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Building and Strengthening HEP Programs in Public Higher Education Systems

Lessons from 15 States

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About This Guide

This guide is a synthesis of insights from public higher education system HEP program leaders across 14 programs and 15 states. Building and strengthening systemwide HEP programs requires matching organizational models to state context, securing sustainable funding, especially state appropriations, formalizing DOC partnerships, investing in multi-agency partnerships, and planning for reentry. HEP programs implementing these practices position themselves for comprehensive, mature, and sustainable programming. May it serve current and aspiring HEP leaders in building systemwide programs that provide high-quality, accessible higher education to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated learners.

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Executive Summary

Public higher education systems are groups of colleges or universities governed by a single board and a system chief executive officer. Most state colleges and universities operate within statewide systems that allow varying degrees of campus autonomy while enabling collaboration across campuses through shared policies and procedures, such as student enrollment and credit transfer. A growing number of public higher education systems also operate higher education in prison (HEP) programs. These HEP programs reflect the college or university system that they are a part of and operate across college campuses and correctional facilities within a state.

The dual nature of HEP programs, existing within both educational and correctional systems, makes them complex to lead but well-equipped to address common challenges. For example, individual higher education institutions operating HEP programs often face barriers related to prison transfers, credit transfers, and reentry support that statewide systems are uniquely positioned to address through coordinated infrastructure and shared resources. By studying how public higher education systems engage in HEP, this field can learn how to better navigate statewide correctional systems that often transfer incarcerated students between facilities during their college program and release them to cities far from their college.

To improve student success for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students, NASH and the SUNY Office of Higher Education in Prison partnered to conduct a year-long study of public higher education systems and HEP. This practitioner guide identifies key structural and policy indicators that correlate with comprehensive, mature, and sustainable HEP programs. Drawing from 17 interviews with system leaders across 15 states, this study examines how public colleges and universities coordinate, fund, and sustain HEP programming.

The research reveals four distinct approaches to coordinating HEP programs in public higher education systems: State University System Office Coordination, Multi-Institutional Consortium, Single-Institution Dominant with System Support, and Nonprofit-Facilitated Partnership. No single model proves universally optimal; rather, comprehensive coverage and sustainability depend on matching organizational structure to state context and securing adequate resources.

Five critical indicators emerged as being associated with comprehensive statewide coverage, mature HEP programs, and sustainable funding:

1. **State funding strongly correlates with scale and sustainability:** The strongest finding across all models is that HEP programs with comprehensive or substantial facility coverage have dedicated state appropriations.
2. **Political champions correlate with state funding:** High-level champions (governors, legislators, chancellors) correlate strongly with securing state appropriations.
3. **Workforce development integration builds political currency:** Systems that integrate career and technical education and partner with the Department of Labor demonstrate stronger correlations with state funding.
4. **HEP programs with formalized Department of Corrections (DOC) partnerships are more comprehensive:** All comprehensive, substantial systems maintain formal memoranda of understanding (MOUs) or interagency agreements with Departments of Corrections, establishing standardized processes and operational stability through personnel changes.
5. **Reentry infrastructure distinguishes mature systems:** System-level reentry services distinguish mature from emerging systems, with the majority of mature systems providing coordinated services compared to none among emerging systems.

Building and strengthening HEP programs in public education systems requires strategic alignment across multiple dimensions: securing dedicated state appropriations, cultivating political champions, integrating workforce development, formalizing DOC partnerships through MOUs or interagency agreements, and investing in system-level reentry infrastructure. These evidence-based indicators provide actionable guidance for current and aspiring HEP leaders working to expand scale and operational maturity.

