



# Identifying and Scaling Programmatic Technical Assistance Resources in Higher Education in Prison

This Request for Proposals (RFP) is for higher education in prison (HEP) programs operating in prisons or jails that are working independently or as a consortium, as well as nonprofit agencies and institutions that are working as third-party facilitators of HEP programs. The RFP invites these entities to submit a proposal to refine, scale, and disseminate a programmatic technical assistance (TA) resource that they have developed and that they have found to be effective in serving the educational goals or other identified needs of their students. Awarded grantees will gain support for the refinement, scaling, and dissemination of their resource through supported engagement in a focused community of practice designed to address high-leverage needs (HLNs) for programmatic TA in the HEP field.

## Overview

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Ascendium Education Group has partnered with the American Institutes for Research<sup>®</sup> (AIR<sup>®</sup>) to support this initiative to identify and scale programmatic TA in HEP. This initiative is grounded in and motivated by the current context in which HEP programs exist:

- The landscape of HEP programs has grown rapidly in the last 6 years, with data indicating that the field has increased from approximately 100 programs in 2018 to more than 600 programs in 2024. This growth has largely been due to (a) the Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative that was launched in 2015 and (b) the 2020 passage of the [FAFSA Simplification Act](#), which fully restored Pell Grants for otherwise eligible individuals who are detained or incarcerated and enrolled in a HEP program; this act went into effect on July 1, 2023. These expanded opportunities to serve students in carceral settings led many HEP programs to develop resources that meet the unique needs of their students within the context of their own programmatic and carceral settings. This presents an opportunity to identify, investigate, and test these resources so they can be refined and shared for applicability across the broader HEP field.
- While HEP programs have been designing and implementing curricula and support systems that meet the unique needs of their students, there is a recognized need to define markers for resource

quality and ensure alignment to the postsecondary pathways that lead to equitable student success by establishing (1) a validated set of high-impact programmatic resources and (2) a single repository to house these resources for dissemination across the HEP field.

## Theory of Action

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The HEP field would benefit from leveraging the tools and resources that individual HEP programs have already created and have been using with success in their own contexts. Up until now, the HEP field has not had the capacity or the necessary mechanisms in place to identify and access existing resources or to determine whether the resources are of high quality and could be implemented by other programs with similarly positive results. This RFP invites HEP programs to submit a proposal to leverage a programmatic TA resource they are currently using and that they believe has value and applicability to the broader field of HEP programs. Awarded programs will comprise a cohort of grantees that will receive support and coaching through a focused community of practice (CoP) led by AIR to refine, scale, and disseminate their resource. AIR will engage with the CoP to provide whole group and individual coaching support and will conduct site visits to collect data on how resources are being used with programs, understand what makes them valuable, and explore how they can be refined and packaged into a scalable, open-access resource for use by other programs in the field. The work of this collaborative will provide proof points of effectiveness and the necessary conditions to enable other HEP programs to design, launch, and continuously improve equitable pathways through postsecondary education and into the workforce for students who are incarcerated.

The expected outcomes of this 2-year initiative for grantees and the broader field include the following:

- The HEP field will be better positioned to design and implement college programming in carceral spaces that equitably engages incarcerated learners in well-articulated pathways to complete postsecondary programs that set them up for lifetime autonomy and success.
- Grantees will generate evidence through a continuous improvement process that helps understand the effectiveness of their resources in their own context and fieldwide.
- Grantee resources will be refined and packaged into a repository of high-quality resources that have broader applicability to address HLN in the field.
- Grantees will be able to communicate about the quality and relevance of their resources as well as the conditions in which their resources can be deployed successfully.
- Grantees will effectively disseminate their resources to other programs.
- Grantees will co-develop a set of validated high-impact resources for use in the field.
- Grantees will experience increased collaboration and coordination with one another as part of the CoP.

