



# Including Students Without Access to Pell

## Strategies for Raising Flexible Funding

*The information provided here is a snapshot of factors to consider when offering programs to students who are incarcerated and who are not eligible for Pell Grants. Universities and colleges are individually operated, and not all strategies are equally applicable. If you have specific questions, contact JFF's Center for Justice & Economic Advancement at [justice@jff.org](mailto:justice@jff.org).*

The restoration of access to Pell Grants for incarcerated learners is a huge step forward in increasing educational opportunities, but we know that there will be learners for whom a Pell Grant is not an option for a variety of reasons.

Colleges may be tempted to restrict access to prison education programs (PEP) to those who are Pell eligible for funding reasons, but in order to not reproduce systemic (and inequitable) barriers to opportunity, it's essential to ensure that programs are accessible to all learners, even those who are ineligible for Pell. We believe all learners should have access to high-quality and meaningful educational programming.

Here are seven tips for colleges that are devising strategies for raising additional flexible funding to support access to PEP programs.

### **1. Understand the true per-student cost of your program.**

We know that tuition doesn't necessarily reflect the true cost of program delivery. Having more accurate costs can help you better target your fundraising. In addition, many funders prefer to support direct program costs instead of providing funds to cover tuition. Work with your financial aid office to develop a realistic tuition model. You may be able to have the college waive tuition with the assumption that you will raise funds to cover program delivery costs.

### **Some things to consider:**

- Are there on-campus services that are covered under tuition that incarcerated students aren't accessing? For example, does part of tuition support the library, writing center, technology, etc.? These should be discounted from the cost of attendance.
- What is the true cost of instruction? This may vary depending on whether instructors are adjuncts (paid per course) or teaching as part of their course load.
- What additional staff time is needed to support the program? This could include administrative time and advising or other support services.
- Are there other programs on campus (TRIO or dual enrollment, for example) that pay a "reduced" tuition rate? Can that model be a starting point?
- Consider unique costs, such as IT support for managing online learning provided in the facility (where applicable) or printing fees for materials that need to be brought in.

**2. Identify additional costs that private funders may want to cover.**

You might be able to find funders interested in funding specific costs, such as technology access inside the facility (if allowable), books or other course materials, or digital literacy training.

**3. Partner with community-based organizations.**

Many community-based organizations are eligible for grants and funding that the college can't apply for directly. Many private funders prefer to work with small nonprofits rather than educational institutions. These partnerships can increase access to wraparound supports and are important for ensuring access to the resources that students reentering the community following incarceration will need as they transition to campus—including housing, transportation, employment, computers and other digital devices, and other basic needs.

**4. Forge a relationship with your college development office.**

Make sure your college's development office is aware of the PEP program and explain why Pell eligibility is an equity issue. Development staff will then be able to help you identify funding opportunities—federal, state, and private grants, as well as donations—that can support your program.

**5. Connect with student groups focused on criminal justice and social justice.**

Your college may have student groups that would be passionate about supporting equitable access to PEP programs. Think about ways to harness their energy to build awareness and support fundraising. Their engagement can also benefit formerly incarcerated students who are returning to campus.

**6. Engage with alumni and current students, and hire formerly incarcerated students in development roles.**

Compelling stories from those who benefitted from PEP programs play an important role in fundraising. Those stories have more impact when told by the individuals themselves, especially if they have formal roles as development staff. Funders immediately see the return on investment of their support when they hear the statistics from people who embody them.

Students and alumni can also inform your fundraising strategy by letting you know what they want out of the program and specific features and supports to include in funding requests.

**7. Consider how to engage corporations and the business community.**

Some businesses may be open to supporting PEP programming. For example, Hudson Link has been successful in engaging with professional sports teams, who in turn can provide access to other corporate funders. Another grantee reported that they are reaching out to companies that have made commitments to hiring formerly incarcerated individuals.