Introduction

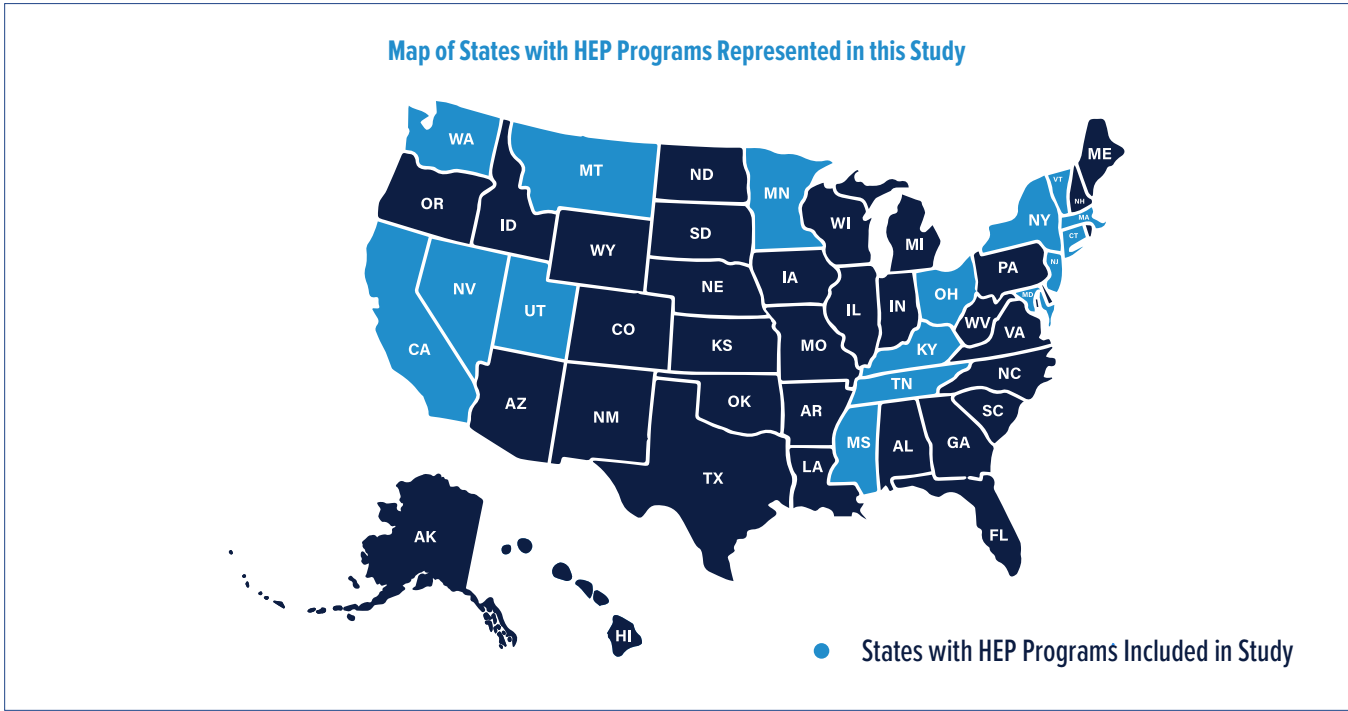
In 2025, the National Association of Higher Education Systems (NASH) and the State University of New York’s Office of Higher Education in Prison (SUNY OHEP) partnered to deepen understanding of how public higher education systems engage with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students.

Public higher education systems comprise the majority of two- and four-year universities in the United States. They formed the majority of the HEP landscape prior to the 1994 elimination of Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated college students (Norweg, 2021). However, since the reintroduction of Pell Grants in HEP beginning in 2016, the landscape has shifted again to include new and expanding HEP programs (Gaskill et al., 2023). This growth has prompted this current research project on public higher education systems and their engagement in HEP programming.

Our recent report, *Higher Education Systems in Prison Education and Campus Reentry: A National Landscape Analysis*, offered a landscape of public higher education systems and their engagement in HEP and begged the question, “What is a successful HEP program in a public higher education system?” This guide is meant to give insight into key features and elements, strategies, policy recommendations, and organizational structures that can build and strengthen systemwide HEP programming.

Study Overview

This guide is an analysis from 17 interviews conducted with HEP program leaders at public higher education systems across 15 states, constituting 14 state and regional public HEP programs. Interviews were conducted between July and September 2025 with system-level administrators, directors, and coordinators who oversee HEP programming across multiple facilities or campuses. Participants include representatives from public university systems, community college systems, state-level consortia, and regional coordinating bodies.



