

# New England Prison Education Collaborative NEPEC Newsletter

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## NEPEC Accelerator Grants

NEPEC, with support from Ascendium Education Group, is excited to announce the release of the inaugural Accelerator Grant Request for Proposals (RFP) on April 30, 2025. These competitive grants will provide \$100,000 in funding to each awardee, to support higher education institutions in New England working to create new or expand and improve existing Pell-eligible Prison Education Programs.

NEPEC will award five Accelerator Grants in year one and release subsequent RFPs in the same general timeframe in 2026 and 2027.

NEPEC will host a live webinar which will offer an in-depth overview of the RFP including what kind of activities are eligible for funding through these Year 1 Accelerator Grants. Participants will have the opportunity to ask questions as well.

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Follow NEPEC on [LinkedIn](#) and visit our [website](#) on **April 30, 2025** for access to the full RFP and webinar registration.

## in New Hampshire

The NEPEC Team has contracted with [Cookson Communications](#) and [Unlocked Labs](#) to support the needs of the stakeholders who are being convened to carry out the state strategic planning work underway in New Hampshire with the goal of expanding high-quality, workforce-aligned higher education in prison.

Matt Cookson, President and CEO of Cookson Communications brings deep expertise in public affairs, communications, and stakeholder engagement in New Hampshire. He has been engaged to collaborate directly with NEPEC Director Sarah Kuczynski to help to facilitate a planning process that is locally informed and aligned with broader state priorities.

Unlocked Labs, a mission-driven nonprofit dedicated to supporting departments of corrections in developing the infrastructure necessary to expand access to education and rehabilitation programs, will be conducting a comprehensive technology assessment that will culminate in recommendations to the planning group for implementing the requisite infrastructure to enable twenty-first century educational opportunities within the state's three carceral facilities.

Together, contributions from the two experts NEPEC has engaged to support the strategic planning work in the Granite State will help to shape a thoughtful and collaborative cross-sector plan that serves as a roadmap to build momentum for long-term success when it comes to increasing access to higher education and vocational opportunities in New Hampshire carceral facilities.



## Quarterly Workshop Series Launch

On March 19, 2025, NEPEC hosted its first quarterly workshop, "**Conducting a Higher Education in Prison Needs Analysis: Varied Approaches and Perspectives**," bringing together key New England stakeholders, national colleagues, and experts to support the development of state strategic plans for postsecondary education in prison. Structured as a capacity-building session, equipping participants - including representatives from Departments of Correction, State Higher Education Executive Officers, program providers, and leaders with lived experience - with tools to conduct a needs analysis and assess barriers to expanding access and improving student outcomes.

With over 50 in attendance, the session's dynamic panelists included [Haley Shoaf \(Unlocked Labs\)](#), [Nathan Barrett \(Coleridge Initiative\)](#), [Alex Monday \(Ithaka S+R\)](#), and [Ess Pokornowski \(Ithaka S+R\)](#), who shared insights on leveraging data, technology, policy and research to conduct a needs analysis to inform effective program delivery and to equip states to

expand the quality and quantity of higher education in prison offerings.

**The workshops are open to all**, although they are designed to be particularly relevant to state stakeholders who are currently engaged in NEPEC's state strategic planning initiative and those who are working to build capacity to engage in this planning process in the future. As NEPEC works to support states in achieving their goals, these workshops will serve as a cornerstone for fostering collaboration and actionable solutions in expanding access to high-quality higher education in prison.

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Please follow us on [LinkedIn](#)  
for topic and registration details on the June 18, 2025, workshop.

## Regional Readings

### **Connecticut**

On March 28, 2025, the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management's Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division released an initial [report](#) in response to the request by the Connecticut General Assembly for a comprehensive needs assessment on postsecondary education within the state's correctional facilities. This pathbreaking report evaluates the current educational landscape in the state, provides analysis of unmet demand, and offers strategic recommendations to enhance access and quality of higher education for incarcerated learners. From their demand analysis, the authors of the report conclude that "clearly a demonstrated pool of potential students beyond those actively participating exists" and that "likely, sizable, unmet demand exists" for higher education within the sentenced population in Connecticut. It will be followed by subsequent installments that meet the remaining requirements outlined in the legislation that tasked this division with carrying out this needs assessment.

### **New Hampshire**

On March 20, 2025, NEPEC Project Manager Zeia Fawaz published a guest [blog](#) with the Education Commission of the States spotlighting New Hampshire's progress in expanding access to higher education in prison. The piece highlights the state's creation of the Corrections Education and Vocational Planning Group and the group's unanimous decision to partner with NEPEC for a year-long strategic planning process to advance educational opportunities for incarcerated learners--a process that is currently underway, as detailed in Issue No. 3 of the NEPEC Newsletter.

