

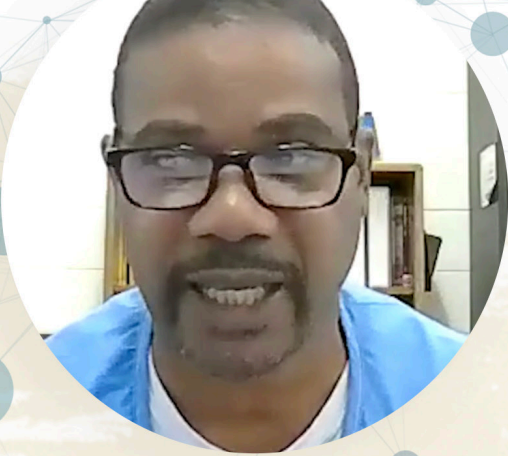


Incarcerated Scholars CONFERENCE



ISC IMPACT


Findings from the
2025 Exit Survey





PURPOSE

This report documents the early outcomes of the Incarcerated Scholars Conference (ISC) in 2025. Drawing on registration data and participant exit survey responses, it offers an initial assessment of who ISC reached, how participants experienced the conference, and potential impact. As ISC is still in its early years and 2025 marks the first year of formal evaluation, this report focuses on short-term, self-reported outcomes and is intended to serve as a point of reference for ongoing learning as the conference continues to grow.



“ISC 2024 was instrumental in helping folks on our campus, in our local community, and in the communities of our students gain an appreciation for the talent and determination that our incarcerated folks have. It humanized their efforts at gaining an education in an environment designed to prevent community-style learning and growth.”

ISC is an annual,
virtual academic
conference that
centers the voices
of currently
incarcerated
scholars and artists.

INTRODUCTION

The Incarcerated Scholars Conference (ISC) emerged from the 13th National Conference on Higher Education in Prison (NCHEP), held in Atlanta in November 2023, which marked the first time a full day of programming was dedicated exclusively to presentations by currently incarcerated scholars.

That day took the form of a virtual “teach-in,” featuring 23 presentations from incarcerated students across 15 states and streamed live via videoconferencing technology. The sessions were well received, revealing a clear demand for more opportunities for incarcerated scholars to share their research, creative work, and lived expertise with a national audience.

Building on this response, the organizer of NCHEP, the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison (the Alliance), launched ISC as a standalone conference. This event expands access and engagement while more fully centering incarcerated scholars as knowledge producers within the field of higher education in prison.

ISC advances the Alliance’s mission to convene the field, amplify system-impacted voices, and mobilize knowledge and resources to strengthen higher education in prison. Consistent with the [Alliance’s 2025–2028 Strategic Plan](#), ISC functions as a core convening that centers incarcerated scholars as academic innovators, encourages innovation and expanded access through its virtual format, and contributes to shared learning and field-building across institutional, geographic, and disciplinary boundaries.

Defining Success



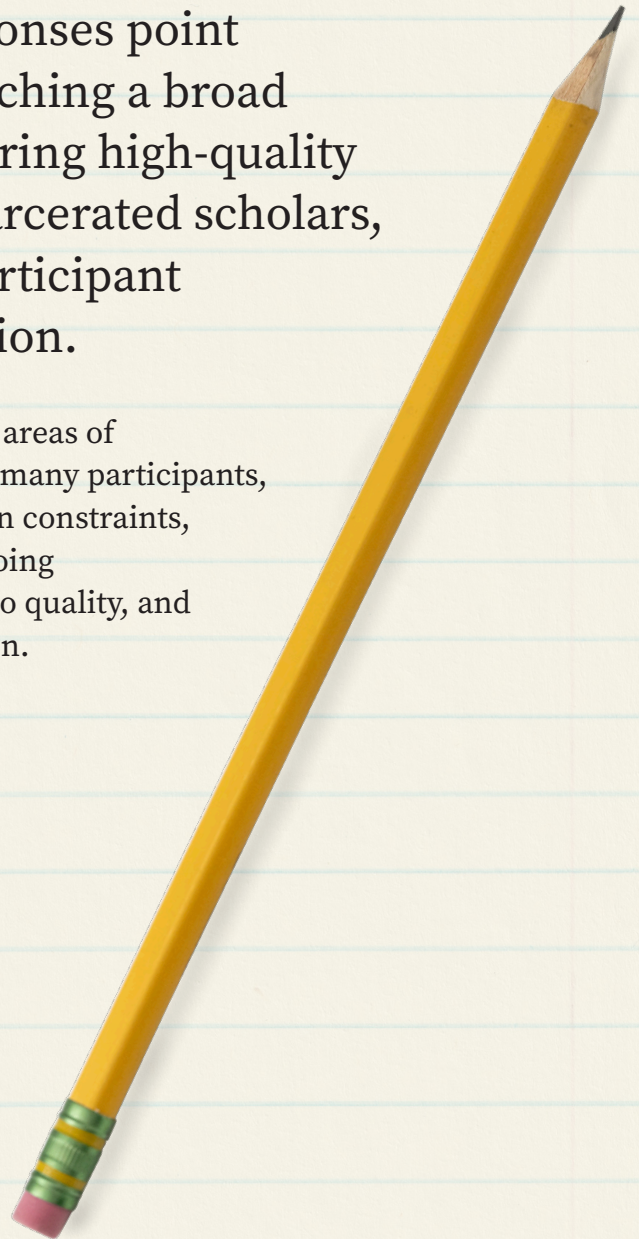
Consistent with the Alliance’s mission and 2025–2028 Strategic Plan, ISC is designed to:

