State of Illinois Uniform Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)
Summary Information

Awarding Agency Name	Board Of Higher Education
Agency Contact	Hannah Church (church@ibhe.org)
Announcement Type	Initial
Type of Assistance Instrument	Grant
Funding Opportunity Number	Higher Education in Prison Grant FY27
Funding Opportunity Title	Higher Education in Prison Grant
CSFA Number	601-00-4161
CSFA Popular Name	Higher Education in Prison Grant
Anticipated Number of Awards	0
Estimated Total Program Funding	$250,000
Award Range	Not Applicable
Source of Funding	State
Cost Sharing or Matching Requirements	No
Indirect Costs Allowed	Yes
Restrictions on Indirect Costs	
Posted Date	11/10/2026
Application Date Range	11/10/2026 - 12/21/2026 : 1:00pm
Grant Application Link	
Technical Assistance Session	Offered : Yes Mandatory : Yes Date : 11/18/2026 : 11:00am Registration link : http://Contact prisoneducaitonprograms@ibhe.org to request the virtual session link.

Illinois Board of Higher Education

JB Pritzker, Governor
Pranav Kothari, Chair ● Ginger Ostro, Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Illinois Public Universities and Private, Not-for-Profit Colleges and Universities

FROM: Ginger Ostro, Executive Director

DATE:

RE: Request for Proposals: Higher Education in Prison Grant

DUE DATE: December 21, 2026, at 1:00 pm CST

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE or Agency) established the Bachelor's Degree Prison Education Program (BD-PEP) grant to support institutions in addressing bachelor's level education programs. The state's higher education strategic plan, *A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth*, calls for closing equity gaps for underserved students and , notably, incarcerated individuals are eight times less likely to complete college than the general public.[1] This grant supports institutions in offering and enrolling students in post-secondary educational courses which lead to completion of a bachelor's degree while in custody of the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC).

The Agency is seeking proposals from institutions that offer courses leading to a bachelor's degree to individuals in custody of the IDOC.

Eligible Institutions: Illinois public and non-profit, independent four-year institutions holding accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission, or other accrediting bodies, authorized by the U.S. Department of Education and are authorized to operate and grant degrees in Illinois by IBHE which are currently offering courses leading to a bachelor's degree at an Illinois Department of Corrections facility.

Eligible Students: This grant serves undergraduate students.

Grant Period: The anticipated grant period will be December 2026 to June 30, 2027.

Grant Funding: Institutions may apply for grants in the amount required to implement the initiatives within the term of the grant. IBHE anticipates the typical award will be approximately $40,000, depending on the proposal's scope and quality.

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[1] Couloute, L (2018). Getting Back on Course: Educational exclusion and attainment among formerly incarcerated people. Retrieved October 20, 2026, from https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/education.html.

Application Deadline: The application materials must be submitted via email to prisoneducationprograms@ibhe.org. Applications, with all required materials, must be received by IBHE on December 21, 2026, at 1:00 pm CST to be considered for funding.

Contact Person: For more information on this application, send inquiries to prisoneducationprograms@ibhe.org.

IBHE will host a virtual informational session for potential grant applicants on November 18, 2026, at 11:00 am. Contact prisoneducaitonprograms@ibhe.org to request the virtual session link.

Background and Program Specifications

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE or Agency) established the Bachelor's Degree Prison Education Program (BD-PEP) grant to support institutions in addressing bachelor's level education programs. The state's higher education strategic plan, *A Thriving Illinois: Higher Education Paths to Equity, Sustainability, and Growth*, calls for closing equity gaps for students who have been left behind, notably, incarcerated individuals are eight times less likely to complete college than the general public.[2] This grant supports institutions in offering and enrolling students in post-secondary educational courses which lead to bachelor's degree while in custody of the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC).

The Agency is seeking proposals that support institutions that offer courses leading to a bachelor's degree to individuals in custody of the IDOC.

