



Ready for Pell Initiative Request for Proposal

November 2021

Important Information

Initiative title: Ready for Pell Initiative

Proposal due: November 24, 2021

Period of performance: December 2021 – December 2023

Funding range: \$100,000 – \$125,000 total over two years for individual colleges; \$50,000 for college systems to support a coordinating function (Each college partnering with a system also submits an application).

Eligible grantees: Title IV eligible institutions that do not currently administer Pell in their postsecondary education programs in prison, and community college and four-year college or university systems offices. Institutions that have participated in a Second Chance Pell (SCP) cohort are not eligible to apply for subgrant awards.

(Note: The eligibility section was modified on November 10, 2021 to clarify that applicants are eligible if they do not currently administer Pell in their postsecondary education programs in prison, but can administer Pell in other postsecondary education programs.)

Expected number of college grantees: 20-30

Proposal length: 10 double-spaced pages

Submit questions and proposal to: AskReadyForPell@jff.org

Introduction

After a 26-year ban, the U.S. Department of Education will reinstate full Pell Grant eligibility for people who are incarcerated for the 2023-2024 academic year. This will restore a substantial funding mechanism for postsecondary education in prison programs. This will also increase the availability and accessibility of PEP programs. Research shows that accessibility to PEP reduces recidivism and increases the likelihood that people will be able to attain employment after prison.

In response to this new opportunity, the Ascendium Education Group has partnered with JFF to launch the *Ready for Pell* initiative, providing grants of up to \$125,000, to strengthen PEP programs and expand the capacity of institutions to eventually administer Pell at the scale that will come with full reinstatement in 2023. JFF will serve as the managing intermediary for the Ready for Pell initiative. Working with our core partner, the Council of State Governments Justice Center, as well as subject matter experts, including the Vera Institute of Justice and the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison, cohort participants will receive technical assistance to strengthen PEP programs and build capacity to maximize the full reinstatement of Pell Grants for eligible PEP students.

About [Ascendium Education Group](#): *Ascendium invests in initiatives designed to increase the number of students from low-income backgrounds who complete postsecondary degrees, certificates, and workforce training programs, with an emphasis on first-generation students, incarcerated adults, rural community members, students of color, and veterans.*

About [JFF](#): *JFF is a national nonprofit dedicated to accelerating the alignment and transformation of the American workforce and education systems to ensure access to economic advancement for all.*

About the Ready for Pell Initiative

On behalf of Ascendium, JFF is seeking a diverse pool, including a minimum of 20 college grantees, with a demonstrated capacity to offer high-quality PEP programs and gear up to administer Pell to the benefit of students who are incarcerated.

I. Initiative Expectations and Objectives

Program Designs for Postsecondary Education in Prison

- Maximize credential offerings, bolster student supports, and expand social networks for students who are incarcerated through meaningful engagement with system office statewide coordination efforts, campus-based student success initiatives, and other community partnerships.
- Build program-level evaluation capacity through the adoption of specific key performance Indicators (KPIs).

Pell Implementation

- Build the capacity to deploy Pell Grants in 2023-24 to maximize benefits to students who are incarcerated and empower them to make informed financial aid decisions aligned with their academic and career aspirations.
- Train administrators about Pell Grant rules to protect students who are incarcerated from expending their limited Pell Grant dollars due to inefficient system policies and practices (transfer, canceling classes, etc.).
- Plan strategies to expand access and build capacity in the postsecondary institution, and to strengthen PEP programming and expand or introduce administration of Pell grants.
- Strengthen partnerships with corrections institutions and state agencies to expand access to and support for PEP programs, sustain the programs, and support full Pell implementation.

Equitable Access and Outcomes

- Develop recruitment strategies that consider eligibility and career pathways and maximize equity.

- Implement evidence-based wraparound supports, such as academic advising and career planning, with a focus on credit mobility and degree completion.

II. Initiative Support

Technical Assistance

Cohort members will receive customized coaching and peer-to-peer networking, as well as participate in a community of practice connecting them to subject matter experts in the field to strengthen programming and support best practices in Pell implementation.

The first community of practice meeting will take place virtually in January 2022, and the second meeting will take place, hopefully in person, in March 2023. Specific dates will be shared with the selected grantees. Grantees will be required to appoint a team to attend both meetings.

Independent Evaluation

JFF will select an independent evaluator to conduct a three-part study:

1. **Implementation study** to document how grantee colleges and their prison partners started the program, designed delivery models and the financial aid process, and collaborated across state postsecondary and corrections systems. The study will also document the steps taken to implement the partnerships from start to finish.
2. **Student-centered surveys** to inform postsecondary education and corrections partners as to the most student-centered models to integrate and administer Pell throughout the learner journey.
3. **Impact analysis** to assess how existing funding and financial aid models for PEP impact student outcomes for a subset of grantee colleges.