STATISTICAL METHODS

- Frequency counts (n) for the presence of specific elements across systems
- Pearson correlation coefficient (r) for relationships between variables
- Qualitative coding of interview themes and practitioner insights

DATA & METHODS SCOPE

While the sample size of 14 systems interviewed represents a subset of the approximately 90 college systems nationwide, the variety of system models interviewed, and the depth of these interviews provide practical generalizability in these findings. However, outcome measures vary by system. In fact, most interviewees named data collection as a challenge for their HEP program. Finally, it should be noted that all data were collected through interviews with HEP leaders and reflect their perspectives and assessments. Some responses involved estimates or subjective assessments.

DEFINITIONS

Mature System: A HEP program with 5 or more years of sustained operations. These systems have established policies, procedures, and operational stability.

Emerging System: A HEP program with less than 5 years of sustained operations. These systems are still developing infrastructure, establishing partnerships, and building operational capacity.

Scale Measurements

System scale was measured by the percentage of a state's correctional facilities with active HEP programming:

Coverage Level	% of State Facilities	Description
Comprehensive	70-100%	Operating in $\geq 70\%$ of the state's correctional facilities
Substantial	40-69%	Significant presence across multiple regions
Developing	10-39%	Multi-facility coverage, at least 3 facilities
Limited	<10%	Pilot or boutique programs in 1-2 facilities

Rapid Expansion: HEP program grows from programs at minimal facilities to substantial or comprehensive coverage in ≤ 10 years. Qualitative indicators included interview language such as "rapidly expanded," "jump-started," or "grew quickly," as well as transitions from "pilot" programs to "systemwide" operations.

Sustainability Measurements

Systems were assessed for sustainability based on the following indicators:

- Multiple funding streams or funded in full by state budget line items
- Not dependent on grant funding as the sole or primary source
- Not dependent solely on Pell funds
- Not dependent on one political champion (e.g., a single governor) for support

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT OVERVIEW

The 17 interviews included the following types of system leaders:

- **Public university system directors:** Leaders overseeing HEP coordination across multiple university campuses within a state system
- **Community college system coordinators:** Directors managing HEP programs across multiple community college campuses

- **Consortium directors:** Leaders of multi-institution consortia bringing together various colleges and universities
- **Regional program directors:** Administrators overseeing programs that operate across multiple facilities in a region
- **System-level academic affairs administrators:** Vice chancellors, associate vice chancellors, and other system office leaders with oversight of HEP initiatives

Interviewees represented systemwide HEP programs at various stages of maturity, from newly established programs still developing infrastructure to mature programs with more than a decade of operations. HEP program sizes ranged from programs operating in 1-2 facilities to comprehensive programs serving students across 20+ facilities. All interviews were conducted virtually and followed a semi-structured protocol.



Systemwide HEP Models

The 14 systemwide HEP programs analyzed in this study were categorized into four distinct organizational models based on their governance structures, institutional relationships, and coordination mechanisms. The analysis examined how different organizational models correlate with outcomes such as facility coverage, sustainability indicators, and capacity to navigate challenges. Structural features, including centralized coordination, formalized DOC partnerships, dedicated funding, and system-level data infrastructure, were coded across all models to identify patterns associated with system maturity and effectiveness. The key indicators are factors that correlate with comprehensive and sustainable HEP programming operating across public higher education systems.

MODEL 1: STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OFFICE COORDINATION (N=6)

A single state system governs all HEP programs, with the system office providing coordination, technical assistance, and oversight, while campuses retain limited autonomy. The model's centralization varies from light-touch coordination to robust support, balancing standardization with individual campus needs.

What They Have in Common

Structural Elements:

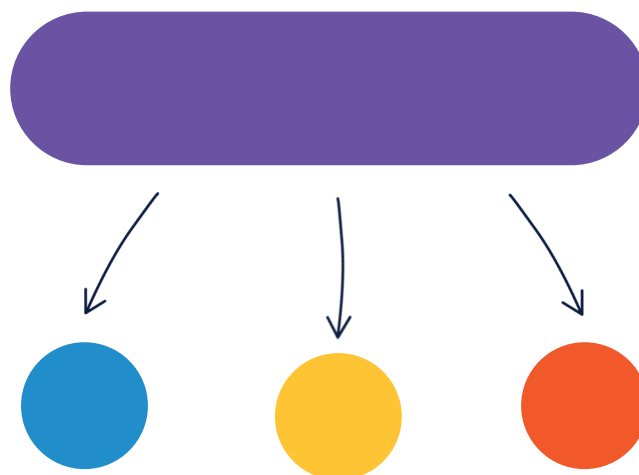
- System-level coordination office (n=6/6, 100%)
- Formal coordination mechanisms such as meetings and convenings (n=5/6, 83%)
- Technical assistance to campuses (n=5/6, 83%)
- Policy guidance role (n=6/6, 100%)

