

Frequently Asked Questions and Glossary



Initiative Overview

What is the overall focus and purpose of the *Identifying and Scaling Programmatic Technical Assistance Resources in Higher Education in Prison* initiative?

This Request for Proposals (RFP) invites Higher Education in Prison (HEP) programs to propose a programmatic resource (i.e., tangible products or materials) that they currently use and that they believe could be refined and disseminated to help other HEP programs design and implement high-quality and equitable programs, especially those that address the high-leverage needs (HLNs) for programmatic technical assistance (TA) across the broader HEP field (see the full RFP for details).

Proposed resources should be grounded in some level of evidence (e.g., program data, anecdotal information, application on the free-world campus, recent piloting) that can speak to the resource’s anticipated or actual effectiveness in the field; however, programs do not need to have formally collected data or evaluated the resource. Selected programs will comprise a cohort of grantees who receive 2 years of collective and individual support and coaching from AIR through a community of practice (CoP). Over the course of the 2-year initiative, AIR will facilitate learning and knowledge-sharing events with the CoP; conduct site visits at each program to collect data on how their resource promotes student success; and work with grantees to help refine, package, and disseminate their resources into **scalable, open-access tools** focused on HLNs for programmatic TA in the HEP field.

This 2-year initiative will support the HEP field, including needs for programmatic TA through:

- Development of a repository of validated, high-impact programmatic resources that focus on the most critical needs for program design and implementation TA of the field.
- Sharing of effective resources with other programs.
- Generation of data to help understand the effectiveness of resources in various contexts.

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What is the RFP timeline?

RFP Process and Award Timeline

Milestone/activity	Date
RFP released	July 22, 2024
Informational webinar for prospective grantees	July 31, 12:00–1:00 p.m. ET
Proposals due	August 23, 2024, 5 p.m. ET
Reviews completed and finalists notified	September 30, 2024
Interviews with finalists completed	October 15, 2024
Award decisions made and proposal teams notified	November 8, 2024
Subgrant agreement and payment setup	November 11–December 31, 2024

Who is eligible to apply?

Eligible applicant organizations include the following:

- An accredited nonprofit institution of higher education (IHE) running a HEP program in a prison or jail, which may include existing Second Chance Pell experimental sites;
- A state college or university system with a HEP program in a prison or jail;
- A consortium of HEP programs in prisons or jails; and
- A nonprofit organization working in partnership with one or more IHEs to run a HEP program in prison or jail.

Organizations must additionally meet the following criteria:

- Has been operating the program for at least one full academic year with a cohort of students;
- Provides enrolled students with credit-bearing courses that lead to at least one recognized postsecondary certificate or an associate degree, a bachelor’s degree, or a graduate-level degree;
- Maintains a strong working relationship with the department of corrections or other corrections partner;
- Is not currently receiving external funding to specifically support the refinement or scaling of the programmatic resource that is the focus of the response to this RFP;
- Can describe how the programmatic resource meaningfully advances students’ educational and workforce goals or otherwise addresses an HLN aligned with one of the four dimensions defined in this RFP; and
- Is based in the U.S. or in U.S. territories.

Applicants may represent partnerships between organizations and/or institutions. Applicants are expected to coordinate proposal submissions with the appropriate grants office(s) at their organization. At an academic institution, this may include securing approval(s) from the institution's office of sponsored programs, or a similar office.

We are committed to investing in projects led by and representative of individuals and organizations reflecting the diversity of HEP programs and surrounding communities to which people who are incarcerated may return post-release.

Applicants are encouraged to email HEPResourceCohort@air.org should they have additional questions about their eligibility. Please type "HEP TA Resource Initiative" in the subject line of your email.

Can I submit more than one proposal?

No. A single organization/HEP program may submit no more than one proposal in response to this RFP. We ask potential partners to prioritize responding to at least one of the four dimensions of quality HEP programs and focus areas outlined in the RFP.

What are the deliverables and reporting requirements for grantees?

Grantees will be expected to complete and submit a Year 1 annual report to AIR to share progress on project activities, elevate challenges, and highlight successes. Grantees also will be required to submit a final grant report and financial report to Ascendium through the Fluxx system at the end of the 2-year grant period.