## Specific Request for This RFP

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This initiative recognizes that many HEP programs have developed programmatic resources that promote the success of their students and that have shown promise in their own contexts. These resources have tremendous potential value to the broader field; however, there are limited formal channels through which HEP programs can demonstrate the effectiveness of their resource and share and package their resource to support the HLN TA needs of programs operating in other contexts, making it challenging for programs to search for resources that they can be sure are of high quality. This initiative will provide individualized support and assistance to a cohort of HEP programs that have developed, and are currently using, a resource with some indication of success in their own context. The initiative will support grantees in refining, scaling, and disseminating their resources to the broader field. Specifically, grantees will participate in a 2-year learning collaborative CoP and will engage in a cycle of continuous improvement to pilot, refine, and disseminate their resources for broader usability by the HEP field, resulting in a validated set of high-impact programmatic TA resources.

For the purposes of this grant initiative, a “**resource**” is defined as something that is **specific to a HEP program or can be adapted or refined to support a HEP program**, is **tangible**, and **can be packaged to support broader use** in other programs.

This initiative is interested specifically in funding programs with resources that address an HLN in at least one of four dimensions related to best practices in HEP program design and implementation: (1) Systems Alignment; (2) Student Preparation; (3) Program Implementation; and (4) Transfer, Degree/Credential Completion, and Workforce Success. These four dimensions and the types of resources that address HLNs in these dimensions are described in more detail below.

- **Systems Alignment:** Resources in this dimension support HEP program leaders in collaborating 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 or jail facility.
  - The types of resources in this dimension may include (but are not limited to) those that promote integrated data systems, partnership models, and agreements. Such resources also may include effective approaches or models for securing necessary commitments and partnerships; and resources that help address challenges or barriers related to the realignment of policies, structures, and systems to enable the postsecondary success of students who are incarcerated.
- **Student Preparation:** Resources in this dimension support building and expanding prospective student awareness of HEP programs. This includes resources that help HEP programs promote the value of participating in a postsecondary program and to clearly communicate eligibility requirements for enrollment, available financial aid supports, and expectations for program participation.

- The types of resources for this dimension may include (but are not limited to) student recruitment materials that broaden access for prospective students to the HEP program and improve equity in enrollment, including materials that dispel myths and/or address the concerns of prospective students and articulate the value of the program in the workforce; financial aid and financial literacy-focused resources; and resources that effectively assess the readiness of HEP program students and/or help programs provide the necessary supports to address students’ needs and prepare them for success in college.
- **Program Implementation:** Resources in this dimension support the operationalization and delivery of HEP programming in a manner that reflects the specific contexts and needs of the students and integrates the development of skills that promote workforce readiness while supporting students in their postsecondary pathways.
  - The types of resources for this dimension may include (but are not limited to) resources to address challenges related to the digital divide and the use of technology in prison classrooms; syllabi and lessons that are adapted for prison classroom settings; faculty and staff training resources; student advising resources to support personalized and holistic approaches to understanding students’ needs, goals, and connecting them to aligned services; and resources that focus on empowering students and giving them agency in their postsecondary experience.
- **Transfer, Degree/Credential Completion, and Workforce Success:** Resources in this dimension support leaders in HEP programs in continuing to offer supportive services for HEP program alumni to maintain connections, support degree completion, and grow their professional networks.
  - The types of resources for this dimension may include (but are not limited to) those that address challenges associated with midterm or mid-program release from a carceral setting and transfer to the free-world campus; “warm handoffs” after incarceration to free-world campus supports and services; and resources to connect students to alumni and professional networks after their release to support continuation to degree/credential completion and workforce transitions.

The four dimensions of HEP program design and implementation and the related HLN within each dimension were identified and defined through a literature review of best practices in higher education that can be applied in HEP program contexts, as well as a targeted review of the emerging literature on promising practices and barriers to providing high-quality college programming and pathways for students who are incarcerated. The four dimensions and the related HLN that emerged from the literature review were further refined based on needs-sensing conversations and consultation with experts in the field, including intermediary organizations working to support HEP programs, HEP program leaders and staff, and student alumni from HEP programs.

## Applicant Eligibility

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### Who May Submit Proposals:

Eligible applicants must meet the following criteria. By submitting an application, you are confirming that you meet these criteria.

- An accredited nonprofit institution of higher education (IHE) running a HEP program in a prison or jail, a state college or university system with a HEP program in a prison or jail, a consortium of HEP programs in prisons or jails, or a nonprofit organization working in partnership with one or more IHEs to run a HEP program in a prison or jail.
- Applicants must additionally meet each of the following criteria:
  - Has been operating the HEP 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 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.