Partnership Structures:

- Statewide DOC partnership or agreement (n=5/6, 83%)
- System office mediates state, DOC, and campus relationships (n=5/6, 83%)

Funding Patterns:

- State appropriations present (n=5/6, 83%)
- Mixed funding sources, e.g., combining state, Pell, and institutional (n=6/6, 100%)
- System office receives and/or distributes funding (n=5/6, 83%)



Challenges Common to This Model

Coordination Complexity (n=5/6 report):

- Balancing system-level policy with campus autonomy
- Managing variation across institutions
- Resource constraints at the system office level

DOC Relationships (n=5/6 report challenges):

- Navigating multiple stakeholders (system office, campuses, DOC)
- Transfer policies disrupt student progress
- Facility-level variations in operations

Funding Sustainability (n=4/6 concerned about):

- Dependence on state budget cycles
- Competition with other state priorities

“When I’m onboarding new faculty, I have to explain: you essentially have three bosses: Department of Corrections, your college, and the state board. Each of us are looking at different aspects of what you’re doing.” — *System leader in the West*

MODEL 2: MULTI-INSTITUTIONAL CONSORTIUM (N=2)

A formal consortium unites multiple institutional partners and the DOC through a binding MOU or interagency agreement, establishing coordinated rather than competitive collaboration. Partners contribute complementary expertise while sharing costs and rewards, with MOUs evolving from basic commitments into robust documents that cover articulation agreements, data sharing, and governance protocols.

What They Have in Common

Structural Elements:

- Multiple institutions participating (n=2/2, 100%)
- Formal consortium structure or agreement (n=2/2, 100%)
- Shared governance mechanisms (n=2/2, 100%)
- Lead coordinating entity (n=2/2, 100%)
- Voluntary membership model (n=2/2, 100%)

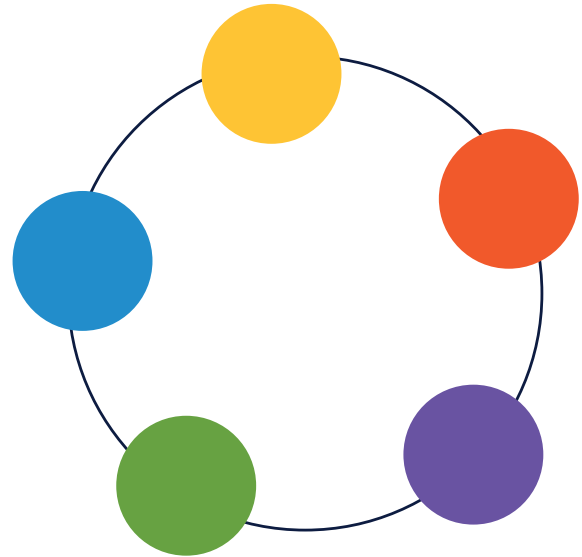
“The dean of the School of Criminal Justice called all of these players together who were doing a little bit here, a little bit there, sat us all around this big table and said, ‘y’all are doing cool stuff in little pockets...What would it look like if we sewed it together?’ And everybody volunteered their time to think through envisioning what the [HEP program] could be.” — *Consortium leader in the East on the origin of their HEP program*

Partnership Approaches:

- Statewide or regional MOU (n=2/2, 100%)
- Collaborative decision-making (n=2/2, 100%)
- Shared resources and expertise (n=2/2, 100%)
- Cross-institutional student mobility (n=2/2, 100%)

Funding Patterns:

- Mixed funding sources (n=2/2, 100%)
- State appropriations present (n=1/2, 50%)
- Institutional contributions (n=2/2, 100%)
- Grant and foundation support (n=2/2, 100%)



Challenges Common to This Model

Coordination Complexity Across Autonomous Institutions (n=2/2 report):

- Each institution has its own policies, union contracts, and processes
- Constant negotiation and alignment are required

“We brought students in, and we asked them: What went wrong? What didn’t work? What would work better? They were saying, ‘When we moved from prison to prison, we lose all our progress. The credits don’t transfer.’ So we kicked into the original MOU: every class you take has to move you towards a degree. Credits have to transfer.” — *Consortium leader in the East*

Sustaining Collaboration Over Time (n=2/2 report as concern):

- Dependent on continued institutional buy-in.
- Leadership changes can disrupt partnerships.
- Requires ongoing relationship maintenance.

