The Seventh Annual Conference
on Higher Education in Prison
Exit Report

November 2-5, 2017
Arlington, Texas

Alliance for Higher Education in Prison
January 12, 2018
# Table of Contents

Executive Summary ........................................................................................................... 4  
1. Attendance and Participation ...................................................................................... 10  
2. Logistics ..................................................................................................................... 30  
3. Communication ......................................................................................................... 40  
4. Content ...................................................................................................................... 49  
5. Cost and Scholarships ............................................................................................... 69  
6. Additional Feedback ................................................................................................. 80  
Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 87
List of Figures

Executive Summary

Figure A: Key Configures Numbers at a Glance
Figure B: Attendance at the Concurrent Sessions
Figure C: Concurrent Session Leadership

Chapters

Attendance
1.1 Key Conference Attendance Numbers at a Glance
1.2 Participant Background in the Field Via Exit Surveys
1.3 Respondent Attendance by Day
1.4 Attendance at the Concurrent Sessions
1.5 Participation by the Formerly Incarcerated (By Concurrent Session)
1.6 Concurrent Session Leadership

Logistics
2.1 Conference Location
2.2 Hotel
2.3 Registration
2.4 Wellness Room
2.5 Exhibit Hall

Communication
3.1 The Spread of Information Prior to the Conference
3.2 Communications On-Site and During the Conference
3.3 Respondent Social Media Habits
3.4 Following NCHEP on Social Media

Content
4.1 Relevance of Concurrent Session Topics
4.2 Value of Concurrent Sessions (General)
4.3 Concurrent Session Formats
4.4 Plenary Session Topics
4.5 Built-In Time for Networking

Cost of Scholarships
5.1 Cost of Conference Hotels
5.2 Other Conference Costs
5.3 Cost of Attendance
5.4 Scholarship Figures at a Glance
5.5 Scholarships Received
5.6 Scholarships and Covered Costs
5.7 Outside Support
Executive Summary
2017 NCHEP Conference
Arlington, Texas

Summary
All available measures collected from the conference and post-conference data sets (online registrations, attendance figures, exit surveys, unsolicited written testimony, anecdotal evidence, panel and program information, and more) suggest that the NCHEP 2017 conference was a resounding success. In all areas, from content to logistics and everything in between, and in their more generalized feedback, the roughly 300 conference participants rated their experience favorably. No aspect of the conference received majority negative reviews, and indeed most received very positive and even glowing reviews. In fact, several conference participants said it was the "best" conference they had ever attended and would look forward to attending (and helping with) the conference in the future. The bar is set quite high, in other words, for the 2018 planning committee. Nonetheless, the feedback shows that AHEP still has several areas for improvement in its conference planning, and much to learn about the community it serves, collaborates with, and advocates on behalf of. This document provides highlights from data collected prior (e.g.: online registration and scholarship application), during (e.g.: onsite registration, panel attendance) and after (Exit Report and unsolicited feedback/emails) the 2017 NCHEP. Readers are encouraged to consult the full 2017 Exit Report for a much more intensive look at the discussions that follow.

Introduction: Conference Figures at a Glance
As Fig. A (below) makes clear, we estimate that the 2017 NCHEP Conference hosted at least 278 participants. It is quite possible that this figure was even higher, as 335 registered online prior to the conference, but 278 participants were confirmed through cross-referencing onsite check-in (for individuals who used online registration) and onsite registration (for individuals who did not register prior to the conference). Participants who cancelled their registration were also tracked. Inevitably, a handful of participants probably attended without registering (online or onsite), and as such, it is likely that our final attendance count was closer to 300. Perhaps more importantly, NCHEP drew 75 formerly incarcerated participants (who disclosed this information during the registration process), who together constituted 27% of the entire conference attendance. At the same time, formerly incarcerated people did more than just attend; they served on 21 of the 39 conference panels during the concurrent sessions (54% of the overall panels offered). Moreover, while 152 of the overall conference participants presented as speakers within the concurrent sessions, 48 of them (32%) had been formerly incarcerated. To a significant degree, as their comments suggest, travel scholarships and other forms of institutional support were decisive...
factors in the participant's decisions to attend or not attend, and for many, such support was the predictor and primary enabler of attendance. To that end, AHEP managed to offer a total of 83 conference travel scholarships, providing a baseline of support that made the conference diverse, inclusive, cost effective, and memorable.

Fig. A
Key Conference Numbers at a Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>335</td>
<td>Online Registrations Submitted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>278</td>
<td>Overall Conference Participants (Low end estimate; based purely on on-site registrations and check-ins)</td>
<td>Actual conference participation may have been higher given likelihood of at least a nominal amount of people not registering or checking-in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Formerly Incarcerated Participants</td>
<td>27% of total conference attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Exit Survey Responses Completed</td>
<td>All conference participants were asked to complete exit surveys on a voluntary basis once the conference concluded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>121</td>
<td>Total Scholarships Requested</td>
<td>5 were awarded scholarships but then declined; 3 additional participants accepted scholarship offers but then had to decline attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>Travel Scholarships Offered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>Travel Scholarships Awarded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Travel Scholarships Awarded to Formerly Incarcerated People</td>
<td>(including 2 family members currently incarcerated people)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Travel Fellowship Requests Not Funded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$198,935.09</td>
<td>Total Conference Cost</td>
<td>(Including Scholarships; Including fiscal sponsor fee: 9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$90,563.00</td>
<td>Total Costs of Travel Scholarships</td>
<td>(Includes travel, hotel, meals, and incidentals)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$250.00</td>
<td>Average cost per person to support meals</td>
<td>Given the roughly 300 participants, most conference costs went to either scholarships or meals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Total Concurrent Sessions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Total number of panels hosted within the conference’s 6 concurrent sessions</td>
<td>21 (54%) featured speakers who had been formerly incarcerated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>152</td>
<td>Total number of participants who presented at concurrent sessions as either panelists or moderators</td>
<td>48 (32%) of the conference presenters/moderators had been formerly incarcerated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>683</td>
<td>Total number of conference participants who attended the concurrent sessions as audience members</td>
<td>22 participants, on average, sat within each panel hosted during the conference’s six concurrent sessions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strong Attendance
As Fig. B (below) shows, conference participants attended the conference in strong numbers throughout the weekend, most prominently during the concurrent sessions of Friday and Saturday. On average, each panel drew 22 audience participants each. 683 total participants were actually counted, but one entire session (7 panels) went uncounted, so it is more likely that closer to 800 conference participants filled rooms over the course of the concurrent sessions.

**Figure B**
**Attendance at the Concurrent Sessions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session  #</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Total Attendance</th>
<th>Average Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 1</td>
<td>Fri. Nov. 3</td>
<td>11:30 am to 1:00 pm</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 2</td>
<td>Fri. Nov. 3</td>
<td>2:30 pm to 4:00 pm</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>29 (1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 3</td>
<td>Fri. Nov. 3</td>
<td>4:30 pm to 6:00 pm</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 4</td>
<td>Sat. Nov. 4</td>
<td>11:30 to 1:00 pm</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 5</td>
<td>Sat. Nov. 4</td>
<td>2:30 pm to 4:00 pm</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>16 (5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 6</td>
<td>Sat. Nov. 4</td>
<td>4:30 pm to 6:00 pm</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTALS**
683  22

The Formerly Incarcerated Had Significant Roles
Formerly incarcerated participants had a significant role to play in the conference. More than half (54%) of the offered panels featured formerly incarcerated speakers. Meanwhile, within the panels themselves, roughly one out of three participants had experienced incarceration.

**Figure C**
**Concurrent Session Leadership**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concurrent Session</th>
<th>Panels</th>
<th>Panels Featuring Formerly Incarcerated Presenters or Moderators</th>
<th>Total Presenters</th>
<th>Total Formerly Incarcerated Presenters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10 (56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15 (65%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2(7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTALS</strong></td>
<td>39</td>
<td><strong>21 (54%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>152</strong></td>
<td><strong>48 (32%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tips for Future Conference Planners: Concurrent Sessions

The roughly 70 participants who offered exit responses offered a range of topic ideas for future concurrent sessions. The 2017 Exit Report includes a full index of their commentary. Some of the main themes their comments addressed included:

- How to navigate higher education. Specifically, how to access institutions in the first place, but also how to transition between programs (prison to traditional campus and also into graduate school) and advance from "poor" and underserved access/entry points.
- How to navigate a diversifying higher education landscape (specifically programs students believe are underfunded, community colleges, two-year programs, smaller state and regional programs, for-profit, and online programs)
- How to navigate higher educational procedural and especially financial processes, such as securing Financial Aid, Scholarships, etc.

Also present were panel suggestions on these themes:
- Technology (how to gain literacy, how to access it inside/in prison)
- Rhetoric and Language (how the conference can build a more inclusive vocabulary and culture)
- Pedagogy
- Immigrant and undocumented concerns
- Re-entry and pathways to [traditional] campus

Tips for Future Presenters at the Concurrent Sessions

Respondents to the exit surveys also had ideas for planners in better preparing and curating future concurrent sessions presenters. Again, the 2017 Exit Survey includes the full chronicle of their commentary. Some of the highlights include:

Do's
- Advocate for the sharing of contact information (all program participants in advance of the conference)
- Consider and design your pedagogical conduct —participants are asking for more sustained interpersonal dialogue, interactivity, and even innovative/inclusive seating arrangements. While palpable audience dislike of the "lecture format" is not unique to this conference, presenters who adopt it might consider being more transparent with audience members about why they use it. This might include presentations of research on why certain presentation/pedagogical formats create better learning environments than others, and in what contexts. More than anything, it seems audience members appreciate transparency and being "treated as equals" as one put it
- Adopt a more inclusive design of plenary sessions, featuring more formerly incarcerated speakers and corrections workers especially (broadly, inviting more people from corrections to the conference).
- Consider creating or contributing to an NCHEP conference or even AHEP organizational "dictionary" where participants can consult some of the concerns about the conference rhetoric and culture. What was classified as “hurtful descriptors” of the formerly incarcerated and currently incarcerated (along with the prison experience in general) seemed bothersome to many in the exit surveys. Planners might include an accessible, printed placard within the conference materials informing presenters of why some terms are hurtful/offensive/bothersome and should not be considered before being used; how/when/if it is appropriate to push back against and intervened against when they appear in Q and A’s and comment sessions. Or, planners might
consider using presenters in a brainstorming session asking people to contribute to the eventual production of such materials.

- Be conscious of logistics: honor time constraints, use PowerPoint slides and narration selectively, be courteous and respectful of the audience, and solicit their engagement.
- Remember to stay hopeful; participants encouraged adopting a more positive note for the end of the conference or even aspects of analysis used in the concurrent sessions.

Don'ts

- Panel should be more actively facilitated by moderators (e.g.: speakers went too long and took valuable time from other panelists and/or the audience).
- Use the lecture format as a reflexive fallback for presentations. If you do adopt it, be sure you know why, and consider explaining your rationale to the audience.
- Exclude or "talk over" your audience.
- Too many presenters relied on PowerPoint or reading; use these tools selectively.

General Suggestions for the 2018 Planning Committee

And finally, the exit survey asked for general feedback. The 2017 exit report again features a fuller elaboration of these discussions. In brief, participants urged:

- The creation of regionally specific and/or professional networks; this should also include specific allotted times for other specialized groups (practitioners, graduate student) to meet/network.
- Greater inclusion, less exclusivity, more diverse content.
- Involve (and center) formerly incarcerated and the dept. of corrections.
- Anticipate travel days in planning (less/different content on Sunday).
- Sharing of contact info (make email list available before conference).
- Building in of more networking and down time, including more time to talk between sessions, and perhaps more social events in the evening.