## Higher Education Working Group

Since the last issue of the newsletter, NEPEC has convened two key stakeholder groups to support the initiative's success in the region.

The Regional Advisory Council (RAC) is composed of a small group of cross-sector leaders who serve one-year terms and meet quarterly. Members of the RAC will provide strategic guidance, help process learnings from NEPEC's activities and will advise at key decision points throughout the project. The RAC will play an important role in shaping the direction of NEPEC's multi-year effort to expand high-quality, workforce-aligned postsecondary education in prison across the region.

The Higher Education Working Group (HEWG) provides direct subject matter expertise to shape several key deliverables under NEPEC's higher education engagement workstream. The HEWG members have played an instrumental role in preparing the Accelerator Grant RFP that will go live later this month. For the first six months of their one-year term, members will be convening monthly. The HEWG is structured to provide a diversity of expertise and ensure NEPEC's resources remain responsive to the needs of incarcerated learners and the institutions that serve them.

Both groups will serve to advance NEPEC's mission to accelerate, support, and collaborate in expanding high-quality education for system-involved learners across New England.

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*We look forward to sharing member spotlights and updates on progress made by the working group and the advisory council via the NEPEC [LinkedIn](#) page and future issues of the newsletter.*



## NEPEC Team Attends NCHPEP 2025 in New Orleans



The NEPEC Team had the pleasure of attending the 14th Annual National Conference on Higher Education in Prison (NCHEP), held in New Orleans, Louisiana. Hosted by the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison, the two-day conference took place on April 10-11, 2025, against the rich historical and cultural backdrop of a city known for its resilience and community-driven change. This year's conference theme, "A New Era? Pell Reinstatement and the Future of Prison Education," invited program providers, system-impacted leaders, funders, and researchers from across the country to explore the shifting landscape of higher education in prison (HEP) as the field navigates the reinstatement of Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated students. The NEPEC Team started the conferencing off by hosting a mixer for New England stakeholders on the evening of April 9th -- the turnout was amazing!

The conference featured engaging panel discussions, workshops, and networking sessions aimed at addressing both the challenges and opportunities presented by this new era in prison education. The Alliance, along with partners and speakers from programs nationwide, brought together a wealth of expertise and lived experience. Sessions ranged from navigating the complexities of Pell reinstatement and building statewide networks, to exploring the role of technology, student voice, and equitable pathways to reentry. The conference also created space for critical conversations about collaboration across sectors and centering the voices of incarcerated learners in program design and evaluation.

For the NEPEC Team, attending NCHEP 2025 was both inspiring and energizing. We were grateful for the opportunity to connect with peers, partners, and new colleagues from across the country who share a commitment to expanding access to high-quality, workforce-aligned postsecondary education in prison. The sense of collaboration and shared purpose throughout the event reinforced our appreciation for this welcoming HEP community. We look forward to applying the insights and connections gained at NCHEP as we continue our work supporting our partners across New England.



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## Upcoming Events and Opportunities

### **NEPEC Quarterly Workshop**

June 18, 2025 | Topic - In Development

Follow us on [LinkedIn](#)

### **NEPEC on the Road**

[Tufts University Prison Initiative of Tisch College \(TUPIT\) MyTERN](#) Graduation

May 8, 2025 | Medford, MA

[Boston College Prison Education Program](#) Graduation

May / September 2025 | Boston, MA / Shirley, MA

[White Mountains Community College](#) Graduation

May 28, 2025 | Berlin, NH

[Aligning Efforts: Navigating the Intersection of Student Services and Prison Education](#) Second Annual Prison Education Program Convening

Hosted by National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators

June 4-7, 2025 | Washington, DC

[Horizons: Horizons: Dare To Be Brave To Be Brave](#)

Presented by Jobs for the Future

June 10-11, 2025 | New Orleans, LA

[79th Correctional Education 79th Correctional Education Assoc. International Conference & Training Event. International Conference & Training Event](#)

August 10-13, 2025 | Pittsburgh, PA

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## Stay Connected

Thank you for your continued support and partnership as we work to make higher education accessible to all learners who are incarcerated in New England. We look forward to keeping you informed and engaged in our shared mission.

Best regards,  
NEPEC Team

Sign up for our newsletter to  
make sure you don't miss a thing!  
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