Resource Pooling Challenges (n=2/2 acknowledge):

- Institutions may have unequal resources.
- Fair distribution of costs and benefits is essential.
- Grant dependency creates vulnerability.

MODEL 3: SINGLE-INSTITUTION DOMINANT WITH SYSTEM SUPPORT (N=4)

One public college institution provides the majority of statewide prison education programming and maintains a direct operational relationship with the DOC, while a System Office provides light coordination. The lead institution is typically mission-driven with extensive operational infrastructure and a long history in HEP. This model often succeeds when facilities are geographically concentrated, allowing a single institution to serve multiple sites efficiently.

What They Have in Common

Structural Elements:

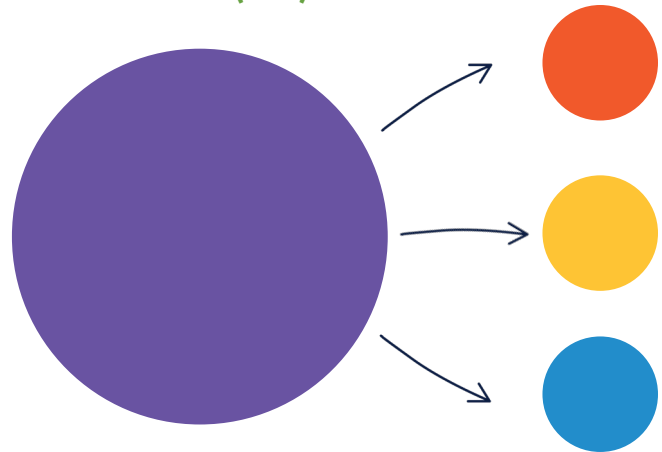
- Campus-based decision-making authority (n=4/4, 100%)
- Institutional reputation and investment (n=4/4, 100%)

System Involvement:

- Limited system-level coordination (n=4/4, 100%)
- Institutional autonomy high (n=4/4, 100%)
- System office provides support, not direction (n=3/4, 75%)

Funding Patterns:

- Institutional budget as primary source (n=4/4, 100%)
- Pell grants utilized (n=4/4, 100%)
- Limited or no state-dedicated appropriations (n=3/4, 75%)



Challenges Common to This Model

Institutional Capacity Limits (n=4/4 report as constraint):

- A single institution faces faculty recruitment challenges
- Limited ability to serve geographically dispersed facilities

Vulnerability to Institutional Changes (n=3/4 report concern):

- Leadership transitions can lead to structural vulnerability of the HEP program
- Institutional priority shifts can threaten the entire state's HEP infrastructure

Limited System Support (n=4/4 note):

- Institutions operate largely independently
- There are some missed benefits of system-level coordination, shared resources, and collective advocacy



MODEL 4: NONPROFIT-FACILITATED PARTNERSHIP (N=2)

Nonprofit organizations serve as the central coordinating hub, facilitating partnerships among public colleges, state agencies, and community resources through regular stakeholder meetings. The nonprofit provides wraparound student support services while orchestrating collaboration across partners with clear boundaries, shared goals, and collective problem-solving to ensure comprehensive support beyond academics.