CONCLUSION

Overwhelming evidence from the 2017 NCHEP conference suggests conference participants had a great experience. Still, if conference planners hope to improve for the 2018 events, there are several concrete areas for improvement that can be easily identified, and with them, challenges as well. In terms of attendance, the conference has plenty of room for growth, especially among the formerly incarcerated and communities like corrections and Second Chance Pell site practitioners. As planners work to include these groups, they will face the challenge of providing support (financial support especially) as many of the conference participants have (and will continue) to have issues with economic insecurity.

Other major planning measures, such as logistics and communications, seem to be working quite well, but with them come the challenges of staying flexible, innovative, and even visionary, and also while keeping costs low, selecting accessible and livable locations, and—in general—maintaining a high standard of equity of experience among all the conference participants. Areas like conference content also reveal room for improvement. Challenges from participants suggest that there are shortcomings afoot in the conference and organizational culture—"exclusivity" "cliques" and "silencing" are strong words that emerged from the exit surveys, and are, perhaps, reflective of dissent inevitable to any large event. But they are clearly worth the organization's attention moving forward. Thankfully, AHEP has plenty of resources to leverage in overcoming these challenges. Using the tools of constructive teaching and dialogue, innovative pedagogy, and careful attention to rhetoric, culture, conduct, and language, it will be
possible for 2018 planners to put AHEP's best principles and potentials into practice, and in so doing make the 2018 conference an even better (and transformative) experience—AHEP's "best" yet.
1. Attendance and Participation

Summary
The 2017 National Conference on Higher Education in Prison (NCHEP) held in Arlington, Texas (November 2-5), drew at least 278 participants. Of the confirmed participants, 75 were formerly incarcerated, representing 27% of the total conference population. With the end of the conference, participants were also asked to complete exit surveys that helped supply the vital information for the completion of this Exit Report. A total of 70 participants completed the Exit Surveys. Compiling participation figures presented several challenges to compiling the conference documentation and data. As a result, this discussion also features suggestions for how future conference planners can make the assembly of conference attendance data easier, beginning with a redesign of the online registration prompts and the onsite registration forms.

I. Overall Attendance

Introduction
According to a comparative and intensive study of all the records produced by the 2017 NCHEP conference, it is possible to confirm a total of 278 people participated. This figure accounts for all participants who registered online or onsite at the conference. It is not possible to account for participants who did not register online or onsite and we estimate that there could be a small number of participants who did so. Seventy-five of registered participants (representing 27% of the entire conference membership) were formerly incarcerated. Relative parity was achieved at all levels of the conference planning, organization, and within the sessions, where the 27% overall membership of the formerly incarcerated found symmetry within the planning committee, within the panels, and so on.
### Fig. 1.1 Key Conference Attendance Numbers at a Glance

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### Several Attendance Figure Compilation Challenges Arose from the Registration Process

The assembly of reliable conference attendance information proved quite difficult once the conference concluded. As outlined in fig. 1.1, the conference's attendance figures did come together, but only after some substantial investment of administrative time and energy. The registration process created several challenges in terms of processing and assembling the after-conference documentation, and for reasons that included (but were not limited to) the registration process having generated incomplete, missing, or contradictory records.

In the abstract, the work of compiling attendance figures for this and future exit reports should require the assembly and processing of only two post-conference record groups—1) online registrations and 2) the on-site registration forms.

- Essential Record Group 1: The Online Registrations
- Essential Record Group 2: The On-Site Registrations
Online Registration and On-Site Registration
Their essential task of online registration is to document contact information on all the conference participants, offering the easiest pathway to compiling basic attendance figures. Yet online and onsite registrations have to be corroborated, namely, with on-site registrations, as (naturally) there is no way to ensure a participant's physical presence at a conference site without a physical check-in and registration process. This means that the online registration data has to be paired with a second record group, the on-site registrations. Taken together, the online registrations and the on-site registrations should provide all the documentation necessary to compile good and usable attendance data. As we shall see, however, both record groups did not enable this process to take place.

Both of the Essential Record Groups Had Limitations
Both of the essential record groups for generating NCHEP 2017 attendance figures had problems, and in three discrete categories. Each record group had problems in all three areas, and sometimes simultaneously.

- Problems of design
- Problems of completeness
- Problems of subsequent administrative workflow

Problem Cluster #1: The Online Registrations
Conference planners relied on a Google Form to take and compile the online registrations, which offered the advantage of giving NCHEP free and open-source access to a fairly smooth and reliable system for data compilation, and at the scale required for hosting 300-odd conference participants and planners. For the most part, then, the online registration process worked great; the Google Form registered and compiled a wide range of information.

Yet a few examples can quickly illustrate some of the shortfalls of the online registration process. The first is that 335 participants actually made online registrations to the conference, and yet only 278 actually attended. The online registration process, clearly, had difficulty accommodating inevitable conference problems, such as grappling with duplicate registrations, cancellations, and other unforeseen circumstances. In the end, roughly 75 names had to be purged from the registration list as duplicates, no shows, or because of other issues. Perhaps it is best to quickly sketch what worked and what did not work about the online registration process.

What Worked
- The online registrations solved a good number of the major problems of structuring post-conference administrative workflow, but not all. The Google Form did a great job, for example, of assembling information for fast and cheap, but it also produced incomplete and sometimes misleading information that in some instances (not all) created greater problems down the road.

What Didn’t
- The key problem here was a problem of design. It presented important questions (such as whether participants had been formerly incarcerated) and this led to greater problems of structuring the post-conference administrative workflow. For example, the online registration form did not ask participants directly if they had been formerly incarcerated. Instead, it presented this very important question indirectly, and using three different indirect prompts—1) If anyone in their family was currently or had been incarcerated 2) If they had participated in a higher
education program while incarcerated (leaving administrators to assume "yes" answers meant they had been formerly incarcerated) or 3) If they had anything else to share. On the first question, then, many responded that they "didn't know" how to answer it, or simply identified themselves, for example, introducing future administrative uncertainty. On the second, administrators had good reason to assume (but only assume) that "yes" answers meant they had been formerly incarcerated; in most instances, a firm answer remained elusive, again complicating the task of assembling how many formerly incarcerated actually participated. On the third question, meanwhile, people often used the open-ended opportunity to identify themselves as formerly incarcerated. When they did so, this information came as a surprise or under unclear terms to administrators, requiring additional corroboration with supporting documents outside of the two essential post-conference reference groups. If formerly incarcerated participants identified as formerly incarcerated within this section of the exit survey, but not to the other prompts, was the information reliable? Thankfully, in the end, there were other conference documents and materials available to piece the vital attendance figures together, but the process could be much simplified by asking people to identify themselves as formerly incarcerated directly on the registration form.

- **Problems of completeness.** The online registration process also created several duplicate registrations that then had to be purged from the master list. It is unclear how this happened or why, or how it might be remedied in the future. It is possible registrants completed multiple applications, or had somehow forgotten they had registered? Many of the online registrations also went incomplete—participants did not respond to all the answers or fill in the forms completely, illustrating potentially a problem in design, given that it might have been possible to require the completion of the forms through Google before the system would accept submissions. In any case, Google Forms seems, at times, inflexible or hard to work with in accommodating these problems. In the future, much more attention needs to be devoted to the design of the registration form. It is suggested that the demographic data be required and that google automatically collect each email so that a confirm is send to the person registering and this will also allow individuals to edit/retract their registration if needed.

- **Problems of structuring subsequent workflow.** Really the key issue here is that because there were bigger problems of design and completeness/incompleteness, it follows that there were also problems in structuring the subsequent post-conference administrative workflow. Yes, the Google Form saved incredible amounts of time in assembling key data on the fast and cheap. In those terms, it worked great. But because so much of in the information needed cross-checking, processing, collaborating, and the consultation of more documentation outside of the essential record groups, it proved more inefficient than one might assume.

Problem Cluster #2: The On-Site Registrations

Again, without a doubt, the on-site conference registration process also did substantial and important work in helping to assemble the basic attendance figures for the conference. In this case, unlike the online registrations employing a Google Form, the on-site registrations relied on a more traditional methodology, that of a checklist that conference staff would use at one of three registration checkpoints, where participants checked in and registered once they arrived on site. Given that the online registrations made for a ready-made list of likely participants, it saved planners a lot of time—on-site, the task simply involved checking the names of those who made a physical appearance. Again, together the two record groups would have been enough to assemble the basic attendance data of the conference.

Yet a few examples again illustrate some of the shortfalls of the on-site registration process. First, conference administrators used three paper forms, and to varying degrees of completeness. For the most part, the design of the forms made a lot of sense, and mostly worked. Yet in a few instances, the forms gave rise to problems of incompleteness which then (once more) complicated the post-conference
administrative workflow. For example, names were sometimes written in hand in the margins of the forms, and sometimes the names were incompletely presented, which required a very quick process of corroboration with the online registrations. But the biggest problem, by far, was that the three lists were not assembled during the conference into a master list.

What Worked

- **For the most part, the on-site process worked pretty well.** The only big concern was that it created three separate forms (easy for AHEP to lose or displace) and that these forms were then not corroborated or matched to produce a master list.

What Didn’t

- **Again, compared to the online registrations, the on-site registrations worked pretty well.** But the major problem was how they structured the post-conference workflow, adding unnecessary and time-consuming steps to a process that one can imagine being accomplished very easily during the conference through a slight set of changes to the registration process. Conference staff need to make sure that in instances where a complete name is not listed from the online registration, participants offer their full name. The on-site registrations were not used to solicit information on whether a person was formerly incarcerated or not, but it might also be useful to present people with their online registration data and ask them to update information that’s not included or incomplete. Finally, it makes sense to have a member of the conference staff corroborate the lists from the various checkpoints. Conference planners invite the possibility of losing or misplacing one of the lists the more lists there are; they also invite confusion in corroboration the more time passes between the conference and the assembly of attendance data.

The Need for Additional Essential Record Groups:

Gathering and Reconciling More Post-Conference Documentation to Fill the Gaps

Because both of the essential record groups for assembling reliable attendance data had flaws, it fell to post-conference administrators to assemble and collate this basic conference information from additional record groups generated by the conference. This presented additional problems because these record groups were not designed, naturally, to generate attendance data. In most cases, they were designed for different administrative functions, making the assembly of attendance data from them a challenge. For example, fig. 1.2 (below), is designed to show the employment background of the conference participants. Lacking good information on the number of formerly incarcerated people who attended the conference, however, it can be read to provide at least some (albeit incomplete) evidence that this population at least existed, though none of the data is very reliable or clear. In a second way, it also provides a useful snapshot of the diversity of the conference participants, but in terms of how this diversity was reflected in the actual attendance numbers, it obviously leaves more questions than answers.
In the abstract, the conference exit surveys (record group 3) should have had no place in the assembly of attendance data for the conference. By nature, they are incomplete records for generating attendance figures. The main reason is that they're by nature incomplete, as they're filled out on a volunteer basis after the conference, and, indeed, not everyone who participated in NCHEP 2017 completed the exit surveys. Yet read and treated as a source of information on the conference attendance, they have some advantages and insight on the attendance discussion. As fig. 1.2 illustrates (above) the participants at least came from diverse backgrounds and included at least a few insight into who was there, even as this information remains elusive in quantifying.

What Worked

- **The exit surveys at least helped buttress a sense of the diversity of participants at the conference.** Unlike the online registrations, for example, participants in the exit surveys were asked to identify their experience in the field, and *this generated some information on those who identified as formerly incarcerated*. This information would be essential for the online registrations to capture, but again the online registrations did not.
- **The exit surveys produced a nice visual representation of the conference diversity,** which (at least at a glance) does a nice job of showing how many different kinds of people the conference brought together. But in terms of quantifying the conference attendance, this information is not
very useful. It would be useful to have this same question (how do you describe your role in the field) in the online registration for future conferences.

What Didn't

- They have an obvious problem: they are again incomplete records. 70 people out of the 278 total participants completed the responses.