Grant Amounts

Individual Colleges

Each college will receive a subgrant of up to \$125,000, awarded over two years, to build institutional capacity when Pell becomes available in 2023. (If applying jointly with a college system, colleges will still receive up to \$125,000 per institution. SCP colleges participating as “peer colleges” as part of the system cohort are not eligible for the institutional grants.)

Ready for Pell initiative grantees can use the grants for the following activities:

- Building infrastructure to deploy Pell Grants in 2023-24 to maximize benefits to students who are incarcerated.
- Designing and piloting programming to empower students who are incarcerated to make informed financial aid decisions aligned with their academic and career aspirations.
- Developing and refining alternative funding models and financial aid opportunities until Pell is reinstated, to advance PEP and improve student outcomes.
- Developing recruitment strategies that consider eligibility and career pathways and maximize equity.
- Training administrators about Pell Grant rules to protect students who are incarcerated from expending their limited Pell Grant dollars due to inefficient system policies and practices (transfer, canceling classes, etc.).
- Planning to implement evidence-based wraparound support, such as academic advising and career planning with a focus on credit mobility and degree completion.
- Building program-level evaluation capacity through the adoption of specific KPIs that speak to program and student success (reference: www.ihep.org/publication/supporting-success-the-higher-education-in-prison-key-performance-indicator-framework/).
- Maximizing credential offerings, bolstering student supports, and expanding social networks for students who are incarcerated through meaningful engagement with statewide coordination efforts, campus-based student success initiatives, or other community partnerships.

Postsecondary System Offices

A college system will receive \$50,000 over two years for its coordinating role with the subset of colleges (minimum of two) selected for this initiative.

College systems can use the grants for the following activities:

- Convene communities of practice across the system that includes Ready for Pell colleges and in-state SCP colleges to share lessons learned for administering Pell.
- Connect Ready for Pell initiatives with other systemwide student success initiatives.

- Help scale PEP programs by utilizing the college systems platform to incentivize adoption when Pell eligibility is restored and work to increase the number of colleges providing PEP.
- Deploy strategic communications to share findings and learnings across the rest of the system.
- Convene cross-sector stakeholders at the state level to support and scale PEP programs to maximize learning opportunities and financial aid access with full Pell reinstatement.
- Develop other strategies for scaling Ready for Pell initiatives, as determined by the college system.

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Postsecondary System Application

Postsecondary systems can apply on behalf of a cohort of colleges that are providing PEP programs. Each of the colleges that are participating in the cohort should complete the **Individual Institution** application. Systems may include Second Chance Pell grantees to serve as “peer mentor colleges” in the cohort, but the SCP colleges should not complete an application. They are not eligible for Ready for Pell technical assistance or direct subgrants under this grant.

Section 1: System Information (Not included in page count)

1. System contact information: Name, grant point of contact and email address, and fiscal point of contact and email address.
2. Are you including any colleges in the cohort that are current SCP recipients? If yes, list the colleges.
3. Which institutions are submitting a proposal to participate in the Ready for Pell initiative from your system? Please list which are emerging programs (one to three years in operation) and long-standing (four or more years in operation). Note: SCP colleges are not eligible to submit proposals.
4. Why are you including these institutions in the Ready for Pell initiative?

Section 2: System-Level Support for PEP Programming (35 points)

1. What efforts have been made at the system level to support PEP programs? How does the system support postsecondary attainment (i.e., enrollment, completion, transfer, and reentry) for students who are enrolled in PEP programs?
2. Does the system assess the quality of the PEP programs delivered by local institutions? Does the state assess learning gains in prison or the transferability of postsecondary education between prison and reentry? If so, describe how.
3. Does the system assess equity in access and attainment of postsecondary credentials against broader student success goals for the system? If so, describe how.

When Pell has been reinstated, what are anticipated constraints to ensuring equity in higher education access, quality, and outcomes for students who are incarcerated?

4. When Pell has been reinstated, what are anticipated opportunities for ensuring equity in higher education access, quality, and outcomes for students who are incarcerated?

Section 3: System-Level Support for Pell Reinstatement (35 points)

1. How does the system support efforts to finance PEP programs?
2. Has the system developed capacity-building strategies to equip institutions to effectively administer Pell in 2023? If so, please describe.
3. How does the system anticipate leveraging this opportunity to ensure the system and individual institutions are ready for full Pell reinstatement in 2023?

Section 4: State-Level Coordination to Support PEP Programs and Pell Reinstatement (30 points)

1. What partnerships have been formed or what efforts have been made at the state level to support access to and attainment of postsecondary education for students who are incarcerated?
2. Are students who are incarcerated included in state-level postsecondary education attainment goals? (*Yes, no, or don't know*)
3. What level of support or buy-in does the state corrections agency provide to support PEP programming?
4. Describe efforts across sectors (postsecondary, corrections, labor, etc.) to improve and expand access to quality PEP programs. To what extent are these partners working together to build capacity at the state and local institution or facility level to maximize full reinstatement of Pell grants for students who are incarcerated?

