What is the purpose of the National Conference on Higher Education in Prison (NCHEP)?
The overall purpose of NCHEP is to provide an annual opportunity for the higher education in prison community to gather and mobilize the talent, resources, and energy needed to expand access to quality higher education and academic reentry support services to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people.

When was the first NCHEP and who hosted it?
The Education Justice Project at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, hosted the first NCHEP in 2010. About 75 people attended the 2.5-day conference.

When did the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison start hosting NCHEP?
The Alliance started hosting NCHEP in 2017, which was the 7th annual NCHEP. The Alliance recognized that by hosting NCHEP on an annual basis, it could provide stability and consistency while increasing accessibility and equitable opportunity to those interested in attending the conference, which is a growing number each year, and alleviate the responsibility of assuming the significant costs (material and individual) from any program in the community.

How is NCHEP funded?
A mix of private foundation funding and individual donations supports the conference. This funding helps cover the costs of the conference from hotel space to financial aid. Individual registration fees help to cover the expenses related to attendance, including all meals for all attendees. Registration fees do not support the Financial Aid Program, which is solely supported by funds raised by the Alliance.

Who plans the NCHEP?
The Alliance for Higher Education in Prison first hosted the NCHEP in 2017, the 7th annual conference. Planning involved a collaboration between staff, the Alliance Advisory Board, and a planning committee made up of 12-15 self-nominated community members. After carefully compiling comprehensive Exit Reports (available here), which include extensive feedback from the community and the team’s honest assessments of previous NCHEPs, the Alliance decided to perform several changes in the way the conference will be planned, starting in 2021. More specifically, the Alliance’s intention is to continue evolving in the way it engages the community, and in the ways the community can engage the Alliance and the broader field of higher education in prison in return. In an effort to offer opportunities for more community members to participate in the planning process, we will solicit community suggestions, ideas, and feedback through multiple open discussions and surveys on topics such as the conference theme, keynote speakers, special events, etc. The Alliance believes that these efforts will generate a significant structure for the planning of the 2021 NCHEP and of future conferences. Visit our webpage to stay updated about the changes that will be in place for the National Conference on Higher Education in Prison.

Why has NCHEP moved around each year?
Year after year, NCHEP has grown in both attendance and the types and number of events it has offered. By 2016, almost 300 people were registering for the conference! Organizing the conference presented a big undertaking and volunteers did most of the work. Organizations – universities, higher education in prison programs, and community partners – took turns hosting the conference as a way to share the workload as well as the financial burden associated with hosting. An official selection process did not exist; conference hosts were always identified and selected “on the spot” at the end of the previous year’s conference. The conference being hosted in various locations helps to ensure community members and programs in those cities can attend the conference while also providing new opportunities for connection and collaboration with
community members who may not have been able to attend a conference before. The Alliance makes an effort to keep the conference within the Mountain or Central Timezones: it is our hope that this factor will alleviate the burden of traveling through multiple time zones for many participants. Additionally, we try to host NCHEP in cities that are easily accessible in order to keep the potential costs of travel as low as possible.

Why has the registration fee fluctuated year-to-year?
The cost of the conference fluctuates, depending on the location in which the conference will be held (city and hotel). Individual registration fees help to cover the expenses related to attendance (i.e., audio/video technology, meals, printing) and allow other funding that is raised to be used for Financial Aid packages for community members who would be unable to attend otherwise.

What does it cost to host the NCHEP?
The cost for each NCHEP is different depending on location, market prices, amount of attendees, etc. Please visit the Exit Reports to view the cost of past conferences hosted by the Alliance.

Who can apply for NCHEP Financial Aid packages, and how are they funded?
Anyone without institutional/program travel support is eligible to apply for financial aid, but formerly incarcerated students are prioritized. Scholarships are funded by private foundation support that is raised by the Alliance. Scholarships are not funded by registration fees. Respondents to the 2019 Exit Surveys indicated that the financial aid packages, by and large, provided support for the full cost of the conference, including registration, transportation, hotel, and all meals for the duration of the conference.

How can I find out more about the NCHEP?
Please visit the About the NCHEP page on the Alliance’s website for information about the NCHEP (past and present).

How can I ask more questions?
There are three ways to receive more information:
1.) Send us an email: nchep@higheredinprison.org; or
2.) Use the Comments/Suggestions link on our website (and we will add answers to this FAQ);
3.) Share anonymous feedback on this year’s conference planning by completing this form.