We are committed to investing in projects that are led by and representative of individuals and organizations that reflect the diversity of HEP programs and the surrounding communities to which incarcerated individuals may return after their release. Therefore, we strongly encourage submission of proposals from programs that proactively center the student experience and prioritize equity in postsecondary access and academic success among individuals in carceral settings.

### Who May Serve as Project Lead:

There are no restrictions or limits on who may serve as the project lead.

### Limit on Number of Proposals per Organization:

A single organization may submit no more than one proposal to this RFP.

## Limit on Number of Proposals per Project Lead or Co-Project Lead:

An individual may serve as project lead or co-project lead on no more than one proposal submitted to this RFP.

**Award Information:** Standard grant

**Period of Performance:** December 1, 2024–December 31, 2026

## Project Budget:

Projects may request up to a **total of \$325,000 to cover direct and indirect costs** over the 2-year grant period.

- **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.
  - ***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 [TBD])
    - » 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 TBD)
  - Direct costs for travel may be estimated at approximately \$2,000 per trip/per person.
- **Indirect costs** are organizational costs that are not directly tied to the project budget but that are required to support general organizational operations. Examples of indirect costs include executive and support staff salaries (e.g., human resources, accounting, IT staff, etc.), organizational equipment and technology, rent, and utilities. Indirect costs on direct expenses are allowed but should not exceed 15% of the total budget.

## Detailed Summary of Grantee Commitment and Expectations

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During the grant period, grantees will be expected to commit to and engage in the activities listed in Table 1. Project budgets will need to consider and account for the direct costs associated with the described activities and events.

**Table 1. Grantee Activities and Commitments**

Activity/event	Expected time commitment	Description
Full cohort group virtual meetings	90 minutes, up to eight meetings per year	<p>Full-group meetings will provide an opportunity for group learning, networking, and collaboration. Activities will be designed according to grantee needs and may include sharing of lessons learned, peer-to-peer learning, and content-focused learning sessions facilitated by grantees and/or experts in the field.</p> <p>In Year 2 of the grant period, shared work during these meetings will focus on dissemination of resources.</p>
1:1 virtual coaching meetings with grantee and coach	60 minutes, up to eight meetings per year	1:1 coaching meetings will provide grantees with direct, tailored support for resource development and continuous improvement. Meeting content will be developed in collaboration with grantees and refined on an ongoing basis according to evolving needs.
In-person cohort convenings	January 2025: 2-day kickoff convening January 2026: 2-day resource sharing and Year 2 kickoff meeting	In-person cohort meetings will support relationship building and provide protected time for grantees to deeply engage with the work and connect with one another. <b><i>Project teams should budget for travel for at least two team members to attend the Year 1 and Year 2 meetings.</i></b>
NCHEP conference	April 2025; see conference website: <a href="https://www.higheredinprison.org/national-conference">https://www.higheredinprison.org/national-conference</a> Spring 2026; dates and location TBD	Attendance at the annual National Conference on Higher Education in Prison (NCHEP) will support continued in-person relationship building among grantees in addition to networking and eminence building for resource(s). All funded project teams will be expected to send at least two team members to NCHEP each year of the grant, regardless of whether or not they are presenting. AIR’s coaching will include supporting any grantees interested in developing proposals to present at NCHEP, either individually or in groups. <b><i>Project teams should budget for travel and conference costs for at least two team members to spend 3 days at NCHEP in 2025 and 2026 (one pre-conference day and two conference days).</i></b>
Interim work on own	As applicable between scheduled meetings	Grantees will be expected to support progress of their resource development by independently completing interim work as applicable between monthly meetings. AIR will be available for asynchronous support as needed between meetings.
Review existing resources available via the <a href="#">Resource Community for Higher Education in Prison (RCHEP)</a>	Approximately 8 hours of time in the first quarter of the grant period	Review of existing resources will enable grantees to better understand what is already available and situate their resource in the broader context of available resources, in addition to distinguishing the unique value their resource provides.