Additionally, grantees will be expected to produce two formal deliverables in Year 2, with support and coaching from AIR: (1) a refined resource that includes accompanying tools, guidance, and support materials to allow application/customization to different program contexts and (2) a dissemination plan to amplify visibility and enable the application/customization of the resource for use by other HEP programs in the field.

How should I think about staffing for my proposed resource?

Applicants are encouraged to submit proposals that engage a team of key staff that is sufficient and appropriate for executing the proposed work. In developing teams, applicants should consider the following expectations for meeting and convening attendance:

- **Monthly CoP meetings:** Applicants should plan for at least one individual from the HEP program to attend monthly CoP meetings. Other team members and/or other program staff that may be interested in or doing work related to CoP meeting topics also are encouraged to attend.
- **1:1 coaching meetings:** Applicants should plan for all key staff to attend 1:1 coaching meetings.
- **In-person convenings and the annual National Conference on Higher Education in Prison (NCHEP):** Applicants should plan for at least two key staff to attend.

Am I eligible to receive grant funding if I already receive external funding?

Applicants are eligible to receive grant funding even if they already receive external funding. Applicants are encouraged to list all funding sources for their overall program as requested in the “Grant Budget and Budget Narrative” section of the application. However, applicants are *not* eligible for grant funding if they are currently receiving external funding that *specifically* supports the refinement or scaling of the resource that is proposed in response to this RFP. This does not include funding that supports work for which the resource is a *component*, but rather funding that is solely intended to support the development of that resource.

Is there a specific geographic focus for funded activities?

No. This initiative welcomes and encourages grant proposals from a range of HEP programs in communities throughout the U.S. or its territories.

What is the period of performance?

The grant period will run from December 1, 2024, through December 31, 2026.

Whom do I contact if I’m having technical difficulties while submitting the proposal?

If you have questions about the RFP, please email HEPResourceCohort@air.org. For questions related to the Fluxx portal, please email grantsmanagement@ascendiumeducation.org. Please type “HEP TA Resource Initiative” in the subject line of your email. We will attempt to resolve technical issues as quickly as possible.

Proposal Budgeting

1. What are the expected award amounts?

Proposers may request up to a total of \$325,000 to cover direct and indirect costs for the 2-year grant period. Indirect costs on direct expenses are allowed but **should not exceed 15% of the total budget**.

- **Direct costs** are the costs involved in delivering project services. Examples of direct project expenses include personnel, salaries, fringe benefits, travel, supplies and materials, trainings, meetings, and consultants.
- **Indirect costs** are organizational costs not directly tied to the project budget but required to support general organizational operations. Examples of indirect costs include executive and support staff salaries (e.g., human resources, accounting, IT staff), organizational equipment and technology, rent, and utilities.

Should travel and lodging costs be included in proposal budgets?

For this project, proposal teams must include costs associated with travel and attendance at the following events for two team members:

- A 2-day, in-person meeting facilitated by the AIR team with the funded cohort of grantees in winter 2025 and winter 2026 (location and dates to be determined); and
- 3 days of attendance at the annual National Conference on Higher Education in Prison (NCHEP) in April 2025 and in spring 2026 (specific dates and locations to be determined).

Direct costs for travel may be estimated at approximately \$2,000 per trip/per person.

Should proposal budgets include costs associated with implementing resource dissemination activities?

Yes. Grantees will be expected to develop and implement a dissemination strategy to amplify uptake of the resource (i.e., the project's main deliverable). Project budgets should reflect adequate funding to support and implement dissemination activities in Year 2 of the grant.

Can proposal budgets include funds for the creation of a position specifically focused on refining and scaling the proposed resource?

Applicants are encouraged to consider sustainability when thinking about creating positions specifically focused on the proposed resource. Although the creation of a finite position in response to this specific opportunity is discouraged, applicants hoping to expand staffing for this work may include a justification for doing so, including a plan for the financial sustainability of the position beyond the funding period.

What kinds of activities will this grant *not* fund?

Grant funds may not be used to develop or implement a HEP program and/or develop a *new* resource.

Proposal Scoring Process

1. What is the proposal review process?

AIR will lead the proposal review and scoring process. All proposals will be independently scored by two reviewers (AIR and an external subject-matter expert) using a common scoring rubric. Proposal reviewers will first review proposals individually and then discuss scores with their review partner. Areas of alignment and misalignment will be discussed and will aid review pairs in developing consensus on final ratings. Reviewers will decide whether a proposal should move forward to the interview stage and will provide a rationale for this decision. All applicants will receive a summary of combined reviewer feedback.