Record Group #4: The Scholarship Applications

Like the exit surveys, the conference scholarship applications made for an unlikely record group in documenting conference attendance. By design, they limit themselves to a subset of conference participants interested in finding financial support to attend, and are thus not reflective on the conference attendance as a whole. Yet because they specifically asked participants if they were formerly incarcerated or not, they were one of the few record groups to actually contain this important information. Without them, it would have been very difficult to document the number of formerly incarcerated participants in NCHEP 2017.

What Worked

- The Scholarship application process asked well-designed questions, and put the solicitation of key information directly to the participants. Unlike the online registration process, then, this put the question of whether participants had been incarcerated directly—a measure essential to the organization's functioning.

What Didn't

- They were not designed to answer basic attendance questions about the conference participants. Because the fellowship application spreadsheet is not designed to do the same thing as a registration form, it makes sense that there would be no easy way to corroborate fellowship information with registration information. Still, that vital conference information had to come from these sources again suggests that the registration process needs some re-design investment in the future.

Conclusion

Assembling attendance figures and other related data for the 2017 conference proved much harder than it needed to be, and slowed the production of a conference exit report. This, in turn, slowed other aspects of the NCHEP's work in transitioning from the conference toward planning for 2018. The main reason is that the registration process, which ought to have generated the key record groups for assembling attendance figures, fell short on these tasks for various problems of design, completeness, or post-conference administration. In the future, more attention to the design and administration of the registration process will lead to a better and faster sense of who actually attended (allowing for ways to automatically collect email addresses and allow for individuals to edit their submission), including important measures on how many conference participants were formerly incarcerated (asking this question directly), as well as what role the various conference participants played during the conference itself (asking this question directly).
II. 2017 NCHEP: Attendee Profiles

Introduction
A total of 278 people participated in the NCHEP 2017 conference. Seventy-five of them (representing 27% of the entire conference membership) had been formerly incarcerated. The 27% overall membership of the formerly incarcerated participants found their numbers represented fairly symmetrically within the planning committee, within the concurrent sessions, and throughout the conference overall. The only exception was the plenary sessions, where formerly incarcerated participants were not represented.

Conference participants generally fell into one of three readily identifiable categories—1) participants affiliated with an institution of higher education that also features a higher education in prison program 2) participants affiliated with an advocacy group (usually non-profit or higher education affiliated) active in the world of higher education in prison and 3) a formerly incarcerated individual with some kind of tie to a program in higher education in prison. Participants in all three profiles (in most instances) had some kind of financial support that helped them attend and participate in the conference.

Participant Profiles

Common Conference Participant #1
Affiliated with a university or higher educational institutions that features a higher education in prison program. Received outside support.

Common Conference Participant #2
Affiliated with an advocacy group (usually non-profit or higher-education affiliated) active in the world of higher education in prison. Received outside support.

Common Conference Participant #3
A formerly incarcerated individual with some kind of tie to a program in higher education in prison. Received travel scholarship.

The Largest Conference Constituencies

Higher Education Institutions with Prison Programs
By far, the biggest constituencies were those who were primarily affiliated with institutions of Higher Education. Mapped onto those who also work in higher education programs, by far the most common type of participant. This makes sense. These institutions have faculty, resources, graduate students, programs, program support staff, undergraduate students. They have administrative support staff (Directors of Student Services, Outreach Officers, Counselors, Academic Managers, etc.) and provide institutional space as well for many of the Prison Program Directors who also attended.

Other Groups: Non-Profits, Advocacy Organizations, and Government Groups
A very small volunteer contingent (1 identified) and a handful of independent researchers and self-identified consultants as well.

Conclusion
From the attendance data, it becomes clear that most of the conference participants fit a set of common profiles, ranging from those affiliated with a higher educational institution featuring a higher education in
prison program, to those affiliated with advocacy groups, to a substantial number (27% of all conference participants) of formerly incarcerated participants. Throughout, representation within each segment of the conference remained fairly consistent, excepting for the plenary sessions.

III. Participation

Introduction
Those who attended NCHEP 2017 participated in the conference in a variety of ways. Where the formerly incarcerated represented roughly 27% of the overall conference participants, this ratio was maintained within several aspects of the conference, from the constitution of the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison Founding Advisory Board, to the conference planning committee to the concurrent sessions. The exception to this was the plenary sessions, which had no participation by formerly incarcerated people. The conference did not collect information on the attendance at the two film screenings.

Conference Leadership and Planning

NCHEP 2017 Achieved 27% Overall Participation of Formerly Incarcerated People
As illustrated in fig. 1.1, there were 75 formerly incarcerated participants out of 278 overall conference attendees. This means that roughly 27% of the overall conference was made up of formerly incarcerated participation.

Parity with the NCHEP Advisory Board
Thirteen participants overall served on the most recent iteration of the Advisory Board for the Alliance of Higher Education in Prison. Of these, three members served as formerly incarcerated individuals, or 30% of the advisory board membership. Though overall the representation of the formerly incarcerated was lower within the NCHEP Advisory Board than it was within the conference as a whole, the organization achieved rough parity with the overall conference make-up. Representativeness favored the non-formerly incarcerated in the organization's advisory positions.

1. Margaret Atkins
2. Timothy Boosinger
3. Robert Carmona
4. Naomi Dennis
5. Mary Gould
6. Jody Lewen
7. Danny Murillo
8. Brandan Ozawa-de Silva
9. Sean Pica
10. Bianca Van Heydoorn
11. Stephen Walker
12. Cheryl Wilkins
13. Donna Zuniga

50% Formerly Incarcerated Participation with the Conference Planning Committee
The conference planning committee, meanwhile, had five members representing the AHEP Advisory Board and seven members representing the diversity of the higher education in prison community. 50% of the planning committee membership had been formerly incarcerated.
1. Mary Gould
2. Jody Lewen
3. Danny Murillo
4. Brendan Ozawa-de Silva
5. Cheryl Wilkins
6. Christopher Beasley
7. Terrence McTeir
8. Maria Morales
9. Annie Frietas
10. Thomas Fabisiak
11. Brandon Warren
12. Adam Key

Plenary Sessions

Dramatically Less Participation by the Formerly Incarcerated (0%)
The plenary sessions are a place for improvement in the future, based on exit survey demand for more speakers (in general) who have been formerly incarcerated.

Opening Plenary (Thursday)
Brendan Ozawa-de Silva

Friday Session
Lila McDowell (M)

Panelists
Allison Lopez
Rob Scott
Kyes Stevens
Katie Schaffer

Saturday Session
Jody Lewen (M)

Panelists
Tanya Erzen
Lila McDowell
Toya Wall
Bianca Van Heydoorn

Sunday Session
Bianca Van Heydoorn (joined by Devon Simmons, but this was not announced until the day of the talk)
Films

The exit surveys, unfortunately, solicited no feedback on the film sessions. As a result, it is difficult to say how conference participants valued the two film screenings that occurred during the conference. The two films presented stories about re-entry and formerly incarcerated people.

Film Screenings
- "Life After Life" and discussion with filmmakers
- "The Return" and discussion with Bilal Chatman and David Cowan, Operations Manager, Prison University Project

Concurrent Sessions

Fig. 1.3 Respondent Attendance by Day

Most Popular Conference Days by Overall Room Attendance
The most popular conference panels and events were held on Friday, November 3. Events held on Saturday, November 4, were the next best-attended. Fig. 1.3 (above) shows that events on Thursday and Sunday were less-well attended, which makes sense given that these are the major travel days for the conference. Future conference planners can think about the best ways to utilize these days and if there are any ways to ensure that participants arrive early or stay for the full sessions on Sunday (Sunday attendance is always the most challenging).
## Figure 1.4
### Attendance at the Concurrent Sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session #</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Total Attendance</th>
<th>Average Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session 1</td>
<td>Fri. Nov. 3</td>
<td>11:30 am to 1:00 pm</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 2</td>
<td>Fri. Nov. 3</td>
<td>2:30 pm to 4:00 pm</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>29 (1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 3</td>
<td>Fri. Nov. 3</td>
<td>4:30 pm to 6:00 pm</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 4</td>
<td>Sat. Nov. 4</td>
<td>11:30 to 1:00 pm</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 5</td>
<td>Sat. Nov. 4</td>
<td>2:30 pm to 4:00 pm</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>16 (5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 6</td>
<td>Sat. Nov. 4</td>
<td>4:30 pm to 6:00 pm</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTALS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Attendance</th>
<th>Average Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>683</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Concurrent Sessions Participation**

The online registrations indicated that most of the conference participants planned to attend on Friday and Saturday, and this was born out by the room counts.

- Sessions 1-3 were held on Friday, November 3, and had the best overall total and average attendance. Each of the sessions drew average or above-average conference attendance.
- Sessions 4-6 were held on Saturday, November 4, and while data was not collected for session 4, it appears most of the sessions drew less than the Friday panels, with attendance at around 17 participants per session.

**Most Popular Concurrent Sessions**

Given that the overall conference attendance was best on Friday and Saturday, perhaps it should be no surprise that the best attendance within the concurrent sessions occurred on those days; concurrent sessions 1-4 had the highest attendance of the 6 concurrent sessions offered during the conference, while attendance figures dropped during sessions 5 and 6.

**Participation of Formerly Incarcerated at the Concurrent Sessions**

Formerly incarcerated conference participants did more than just attend the NCHEP 2017 conference. They participated in and even led several aspects of the conference.
Concurrent Session 1: Friday, November 2, 11:30am-1:00pm
During Concurrent Session 1, seven sessions were offered, and 4 of them featured formerly incarcerated speakers. One of these sessions was also entirely led by the formerly incarcerated. Overall, one quarter (25%) of the total presenters were formerly incarcerated. It drew above-average attendance (22 participants) to the sessions overall.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Panel Percentage Led by Formerly Incarcerated</th>
<th>Totals Overall for Concurrent Session %(#)</th>
<th>Session Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>100 (3/3)</td>
<td>100 (3/3)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>25 (1/4)</td>
<td>57 (4/7)</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0 (0/6)</td>
<td>31 (4/13)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0 (0/1)</td>
<td>29 (4/14)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>100 (5/5) *participants via video recording</td>
<td>47 (9/19)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>100 (2/2)</td>
<td>52 (11/21)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0 (0/3)</td>
<td>46 (11/24)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>4/7 panels featured formerly incarcerated speakers</td>
<td>46 (11/24) formerly incarcerated participation</td>
<td>156 participants attended, with an average of 22 at each session</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concurrent Session 2: Friday, November 2, 2:30-4:00 pm
Seven panels were again offered, and this time three of the seven featured one or more formerly incarcerated speakers. One of the panels was entirely led by formerly incarcerated participants. Overall, 56% of the presenters were formerly incarcerated. This was also the best-attended sessions offered during the conference, again with 29 participants (on average) attending the individual sessions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Panel Percentage Led by Formerly Incarcerated</th>
<th>Totals Overall for Concurrent Session %(#)</th>
<th>Session Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0 (0/4)</td>
<td>0 (0/4)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0 (0/1)</td>
<td>0 (0/4)</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0 (0/1)</td>
<td>0 (0/5)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>100 (4/4)</td>
<td>44 (4/9)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100 (4/4)</td>
<td>62 (8/13)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0 (0/2)</td>
<td>(8/15)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>66 (2/3)</td>
<td>56 (10/18)</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTALS**