Ready for Pell Initiative Budget Template

Expenses	Year One Dec. 15, 2021 – Dec. 14, 2022	Year Two Dec. 15, 2022 – Dec. 14, 2023
Salaries and fringe benefits		
Office supplies		
Computers and related equipment (Itemize equipment and cost)		
Dues, fees, pubs, and subs		
Printing and copying		
Telecommunications		
Meetings and travel		
Convening and coordinating (If system office is applying, describe expenses for the \$50,000 here.)		
Other expenses (describe)		
Total expenses		

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Individual Institution Application

Section 1: Institutional Grantee Information (Not included in page count.)

1. Institution contact information: Name, grant point of contact and email address, and fiscal point of contact and email address
2. Type of corrections facility: State prison, federal prison
3. Target population: Male, female, special population
4. Pell eligible? (*Yes or no*)
5. Grantee category: Emerging (PEP program in operation for one to three years) or long-standing (PEP program in operation for four or more years)

Section 2: PEP Program Description (25 points)

1. Please describe your institution's existing or emerging PEP program, including:
 - Length of PEP program
 - If applicable, number of students served annually by PEP program
 - Courses, degrees, and credential programs offered in the prison and the institution's approach or plan for supporting career pathways and credentialing, accreditation planning, and transfers after incarceration for completion of degrees or credentials
 - Existence of support services such as academic and financial advising and programming that expands social networks for students who are incarcerated
 - Transition and support plans for students reentering the community, including coordination with campus-based student success initiatives, ongoing academic advising, financial aid coordination, career planning, access to benefits, additional wraparound services, and job placement as needed
 - Institution's existing or anticipated process for recruitment and placement of eligible students into PEP programs
 - Describe process for determining eligible learners for PEP program
 - Efforts to ensure equity in recruiting and placing eligible students in PEP programming

- Current processes or practices for supporting students through key points of transition (i.e., enrollment, completion, transfer, and reentry), identifying key institutional stakeholders and community partners for reentry, both internal to the institution and external partners, at each step
2. Describe your institution's plan to transition to using Pell in 2023 and what degree or credential programs will be offered, as well as additional services.
 3. What are anticipated constraints in getting ready for Pell and, after Pell has been reinstated, for ensuring equity in higher education access, quality, and outcomes for students who are incarcerated?
 4. What are anticipated opportunities in getting ready for Pell and, after Pell has been reinstated, for ensuring equity in higher education access, quality, and outcomes for students who are incarcerated?

Section 3: Financial Aid Implementation (25 points)

1. Please describe the current funding streams supporting PEP programs and students who are incarcerated.
2. Please describe your institution's screening and assessment process to determine funding for PEP eligibility. How have you addressed equity issues in ensuring equitable access to PEP programming and funding?
3. Please describe your institution's anticipated challenges and opportunities with administering Pell Grants when the program is reinstated.

Section 4: Partnerships (20 points)

1. Describe the relationship with the corrections partner for the PEP program, including:
 - Type of facility
 - Support for PEP program delivery, including consistent use of space, allocation of staffing, and level of priority placed on education programming
 - Level of buy-in and support for the PEP program at the facility staff and leadership level
 - Level of buy-in and support for PEP programs at the state level, with the community college system office or postsecondary coordinating board
 - Depth of cooperation with key partners
 - Opportunities for strengthening buy-in at the facility or system level or with partners

2. Describe the current and anticipated partnerships that support current and emerging PEP programs, including anticipated partners providing the following:
 - Wraparound supports (e.g., academic advising, digital literacy, mental health supports, and supports for networking)
 - Instruction or training services beyond the institution's PEP programming
 - Other financial aid services
3. Describe how your institution, together with your partnerships, will build a long-term plan for sustaining and scaling Pell implementation and PEP programs.
4. Describe how your institution and your partners will help students sustain their educational attainment post-incarceration.

Section 5: Evaluation Participation (15 points)

As part of this program, all grantees and their corrections' partners will be required to participate in research about their PEP program implementation, impact, and student experiences.

1. Describe your institution's experience working with independent evaluators, including your experience with collecting and sharing data with external evaluators.
2. Are there any challenges that you foresee with participating in an independent evaluation? If yes, please explain.

Section 6: Proposed Budget and Financial Information (15 points)

Provide a brief justification for the proposed budget categories and totals and complete the budget template.

Ready for Pell Initiative Budget Template

Expenses	Year One Dec. 2021 – Dec. 2022	Year Two Dec. 2022 – Dec. 2023
Salaries and fringe benefits		
Office supplies		
Computers and related equipment (Itemize equipment and cost)		
Dues, fees, pubs, and subs		
Printing and copying		
Telecommunications		
Meetings and travel		
Other expenses (describe)		
Total expenses		

Section 7: Appendix

Provide biographies of key project personnel, detailing their proposed role and relevant experience. (Maximum of a half-page per person.)