
HEP RFP FAQs

Eligibility

Are current Ascendium grant partners eligible to apply?

Yes. A current grant partner may submit a proposal for **new/additional work**. However, we will not consider requests to extend the same work we are currently supporting.

Are postsecondary programs serving youth or individuals with long/life sentences eligible to apply?

Yes. The goal of this initiative is to identify and implement a system of delivery that can effectively serve all students enrolled in credit-bearing/credentialing postsecondary programs.

Does the education have to be credit-bearing? Can it be a form of professional development?

Ascendium's philanthropic mission is to remove barriers to postsecondary credential/degree completion. Therefore, we do not fund work that does not lead students to a meaningful postsecondary credential.

Are blended programs of face-to-face and online instruction acceptable?

Yes. We will consider thoughtful, high-quality blended programs.

Is this grant specific to certain crimes committed? Or can these programs be implemented toward the entire prison population?

There are no restrictions pertaining to the type of conviction or offense.

Does a degree have to be earned during incarceration, or can this apply to coursework that students start in jail/prison, and continue after release? Should there be an employer partner(s)? And why can't we apply as one prison site?

At a minimum, the degree/credential should be started while incarcerated, but can certainly continue once the student is released. We would like to see projects that have thoughtfully considered the needs of students along the entire education and career pathway—from intake and enrollment into release and re-entry. We believe this involves the entire system and cannot be fairly assessed at one prison. This requires a collaborative effort between corrections and education providers.

Our existing academic-corrections relationships are at capacity and as an organization we do not expect to expand in student enrollment—can we apply for funding to enhance our program quality without increasing enrollment?

While we don't have specific expectations around enrollment increases, we have found that a thorough analysis of the prison system (its intake and placement practices through the lens of educational access) can often yield insights into policy/practice maneuvers that can be used to increase educational access. We hope this initiative encourages this type of analysis.

Application

Is the grant scope limited geographically to the Midwest/Great Lakes region?

No. We are accepting applications from projects located anywhere in the United States.

The LOI asks for the name of a lead entity—what is that and what type of entities are eligible to serve as the lead?

The lead entity will be the primary contact and project manager for the grant. Lead entities must have the ability to access, coordinate and consolidate data to appropriately track project outcomes.

Eligible entities administering prison-based, postsecondary programs include: (1) public/private, nonprofit colleges and universities; (2) community and technical colleges; (3) state/federal prison systems or local jails; and (4) independent 501(c)(3) organizations.

The LOI asks me to list our implementation partners. Do the implementation partners need to commit to the project before we submit the LOI?

Commit, no. Be fully aware and in agreement to apply for funding and then ready to commit once grant funds are secure—absolutely. All project sites will be required to have basic partnership agreements in place prior to the planning period and administering of grant funds. Comprehensive MOU's may be developed and executed during the planning phase and must be in place prior to the implementation period.

How will our LOI be evaluated?

LOIs will be evaluated via a consistent set of evaluation criteria. An external evaluation team of experts from around the nation has been assembled to assist with this process.

Will all applicants who are invited to apply start with a planning grant or will some be invited to move directly to implementation?

All applicants should start with a request for a planning grant and should use the proposal process to specify what the planning process will entail. We recognize that the planning process will be different for every system.

Authorized Expenses & Budget

What types of expenses are eligible?

Eligible expenses include: personnel salaries/fringe, contractual and professional services, travel/trainings/meetings, equipment, materials and supplies and direct operating expenses. Please contact us if you have questions about the eligibility of a particular expense.

What is your indirect costs policy?

Ascendium recognizes there are organizational costs involved in implementing an effective grant project. To help offset these indirect costs, the maximum allowable indirect cost rate is up to 15% of the total direct project expenses.

Is this a reimbursement grant or up front funding?

Funding will be awarded up front.

Is there a matching requirement in the budget?

No. However, identifying supplemental funding sources would contribute to a stronger, more competitive proposal.

Notifications

Will we receive a notification that our LOI has been received?

Yes. The primary contacted listed on the LOI will be notified by email.

Should we reach out to a program officer on the Ascendium website if we have a question on throughout the application process?

You should email your question to philanthropy@ascendiumeducation.org. We are committed to replying as promptly as possible.

How will we be notified of the final decision?

The primary contacted listed on the LOI will be notified of the final decision via email.

Funding & Reporting Requirements

How many awards does Ascendium intend to make?

We do not have a set number of awards in mind. However, we would like to keep the cohort of participants fairly small to facilitate deep engagement. We are planning to award fewer than 10.

Does being invited to submit a full proposal guarantee funding?

The short answer is no. However, we intend to invite proposals from organizations with which we would strongly like to partner.

The RFC mentions that there will be a planning phase and an implementation phase, if we are selected for funding, will we have to submit another funding proposal for the implementation phase?

No. During the planning phase you will develop a plan and a comprehensive budget for the implementation phase. This plan and budget will inform funding decisions for the implementation phase.

If we complete the planning phase, does that guarantee us funding for the implementation phase?

Not necessarily. Our goal is to support plan implementation. However, in some circumstances, where plans or partnerships have not progressed, we reserve the right to not fund the implementation phase.

If we are successful in receiving a grant, will we need to submit annual progress reports and/or attend in-person meetings?

Yes and yes. Annual reporting is a standard part of Ascendium's grantmaking process, as are periodic phone check-ins with a program officer. In addition, by participating in the initiative, you agree to attend at least two in-person convenings. The dates of the convenings will be announced as far in advance as possible.

Does Ascendium plan to offer this funding opportunity on a regular basis, or is this a one-time investment?

Ascendium is committed to supporting higher education in prison and while this exact funding opportunity is unlikely to be repeated, we do hope to issue additional HEP related RFPs in the future.