3/7 panels featured formerly incarcerated speakers

56% (10/18) formerly incarcerated participation

176 participants attended, with an average of 29 at each session (Best attended session of 6)
Concurrent Session 3: Friday, November 2, 4:30 - 6:00 pm
Six panels were offered in Concurrent Session 3, and this time five of the six featured one or more incarcerated speaker. One of the panels was entirely led by formerly incarcerated participants, while 5 of the 6 overall were composed of more than half formerly incarcerated speakers. This meant that overall, this concurrent session had 65% representation of the formerly incarcerated as speakers. This was the second-best attended concurrent session of the entire conference (but noting that there was one less panel during this session).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Panel Percentage Led by Formerly Incarcerated</th>
<th>Totals Overall for Concurrent Session %(#</th>
<th>Session Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>75 (3/4)</td>
<td>75 (3/4)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>50 (2/4)</td>
<td>63 (5/8)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>71 (5/7)</td>
<td>66 (10/15)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0 (0/2)</td>
<td>59 (10/17)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>100 (4/4)</td>
<td>67 (14/21)</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>50 (1/2)</td>
<td>65(15/23)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>5/6 panels featured formerly incarcerated speakers</td>
<td>65 % (15/23) formerly incarcerated participation</td>
<td>149 participants attended, with an average of 25 in attendance at each session</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concurrent Session 4: Saturday, November 3, 11:30am - 1:00 pm
Seven panels were offered in concurrent session 4, and this time four featured one or more incarcerated speaker. One of the panels was entirely led by formerly incarcerated participants Overall, this session had 31% of its overall speakers drawn from the formerly incarcerated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Panel Percentage Led by Formerly Incarcerated</th>
<th>Totals Overall for Concurrent Session %(#</th>
<th>Session Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0 (0/5)</td>
<td>0 (0/5)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>25 (1/4)</td>
<td>11 (1/9)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>25 (1/4)</td>
<td>15 (2/13)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Concurrent Session 5: Saturday, November 3, 2:30-4:00 pm
Six panels were offered in concurrent session 5, and five of the six featured one or more incarcerated speaker. Only seven percent of the overall speakers in this session were formerly incarcerated. This session drew the lowest average attendance of any of the conference sessions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Panel Percentage Led by Formerly Incarcerated</th>
<th>Totals Overall for Concurrent Session %(#)</th>
<th>Session Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0 (0/4)</td>
<td>0 (0/4)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0 (0/5)</td>
<td>0 (0/9)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>25 (1/4)</td>
<td>8 (1/13)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>16 (1/6)</td>
<td>11 (2/19)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0 (0/3)</td>
<td>10 (2/22)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0 (0/6)</td>
<td>7 (2/28)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>2/5 panels featured formerly incarcerated speakers</td>
<td>7% (2/28)</td>
<td>95 participants attended, with an average of 16 at each session (Least attended session of 5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Concurrent Session 6: Saturday, November 3, 4:30-6:00m
Six panels were offered in session six, and three featured one or more incarcerated speaker. 20% of all the speakers in this session had been formerly incarcerated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Panel Percentage Led by Formerly Incarcerated</th>
<th>Totals Overall for Concurrent Session %(#)</th>
<th>Session Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>75 (3/4)</td>
<td>75 (3/4)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>29 (2/7)</td>
<td>45 (5/11)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0 (0/3)</td>
<td>36 (5/14)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0 (0/6)</td>
<td>25 (5/20)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0 (0/5)</td>
<td>20 (5/25)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>20 (1/5)</td>
<td>20 (6/30)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>3/6 panels featured formerly incarcerated speakers</td>
<td>20% (6/30)</td>
<td>107 participants attended, with an average of 18 at each session</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Concurrent Session Totals**
In terms of who led the concurrent sessions, fig. 1.6 (below) demonstrates that of the 39 panels hosted during the conference’s 6 concurrent sessions, 21 of them featured at least one speaker who had been formerly incarcerated, meaning 54% of all panels hosted during the conference managed to center a formerly incarcerated speaker in a speaking role. Meanwhile, of the 152 participants who had leadership roles during the conference as concurrent session presenters, 48 of them had been formerly incarcerated, meaning 32%, or roughly one out of three participants who spoke before audiences at the conference, had been formerly incarcerated.
Fig. 1.6 Concurrent Session Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concurrent Session</th>
<th>Panels</th>
<th>Panels Ft. Formerly Incarcerated Presenters or Moderators</th>
<th>Total Presenters</th>
<th>Total Formerly Incarcerated Presenters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10 (56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>21 (54%)</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>48 (32%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSION

The 2017 NCHEP conference drew nearly 300 people to Arlington, Texas, across several days in early November. Nearly a third of all the participants had been formerly incarcerated. Together, these two figures—the 278 participants and the 75 formerly incarcerated participants—established a ratio that was then largely maintained throughout all aspects of the conference planning and administration, meaning the formerly incarcerated had a substantial role to play in ensuring the success of the conference overall.
2. Logistics

Summary
In terms of conference logistics, the 70 conference participants (out of 278 total) who offered responses to the exit surveys on questions related to logistical concerns reviewed their conference experience quite favorably. Asked to comment on broad logistical questions like the conference location, as well as smaller procedural and on-site amenities and services like the registration process, the wellness room, and the exhibit hall, conference goers for the most part had very favorable things to say, especially to the registration process and the wellness room. Their less enthusiastic feedback remained overall positive and supportive, but greeted discussions of the exhibit hall and overall conference location, especially, less enthusiastically. The lowest-rated metric (the conference location) still generated a majority of conference participants who either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the conference offered accessibility and services that met or even exceeded their needs. Still, while exit survey respondents offered rave reviews of the conference logistics as a whole, the registration process in particular had aspects on the back-end (from an administrative standpoint, not the conference-goer standpoint) that might be easily redesigned or reconsidered in the future to make the conference a better experience for all.

I. Conference Location

Introduction
The 2017 National Conference for Higher Education in Prison took place in the Sheraton Arlington, near Dallas, Texas. Most of the 70 conference participants who offered responses to the exit surveys (out of 278 total) were, by majority, pleased with the various aspects of the conference location, ranging from the city of Arlington itself, on down to the hotel, its grounds, and the hotel's many individual on-site amenities and services. Of the positive feedback the exit surveys generated on the conference location, for example, several of the comments focused on the ease of air transport from the coasts (New York and California, especially) along with the help that the travel scholarships provided, especially to formerly incarcerated participants who also cited financial needs or constraints. Moreover, as Fig. 2.1 illustrates (below), when asked to rank whether they agreed with statements presented to them, and with responses at 1 meaning "strongly agree" and responses at 5 meaning they "strongly disagree," 27 of the exit survey respondents said that they could "strongly agree" to the statement that the conference location was easy for them to access. In short, the choice to locate the conference in Arlington and host the conference at the Arlington Sheraton met or exceeded the expectations of the conference goers.
Positive Responses
Respondents to the exit surveys offering positive feedback tended to highlight two aspects of the conference location in particular. Much of their feedback had to do 1) with its ease of access in terms of flying from either of the coasts (with most of the comments coming from east coast travelers especially) and 2) that Arlington seemed especially accessible as a destination for those who traveled with the support of conference fellowships. For example, two respondents specifically cited: "I am on the east coast. There was a direct flight which helped." Another mentioned, "Not a ton of direct flights from DC but definitely manageable." In terms of the accessibility of the site for those traveling on conference fellowships, meanwhile, 2 of the exit survey respondents noted that they would not have been able to attend without support. "Thanks to the scholarship I received I was able to attend. Without it, the location would have been challenging to get to." Another noted, "Had the scholarship… really made this trip very is to plan."

Lukewarm Positive Responses
As the above discussions reveal, however, very few were of the conference participants were enthusiastic ("strongly agree") about the accessibility of the conference location. Those that were tended to be from the coasts—a reality, as we shall see, that gave rise to some of the participants expressing resentment at what they perceived to be an over-representation of coastal-based representatives and institutions at the conference. Those who were happy with the conference location based on receiving travel scholarships, meanwhile, might have been happy with any similarly accessible location so long as similar funding opportunities existed. As a result, it is worth taking the lukewarm responses on the conference location seriously—of all the conference aspects, it was the element that received the poorest reviews in the exit surveys.

Access Challenges
Clearly, not everyone could "strongly agree" that the conference location proved easy to access, and much of this had to do with access challenges they faced in transportation. When the exit survey asked participants to explain any transportation or access challenges they had related to the geographic location of the conference, the exit survey responses helped shed some light into these frustrations. As Fig. 2.1 (above) shows, for example, 43 exit survey respondents (representing 61% of the total exit survey
responses offered) expressed they did not strongly agree that the conference location had been easy to access. In fact, at least a handful (7) of the responses reacted quite strongly on this point, suggesting that they "strongly disagreed" that the conference location had been easy to access. Put another way, of all the conference experiences that the exit surveys sought to measure, it was the conference location in Arlington that generated the strongest and most widespread feelings of participant ambivalence. Indeed, 20 of the respondents (roughly 29% of the survey responses offered) did not agree that the conference location had been easy to access. Conference participants went on to identify their concerns.

Concerns with Hotel Shuttle Service
71% of the total "disagree" or "strongly disagree" responses were related to the hotel shuttle from the airport to the hotel. Here are their comments:

- "No shuttle access from Love Field"
- "LONG wait at airport for van to hotel"
- "Shuttles from the airport to the hotel were not readily available"
- "Sheraton shuttle drove right past two of us waiting at the airport, and we were unable to reach anyone at the hotel by phone (tried 4x). This forced us to take a $25 car to the hotel."
- The overflow Hotel, the Double Tree has a North and a South and they sent us to the wrong location, and then they would not take us to the right one. It was a very long day. We could wait for 45 min-hour for the shuttle to take us back to the airport and then wait for the shuttle to take us to the Doubletree South. It bad thing is we called and gave our name and they told us to get on the Double Tree North...not sure how they did it but it us miss the first day of events.
- "None-the airport shuttle was great" (A contrasting view)

Other Concerns
In addition to concerns about the hotel shuttle service, exit survey respondents were forthcoming about a few other points regarding the conference location. Note again that they tend to emphasize problems with ground transportation getting to and from the hotel, especially, although some touched on points about the hotel's amenities and the sex offender registry in the State of Texas.

- **Rental Cars**: "The rental cars were 20 minutes from the airport. I did not know of any transportation from the airport to Sheraton Arlington"
- **Hotel Amenities**: "The hotel did not have a store with amenities such as notebook paper, tooth brushes or small personal items" and "We should have everyone at the same hotel"
- **Airport Location**: "I was a bit confused about the two airports"
- **Other Concerns**: "I have an alum who wanted to come to the conference who is on a sex offender registry. Texas was hard for him to get permission to come to."

Suggestions for Improvement of Conference Location
The exit survey respondents were asked what they would do to improve the accessibility of the conference. This question generated a wide range of answers. Respondents cited recommendations ranging from the selection of the conference city itself, to the food available there, to the hotel, to the ground transportation, and more generalized aspects of the conference planning. A few areas of suggestion stood out from among the exit survey responses:

City
Most of the exit response surveys that offered a suggestion on how to improve the venue of the conference recommended choosing a different city. More specifically, a good number of the respondents wanted a more walkable, centrally located, and potentially university-affiliated site. A sample:
● "Slightly larger city"
● "It was a nice facility and food and etc. were good. Everything being in one place probably kept people a little more together and focused. Nashville was also great -- like the "feel" of being on a campus a little more than the hotel experience -- but from a practical point of view -- hotel was better."
● "Access to experience the city and other venues"
● "It was fine--very reasonable. It would be great if we could find a similar venue in Denver."
● "I would have liked to have been closer to the city (Dallas)."
● "Please try to find someplace real for us next time.... Nashville was fine, we were somewhere. Amidst the parking lots and stadia of Arlington we were Nowhere"
● "The hotel was a good space but I would have liked for the hotel to be closer or even in a city. There was not much around for participants or partners to go explore"
● "There just wasn't a lot to do around the conference site for those of us who had traveled long distances"
● "Location with more walk-ability to local restaurants"
● "Located to more of a city around the hotel"

Venue and Grounds
Beyond the basic suggestion to pick a better city for the conference, the next most common set of recommendations focused on the hotel site. By and large, however, these comments tended to be far more positive than those generated by Arlington. Some again specifically emphasized utilizing a campus or university space in the future.

● "Change the waterfall water…"
● "Perfect size space, loved the outdoor space"
● "It was fine to have it at a hotel, but I prefer a college or university host. Last year's at Belmont in Nashville was my favorite."

