

# 2026 NCHEP 15

## The 15<sup>th</sup> National Conference on Higher Education in Prison

 Hosted by the  
ALLIANCE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRISON

### Call for Proposals

The Alliance for Higher Education in Prison is excited to announce the Call for Proposals for the 15th National Conference on Higher Education in Prison, which will take place on April 9-10, 2026, in Cleveland, Ohio.

**Submit a presentation proposal by October 19, 2025:**

<https://app.oxfordabstracts.com/stages/79548/submitter>

**The theme that will frame NCHEP 15 is:**

#### ***Beyond Access***

NCHEP 15 calls the higher education in prison field to move beyond celebrating entry points and toward examining the integrity, depth, and potential of education during incarceration. In this time of shifting policies, funding challenges, and evolving student needs, sustainability means more than survival; it must reflect equity, accountability, and long-term impact. This theme challenges us to consider how to build coordinated systems, scalable practices, and shared responsibility within and beyond the classroom.

### Topics of Interest for Proposals

Based on feedback from the community, the following represent the key topics we are looking to explore at NCHEP 15. We seek proposals that not only address these topics but also provide practical, actionable solutions.

#### **1. The Reentry Continuum**

Too many PEPs treat reentry support as peripheral rather than an integral component of the student experience. Sessions in this track will explore how to embed continuity of care, cross-institutional collaboration, and durable relationship structures into the DNA of their programs. How can we sustain meaningful educational momentum through reentry?

## **2. Student Voice as Leadership**

This track uplifts the leadership of currently and formerly incarcerated students in shaping not just their own education, but the future of higher education in prison. Sessions in this track will center student-led advocacy, governance roles (like advisory boards, steering committees, and alumni councils), student-focused funding models, or hiring practices that are welcoming to people with lived experience. Presentations may highlight how student power can be embedded into decision making to influence policy, guide institutional culture, and redefine what success looks like.

## **3. Aligning Systems, Centering Students**

This track focuses on how prison education programs, corrections, higher education institutions, and oversight agencies can collaborate across state, regional, and national levels to move beyond compliance towards co-created standards connected to actual student experience. Sessions will address the importance of cross-system coordination and share strategies to formalize a continuum of support that connects policy, practice, and accountability.

## **4. Justice by Design**

What does a high-quality education look like in prison? This track explores how to define, assess, and sustain meaningful postsecondary learning behind bars—and how to design programs that go beyond compliance to achieve true educational excellence.

## **5. Inclusive and Adaptive Learning**

This track addresses access, inclusion, and the realities of education in carceral settings with diverse learning needs, including students with learning and physical disabilities. Topics could include trauma-informed and culturally responsive pedagogy, navigating accommodations, universal design, and supporting neurodivergent learners.

*We would also like to invite prospective presenters to submit proposals on the following topics, which are fundamental to the field and relevant every year, regardless of the annual conference theme.*

## **6. HEP Foundations**

This track will focus on the essentials of building and sustaining higher education in prison programs. Sessions might address funding models, program design, cross-sector partnerships, or the practical and ethical dimensions of working in carceral settings.

## **7. Funding and Pell Implementation**

This track will address funding challenges for HEP programs, from sustainability and resource allocation to partnerships and diversified revenue streams. It will also examine Pell

reinstatement, including Best Interest Determination, admissions, site and data management, institutional collaborations, and the impact of new federal eligibility rules. How can we best navigate the new funding and Pell landscape to ensure stability and opportunity for students?

## Submission Formats and Requirements

The conference structure and submission formats reflect this year's theme and our commitment to make NCHEP a space of connection, collaboration, and knowledge creation and exchange, as well as of mutual support.

Presentations will take place in hour-long session blocks. **All presentations at NCHEP 15 will be 40-45 minutes long**, with up to 15-20 minutes of Q&A.

To accommodate a variety of approaches and encourage dynamic engagement, we are offering several presentation formats. We are especially hoping to offer more interactive workshop presentations this year. If you have a workshop proposal to submit, we would be excited to see it!

- **Individual Presentation:** A single presenter delivers a focused talk, case study, or research finding(s) on a specific topic. This format is best for sharing in-depth knowledge or lessons learned from a particular project or experience.
- **Group Presentation:** A small team delivers a coordinated and focused talk, case study, or research finding(s) on a specific topic. This format is best for sharing in-depth knowledge or lessons learned from a particular project or experience.
- **Panel Discussion:** A group of 3-4 panelists participate in a moderated conversation, offering various perspectives on a shared topic. The session is guided by a moderator (proposed by the proposal team) to ensure a dynamic exchange of ideas.
- **Workshop:** A highly interactive session where facilitators engage participants in activities, group work, and/or hands-on exercises. The goal is to help attendees build practical skills, explore tools, or develop strategies they can apply in their own work. Workshops emphasize participation and active learning rather than lecture.

Each presentation proposal will be required to provide detailed written responses of up to 250 words on the following:

- **Presentation Description:** Describe your presentation and how it relates to the selected topic
- **Presentation Significance:** Explain why your presentation is important for the field of higher education in prison
- **Presentation Relationship to Format:** Provide details about how your presentation relates to the selected presentation format.  
For example:

- **Individual presentation:** Explain your unique qualifications for presenting individually. If the content stems from group or collaborative work (e.g., a co-authored article), please indicate whether additional proposals on this work will also be submitted to NCHEP.
- **Group presentation:** If the content stems from group or collaborative work (e.g., a co-authored article), please indicate whether additional proposals on this work will also be submitted to NCHEP.
- **Panel discussion:** Describe the proposed plan for facilitation, including who will serve as moderator and how and why panelists were selected. *Note: panel moderators are responsible for guiding discussion and time management; panelists are responsible for sharing their expertise and perspectives. While applicants may propose a moderator, final determinations regarding facilitation will be made by the NCHEP Planning Team.*
- **Workshop:** Outline the interactive features of the session and how they will be facilitated.

## Eligibility

We encourage submissions from:

- students
- educators
- researchers
- nonprofit leaders
- higher education in prison practitioners
- corrections professionals
- and more!

Because the conference is in person, all presenters are expected to attend on site. We also welcome the participation of currently incarcerated presenters, who may join virtually as part of a larger presentation team. *We are only able to facilitate hybrid participation for currently incarcerated presenters.*

**Note:** Registration will be held for all accepted presenters; however, the Alliance does not cover presenter registration fees. Presenters submitting proposals who need financial assistance to attend NCHEP are strongly encouraged to apply for Financial Aid (<http://www.higheredinprison.org/info/nche-2026-financial-aid>) by October 19, 2025.

## Presentation Proposals Dates and Deadlines

- **October 19, 2025:** Call for Proposals close
- **Mid November 2025:** Proposal accept/decline notifications sent
- **Mid December 2025 / Early Jan 2026:** Registration opens
- **April 8, 2026:** Pre-conference
- **April 9-10, 2026:** NCHEP 15

Have questions? Email us at [nchep@higheredinprison.org](mailto:nchep@higheredinprison.org)