- ✓ Reach a broad national audience, connecting incarcerated scholars, educators, advocates, and practitioners across geographic regions, institutions, and systems.
- ✓ Deliver high-quality, accessible programming led by incarcerated scholars, positioning them as innovators within the field.
- ✓ Foster learning and connection among participants while encouraging new ideas, collaboration, and action across the field of higher education in prison.
- ✓ Expand access to technology and virtual engagement for incarcerated learners, while identifying and addressing structural barriers to participation.
- ✓ Strengthen civic, scholarly, and public engagement between incarcerated scholars and the broader field, creating pathways that connect ISC participants to ongoing Alliance programming, including NCHEP and Education in Action (EiA).

Key Findings

Findings from ISC 2025 registration data and exit survey responses point to a convening that is reaching a broad national audience, delivering high-quality programming led by incarcerated scholars, and generating strong participant engagement and inspiration.

Participant feedback also raised clear areas of improvement for the conference. For many participants, internet access and technology remain constraints, as many participants highlighted ongoing challenges related to technology, audio quality, and videoconferencing platform navigation.





National reach

Registrants represented all 50 U.S. states, confirming ISC’s role as a national convening within the higher education in prison field.



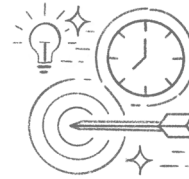
Broad participation

Over 800 individuals registered for ISC 2025, including participants affiliated with at least 145 colleges and universities and 63 government- or corrections-affiliated staff across 19 government domains.



High overall satisfaction

95% of survey respondents rated their overall conference experience positively (“satisfied” or “very satisfied”), with an average satisfaction rating of 4.55 out of 5.



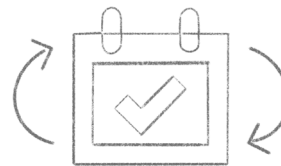
Strong relevance

94% of survey respondents reported that session topics were relevant to their interests, and session content received an average rating of 4.54 out of 5.



Catalyst for action

91% of survey respondents indicated that a session or speaker inspired them to engage in new activities, advocacy, or initiatives beyond the conference.



High likelihood of return

96% of survey respondents reported being likely or very likely to attend a future ISC, with an average likelihood rating of 4.65 out of 5.

“Every workshop I attended was well-organized, with presenters who were informed, prepared, and spoke like the experts they are, clearly ready to keep contributing to our communities and society at large.”



PARTICIPATION AND REACH

ISC 2025 convened incarcerated and formerly incarcerated scholars, educators, and advocates from across the country for a two-day virtual gathering focused on scholarship, civic leadership, and collective learning.

811

participants registered for the conference.

90

participants identified as system-impacted.

15

presentation sessions and two expressive arts plenaries were led by currently incarcerated scholars and accessed virtually by participants in a range of individual and group settings.

63

correctional or government-affiliated staff participated (based on analysis of 19 distinct .gov domains).

145

colleges and universities participated (based on analysis of distinct .edu email domains).