Applicants whose proposals were recommended by reviewers will be invited to participate in the interview stage, to be conducted in September 2024. All applicants will be notified of these funding decisions by November 2024.

How will the full proposal be evaluated?

Proposals will be evaluated according to their alignment with the guiding questions, scoring criteria, and focus areas outlined in the RFP. Specifically, applications will be scored on indicators of responsiveness to each of the required proposal sections including:

- Organizational information, application information, and abstract **(up to 12 points)**
- Articulation of the resource's contribution toward addressing a high-leverage need **(up to 16 points)**
- Applicability of the resource to the needs of the broader HEP field **(up to 12 points)**
- Potential to improve and scale the resource to other programs and contexts **(up to 12 points)**
- Organizational capacity to implement resource **(up to 12 points)**
- Assessment of potential risks and the strength of mitigation strategies to address these risks and minimize barriers **(up to 8 points)**
- Grant budget feasibility **(up to 8 points)**

Submitting a Proposal

1. Where do I submit my proposal?

To submit a proposal for this funding opportunity, you must register for an account in the Fluxx grant portal. **Ascendium strongly encourages applicants to complete this step early in the application process; it may take up to 2 business days for registration requests to be reviewed and approved.** All users who are planning to submit a proposal must register; as part of this registration process, you may have up to three contacts, as well as an Authorized Signatory and an Authorized Financial Contact.

To register, follow these steps:

- a. Navigate to <https://ascendium.fluxx.io/>.
- b. Click **Register Now**. The registration form displays.
- c. Complete all required fields. Required fields are bolded.
Make sure to select **Yes** from the drop-down menu under *Are you requesting grant portal access to apply for a current open funding opportunity?*
- d. Click **Submit Request**. A message will display thanking you for submitting your registration request.

Ascendium will review your request and email login credentials and instructions to you within 2 business days.

Once you have access to your grant portal account, you can submit your proposal by navigating to <https://ascendium.fluxx.io/>. Additional details on how to submit your proposal in Fluxx are provided in the RFP document.

Whom do I contact if I'm having technical difficulties while submitting the proposal?

If you are having technical difficulties while accessing or submitting your proposal via the Ascendium grant portal, please email questions to grantsmanagement@ascendiumeducation.org. Please type "**HEP TA Resource Initiative**" in the subject line of your email. We will attempt to resolve technical issues as quickly as possible.

Glossary of Key Terms (as Applied to the RFP)

Community of practice (CoP): A group of people who share an interest, shared experience, and/or expertise in a specific domain (e.g., Higher Education in Prison, or HEP, programs) and who regularly interact with one another to share best practices and advance work in the field.

Digital divide: The gap between students on free-world campuses who have unfettered access to technology and the internet and students who are incarcerated and have limited or no access to the web due to the security concerns of correctional facilities or to other obstacles.

Higher Education in Prison (HEP) programs: HEP programs are eligible, credit-bearing academic programs offered by educational institutions to individuals who are in carceral spaces.

High-leverage needs (HLNs): Problems that, if addressed, would lead to significant improvements in the design, delivery, and continuous improvement of HEP programs.

Institution of higher education (IHE): An accredited college, university, or similar institution that offers postsecondary-level academic instruction that leads to a credential, an associate degree, or a higher degree.

Postsecondary education: Coursework following K–12 or secondary education offered by institutions of higher education that can lead to a certificate, associate degree, bachelor’s degree, or graduate/professional credential.

Program implementation: The operationalization and delivery of HEP programming in a manner that reflects the specific contexts and needs of the students and that integrates the development of skills that promote career readiness while supporting students in their postsecondary pathways.

Systems alignment: Collaboration with academic institution leadership, corrections agency leadership, and/or community-based organizations to secure commitments and define critical processes for integrating a HEP program within the academic institution infrastructure and prison facility.

Student preparation: Efforts to build and expand prospective student awareness of HEP programs. This includes promoting the value of participating in a postsecondary program and communicating eligibility requirements for enrollment, available financial aid supports, and expectations for program participation.

Transfer, degree completion, and workforce success: Supportive services for HEP alumni to maintain connection, support degree completion, and grow their professional networks.

The “resource”: A product specific to a HEP program that is tangible and can be packaged to support broader use in program contexts.