Activity/event	Expected time commitment	Description
Provide and receive grantee peer feedback	Ongoing throughout the grant period via scheduled meetings and/or ad hoc conversations with other grantees	Peer feedback will provide ongoing opportunities for grantees to learn from one another and receive valuable feedback from others who are doing similar work.
Work with AIR to facilitate a 1- to 1.5-day site visit and virtual data collection (if needed) in Year 1 of the grant period	<p>Preparation time will vary based on processes for gaining approval to enter facilities and collect data.</p> <p>AIR will work with each grantee in the 1:1 coaching meetings to identify focus group and interview participants and to craft a plan for on-site data collection.</p> <p>AIR recognizes the complex nature of gaining approval to enter facilities and collect data and is committed to working with each grantee and site to minimize the burden on grantees and their programs to the extent possible.</p> <p>The anticipated time commitment for the site visit is between 2 and 2.5 working days during the first year of the grant period (to include preparation, logistics, and time coordinating with the AIR team while on-site).</p>	AIR data collection will help grantees gain insights and understand user experiences, including strengths and benefits, challenges, and areas for potential refinement related to implementing the resource. AIR will develop case studies of resource(s) that will identify key facilitators and barriers and that will help other programs understand why the resource is effective and how it will work in other contexts.
Submit resource for external review/piloting at another HEP program	Approximately 12 hours of time to prepare the resource and accompanying information to support review/piloting of resource by another HEP program	Grantees will be asked to share their resource with another HEP program for external feedback and review as part of the continuous improvement process. This review may include piloting the resource by the partnering HEP program. This activity is anticipated to occur in the latter half of Year 1 of the grant period. The intent is to provide an opportunity to understand how the resource can be used in a different context, as well as identify any areas for improvement or guidance for customization that can inform scalability and dissemination to the broader HEP field.

## Grant Reporting Expectations

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 products during the grant period:

1. A refined resource that includes accompanying tools, guidance, and support materials to allow application/customization for different program contexts (*due by end of March 2026*).
2. A dissemination plan to amplify visibility and enable the application/customization of the resource for use by other HEP programs in the field (*due by end of April 2026*).

Grantees will be expected to implement their planned dissemination activities for raising awareness and motivating other programs to learn about and use their resource (from May to December 2026). Grantees will receive support from AIR and AIR’s communications specialists in executing their dissemination activities in the final year of the grant.

**All resources produced by grantees will be freely and openly available to promote capacity building and use in the HEP field, with appropriate attribution/citation to authors of originally developed materials. Further and when relevant, grant work products may be licensed under a Creative Commons or other similar licensing scheme to support public accessibility and widespread distribution.**

### Informational Webinar

AIR will host an informational webinar about this RFP on **July 31, 2024, from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. ET**. You can register for the webinar at [https://air-org.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_yELYWvSHS9aa-IF17afPyA](https://air-org.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_yELYWvSHS9aa-IF17afPyA).

A recording of the webinar will be posted at <https://www.air.org/HEPResourceCohort>, along with an updated Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document to summarize and share any questions raised during the webinar.

### Process Timeline

Table 2 presents the timeline for the RFP and the award process. Please note that Ascendium and AIR reserve the right to modify the timeline to accommodate the appropriate review and full consideration of all submissions. Applicants will be notified of any modifications to the timeline.

**Table 2. RFP Process and Award Timeline**

Milestone/activity	Date
RFP released	July 22, 2024
Informational webinar for prospective grantees	July 31, 2024, 12:00–1:00 p.m. ET
<b>Proposals due</b>	<b>August 23, 2024, 5 p.m. ET</b>
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

## Application Process

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### Creating an Account in Fluxx

Before you can submit a proposal for this funding opportunity, you need to register for an account in our grant portal, Fluxx. **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 will be accessing the application should register; you may have up to three contacts, as well as an Authorized Signatory and an Authorized Financial Contact.

To register for a Fluxx account, follow these steps:

1. Navigate to <https://ascendium.fluxx.io/>.
2. Click **Register Now**. The registration form displays.
3. Complete all required fields. Required fields are bolded.
  - a. 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?
4. Click **Submit Request**. A message will display thanking you for submitting your registration request.
  - a. We'll review your request and email you login credentials and instructions within 2 business days.

### Instructions for Submitting Application

Once you have access to your grant portal account, you can submit your proposal.