50


Registrants represented all 50 U.S. states.

These data point to ISC's emerging role as a national convening that lifts up the participation and voice of system-impacted individuals and supports learning and connection across higher education and corrections.


Registration data indicate that the majority of participants were first-time attendees. 673 registrants reported that ISC 2025 was their first ISC experience, compared to 102 returning participants; 21 registrants did not respond to this question. ISC is still building both its audience and its data infrastructure, which limits direct year-to-year comparison. Total registrations decreased from 1,171 registrants in ISC 2024 to 811 registrants in ISC 2025. However, registration

counts alone do not capture the full scope of participation. In 2025, the conference was delivered exclusively via Zoom, whereas the 2024 conference utilized multiple platforms, a shift in delivery model that may also have influenced registration and access patterns. In addition, many presentation sessions at ISC 2025 were available to stream on public YouTube links and therefore may have been streamed and shared within correctional facilities, so overall reach may extend beyond individual registration.

Differences in the number of system-impacted registrants across years should similarly be interpreted with caution. In 2024, 208 registrants identified as system impacted, compared to 90 registrants in 2025, a shift that may reflect differences in total registration volume and access pathways rather than a clear change in proportional representation. ISC 2025 established a clear national baseline, with registrants representing all 50 U.S. states. Geographic data were not collected as part of ISC 2024 registration, however, limiting assessment of national growth over time. Taken together, these data suggest that ISC remains in a formative stage as the Alliance continues to reach new audiences while working to better understand how participation and access can grow and how reach and engagement can be more consistently measured over time.



“I really enjoyed hearing from the students, their impact, their goals, and vision for future.”





CONTENT AND SPEAKERS

Centered on the theme, Pathways to Possibility, ISC 2025 showcased the breadth of scholarship emerging from higher education in prison programs. More than 30 incarcerated scholars presented original research and scholarship, and 43 artworks were showcased as part of the conference's expressive arts programming. Incarcerated presenters led all sessions and joined the conference live, representing 12 states.

Some presentations focused on empirical and analytical inquiry, with scholars examining the impacts of higher education in prison and the social and psychological dimensions of incarceration. Other sessions centered on personal and collective narratives. Several presentations examined how policies, prison conditions, and educational access shape the experiences and opportunities of incarcerated students. The conference opened and closed with sessions led by incarcerated scholars that focused on remote work experiences. This reinforced the conference theme and framed education not as an endpoint, but rather as a pathway to career exploration, applied learning, and professional experience.



95%

Nearly all respondents rated their overall experience positively.

94%

of exit survey respondents found the topics addressed during ISC 2025 relevant to their areas of interest.

CONFERENCE EXPERIENCE


ISC 2025 participants reported a high level of satisfaction across multiple aspects of the conference experience. Overall satisfaction ratings averaged 4.55 out of 5, falling between “very satisfied” and “extremely satisfied.” Feedback consistently highlighted the meaningfulness of the conference and its strong alignment with participants’ interests and needs.

Satisfaction with the content of conference sessions was similarly strong. Participants rated session content an average of 4.54 out of 5, with 94% indicating positive satisfaction. In qualitative responses, attendees frequently emphasized the value of hearing directly from currently incarcerated scholars and engaging with content grounded in lived experience. Participants responded favorably to the structure of the conference tracks as well, with an average satisfaction rating of 4.38 out of 5. Qualitative feedback pointed to opportunities for further refinement and deeper exploration of specific topics, offering guidance for future conference development. In open-ended responses, participants asked for more time to engage with the material, including longer sessions, fewer presentations per session block, and more space for discussion and questions.

Though the satisfaction with the conference experience was high on average, exit survey responses surfaced challenges related to technology and access. Some respondents reported difficulties hearing presenters, navigating the virtual platform, or accessing sessions. These challenges reflect the structural constraints of virtual convenings involving regulated environments and feedback points to the importance of continued efforts to improve accessibility, audio quality, and platform usability.

Interest in continued engagement with ISC was notably high. Respondents reported an average likelihood of 4.65 out of 5 of attending another ISC, with 96% indicating they were likely or very likely to participate again.

“I really enjoyed hearing from incarcerated folks from all around the country, and love seeing more and more incarcerated folks participating in things like this, whether by presenting or simply watching.”



