evidentiary standard.

8 Research Foundation Summary

CGMI's research foundation is deliberately multi-layered. No single source provides a complete model for charter school governance maturity. The framework's strength comes from the synthesis: CMMI's proven staged architecture, NACSA's authorizer accountability lens, Weaver's independent domain measurement, the behavioral evidence standard from corporate board research, and the compliance/quality distinction embedded in charter authorizer frameworks.

The result is a framework that is structurally rigorous (inspired by CMMI), sector-specific (built for charter schools), behaviorally grounded (evidence-based, not self-reported), and practically actionable (three appraisal tiers, clear gate requirements, and an advancement path at every level).

Research Layer	Primary Sources	What It Contributed to CGMI
Global maturity modeling	CMMI (Carnegie Mellon / ISACA)	5-level staged architecture, practice area structure, appraisal methodology, appraiser certification model
National charter accountability	NACSA Performance Framework	Compliance vs. quality distinction, authorizer evaluation criteria, performance domain structure
State governance requirements	NC OCS Operational Framework	Regulatory floor for Level 1, compliance indicators, two-tier evaluation structure
Nonprofit board research	Weaver GMM, KnowledgeLeader CMM	Independent domain measurement, multi-attribute model, confirmation of category viability
Federal grant programs	CSP rubric sections	Domain-to-rubric mapping enabling appraisal evidence in grant applications
Practitioner expertise	Umbrex, IIA Norway, board research	Behavioral evidence standard, external calibration requirement, continuous improvement orientation

CGMI is published as an open specification with a machine-readable JSON schema, a structured public comment process for revisions, and a versioned changelog. For the full framework specification, visit www.cgmi.institute/framework.

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