1. Navigate to <https://ascendium.fluxx.io/>.
2. Log in using the credentials and instructions provided in the registration approval email. The Welcome page displays.
3. Select **Funding Opportunities** from the navigation pane.
4. Click **Apply Now** to begin your proposal submission. An application displays in the foreground.
5. In the Before you Begin section, select **HEP TA Resource Initiative** from the drop-down menu.
6. To complete the proposal, click **Edit** within the selected application. Once the application is complete, click **Save and Close**.

**Note:** The portal doesn't autosave, so click **Save and Continue** often to save your work. If you start and then need to finish your proposal at another time, click **Save and Close**. Return to **Applications** to view your saved proposal.
7. When ready to submit your proposal application, click **Submit**. A pop-up window displays.
8. Click **OK**. The application now displays in the **Applications Submitted** section of the navigation pane. If the application does not immediately display in this section, refresh the screen.

## Proposal Requirements

Once you gain access to this RFP application in Fluxx, you will be required to (1) submit information about your organization and key contacts for the grant (guidelines are provided next) and (2) include a brief project abstract. You will then be asked to (3) respond to a set of narrative questions and, finally, to (4) submit budget information using the guidance and instructions provided in the **Grant Budget and Budget Narrative** section of this RFP document.

Guidelines for entering applicant organization and contact information are outlined below.

### Applicant Organization Information

The organization name displayed in the Ascendium grant portal should align with your organization's legal name and the name that your organization would expect to appear as the grantee organization in a Grant Agreement. Your organization name should align with the organization name as it appears in both your organization's Form 990 and audited financial statements.

- If there is misalignment between organization names, this may be an indication that a fiscal sponsor is required. This is often the case for colleges and college systems.
  - A fiscal sponsor manages Grant Agreements and grant funds on behalf of the grantee organization (the organization conducting most grant activities). If you choose to partner with a fiscal sponsor, the Grant Agreement will display as follows: Grantee Organization Name, a project of Fiscal Sponsor Organization Name. Payments are sent to the Fiscal Sponsor.
- **If you believe you may need to apply through a fiscal sponsor, please contact [grantsmanagement@ascendiumeducation.org](mailto:grantsmanagement@ascendiumeducation.org)** as soon as possible so we can advise you how to efficiently complete your RFP response.
- Within the grant portal, you will be asked to indicate your organization type. Applicants are strongly encouraged to collaborate with their administrative or fiscal staff when completing this portion of the application; responses connect to the types of organizational fiscal documentation that you may be invited to provide.

### Contacts

The Ascendium grant portal allows up to five individuals access to an application. Review the following guidance to ensure that the correct individuals have the access needed.

- **Primary Contact:** This individual will collaborate most closely with Ascendium and AIR. The individual listed here will receive all automated emails from the grant portal.
- **Authorized Signatory:** If funded, this individual will be asked to sign the Grant Agreement. The primary delay in finalizing Grant Agreements is an incorrect signatory listed in the grant application. Before submitting your grant application, review this contact to ensure the person listed has authority to review and sign contracts on behalf of the applicant organization.

- **Financial Contact:** This individual responds to financial practices questions within your application and provides the requested fiscal documentation. If the grant application is approved, this individual will be invited to the grant portal to complete a payment authorization form, which includes your organization’s Automated Clearing House (ACH) and Form W-9 information. Delays in completing the payment authorization form typically occur when the incorrect individual is listed as a financial contact and often lead to extended delays in Ascendium’s ability to process disbursements. Please ensure that the financial contact is familiar with your grant application and is prepared to complete requested documentation if your application is approved.
- **Additional Contacts:** You may list two additional individuals who should have access to the grant application and related reporting. Additional contacts are usually grant writers or other developmental/project support staff.

## Fluxx Application Sections for Submission

### *Welcome*

#### **Grant Program Title: Identifying and Scaling Programmatic Technical Assistance in Higher Education in Prison**

This Request for Proposals (RFP) invites Higher Education in Prison (HEP) programs operating in prisons or jails that are working independently or as a consortium, as well as nonprofit organizations working as a third-party facilitator, to submit a proposal to refine, scale, and disseminate a resource they have developed and are using with success in their program, through supported engagement in a focused community of practice designed to address high-leverage needs (HLNs) for programmatic technical assistance (TA) in the HEP field.