What They Have in Common

Structural Elements:

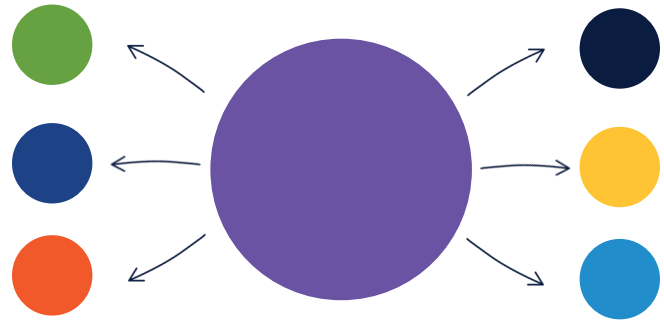
- Nonprofit as central coordinating hub (n=2/2, 100%)
- Regular stakeholder meetings facilitated by a nonprofit (n=2/2, 100%)
- Nonprofit provides wraparound student services (n=2/2, 100%)

Partnership Approaches:

- Clear boundaries between academic and support services (n=2/2, 100%)
- Collective problem-solving across partners (n=2/2, 100%)
- Shared goals and vision (n=2/2, 100%)
- DOC as active partner in governance (n=2/2, 100%)

Funding Patterns:

- Nonprofit fundraising for wraparound services (n=2/2, 100%)
- Colleges fund academic programming (n=2/2, 100%)
- Mixed funding sources, including private philanthropy (n=2/2, 100%)



Challenges Common to This Model

Funding Sustainability (n=2/2 report as primary challenge):

- Heavy dependence on private philanthropy and grants
- Lacking long-term sustainability without state appropriations

Coordination Complexity (n=2/2 report):

- Difficulty managing relationships across multiple autonomous partners (colleges, DOC, nonprofit, community organizations)
- Requires significant coordination capacity



Indicators for Strengthening Systemwide HEP Programs

Despite organizational differences, five success indicators emerged across all 14 systemwide HEP programs analyzed. These factors distinguish mature, comprehensive, and sustainable HEP programs from emerging, limited, and less sustainable ones. No single model emerged as “best”; rather, success depends on matching model to state context, securing adequate resources, and building sustainable partnerships. The presence of state funding correlates strongly with comprehensive facility coverage and sustainability indicators across all models. Additionally, structural indicators reveal clear patterns: HEP programs with state funding, political champions, and workforce integration have more comprehensive state coverage and more robust infrastructure than ones lacking those features.

1. STATE FUNDING STRONGLY CORRELATES WITH SCALE AND SUSTAINABILITY

State appropriations demonstrate the strongest correlation with HEP program scale and sustainability. Funding mechanisms vary, including direct allocation, legislative appropriation, and interagency agreements, but the presence of dedicated state budget allocation consistently correlates with comprehensive coverage.

Statistical Analysis:

- State funding is present in 8 of 14 systems (57%).
- Among HEP programs with comprehensive or substantial facility coverage, 7 of 8 (88%) have state funding.
- State funding shows a strong positive correlation with scale and sustainability indicators ($r = 0.88$, $p < 0.01$ with comprehensive facility coverage).

One public higher education system has been operating HEP programs under a 40-year interagency agreement with legislative allocation. “Our legislature allocates funding to DOC to run education services inside. What our DOC does is contract with our agency,” said a HEP leader in the West. That sustained interagency agreement demonstrates long-term bipartisan commitment through consistent legislative appropriations.

2. POLITICAL CHAMPIONS CORRELATE WITH STATE FUNDING

The presence of high-level political champions such as governors, legislators, and chancellors correlates positively with program expansion, sustained funding, and institutional priority.

Statistical Analysis:

- Political champions were identified in 6 of 14 systems.
- 5 of 6 systems with clear champions have state funding (83%)

Executive champions, such as governors, are associated with rapid expansion; system-level champions, like chancellors, are associated with institutional integration.

“We have a chancellor right now who calls us out in every initiative. Every single thing that happens, she turns and says, ‘Make sure [our HEP programs] are included’... We have those powerhouses at the top making sure we’re always there at the table when we think about the policy and the large investment.” —HEP leader in the West

Another systemwide HEP program expanded from boutique programs to 37 colleges in 6-8 years.

“When this story is written about [our state] in the grand celestial record, someone has to tell the story of [our Governor]. This got jump-started when he came in, and this was his personal passion. He’s always had a personal interest in this... When he got in office, he made that one of his policy priorities and was able to convince the legislature to fund it.” — System leader in the South

It is worth noting that while gubernatorial or legislative support helps establish systemwide HEP programming, sustained operations require institutionalized funding mechanisms that survive political transitions.

3. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INTEGRATION BUILDS POLITICAL CURRENCY

Systems with Department of Labor (DOL) partnerships and career and technical education (CTE) programming show strong correlations with the presence of state funding and legislative support. Workforce outcomes create political currency with policymakers.

Statistical Analysis:

- Multi-agency coordination (coordination across DOC, higher education, workforce, and other state agencies) is present in 6 of 14 systems (43%)
- Among these six systems with multi-agency coordination, all have secured state appropriations ($r = 0.87$, $p < 0.001$)
- Workforce and CTE focus correlates positively with state funding ($r = 0.63$, $p = 0.017$) and system scale ($r = 0.62$, $p = 0.006$)

Workforce development integration, including CTE programs, apprenticeship pathways, and formal DOL partnerships, also serves as an indicator of political support, which in turn correlates with state funding. One HEP leader in the South regards the Department of Labor as a core partner:

“So really at those leadership meetings, you’ve got [our college system], you’ve got the [State] Higher Education Commission, Department of Labor, Department of Corrections... We’ve been meeting monthly for years.”

In that system, the DOL provides reentry employment services, and both the technical and community colleges participate in their HEP program. Workforce development integration creates political currency by connecting education to economic outcomes, employment metrics, and public safety narratives, which resonate strongly with legislators and governors.

4. SYSTEMWIDE HEP PROGRAMS WITH FORMALIZED DOC PARTNERSHIPS ARE MORE COMPREHENSIVE

Statewide MOUs or interagency agreements are associated with operational stability, established transfer protocols, data-sharing capacity, and conflict-resolution mechanisms. Furthermore, they establish clear expectations, facilitate resource sharing, and provide stability across personnel changes.

Statistical Analysis:

- System-level formal agreement, like a statewide MOU or interagency agreement, was present in 7 of 14 systems (50%)
- All comprehensive and substantial systemwide HEP programs have formalized partnerships with DOC (100%)
- 4 of 6 comprehensive or substantial HEP programs have statewide MOUs or interagency agreements (66.7%)
- Formalized DOC partnerships correlate with state funding ($r = 0.714$, $p = 0.004$) and sustainability measures ($r = 0.549$, $p = 0.042$)

Formal DOC partnerships are associated with standardized security procedures, clear transfer policies, conflict resolution mechanisms, data-sharing protocols, and regular leadership communication.

5. REENTRY INFRASTRUCTURE DISTINGUISHES MATURE HEP PROGRAMS

System-level reentry services distinguish mature from emerging HEP programs. Reentry programs are characterized by established pathways for post-release continuation, advising, financial aid support, and campus connections. They often operate with centralized services, including pre-release planning and dedicated navigators or advisors. Emerging HEP programs focus solely on in-prison offerings.

Statistical Analysis:

- Reentry infrastructure demonstrates strong correlation with HEP program maturity ($r = 0.68$, $p = 0.007$) and sustainability ($r = 0.76$, $p = 0.002$)
- Seven of nine mature HEP programs (78%) have established reentry support, compared to zero of five emerging programs (0%).
- Four HEP programs (29%) coordinate reentry at the system level. All four have state appropriations (100%)
- System-level reentry coordination correlates strongly with state funding ($r = 0.75$, $p = 0.002$) and scale ($r = 0.72$, $p = 0.004$)

“Our office has taken on reentry from a systemwide perspective. We have academic reentry services that our campuses can refer a student to us who’s getting ready to go home. So six months prior to release, the campus can tell us, ‘Hey, the students are getting ready to go home,’ and we’ll meet with a student before they leave and create this plan, and then support them in reentry. We also have some fellowship programs for students in reentry.”
—HEP leader in the East

They have a HEP program office that provides centralized reentry services rather than relying on individual campuses. Six-month pre-release planning enables systematic transition support.



Implications for Practice

NO SINGLE BEST MODEL

Each model has strengths and optimal conditions. Model 1, State University System Office Coordination, works best with existing multi-campus public higher education systems and state support. Model 2, Multi-Institutional Consortium, succeeds where bottom-up collaboration exists and DOC welcomes a consortium approach. Model 3, Single Institution Dominant with System Support, functions well with geographic concentration and strong institutional commitment. Model 4, Non-profit Facilitated Partnership, fills gaps where state coordination is absent and nonprofit capacity exists.