Grant Priority

During the review process, priority will be given to institutions already offering courses that lead to a bachelor's degree with a clear BD-PEP plan to: (1) maintain/expand/improve robust student support services for participating students in the IDOC facility participating in the program e.g. advisement, career services, tutoring, etc., (2) offer reentry services/transitional planning, (3) demonstrate success for student outcomes tracking for enrollment/progression/graduation and (4) have a clear plan to stabilize and/or increase enrollment.

Funding Allowances

Proposals should present a comprehensive plan that identifies the courses, degree programs, services (student and reentry), and systems designed for participant enrollment/progression/graduation tracking.

Support and grant funding examples may include:

- Faculty stipends, salary, and/or fringe benefits for teaching or developing coursework delivered for individuals in custody at an IDOC facility.
- Staff stipends, salary, and/or fringe benefits for providing additional services in an IDOC facility for BD-PEP participating individuals or for services for former BD-PEP participants.
- Instructional materials purchased for use by BD-PEP participating students or faculty.
- Technology and/or equipment to support coursework or student services for BD-PEP courses/program.
- Contractual services for BD-PEP associated costs.

[2] Couloute, L (2018). Getting Back on Course: Educational exclusion and attainment among formerly incarcerated people. Retrieved October 20, 2026, from https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/education.html.

- Tuition or fees for participating BD-PEP individuals at an IDOC facility serviced by university in the term in which the enrollment occurred.
- Travel compensation for faculty/staff to IDOC location(s).

Proposal Format

Each proposal must be submitted in the format outlined below. Please review the attachments carefully. The following may be used as a checklist to assemble your completed proposal.

1. **Uniform Application for State Grant Assistance (Attachment 1):**
   This form must be completed, dated, and signed by the President/CEO of the fiscal agent.

2. **Proposal Narrative (Attachment 2):**
   Maximum of ten double spaced pages (size 12 in Times New Roman font with one-inch margins) and compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. Within the proposal narrative, please detail the institution's established post-secondary program offering(s) at Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) facilities for individuals in custody. The narrative should include how the programs help support student success, a plan to maintain or grow enrollment, with maximum points awarded for strategies that increase enrollment, and how the institution will track student participation, progression, and graduation rates. The narrative should also specifically distinguish what is currently provided and what additional grant funding will increase or improve. The narrative should identify the need, proposed activities, students and facilities served, and expected results by June 30, 2027.

   The proposal should include the following components:
   - **Academic Curriculum**. Describe how courses/programs currently being offered at Illinois Department of Corrections facilities – include a curricular outline showing the bachelor's degree program and/or how for-credit courses being offered can be used towards a bachelor's degree.
   - **Student Support Services.** Describe academic support services being provided to individuals in custody and if/how they are focused on retention, progression, graduation efforts. Highlight any services available to individuals available to them following release from the IDOC facility and/or completion of coursework.
   - **Transitional Services.** Describe the re-entry support and career guidance for individuals who participate in educational courses and/or degree programs. Highlight any services available to individuals available to them following release from the IDOC facility and/or completion of coursework.
   - **Enrollment Management.** Share an overview of the enrollment management plan for enrollment of the program including the past three academic years of total enrollment by IDOC site and program. If the program has not been established for at least three years, provide data for established years. The plan should include a three-year projection for enrollment of current offerings and note any planned changes (additions or closures) of courses/degree programs. Provide rationale and explain assumptions in projections model.
   - **Data and Outcome Tracking.** Describe how the institution will track participation of students in the IDOC courses and programs to show retention, progression, and time to degree.
   - **Continuity Plan.** Create a continuity plan, using the provided template, to describe how the work supported by the Bachelor's Degree Prison Education Program grant will continue after the funding ends. <u>This does not count toward the 10-page maximum.</u>
   - **Implementation Plan.** Create an implementation plan, using the provided template, to detail the activities that will be completed during each period of the grant, including

those responsible for carrying out the activities, and the month the activities are planned. This does not count toward the 10-page maximum.