### *Organizational Information*

- Lead applicant organization name
- Location of lead applicant organization
- Name of primary contact for grant
- Email address of primary contact for grant
- Authorized signatory for grant
- Authorized financial contact for grant
- Additional contact 1 (optional)
- Additional contact 2 (optional)

## ***Application Information***

- Total Amount Requested
- Proposal due at [this will be a prepopulated field in Fluxx: August 23, 2024]
- Grant start date [this will be a prepopulated field in Fluxx: December 1, 2024]
- Grant end date [this will be a prepopulated field in Fluxx: December 31, 2026]

## ***Narrative Questions***

### ***Program Overview***

- Please provide the following additional information in the text box below:
  - HEP program name in which resource is used
  - Institution of higher education partner name
  - Name(s) of prison(s) or jail facility(ies) served where resource is used
  - Number of incarcerated students enrolled in program, as of July 2024
  - Gender(s) of students served
- Resource title
- Resource focus area (select all that apply)
  - Systems Alignment
  - Student Preparation
  - Program Implementation
  - Transfer, Degree/Certificate Completion, and Workforce Success
- Project abstract. Briefly describe your resource, including its purpose, how it is used in your program, the target audience(s), how it helps promote the success of your students, and its significance and anticipated contribution(s) to the field in addressing HLN related to Systems Alignment; Student Preparation; Program Implementation; and/or Transfer, Degree/Credential Completion, and Workforce Success. *(Word limit: 250 words)*
  1. Briefly describe your resource, including its purpose, how it is used in the HEP program, who the intended user or audience is, and how long it has been in use in the program. *(Word limit: 1,000 words)*
  2. Please discuss what high-leverage need (HLN) your resource is intended to address. (A high-leverage need is a problem that, if addressed, would lead to significant improvements in the design, delivery, and continuous improvement of HEP programs.) The HLN can relate to specific needs identified in the current program context in which the resource is being used and/or to needs across the HEP field. *(Word limit: 1,000 words)*

3. How do you see this resource being of use to other HEP programs? What is its potential for broader applicability in the field? *(Word limit: 750 words)*
4. How will this grant help you address any challenges or barriers you have experienced related to refining and sharing your resource with other programs? Please include in your response a description of how this grant will help you (1) improve the resource in the context and work of your own program, and (2) effectively scale and share this resource with other programs for use in their own contexts. *(Word limit: 1,000 words)*
5. Describe how you plan to meet the organizational capacity and expertise requirements for successful project implementation, including existing or new personnel that will contribute to the proposed project's activities and outputs. If there are gaps in your organization's expertise or competencies relative to the proposed project's goals, outputs, and audiences, describe how you plan to fill those gaps. Note any key partners you plan to engage in the proposed project to complement your existing organizational expertise and what role(s) those partners will play in relation to the proposed project's goals. *(Word limit: 1,500)*
6. Please provide a brief narrative addressing potential risks and barriers associated with your participation. Please include in your response (1) any anticipated or potential challenges and risks that might prevent the success and achievement of key goals and objectives for the project and (2) strategies that you plan to use for mitigating anticipated risks and challenges. *(Word limit: 750 words)*

### **Grant Budget and Budget Narrative**

In the grant portal, you will be asked to enter a grant budget and a budget narrative that details how you will allocate funds to support this work. There are two components to submitting budget details:

- **Grant Budget:** The grant budget is completed in the Ascendium grant portal at the time of proposal submission and should comply with Ascendium's [Indirect Cost Rate policy](#). The grant budget should include only the grant dollars requested from Ascendium.
  - Budget categories should be rounded up to the nearest \$100 and may include the following:
    - » Direct Expenses: Personnel, consultants, travel, supplies/materials, trainings/meetings, other expenses
    - » Indirect Cost Allocation on Direct Expenses
    - » Sub-Grantee Expenses: Direct sub-grantee costs, indirect cost allocation to sub-grantees, indirect sub-granted allowance to grantee organization.
  - The grant budget sets the foundation for grant reporting and payment disbursements. For projects of more than one year, the grant budget should be broken into individual budget periods. Budget periods are typically about one year in length. Unfortunately, Budget Periods cannot be pre-programmed in the system on your behalf. Applicants are asked to add two Budget Periods for this opportunity:

- » Budget Period 1: 12/1/2024–12/31/2025
- » Budget Period 2: 1/1/2026–12/31/2026
- **Budget Narrative:** Detailed information about the information requested in each budget category should be provided in the budget narrative. This applies only to categories in the grant budget and is completed at the time of proposal.