Food
Again, feedback on the conference location tended to be positive overall. Beyond ambivalence about the ground transportation, the city, and some marginal aspects of the hotel, the exit survey responses on the conference location did bring positive feedback to the front, and these began with what at least one of the participants deemed its "excellent" food.

● "Having the food brought in helps keep everyone together for networking and the restaurant was available if a different kind of meeting was necessary."
● "Venue was perfect. We had the floor to ourselves, plenty of open space and comfortable seating for networking and conversation in between sessions, food was excellent. The organizing committee should be commended!"

Logistics/Planning
A few other points drew attention on the exit surveys. They represent just a tiny fraction of the overall responses on how to improve the conference venue.

● "All participants in one hotel if possible"
● "Replace one of the film nights with a Happy Hour/Social Hour"
● "I wish I got to see half the panels or workshops but it was hard for me to choose from because they were all so great"
Fig. 2.2 Hotel

The hotel hosting the conference (Sheraton Arlington) was a good site for this event.

69 responses

Hotel
A majority of respondents (56.5% of the completed exit survey responses) believed that the hotel suited the conference’s needs (as Fig. 2.2 above shows). Statements of positive feedback, for example, referenced its "perfect size, its "outdoor space," and the "good food." More, only a little more than 15% of the respondents found themselves in disagreement (either "disagree" or "strongly disagree") that the hotel hosting the conference offered a good site to host the event, revealing a clear line of contrast to the more widespread ambivalence expressed about the city.

In the negative responses, some felt that because the hotel was surrounded by parking lots and offered no easy, walkable access to the city, it felt like being located "nowhere," as one respondent put it. Some cited the lack of "walk-ability to local restaurants," while many more again noted that they wished the venue had been near a "college or university," something these respondents felt would promote a more "on campus" feel or "sense of community." Others were frustrated that the hotel overflowed, and that some had to stay off-site. "We should have everyone at the same hotel." Others noted:

- "I could not get room there. Doubletree was fine, but limited time of the shuttle made the Sunday morning part impossible
- "It was a big hassle having to move to the Doubletree for Saturday night. Reserving a larger block of rooms for the entire duration of the conference could have made a big improvement."

Positive Feedback
Concerns about the hotel overflow aside, strong evidence from the exit surveys suggests that most conference participants liked the conference hotel.

- "I liked the venue"
- "Perfect venue. Really enjoyed it."
● "The venue was great."

Conclusion
It seems well worth the time for future NCHEP conference planners to invest serious time and energy in selecting a venue for the conference, partly in recognition of the many challenges and consideration this decision involves (many noted above). On one hand, that most people come to the Conference from the coasts is not surprising, as some of the nation's biggest populations (and incarcerated populations) will be based there. On the other hand, this regional over-representation (defined expansively to include all aspects of the conference experience) looks like regional chauvinism or elitism to some. These concerns should underscore the need to seek out an accessible location that enables easy access for all (for all points in the country), especially those traveling on a budget. For many conference participants, this definition of accessibility extends beyond the city itself. For many it also includes a walkable and tight-knit community where accessibility to good food and recreation might also be considered a part of the conference location discussion.

II. Registration

Introduction
While the registration process had back end issues, it received strong reviews from participants, suggesting that of all the logistical discussions involved in the conference planning, the registration process worked quite well. When asked whether they had any difficulties registering for the conference, for example, 91.4% of the exit survey respondents indicated that they experienced no difficulties with the process. Only a small percentage (8.6) offered feedback citing at least some specific concerns.

Those who offered complaint emphasized that notifications of acceptances to present or attend were sometimes received late, or only by inquiry. This can be adjusted by requesting (checking the box in a Google Form) that a “confirmation” be sent. Some said that the timing of notifications (scholarships and paper/panel acceptance) also complicated the plans of some of those making advance registration and travel plans. While the overall reviews of the registration responses by participants were quite strong, however, this report's discussion of the conference Attendance (detailed in Chapter 1, "Attendance") shows that there were many aspects to the registration process that could use some improvement especially in terms of administrative design. For those more substantive discussions, inclusive of substantial discussion on how the process might be improved, see Chapter 1.
Sample Exit Survey Responses
Exit survey responders found little to critique about the registration process. Over 90% of the responses received indicated that for the most part, the process on the participant end worked very smoothly. Asked to comment on any difficulties they experienced while registering for the conference, respondents offered statements that very quickly reveal how well the process worked. Note that the negative comments again reflect just 8.6 percent of the overall responses.

- "I did not receive my acceptance until I asked about it"
- "There was no confirmation"
- "Because I was using University funds, I was unable to make a donation due to policy, so I wish in addition to suggested donation there was an option for mandatory registration fee so that I could have been able to use my university professional development funds to contribute, rather than personal."
- "I needed to know my presentation fates before registering and planning travel, making my travel plans fairly last minute."

Conclusion
While the registration process ended up creating a number of problems in terms of generating attendance and participation figures for the conference, it worked very smoothly from the perspective of the actual conference participants. The greatest room for improvement with the registration process, then, will be with how the process is designed and administered by future NCHEP conference planners. Chapter 1 again details some of these findings and concerns in greater detail. About the only way to improve the registration process from the perspective of the participants would involve finding some way to inform people of the conference schedules and their acceptance as speakers/fellowship recipients much earlier in the process.
III. Amenities: Wellness Room and Exhibit Hall

Introduction
Like the registration process, the overall conference amenities (those beyond the hotel itself, inclusive of on-site elements) fared very well in the exit survey responses. The best-reviewed element, the conference wellness room, generated what can only be called ecstatic reviews.

Figure 2.4 Wellness Room

Did you use the Wellness Room?
68 responses

72.1%

27.9%

Yes
No

Wellness Room
The wellness room generated widespread enthusiasm, and seemed to be one of the most inspired ideas of the entire conference planning process. Several participants greeted it with statements of delight and surprise on their exit surveys; several of the responses noted it was a conference feature they had never seen incorporated before. As fig. 2.4 shows, more than 70 percent of the respondents also used the wellness room, and those who did used it in diverse ways, suggestive of the many ways participants think of and pursue their own wellness needs. Two of the respondents called their experience with the room "perfect."

"Yoga" A Common Request
Respondents were asked what they liked specifically about the wellness room, and 23 of the respondents answered. Four of them (17% of the responses to this question) mentioned that they appreciated the inclusion of painkillers specifically (ibuprofen, Advil, and Tylenol (2x)) as one of the things they most appreciated, suggesting that for many, simply having painkillers and other basic supplies on-site constitutes a welcomed "wellness" step in the right direction. Another common response—this time in answer to the question on how the wellness room could be improved for the future, revealed greater conference participant ambitions, that of potentially hosting yoga classes as a future option. Of the 16 respondents that offered feedback on how the wellness room could be improved, nearly a third mentioned that they'd like to see a yoga class in the future. The responses indicated that there is also plenty of inner-
organizational talent available to help lead the classes for free. Here are some of the sample Yoga requests:

- "Maybe have someone lead a morning meditation/yoga session? I think there are many of us who attend who are trained/qualified. Optional, of course (and before all sessions begin)"
- "A scheduled meditation"
- "Yoga and meditation classes? I'm a trained instructor and would be happy to offer this service in the future"
- "I think perhaps some guided workshops. Maybe a morning yoga class or guided meditation. Not sure how it would fit in the schedule though."
- "Have a yoga instructor (maybe someone would do this pro-bono?)"
- "Most conferences don't even have this so it was great to just have the space. Yoga classes and massage! Just kidding. It was perfect."

What Did You Like About the Wellness Room?
Conference participants have many different wellness needs. When asked to identify what they liked about the wellness room, responses were quite diverse.

- "White noise machine"
- "Yoga mat"
- "Available and close"
- "I loved that it was available. . . . between traveling and conference sessions, our bodies sometimes have difficulty adjusting"
- "Tea and snacks"
- "It was nice to be reminded how important it is"
- "Quiet and relaxing"
- "Free weights, rather than machines, as well as cardio equipment"
- "It was equipped with everything I needed"

How Could the Wellness Room Be Improved in the Future?
This question generated a smaller range of responses (just 16) but again includes a snapshot of how Yoga requests were.

- "Have someone lead a morning meditation/yoga session?"
- "A scheduled meditation"
- "Massage and Yoga Classes!" (Former instructors also offered their services)

Concerns
A few did share their concerns about the wellness room. It is worth noting that the advertising of the space might be improved in the future given its popularity.

- "Was always too busy!"
- "Able to accommodate more people"
- "I saw a yoga room but I thought it was for the hotel. I didn't know it was for participants. were classes offered or was it on our own time? Maybe have more information on the door or via email. Maybe offer some group time and some solo time for the wellness room. I do like the idea. Stronger presence on social media throughout the weeks leading up to and during the conference in general would help - not just about the wellness room but for general information and hyping us up too :)"
The exit surveys also sought to compile information on the merits of the hotel exhibit hall. For the most part, conference participants found the exhibit hall more than matched their needs and expectations. Most of the conference participants had some kind of experience in the exhibit hall, and they found the facilities more than adequate to the task. As with the hotel generally, then, the exit survey feedback on the exhibit hall was very strong, with more than 85% of respondents indicating that their experiences with the hall and its logistical elements went very smoothly.

What did you like about the exhibit hall?
It seems the thing people most liked about the exhibit hall was the wide-open spaces it offered for working.

- "Space" "Roomy" "Large" (Multiple responses)
- "Everything"
- "Convenient"
- "The screen for showing power point."

How could the exhibit hall be improved in the future?
In reflection of the earlier points about the conference location, the "centrality" of the exhibit hall arose as a point of concern for some of the conference goers. A more centrally located exhibit hall in the future may do wonders for alleviating some of the participant's concerns.

- "A more central location so participants can stop by on their way to sessions"
- "It wasn't as central as it could have been"
- "The air conditioning--too cold!"
- "Have community based organizations set up tables and provide on the spot services"
Conclusion

Most conference participants considered the 2017 NCHEP conference as a smashing success, at least from a logistical standpoint. The conference location did not tend to generate enthusiastic reviews, but most considered Arlington at least a serviceable and accessible location. The hotel itself had some issues in some marginal or inconsequential ways, but for the more important work of hosting a conference and enabling the meeting of basic personal and professional needs, it was more than adequate, even quite comfortable. And the conference really shined on the registration process, at least from the perspective of the conference goers.

Still, there are clearly some ways to improve. Conference goers have made a strong statement about what they value in a conference site—accessibility, affordability are paramount—but they do not like (and some even resent) being isolated, not walkable, not close to cities and their diversity of options. Many are economically anxious, and ground transportation especially figures in that discussion—some surprises in costs rubbed some people the wrong way, as in when the hotel shuttle could not be found and riders instead had to take a taxi. And while registration went smoothly, there are really two registration processes conference planners might consider in the planning for the 2018 conference. The first of course involves the online registrations from the perspective of the participants, and the other, the second, involves administering the processing of registration from the back-end by administrators once the conference concludes. In this latter case, especially, the registration process has some clear room for improvement (as spelled out in Chapter 1). The wellness room, meanwhile, was overwhelmingly the most inspired aspect of conference logistics (according to participant feedback).
3. Communication

Summary
Most people learned about the 2017 NCHEP conference before it occurred through existing institutions and email lists. Also vitally important as a predictor of who learned about the conference early on? Previous conference experience. At the conference itself, meanwhile, email remained paramount, and worked very well. People loved getting regular and even daily email updates; the more the merrier, it seems.

In terms of the survey results on social media, however, there are reasons to be skeptical of the results. It seems fairly clear that very few either learned about the conference using social media or used it at the conference either. But this shortfall may also be a reflection of AHEP not prioritizing it in the conference design or in its networking planning, where encourage social media usage might have been advantageous.

