

2027 NCHEP16

The 16th 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 16th National Conference on Higher Education in Prison, which will take place on March 30–April 1, 2027, in Long Beach, California.

Submit a presentation proposal by November 1, 2026:

<https://app.oxfordabstracts.com/stages/83096/submitter>

The theme that will frame NCHEP 16 is:

Anchored in Justice

'Anchored in Justice' begins with the field's core work: providing rigorous higher education in prison. Justice can be evident in the existence of meaningful academic choice, high quality instruction, credits and credentials with lasting value, and opportunities to continue learning. Justice needs to be reflected in institutional structures, environments, and how the value of education is upheld and reinforced.

This theme invites us to consider not only what is just about this work, but what it means to carry this work forward within a complicated system as the scale and structure of the field are in constant flux. Decisions about curriculum, faculty support, advising, data, governance, and institutional responsibility increasingly cross organizational boundaries. NCHEP pushes the field to consider how to adapt and grow without becoming unmoored.

Education is shaped by the environments in which it occurs. Facility routines, health, family responsibilities, and access to materials all shape what educational participation looks like. Program design and resources steer the education students experience, and how that work is described informs public understanding of the relationship between education and incarceration. *Anchored in Justice* asks for a wider view, and what it takes to stay centered within a storm while helping students reach towards a possibility horizon.

Topic Tracks for Proposals

Based in part on feedback from the community, the following represent the key topics we are looking to explore at NCHEP 16. We seek proposals that not only address these topics but also provide practical, actionable solutions.

1. Humanities, Arts, and Intellectual Life

The humanities and arts are increasingly asked to justify their place in higher education. That pressure is especially pronounced in prison, where education is often evaluated through immediate vocational or correctional outcomes. *'Anchored in Justice'* affirms that people in prison should have access to the full intellectual range of higher education. This track seeks proposals that make a rigorous case for why the humanities are indispensable to that education. Sessions may examine how literature, history, philosophy, languages, writing, and the arts develop interpretation, communication, ethical judgment, historical understanding, imagination, and the ability to engage complex ideas. Humanities inquiry also engages questions of meaning, responsibility, identity, and purpose that are central to intellectual and personal development. These capacities matter in the workforce as well, where writing, research, sound judgment, collaboration, and creative problem-solving carry value across professions. Strong submissions should demonstrate why the humanities are central to a college education and how they prepare students for meaningful work and fuller intellectual lives.

2. Reentry Models and Educational Continuity

'Anchored in Justice' frames reentry through educational continuity. Coursework, credits, academic records, advising, and degree plans should remain useful when a person leaves custody. Some students are released midway through a degree and need a clear route into campus-based or online study without losing academic progress. Returning students may

also be securing housing and employment, replacing identification, or meeting supervision requirements. This track seeks tested models such as prerelease degree planning, transition advising, direct enrollment pathways, campus reentry programs, and coordinated housing or workforce support. Presenters should explain how the model operates, which organization is responsible at each stage, how the work is funded, and what has been learned through implementation.

3. System Alignment and Shared Infrastructure

Higher education in prison operates across colleges, corrections agencies, state offices, and community organizations. 'Anchored in Justice' gives that coordination a practical purpose: preserving educational access and continuity across institutional boundaries. This track focuses on the infrastructure needed to carry out shared work. Sessions may feature cross-sector consortia, statewide coalitions, interagency agreements, data-sharing protocols, academic record systems, communication procedures, or coordination across multiple sites. Presenters should show how responsibilities are assigned, how information and decisions move between organizations, and how problems are resolved. Strong proposals will provide a process, agreement, tool, or operational model that participants can adapt in their own settings.

4. The Public Narrative Challenge

The challenge at the heart of this year's 'Anchored in Justice' theme is how to secure durable support for rigorous education in prison without conflating the value of education with the fact of incarceration. This track seeks developed approaches to public narrative, strategic communications, policy framing, coalition-building, fundraising, and government relations. Proposals should bring more than a restatement of the dilemma. They may offer tested messages, audience research, communications strategies, policy arguments, campaign models, or new conceptual approaches. Presenters should identify the audience they are trying to reach, explain the reasoning behind their strategy, and provide language or evidence that others can use when making the public case for education without making the case for prison.

5. Artificial Intelligence in HEP

Artificial intelligence is changing college instruction, the production of knowledge, and the qualifications employers expect. Correctional settings present real constraints involving network security, privacy, and institutional control. Blanket restrictions, however, can inadvertently harm students by denying them access to skills their

nonincarcerated peers are developing, and exclude them from career pathways in which the effective use of AI is becoming a basic expectation. Within 'Anchored in Justice,' the field must develop forms of access that address legitimate security concerns while preserving educational and professional opportunity. This track seeks proposals on AI literacy, prompt engineering, responsible use, bias, privacy, attribution, assessment, and faculty preparation, as well as technical and operational models using closed networks, locally hosted systems, approved datasets, limited-function tools, or supervised access. Presenters should describe the educational or workforce purpose, required technology, identified risks, safeguards, institutional responsibilities, and lessons from implementation or testing.