## Financial Practices

To support our review of grant proposals and organizational context in which a project is situated, Ascendium staff complete a financial due diligence review of each application submitted. The review helps us determine whether appropriate resources have been requested to support the project request and to identify whether the appropriate financial practices are in place to responsibly manage grant funds. The review also helps us determine opportunities to support the strengthening of an organization’s fiscal infrastructure and financial health.

The extent of the financial review depends on your organization type. The grant portal will display the financial practices question and attachments required for your application after Organization Information is completed and saved. The documentation you’ll be asked to provide will vary by organization type and may include audited financial statements or a Memorandum of Understanding (applies only to fiscally sponsored projects).

## Additional Information About Ascendium Education Group and American Institutes for Research

### About Ascendium Education Group

Ascendium Education Group is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization committed to helping people reach the education and career goals that matter to them. Ascendium invests in initiatives designed to increase the number of learners from low-income backgrounds who complete postsecondary degrees, certificates, and workforce training programs, with an emphasis on first-generation learners, incarcerated adults, rural community members, learners of color, and veterans. Ascendium’s work identifies, validates, and expands best practices to promote large-scale change at the institutional, system, and state levels, with the intention of elevating opportunity for learners from low-income backgrounds. For more information, visit <https://www.ascendiumphilanthropy.org>.

Ascendium is providing the funding support for this initiative and will serve as the administrator for the grant awards and as a collaborative partner to AIR. AIR leads the RFP process, external review panel, and grantee selection process, including providing final grantee recommendations to Ascendium. More information on AIR is provided next.



## About American Institutes for Research

Established in 1946, the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit institution that conducts behavioral and social science research and delivers technical assistance both domestically and internationally in the areas of education, health, and the workforce. AIR's work is driven by its mission to generate and use rigorous evidence that contributes to a better, more equitable world. With headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, AIR has offices across the U.S. and abroad. For more information, visit [AIR.ORG](https://www.air.org).

Fulfilling a key part of AIR's mission, our staff work with international, national, state, and local agencies providing **technical assistance** services that build capacity, facilitate policy change, enhance workforce competencies, foster behavior change, and transform overall systems to achieve outcomes for the people they serve. Through training, coaching, and technology solutions, AIR supports agency staff in addressing challenges across education, health, workforce, and social services. We focus on bridging research and practice by using data for planning, monitoring, and measuring progress and the ability to guide organizations in selecting and implementing the most relevant evidence-based practices to meet their needs.

AIR's work in **postsecondary education** spans the entire postsecondary continuum, including transition to postsecondary education, postsecondary education itself, and transition out of postsecondary education. We ground our work in real-world context, partnering with institutions, practitioners, and students to improve outcomes, with a focus on elevating the unique experiences and voices of students, including students of color, first-generation students, students from low-income backgrounds, adult students, military students, rural students, students in carceral spaces, and parenting students. Our research expertise informs evidence-based practices and system transformation, and we draw on this expertise to synthesize what we learn from practice, research, policy, and evaluation to engage and advance the field.

AIR leverages decades of **workforce** research and strategic planning and consulting to enhance lives and communities. Our workforce program area focuses on the full employment cycle, including workforce preparedness, recruitment, selection, performance management and human capital solutions, and improving outcomes for people with disabilities. Our work extends globally, supporting clients in developing a workforce ready for today's jobs and future opportunities.

AIR's work in **justice systems** is committed to generating and using rigorous evidence to engender transformative change that dismantles structural factors that lead to racial and other disparities. AIR's work spans the justice continuum—from prevention to intervention and reentry—and embeds community-based, restorative, developmentally appropriate, and culturally responsive approaches. We aim to address root causes of harm and trauma and promote equitable access to resources and