I. Learning About NCHEP 2017

Introduction
Most people who learned about and attended the conference tended to fit a profile, and if diagrammed, probably had circles intersecting in three ways. First, they were affiliated with an institution, and probably one with a higher education program, though not necessarily. Second, within those institutions, they had access to a listserv (Higher Ed in Prison listserv) or an internal program email list that enabled them to learn about it. And third, they or someone they knew probably had experience with a conference. Far less important, and perhaps somewhat surprisingly, social media emerges as almost a non-presence in this discussion. Only one participant found the organization via social media.

How Participants Learned About NCHEP 2017: A Common Profile
The typical profile of a conference goer who learned about and then attended the conference fit certain criteria.

- **Predictor #1**: Affiliated with an existing institution, either by employment or some other measure. Entangled meaning not only an only institutional affiliation, but affiliation specifically with higher education in prison programs
- **Predictor #2**: Email and internet access, the primary venues through which communication arrived.
- **Predictor #3**: Prior experience with an NCHEP conference

A common profile of the early conference communicator appears when all three are combined. The typical NCHEP 2017 conference participant who learned about NCHEP 2017 prior to the conference was already employed or connected to some kind of professional work network affiliated with a higher education in prison project. Very broadly speaking, this makes sense, given that these were typically participants with email or internet access, which proved vital to how information and news about the conference was shared prior to its happening. Another important factor, though perhaps to a slightly lesser
extent than these existing institutional affiliations, where those with previous experience with the conference during its iterations in a previous year. Typically, they came from existing institutions, of which some were clear drivers of early communications. These included institutions of higher education, followed by existing Higher Education in Prison Programs. Two or three of the above predictors made it very likely that people in these networks learned and were motivated to attend.

Email Paramount in Spreading the News
Exit survey respondents overwhelmingly replied that it was through their existing networks of colleagues and friends, and that they most likely had their communications in email. Indeed, the most common response (19 responses out of 59, or 32% of all the exit survey responses on this question) said that some form of email, be it through a listserv, Google Group, or some other affiliated list was the first way they heard about the conference. Despite the preponderance of concern, perhaps, about social media engagement for organizations and networks, it was far less important at least at present for the conference. Only 1 response out of the 59 offered indicated that social media had the leading role in their work before the conference—Facebook.

Sample Exit Survey Responses: How They Learned (59 total responses)
A total of 59 respondents offered answers to prompts soliciting information on the various communications aspects of the conference, a number slightly smaller than the total number of responses offered to questions about the conference logistics. Perhaps an indication that the communications process worked well and tended not to generate more impassioned types of feedback.

Listserv/NCHEP Listserv/AHEP Listserv, Including "Email" and "Google Group" (19 responses)
By far, most of the conference participants learned about the conference and communicated about the conference prior to November 2017 using some combination of email or group listserv, including the NCHEP or AHEP email accounts. It seems many people may have also used multiple email channels for these communications.

- Listserv (4 responses)
- NCHEP Listserv (1 responses)
- "I am on the AHEP listserv"
- "Higher Education in Prison listserv"
- "dlist"
- "email, we are part of 2nd chance Pell"
- "Hudson Link"
- "Email and list serve"
- "AHEP list serve"
- "Prison-ed google group"
- "the Higher Ed in Prison Google group"
- "email from a friend"

Colleagues and Friends (10 responses)
If access to a common email list or listserv provided the primary way people learned about the conference, they identified professional relationships and networks in people as the second most important channel. They are inseparable, of course, but again speak to the importance of these email chains and channels as a venue for communication.

- "Colleague"
- "Friend/Colleague"
"Jody Lewen sent a message to PUP faculty"
"Work Community"
"Danny from Underground Scholars"
"Jody Lewen in 2012"
"My boss asked me to register for it."
"A friend of mine"
"College partner and email from Vera"
"Through work"

Social Media (1 response)
In marked contrast to email, social media apparently had very little role to play in helping to learn about the conference. Only one respondent indicated they learned about the conference prior to its happening via social media:

- "Facebook post"

Previous NCHEP Conference Experience Also Key

Next to some kind of work or listserv connection, personal experience with the NCHEP conference in years past was also an important indicator of those who learned about the conference very early on.

Previous Experience (11 responses)
- "Annual participant"
- "Presented at Conference in 2015"
- "I attended NCHEP last year"
- "Attended for the past two years."
- "I've come to the conference all seven years!"
- "colleagues who participated in the past"
- "I attended the conference in Pittsburgh, and am on the mailing list."
- "I work in HEP and was at the conference in Nashville last year."
- "NCHEP 2016"
- "I attended previous gatherings"
- "I was invited to present...I had also attended another event in 16 or 15"

Learning Driven by Existing Institutions

If existing work connections, access to a professional or group listserv, and previous experience were all major indicators of how one learned about the conference, the biggest group among these was people tied to institutions of higher education. And within those institutions, it seems to be graduate students and faculty who do the most work, followed by administrators.

Institutions of Higher Education (9 responses)
9 of the responses highlighted the role of higher education institutions specifically.

Doctoral Committees (Faculty and Grad Student Networks) (4 responses)
- "A member of my doctoral committee recommended that I attend"
- "I was forwarded an email from my mentor, Professor Xuan Santos"
- "Dr. Kelsey Kaufman"
- "Graduate Advisor"
Institutions of Higher Education Generally (3 responses)
- "Through Marge Valentine at Three Rivers Community College"
- "Through the Bard College Prison Initiative"

Higher Education Administrators (2 responses)
- "Academic Dean"
- "My College Dean"

Existing Higher Education in Prison Programs
If access or affiliation with a higher education program indicated one way in which people learned about the conference, it proved even more likely if that institution had a prison in higher education program.

Existing Higher Education in Prison Programs
Example:
- "The director of Salt Lake Community College Prison Ed Program"

Existing Programs (Unspecified, but potentially AHEP Programs)
Example:
- "Through my program"
- "From the prison education program with which I volunteer"

Project Coordinators
Example:
- "Project rebound coordinator"

Others
Communications sometimes came through state education directors and through the independent seeking of researchers.

- State Educational Directors "Our state education director told me about it."
- Independent Research "Looked for it"

Conclusion
When it comes to learning about the conference, individuals connected to institutions and especially higher education in prison institutions fared best. Perhaps this is right in line with the organizational goals; deepening reach of conference awareness would higher visibility of who those programs are, and what they do, etc. It seems to largely depend on what the conference envisions itself to be doing and who it considers having missed out on attending. Email seems to matter much more for the nitty gritty of business, though social media might be better utilized especially to raise visibility of the organization down the line and better network conference participants. There is also a need to consider how to diversify attendance beyond university/program affiliated attendees, if that is of interest to conference planners. When it comes to sharing information about the conference and organizing the conference, email seems to work best for this event.
II. Communications Before and During the Conference

Introduction
Once they learned about the conference, communications about the conference took place in a few ways. In general, the exit surveys provided suggested conference goers were very happy with communication prior to their arrival. Those who were not (about 25% of remaining respondents) cited some small concerns.

Fig. 3.1 The Spread of Information Prior to the Conference

I was provided all of the information I needed for the conference prior to arriving in Texas.
70 responses

Were participants adequately informed by the time they arrived?
Figure 3.1 suggests that they were. Nearly 3 out of 4 conference participants said they would strongly agree that they were provided all of the information they needed for the conference prior to their arrival in Dallas. This should be taken, perhaps, as a reflection of how effective the email, work, and listserv communities were in spreading information.
Mass Emails and Conference Website Dominated Communications During the Conference

Given that 70 participants completed an exit survey, it is striking that when asked what were the most effective forms of communication through which you received information regarding NCHEP 2017, 65 of the exit survey respondents offered an answer—a good indication, perhaps, of a strong and passionate consensus. Given that nearly every single one of the responses offered cited email, mass-email, or the conference website, some of the strongest consensus of the entire conference came from the effectiveness of the emails written, particularly the "mass" emails, or the ones used to update the conference at regular interims—notably the "daily emails" which received high praise.

Sample Exit Survey Responses

When asked what were the most effective forms of communication through which you received information regarding NCHEP 2017, most respondents indicated:

Email and Website (40 Responses)
Irrefutable evidence suggests that the conference emails worked very well, both in the lead-up to the conference and during the conference itself.

- "Mary's wonderful emails"
- "I really liked the daily round-up emails"
- "Email was more than great"
- "Website" "The conference website and email"
- google group and direct emails
- Website and mass email.
- web
- Both conference website and mass emails.
• the daily/ weekly emails. the website was very helpful.
• Individual and mass emails were highly effective in communicating conference info.

Outliers
A tiny number of the participants, however, were excluded from the emails. Given the importance of having access to these emails, it makes sense that those who somehow did not would make note of their exclusion. It might be a good idea in the future, then, for conference planners to perhaps include a message board or kiosk where the daily emails and announcements might also be hosted or broadcast.

• "The only communication I received was through the travel provider"

Tips for Better Communication in Future Conferences

Don't Fix What Isn't Broken
Conference goers were asked to identify some of the ways in which communication with participants could improve for future conferences. Only 27 responded, a question suggesting that many did not have a strong response. At least a couple of these, moreover, were "N/A," and more than a few were simply supportive. Common responses: "very good," and "great" and even "perfect." Many suggested augmenting communications perhaps with social media, though ambivalence and exclusivity of social media troubled just as many as recommended it.

Sample Responses
Again, people were very happy with the communication at the conference and had few suggestions, ultimately, for changes. Those that did tended to think of technological or social media augmentations, but these suggestions were controversial.

• "Twitter!"
• "Text" (presumably text updates and notifications)
• "Timing: it should ALL have been done earlier. Presenters should have had more knowledge about their specific spaces earlier"
• "I think all future communications should go through your email first. Many people do not communicate through some of the social media resources."
• "A conference app that folks could use during the event."
• "More Ice Breakers…Since I am a student and formerly incarcerated I am more of an introvert. I believe ice breakers are a way to engage two different worlds together."
• "More Social Media Use"
• make sure a phone number for someone at the convention is published in case they need to be contacted about a tardy arrival, ...
• It would be cool to have a conference app that folks could use during the event

Conclusion
If email offered the primary way that people learned about the conference, the very same seemed to be true during the conference itself. Yet during the conference the importance of the daily emails seemed even to increase—many people seem to have relied solely on the daily emails to keep them up to date on the conference news. And they were glad to have the service.
III. Social Media Usage

Introduction
Despite what might be assumed given social media's seeming omnipresence, social media usage was not all that widespread during the conference, certainly not when compared to email and the website itself. The exit survey asked people about their social media habits. As fig. 3.3 shows, most indicated that they used social media in their daily lives. Yet at the conference, it seems like most were not using social media, which is either refreshing or perhaps an opportunity. Of the platforms people use, Facebook was by far the most common, with 82.1 percent of respondents indicating they used the platform. Instagram followed. Twitter in third. LinkedIn fourth, and Snapchat last, with just 3.6 percent of the respondents indicating they used the service.

Fig. 3.3 Respondent Social Media Habits

![Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn usage statistics](image)

Figure 3.4 Following NCHEP on Social Media

Which of the following do you use to follow NCHEP (check all that apply):

33 responses

![Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn usage statistics for following NCHEP](image)
Social Media Habits at the Conference
When asked what social media platforms they would use to follow NCHEP at the conference, perhaps it comes as no surprise that in some ways, everyday habits looked exactly the same as conference habits. That is, Facebook reigned supreme. But unlike in their everyday habits, some platforms seemed more attractive to conference goers than others—unique to conference space. Twitter, for example, seemed less utilized in everyday life than it did at the conference. The only deviation came between Twitter and Instagram, which switched places. Twitter became the more popular platform for following news (text-based and links providing a better information and news platform for conference participation) while Instagram, prioritizing images and videos not as common. LinkedIn also dropped off; Snapchat not used at all.