STATE FUNDING IS CRITICAL ACROSS ALL MODELS

The strongest finding across all analyses is the critical importance of state appropriations. HEP programs with state funding operate on a significantly larger scale and are more sustainable than those without state funding, regardless of organizational model.

WORKFORCE INTEGRATION IS POLITICAL STRATEGY, NOT JUST EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

HEP programs that achieve multi-agency coordination operate on a larger scale and with greater sustainability than those that rely solely on bilateral DOC-education partnerships. Workforce integration enables programs to speak the language of economic development, employment outcomes, and taxpayer returns, narratives that resonate with legislators. This political utility explains why workforce partnerships correlate with state appropriations.

FORMALIZED DOC PARTNERSHIPS ARE FOUNDATIONAL

Across all models, formalized DOC partnerships through MOUs, interagency agreements, or contracts correlate with operational stability and comprehensive coverage. These agreements establish clear expectations, standardize processes, and provide a framework for problem-solving.

REENTRY INFRASTRUCTURE MARKS MATURITY

Mature HEP programs consistently demonstrate established reentry infrastructure, including pre-release application support, transfer credit agreements, campus-based programs, and connections to community resources. Emerging programs typically focus primarily on in-prison programming.

DATA CAPACITY GROWS WITH THE HEP PROGRAM

Data collection emerged as a widespread challenge, named by 11 of the 17 interviewees. Part of the challenge is that there are no standardized metrics or data collection practices across the HEP field. Many HEP leaders attempt to track data in ways that mirror those used in on-campus programs, but this approach has limitations. HEP is unique, so traditional ways of studying outcomes are insufficient on their own. Time to degree completion, for example, was one metric an interviewee observed that does not translate from on-campus to prison programs because degree pathways inside are necessarily longer, and duration is not an indicator of institutional efficiency or financial impact as it is on campus. This points to a tension between standardizing performance metrics and acknowledging HEP's unique context. As more HEP programs become Prison Education Programs (PEPs) to utilize Pell funds, more programs will likely converge on the metrics required by that designation to meet the best interest determination (BID). Several interviewees noted that defining BID and key metrics should be decided by HEP practitioners who understand the context, rather than by the DOC or another state agency. This is a critical point because the ability to report metrics affects funding, particularly from state legislators, which has emerged as an indicator of the sustainability of HEP programs.

It is worth noting that most of the Pell-dependent HEP programs represented in this study were also emerging programs that had yet to build a data infrastructure. None of those programs reported having systemwide data collection in place, though they recognized it as a gap. By contrast, the three programs that were mature, state-funded, comprehensive, and sustainable all have systemwide mechanisms for collecting and analyzing data. Yet they, too, describe data collection and metrics as a challenge.

In the end, while data collection and metrics capacity are associated with maturity, sustainability, and scale, systemwide data collection appears to develop alongside HEP programs as they grow in size and mature in age.

Looking Ahead

As more resources become available, our field is growing: more public colleges and universities are returning, public-private partnerships are forming, and nonprofit consortia management models are becoming more popular. This is an exciting time for expansion, so we need to understand the issues we're facing. A systems approach to HEP demonstrates that growth can be achieved through collaboration rather than single institution capacity building, so the sum is greater than its parts.

Building and strengthening public HEP programs requires strategic alignment across multiple dimensions: securing dedicated state appropriations, cultivating political champions, integrating workforce development, formalizing DOC partnerships through MOUs or interagency agreements, and investing in system-level reentry infrastructure. These evidence-based indicators provide actionable guidance for current and aspiring HEP system leaders working to expand scale and operational maturity. This research has implications on how to scale as more resources become available, as well as how to make your program more secure and sustainable. Moving forward, NASH will provide technical assistance, convening opportunities, and resources to support public higher education systems in this evolving area.

ABOUT NASH

Founded in 1979, the National Association of Higher Education Systems (NASH) works to advance the role of multi-campus systems and the concept of systemness to create a more vibrant and sustainable higher education sector. NASH represents over 100 public higher education systems in the U.S., which include more than 1,400 institutions and serve more than 16.2 million students nationwide. Learn more at www.nash.edu.

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