6. Career, Technical, and Vocational Education

'Anchored in Justice' requires career and technical education to provide substantive learning and credentials with value beyond a single facility. This track covers industry-recognized credentials, pre-apprenticeships, registered apprenticeships, and pathways into degree programs. Sessions may address Workforce Pell, curriculum, licensure, technology, transferability, employer partnerships, and regional workforce needs. Proposals should explain what students learn and how programs are funded, staffed, equipped, and coordinated among colleges, facilities, employers, labor organizations, and apprenticeship sponsors.

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

7. HEP Foundations

HEP Foundations is an evergreen introduction for people entering the field, joining a partnership, or assuming responsibility for a program. It focuses on the administrative and operational work required to establish and sustain HEP. Sessions may explain college and correctional approval processes, Pell implementation, understanding Workforce Pell, internet and technology access, partner responsibilities, budgets, staffing, admissions, enrollment, financial aid, academic records, and technology procedures.

The track also addresses student data infrastructure, privacy, reporting, agreements, and continuity during disruptions. 'Anchored in Justice' calls for programs supported by clear

responsibilities and reliable systems. Proposals should provide practical orientation, implementation lessons, or tools such as agreements, workflows, checklists, and planning frameworks.

8. Teaching, Learning, and Academic Quality

'Anchored in Justice' is realized in what students encounter as college learners: intellectual challenge, meaningful academic choice, strong instruction, useful feedback, and opportunities to develop and demonstrate knowledge. This track focuses on classroom practice and the academic standards that guide it. Sessions may address curriculum, pedagogy, discussion, assignments, assessment, course materials, accessibility, and teaching when time, technology, or movement is restricted.

The track may also examine what faculty need to understand about teaching in a prison and how facility conditions affect learning. Proposals on learning outcomes, curricular coherence, faculty development, program assessment, and accreditation should remain centered on educational quality. Presenters should share an instructional practice, resource, evaluation approach, or finding that others can use.

9. Health, Healing, and HEP

'Anchored in Justice' extends to the conditions under which learning occurs, including health and well-being. This track examines the relationship between academic life and mental, emotional, physical, or spiritual well-being during incarceration. Sessions may address trauma-informed teaching, counseling and health partnerships, peer support, classroom community, or programs that connect academic study with health and healing. The track also welcomes proposals on public health courses, degrees, and related program initiatives. Strong submissions will ground claims about healing or well-being in a defined practice, program, or body of evidence. Presenters should clarify the roles of educators and health professionals and explain how the work relates to educational aims.

10. Philanthropy and Foundation Funding for HEP

This evergreen track focuses exclusively on philanthropic and foundation funding for higher education in prison. Sessions may examine how foundations establish priorities, identify prospective grantees, evaluate proposals, assess risk, and structure awards, including general operating support, project grants, capacity-building investments, and support for pilot initiatives or emerging areas of practice. The track also provides HEP programs with a clearer understanding of philanthropic decision-making, addressing

proposal development, funder relationships, reporting, evaluation, sustainability, and differences between program needs and grant requirements. Within 'Anchored in Justice,' the track considers how philanthropy can strengthen educational quality, institutional capacity, and responsible innovation. Proposals should be led by philanthropic organizations or developed with a philanthropic partner and should present a grantmaking approach, funding model, or evidence-based lesson from investment in HEP.

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 16 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 and alumni
- HEP program leaders and practitioners
- faculty and academic support professionals
- college, university, and system leaders
- corrections leaders and facility staff
- government and policy leaders

- community and reentry organizations
- employers and workforce partners
- researchers, evaluators, and data professionals
- philanthropic and foundation leaders
- advocacy, communications, and public affairs professionals
- technology and digital learning professionals

Because the conference is in person, 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 spots will be held for all accepted presenters; however, the Alliance does not cover registration fees for presenters. Presenters submitting proposals who need financial assistance to attend NCHEP are strongly encouraged to apply for Financial Aid by November 15, 2026.

Presentation Proposals Dates and Deadlines

- **September 2, 2026:** Call for Proposals opens
- **November 1, 2026:** Call for Proposals closes
- **Mid November 2026:** Registration opens
- **Early December 2026:** Proposal accept/decline notifications sent
- **December 2026:** Full conference agenda announced
- **March 30–April 1, 2027:** NCHEP 16

Have questions? Email us at nchep@higheredinprison.org