Conclusion
On one hand, these numbers are pretty revealing. Perhaps of an older, less-out-of-touch conference clientele (at least in terms of social media). But also perhaps of very real limitations and trends as well. Organizations have tried in recent years to incorporate these tools better, and some have failed spectacularly. Also it seems view of social media grows dimmer by the minute, and perhaps is turning people off? It is interesting that Twitter seems to be more popular at conferences than it does in spaces outside of conferences. On the other hand, reason to distrust and be skeptical of these numbers. NCHEP doesn't seem all that interested in using social media during or before the conference in an interesting way. And perhaps better utilized, these numbers might change.

CONCLUSION

Future planners should strive to both streamline communication channels and increase access to them. A listserv (or dedicated email system) seems to be ideal. Social Media presents another interesting point of discussion. What kind of conference or organization does this aim to serve? Social media should be a part of the discussion, though it does not necessarily need to be a big part of the discussion. It seems like for now NCHEP is doing just fine without social media.
4. Content

Summary
In terms of content, the 2017 NCHEP National Conference used several vehicles and formats to enrich the experiences of its participants. Plenary sessions, concurrent sessions, dedicated times for on-site networking, and two film screenings provided ample opportunity (and each using a variety of formats) for participants to emerge better informed and empowered as advocates, teachers, and lifelong learners navigating the world of higher education in prison. Based on the exit survey data, all of the formats were met with favorable reviews by the participants, though some of the content formats fared better than others. The plenary sessions, for example, seemed to satisfy participants the most (82% favorable comments) and thus only slightly more than the still-quite-popular concurrent sessions (80% favorable comments). The built-in networking opportunities generated the lowest favorability (78.6% favorable comments) overall. At the same time, a lack of data solicited specifically by the exit survey (a missed opportunity by the conference planners) makes it unclear how many appreciated or found value in the film sessions. Still, even with the incomplete records, it seems incontrovertible that this year's conference participants were pleased with the conference content.

There are several areas, nonetheless, in which clear room for improvement stands out. What looms largest in these discussions is the overall experience of the participants—far more important than any idea, concept, innovation, abstraction, theory, data set, fact, or insight generated by the conference speakers or presenters, it was the personal experience of the conference that seemed to resonate most in what people said about the conference content. While most spoke glowingly about their experience, the few who had a less than favorable experience tended to isolate a few instances of conduct (usually by conference presenters, though tantalizing glimpses of presenter resentments toward their audience and vice versa also exit) that should give future conference planners pause. While the exit surveys offered (perhaps a problem of their own) altogether little insight into what these episodes actually involved, or how serious and hurtful they were, it appears as though a confluence of the perception of flawed pedagogical approaches, improper rhetoric—as well as the shrewd perception of very real and systemic inequalities—sometimes caused very real resentments between and among the conference participants. This content, far more than the intellectual content of the conference, factored into the rare negative perceptions of the conference's overall assessment and conference value.

I. The Concurrent Sessions

Introduction
A strong majority (80 percent of respondents) expressed agreement that the sessions were useful and relevant to their areas of interest. The exit surveys solicited their feedback on the concurrent sessions in basically three areas: issues related to the concurrent session topics, the concurrent sessions overall "value," and the concurrent sessions format. The exit surveys (in the future) might seek out of ways of streamlining or more specifically soliciting feedback in these areas, as respondents had tendencies toward adopting common critical frameworks throughout much of the discussion that follows. Not all of it proves useful to what the exit surveys were actually asking.

- Concurrent Session Topics. In terms of offering feedback on the concurrent sessions topics, for example, many expressed that while they were generally pleased with the topics, they hoped to see far more in the future dedicated to problems that tended to fit a theme around what we can
call "navigating higher education." This includes common problems such as, for example, practical issues such as how to gain admission, how to transfer between programs, how to overcome deficiencies in access to technology, and so on. More specifically on this theme, several of the comments also focused on how students might gain access to a variety of higher educational institutions, and not just elite or well-funded private programs, but ones that in many ways seem more likely as points of access and entry. These include community colleges, two-year schools, and smaller public institutions.

- **Concurrent Sessions Value.** In terms of the concurrent sessions overall value, many of the respondents were again quite positive in their overall feedback. But in an interesting tendency throughout this section of the exit survey, responses generally spoke to the personal experiences of the participants. Their testimony underscores that for many participants, the key information gleaned from their experience in the sessions was often quite personal. They offered reflections on their experience far more than the conceptual or abstract ideas. Comments, for example, focused on issues of pedagogy, rhetoric, and representation within the sessions much more than the nature of abstracted ideas or concepts.

- **Concurrent Sessions Format.** Finally, in terms of the format of the concurrent sessions, participants again turned to personal experience, suggesting that it was actually quite difficult for many to envision how the conference might be alternatively formatted in the future to generate the kinds of information and experience future planners might want to generate. Instead, most of the participants again used the prompts to reflect on their personal experience within the sessions,

It becomes clear, moreover, from a small but vocal minority within the written feedback on these points that not all experiences within the concurrent sessions were necessarily positive. In a theme echoed throughout all the concurrent session discussions (topics, value, and format), elitism (and perceived elitism) within, around, and immediately after the concurrent sessions rubbed many of the conference participants the wrong way. What emerges from these charges is that presenters and panel moderators together (along with planners, of course) might be well-served in making changes to their common approaches with presentation styles, rhetoric, and pedagogy for this conference. Respondents indicated that strategies like circular seating or sessions adopting a more give-and-take style in discussion might be advantageous. In short, while people generally appreciated and gained much from all aspects of the concurrent sessions, there is clearly room to improve. That improvement seems to start not only with the conference planners, but also the concurrent session presenters and moderators.

**Fig. 4.1 Relevance of Concurrent Session Topics**

I found the topics of many of the concurrent sessions useful and relevant to my areas of interest.

70 responses

- 37 (52.9%)
- 19 (27.1%)
- 11 (15.7%)
- 3 (4.3%)
- 0 (0%)
Relevance of Concurrent Session Topics

As Fig. 4.1 shows, the majority of the conference respondents who supplied responses to the exit surveys (80 percent) agreed that the topics presented in the concurrent sessions were both useful and relevant. Only a small number of the exit survey respondents (4.3 percent) said they would disagree with the view that the concurrent sessions were useful and relevant to their fields of interest. Many suggested that the conference planners in fact organized too many good panels at once. At least a few made comments like the following:

- "Concurrent sessions were very often hard to choose between!"
- "Perhaps repeat some of the more requested sessions. I wanted to attend so many and had to miss some I would have liked to attend." "Don't put similar topics in the same time, especially if there are only a few (or 2, as in my case) that are somewhat related. The ONE session I really wanted to see was at the same time as my own presentation."
- "Maybe not so many at once--especially when all reentry/research seemed to be happening at the same time! It made it hard to choose"

Imagining Future Concurrent Session Topics

When asked if they had suggestions for new or different topics for future concurrent sessions, the exit survey respondents had many ideas. They reacted enthusiastically when asked to suggest future panel ideas. Their suggestions reflected the diversity of the conference in general, and mirrored the varieties of discussions put on display in the panels. Nonetheless, a few key areas of critical commentary on the concurrent session topics emerged from the suggestions. Presented as a list, they touched on several major overlapping areas:

Common Response Theme #1:
How to Navigate Higher Education

The most common type of suggestion for future panels focused on issues related to helping the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated navigate the many echelons of the educational system, and this included not only helping people secure access to traditional higher educational systems and classrooms, but also online systems and classrooms as well. From the responses, it is also easy to detect some resentment toward better-funded and more prestigious academic institutions, particularly as these institutions seem well beyond the reach or working lives of many of the conference participants. In rare instances, this resentment was broadcast even more broadly, encompassing all of academia. It is worth noting that this broader theme (navigating higher educational institutions) also had its sub-sets and related sets of commentary, as elaborated in two subsequent follow-up sections. For the moment, some samples on theme #1 include:

- "How do students inside [prison] research colleges to transfer to [once they're] outside and apply for scholarships for funding?"
- "Provide working examples of online and offline courses for community college credit, learn about use of CLEP testing for college credit, use of Open Education Resources to complement courses with offline digital resources."
- "Solutions to technology issues/lack of Internet access"
"Opportunities to connect higher education programs with other educational efforts in correctional institutions. Particularly to create pathways for lower level students to transition to higher ed. and to create service opportunities for higher ed. students to assist in educational efforts for students in lower level programs"

"I felt that, by and large, higher education was valorized, not critiqued, in most of the sessions. Would appreciate some sessions that focused more on the back-and-forth between our two sorts of sites, the challenge and tension of putting (as some insiders termed it) the 'privilege industry' into the 'punishment industry.' How to offer 'quality education' inside, without perpetuating the systemic discrimination and infuriating hierarchies of academia? And vice versa: how to use our work inside to query the 'status factories' that are so many colleges and universities?"

"I would have liked to have heard more about how some of the participants transitioned from prison to college - especially finishing their bachelors and attending graduate school."

"How to navigate the college system"

Sub-Set A: How to Navigate a Diversifying Higher Education Landscape

Given the resentful nature of the above comments, perhaps it comes as no surprise to learn that many comments also urged future conference planners to adopt a more expansive understanding of what the higher education landscape today really entails, and to build this more expansive understanding into its conference planning. These comments both add to the theme of navigating the higher education landscape while offering specific commentary on the nature of that landscape, and thus are perhaps best considered as an important sub-set.

"You need to realize that we are not all four-year colleges and some us are actually private organizations, and are in areas of the country that are not NY and California, and Illinois. Look into regional organizations (like Southern, Northeast, etc.)"

"I'm thinking about submitting a proposal to present on all the 'hard stuff' (ethics, boundaries, work-life balance, etc.). Sometimes it seems like people are working hard to present their best selves to their colleagues, which makes sense, but I think we could all benefit from hearing about what real challenges exist."

"Building state consortia, more from community college programs, more from poor programs."

Sub-Set B: How to Navigate Funding, Financial Aid, and Scholarship Concerns

Relatedly, many of the exit survey prompts soliciting suggestions for future panels ideas also generated responses that urged exploration of how the conference might be used to help students fund their educations, or otherwise navigate the intricacies of the financial aid system. Given that financial aid discussions are also largely discussions of higher educational policy, it makes sense to consider them a sub-set of the navigating higher education-themed discussion as well.

"The financial aid processes. Many people are intimidated by the process and don't understand how financial aid is processed."
● "Sessions for funders"

● "Funding should be presented in a collaborative way rather than a panel. Funding varies so greatly that it would be better to share experiences in similar funding situations (Pell, Private Foundations, Individual Donors, etc.)"

● "I appreciated the more difficult topics like funding."

Common Response Theme #2:
How to better include and foreground the participation of the formerly incarcerated

The second most common kinds of topics that respondents hoped to see included in future panels (beyond issues of navigating higher education) were those aimed at better involving and foregrounding the participation of the formerly incarcerated. Many exit survey responses referenced these panels as the most powerful and memorable of their entire conference experience. It should be noted that at least a few of the responses mentioned also included specific mentions of better including "prison employees" and the Department of Corrections.

● "Inclusion of formerly incarcerated individuals in prison higher ed. programs? i.e. teaching and administrating. I have never been incarcerated but I strongly value the inclusion and leadership of people with lived experience and would like to work with folks w/ such knowledge whenever possible. I would like to hear more from program admins on how to navigate such inclusion within DOC facilities as many facilities are not that open to having formerly incarcerated people return as educators"

● "I found the stories of the formerly incarcerated to be beneficial. The stories were impactful, and gave me things to improve my school with. Most of what I gained was how I could improve the transition from inside to outside. I would bring in more criminologist, master level criminal justice graduates and practitioners to provide insight into research."

● "I would suggest more sessions from formerly incarcerated students and more that are not program specific. Many of the sessions felt like program evaluations...here is what went well and did not in our program. Perhaps larger or broader topics would be more applicable."