91%

of respondents reported feeling inspired by a session or speaker to engage in new activities, advocacy, or initiatives.

93.6%

of respondents rated conference content as relevant to their areas of interest.

CONFERENCE OUTCOMES

Exit survey responses provide early evidence that ISC 2025 supported learning and inspired action among participants. Attendees expressed satisfaction with session content, suggesting strong alignment between ISC programming and participant priorities.

Exit survey responses further suggest that ISC contributed to participants' sense of connection and belonging within a broader scholarly and advocacy community. Participants described the conference as a space to connect with others who share lived experience and academic goals, exchange ideas and strategies across institutions and regions, and feel affirmed as part of a collective engaged in the field of higher education in prison. Several respondents explicitly emphasized the importance of seeing currently incarcerated scholars centered as leaders and knowledge-holders, noting that this visibility strengthened feelings of belonging and collective identity.

A small number of exit survey respondents (12 individuals, or 15%) had previously participated in ISC 2024, and reflected on how that participation influenced their work. These responses offer early insight into potential longer-term impacts of the conference. These participants described their experience of ISC 2024 as transformative, noting shifts in how they understood their own voice, leadership, and role within the field of higher education in prison. Several respondents emphasized that the conference reshaped what they believed was possible, not only for themselves, but for incarcerated scholars more broadly and for the future of the field. This group described applying insights from ISC by sharing ideas with colleagues and communities and integrating lessons into teaching or program design. They also reported approaching advocacy and leadership with renewed confidence.

Looking Ahead

The ISC 2025 exit survey provides an important baseline as the first year of formal evaluation for this convening.

Early findings point to clear demand for a conference centered on incarcerated scholars, with participants reporting high levels of satisfaction, relevance, and inspiration. Together, these patterns affirm ISC's role in fostering confidence, connection, and a sense of possibility among those engaged in higher education in prison.

These findings reflect short-term, self-reported outcomes. As ISC continues to evolve, future evaluation efforts will focus on repeat participation, sustained engagement, and how participants apply learning, relationships, and inspiration beyond the conference itself. Strengthening data collection over time will support a deeper understanding of how ISC contributes to individual growth, collective power, and broader field-building efforts.

As ISC continues as an annual conference, future evaluation efforts will explore how repeat participation contributes to longer-term shifts in voice, leadership, and field engagement among incarcerated and formerly incarcerated scholars.

While this report focuses on findings from ISC's first exit survey, the Alliance also maintains post-conference engagement with presenters and attendees through recognition and compensation for creative contributors, follow-up communication with speakers, and opportunities for

continued dialogue and participation across Alliance programming. These activities fall outside the scope of this report, but they may reveal how ISC serves as a point of connection across Alliance programming.

At NCHPEP 14 in 2025, several creative works originally presented virtually during ISC 2024 were featured as part of the inaugural ISC Art Gallery, which created in-person opportunities for conference attendees to engage with incarcerated artists' work. At NCHPEP 15 in April 2026, the Alliance plans to expand the ISC Art Gallery, incorporating creative works from both ISC 2024 and ISC 2025 and further strengthening the connections between ISC, NCHPEP, and the broader work of the Alliance.

Beyond its impact on participants and institutions, ISC also reaches families, loved ones, and communities connected to incarcerated scholars. By creating a visible platform for incarcerated people to share knowledge, creativity, and leadership, the conference offers connection, pride, and a sense of possibility that extends beyond the classroom or facility.

The Alliance remains committed to strengthening ISC and the tools used to measure its impact, ensuring that the conference continues to support meaningful learning, leadership, and transformation across the field.



ISC Art Gallery at NCHEP 14 in New Orleans

Acknowledgments

ISC 2025 was made possible by the generous support of the Mellon Foundation. The Alliance is deeply grateful for their investment in uplifting the voices of incarcerated scholars, graduates, and artists. The Alliance also extends its gratitude to A Revolutionary Press for their generous donation of time, materials, and coordination efforts in bringing the ISC Art Gallery at NCHEP to life.

Learn more about ISC at <https://www.higheredinprison.org/isc>. Find all publicly available ISC presentation recordings at <https://www.youtube.com/@allianceforhlep>.

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“I was thrilled that my incarcerated students had the chance to experience this for the first time. They have goals of submitting to present next year.”



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FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN PRISON