Within the narrative, includes:

- For public institutions, explain how this proposal supports the institution's submitted Equity Plan;
- For private institutions, explain how this proposal fits into the institution's broader student success plan or strategic plan.

3. **A Grant Budget with narrative descriptions of each line (Attachment 3):**
   Complete the budget template for each category, including a detailed Budget Narrative of the estimated expenditures in the budget category. Within the Budget Narrative, please indicate how the budgeted items will achieve the plan in the Proposal Narrative. There is a ten percent limit of total indirect costs of the award.

   For programs under the Grant Exclusive Category, please itemize costs by line-item, ensuring each line item is specific and clearly defined.

Review of Proposals

Proposals will be reviewed, scored according to the rubric below, and selected by a committee convened by the Illinois Board of Higher Education staff. Institutions with the highest scores based on the rubric below will be awarded funding up to the funding available. All applicants will be notified of the panel's recommendations via email message to each institution's primary grant contact. Institutions scoring below 60 points on the following rubric will not be considered for funding.

Fiscal Year Bachelor's Degree Prison Education Program (BD-PEP)Application Requirements and Scoring Rubric:

Submitted the Required Documents:

☐ Uniform Application for State Grant Assistance – **Attachment 1**
☐ Proposal Narrative – **Attachment 2**
☐ A Grant Budget with narrative descriptions of each line and signed certification statement – **Attachment 3**

Institutional Eligibility:

☐ Public University or Independent, Non-Profit 4-year institution authorized to operate by IBHE
☐ Accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, or other accreditation agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and authorized by IBHE
☐ Currently offering courses at an Illinois Department of Corrections facility leading to a bachelor's degree.

If any of the above responses are "NO", the institution is not eligible for the grant and applications will not be reviewed.

Proposal Review Criteria

Student Services Points are based on the institution's plan to maintain, expand, or improve robust student support services specifically for program participants. Applicants must clearly explain: • Existing student services that are available to the participants, e.g., advice, career, tutoring, etc. and how the services will contribute to their success • Any expansion of services that will be implemented during the grant period • How participants will access provided services	25 points
Evaluation of Services Points are based on the institution's evaluation plan pertaining to student services as accessed by program participants. Applicants must clearly explain: • What existing institutional systems will be used to collect data • The measurable indicators and target benchmarks that will assess whether the services achieve the intended benefits • Persons or departments responsible for both data collection and evaluation • Evaluation frequency	15 points
Reentry and Transitional Planning Points are based on the institution's reentry and transitional planning that are necessary for success. The plan should clearly specify which programming, and services fall under the institution's purview, and which are managed by the facility. Applicants must clearly explain: • Holistic, research-based methodology used • Specific programming • Connections to community and institutional resources, e.g., technology assistance, career services, networking, health services, etc. • How the institution plans to collaborate and communicate with IDOC's staff charged with reentry and transitional planning	25 points
Implementation and Continuity Plans Points are based on the institution's implementation and continuity plans included with the grant proposal. Applicants are required to use the Implementation and Continuity Plan Template provided with the RFP materials. Applicants should include a detailed plan for executing work during the grant cycle, and a clear and feasible path forward to continue the work beyond the grant cycle.	10 points
Student Outcomes and Tracking Points are based on the institution's plan to demonstrate success for student outcomes, and tracking for enrollment, progression, and graduation. Applicants must clearly explain: • The methodology, including the frequency of both the collection of data and evaluation, used in tracking participants • The analysis methods, metrics and criteria used to determine student success in enrollment, progression, and graduation	15 points
Enrollment Stabilization and Growth Points are based on the institution's plan to stabilize or increase enrollment, with maximum points awarded for strategies that increase enrollment. Applicants must submit an enrollment management plan with clear rationale, along with relevant metrics and benchmarks.	10 points

Total: ___/100