● "More sessions featuring formerly incarcerated scholars."

● "I appreciated hearing both Michelle Jones and Jerrod Wall speak. It was so valuable hearing directly from graduate and aspiring graduate previously incarcerated persons about their experiences."

● "I would appreciate sessions by prison employees (education directors, maybe guards) willing to discuss ways to effectively work within the system as faculty members. I've been challenged by things like 'count,' lock-downs, and students in solitary confinement. I'd love some frank discussion of how these challenges affect practice."

● "Such a big part of all of our work is working with the DOC and it was discussed minimally throughout the conference. I would also encourage more DOC participants, while they might have a different perspective, their views and voice are important in this ongoing conversation."
Common Response Theme #3
Other Suggestions

Many different kinds of themes received mentions on the question of how to improve the conference sessions. As a whole, however, these suggestions generated less interest than either thematic cluster #1 or #2 and their various sub-sets.

- The Rhetoric of Prison in Higher Education
- Identity
- Pedagogy
- Immigrants and the Undocumented

Rhetoric
The use of hurtful words within the sessions or during the discussions afterward turned a few conference participants off. As a result, the exit surveys sometimes offered suggestions to improve the conference rhetoric as a whole:

- "Discussion on the question of language"
- "The importance of language. Perhaps a linguist can head this panel. There was a lot of talk in regards to the language used to refer to formerly incarcerated people. Some suggested establishing ground rules to refer to them such rather than convicts, prisoners, inmates, etc. Perhaps Eddie Ellis’ letter can be used in this regard."

Identity
Several respondents urged more discussion, as well, of identity issues

- "A discussion on racial tensions in prison and how that plays out in our classrooms and in the housing units. Strategies to address these tensions would be very helpful."
- "I found the topics interesting but the content and Q&As did not often follow the stated panel topics. I would enjoy more in-depth conversations between experienced program administrators. I would also like to see meetings for groups such as LGBT, regional, administrators, etc."
- "Race, Gender, Class dynamics in our work."
- "More women panels about how formerly incarcerated women and how prison has impacted their lives"

Pedagogy
Several respondents strove to remind planners of the importance of classroom pedagogy

- "Topics still seem to focus on advocacy more than pedagogy. I would like to hear more about what happens in prison classrooms and how instructors and students navigate challenges and barriers."
- "Do those of us in the conference community assume topics related to the classroom are trivial? They are at the core of what we do."
- "Sessions on dealing with Trauma; Health and wellness after incarceration"

Immigrants and the Undocumented
One respondent called attention to the plight of immigrants and the undocumented

- "Incarceration of immigrants/undocumented peoples"
Feedback on the Value of Concurrent Sessions

As with the topics of the sessions, most respondents found the concurrent sessions as a whole quite valuable to their experience. But unlike how the topics discussion seemed to give rise to demand for help on navigating the higher education landscape, discussions of the concurrent sessions "value" seemed to emphasize concerns with participant (and especially presenter) conduct.

Fig 4.2 Value of Concurrent Sessions (General)

I found the concurrent sessions I attended interesting and informative.

70 responses

Tips for Future Presenters at the Concurrent Sessions

Respondents to the exit surveys were then prompted to offer suggestions to future presenters with their feedback. Many of the respondents used the space to again offer suggestions for future concurrent session topics, but comments varied widely, addressing both the value of the concurrent sessions as a whole, and more specifically the value of the concurrent session topics. Again, conference planners might design the exit survey in the future to more specifically solicit feedback on what they liked and disliked about the concurrent sessions (or to even drill down further, asking questions that specifically require respondents to name specific sessions). In any case, a number of common themes quickly emerged from the exit survey responses on what worked and what did not work about the concurrent sessions.

Use Your Words, Slides, and Evidence Well (and Courteously!)

One factor that seemed to diminish the value of the concurrent sessions was the quality of the presenter pedagogy. Unfortunately, the conduct of several presenters troubled a few of the participants, and for various reasons.

- "There are many different communities who attend and will attend this conference. It may be worth including some suggestions for presenters (e.g., around language and/or deficit framing) when submitting. However, that may also be on the back end of reviewing submissions."
- "Be respectful of your audience"
- "More participatory discussions and less lecturing"
• "If you use slides, provide clear and specific content. We don't all want or need the same things from sessions, so variety of concurrent sessions is key."
• "I left a session in which former students talked about how much they appreciated their programs during 'reentry.' I heard other attendees praising it, while I wanted more data, not just emoting, about how programs impact reentry."
• "I really liked the sessions that gave me contact information. I took copious notes in each session, and I'd appreciate being able to follow up."
• "When presenters are presenting their research with a panel, they allot enough time for each presenter to share their research"

Logistics Matter
Another factor that seemed to diminish the quality of the concurrent sessions had to do with a variety of logistical matters. All conferences seem to endlessly grapple with a handful of common logistical problems. Perhaps presenting a streamlined set of expectations to future presenters makes sense. It also makes sense to have panel moderators do more to ensure that speakers respect their time limits and audience. Conference planners might also think of using varied formats (or at least explaining their decisions in terms of formatting) within the sessions—many people continue to bristle (for a number of reasons) at the lecture/podium-style format of most academic-led conferences. It might be worth presenting any research or findings that help buttress the case for why some formats work better than others, and under what context.

• "I found the opening statements during each of the workshops/plenaries to be too long. 10 minutes per participant is just too long of a time to speak. I would recommend more interactive workshops/plenaries - maybe diversifying to formats and trying different things. Every single session had the exact same format. It wasn't conducive to different learning styles which is surprising for a conference for/by educators."
• "If using presentation space for lunch meeting, allow time for setup/testing. Our session required a Google Hangouts conference call and there was a meeting in the room until 5-10 minutes AFTER our scheduled start time."
• "Keep to the time, make sure presenters aren't too long-winded as the audience fades quickly. Think of new formats- roundtables, etc."

Draw on Expertise, Local Expertise, and Institutional Diversity
A third factor that seemed to diminish some of the value people found in the concurrent sessions had to do with problems of representation within the sessions. Many participants spoke to over-representation of some communities, and the under-representation of others at the conference.

• "I would like to have attended more sessions with those that are working in prison programs in their state. Having some academics from the Criminal Justice field that work in research would have been beneficial. Looking at recidivism rates, and what is currently employed across the nation would be beneficial. There were no wardens or state representatives available to help digest why some of the rules are in place. We need the people in the room that can affect policy changes."
• "The presenters were fine, just need more variety in the speakers seems there were the same people presenting in multiple sessions."
• "Accredited Faith-based colleges in prison to be represented"
• "Diversify! Why are the same people on all of the panels? If you are putting together a panel, don't just pick your friends--look for people from different programs"
Involving the Formerly Incarcerated and Corrections Staff
A fourth factor, related to representation, was that of specifically involving formerly incarcerated and department of corrections workers. That the conference involved the formerly incarcerated and corrections staff proved to be both an advantage and disadvantage in terms of curating conference content. On one hand, it highlighted to many participants the need for greater inclusion of such speakers in the future. On the other hand, it also highlighted the reality that for the 2017 conference, at least, corrections workers would not be as well represented as formerly incarcerated persons.

- "Something run by corrections staff about their viewpoints?"
- "I would like to hear more from formerly incarcerated educators, students, and persons. Those narratives are the most powerful part of this conference, and I wish there had been more representation--to speak for themselves rather than have people speaking on their behalf."
- "More voices of formerly incarcerated persons"

Discuss Financial Aid
Some also found the value of the concurrent sessions diminished, once again, by the selection of topics.
- "Definitely the Financial Aid process and how it works."

Think of Ways to Increase Access
Some noted that they could not access all of the presentations, and wondered whether it would be possible to perhaps stream or host all of the presentations online as a way to ensure access to conference participants once the conference concluded.
- "Stream or post the presentations online, so we can see the ones we missed via internet link"

Utility of Concurrent Session Formats
As with their comments about the concurrent session topics and overall value, most respondents to the exit surveys also found the formats of their concurrent sessions useful. When prompted, however, many were quite forthcoming with suggestions on how to improve their format.

**Fig. 4.3 Concurrent Session Formats**

I found the format of the concurrent sessions productive and useful.

70 responses
Tips for Formatting Future Concurrent Sessions

Though nearly every aspect of the concurrent session planning gave rise to at least small amounts of critical feedback, the exit survey data suggests that future planners should strive to maintain the status quo. Indeed, the vast majority of the exit survey respondents (more than 75% of them, in fact) said they would either strongly agree or agree with the statement that the concurrent session formats were productive and useful. Common individual responses noted, for example, that the concurrent sessions "are great." Another added, "I loved the informal format many took on, where conversation could happen throughout."

Experience Is Key

Individual and even personal experiences within the sessions tended to generate the most comments among those in the minority (less than 10% of exit survey respondents) who disagreed that the concurrent sessions were productive and useful. That is, a good number of the specific responses avoided the imaginative labor involved in envisioning how sessions would be better organized, and instead spoke to their own experience. To be sure, this provides important information of its own. Respondents touched on aspects of the presentations they did not appreciate. Notably, many of the (again, minority) respondents said that the sessions went on too long, that there were too many, and that something about them suggested inaccessibility. Respondents seemed to want a seat at the table. As one put it, "as equals." Some of the feedback in this vein included:

"Too Many, Too Long, Inaccessible"

While most of the exit survey respondents (more than 75%) said they would agree or strongly agree with the statement that the format of the concurrent sessions was productive and useful, 17 of the total respondents found that they could either not agree or even strongly disagreed with the statement. The minority in disagreement tended to think there were either too many sessions, that the sessions were too long, or that they were formatted in ways that suggested hierarchy or inaccessibility. Some of the samples included:

"Too Many" (6 responses)
- "Too many break out seasons;" "Too many great sessions at the same time!" "Same as always, too much going on at once to take it all in;" "I would have preferred to have less sessions for concurrent sessions;" "Repeat the concurrent sessions so that we have the opportunity to see all the sessions;" "There were too many concurrent sessions for the size of the conference. I noticed that several people presented multiple times during the weekend. Panels could be reduced by limited the presentations by individuals."

"Too Out of Touch" (6 responses)
- "For an organization that is interested in offering education to those who have been marginalized, and thinks hard about open access, I thought the structure of the sessions was weirdly hierarchical and inaccessible (yes, I know, a theme). The only session (which I attended), in which we sat in the circle and spoke as equals, was the one offered by Inside-Out. In many other rooms, even when the group was very small, the conventional panel behind the table, each member reading rapidly for 15 minutes, was the norm. WHY?!!" "More discussion/dialogue/interaction than lecture"
- "More interactive workshops. We've done some of these at the Soros conference, and they work really well with criminal justice topics."
- "Less sessions, more spaces for open group dialogue" "Open and honest engagement"
"Could there be roundtables, where attendees sign up for a seat in a facilitated topical
discussion?"

"More narratives from formerly incarcerated persons. Also, would be interested in more
corrections representatives."

"Inaccessible" (2 responses)

"1.5 hours is a long time for a session. Perhaps 60 minute sessions instead?
"shorter breaks
between sessions"

"Do Not Change" (2 responses)
At the same time, roughly the same number who "strongly disagreed" that the format of the concurrent
sessions was productive and useful urged that their structure not change at all. Indeed, two of the exit
survey responses advocated no changes to the concurrent session formats.

"Do NOT change the 90-minute-long sessions. This is the first conference I've attended at which
those were standard, and it's so fantastic. Keep that. I also like the "working lunch" options. Is
there a way to group disparate sessions in time slots? More than once, I wanted to attend multiple
sessions at one time but no sessions in the next time slot really appealed to my work."

"I like the longer than usual sessions, which allowed for real discussion"

Use Brainstorming Sessions
Finally, there were also comments that better approached the work of envisioning alternative formats.
One of the commenters suggested using one of the sessions to brainstorm ideas for raising funds for
underfunded college programs.

"Brainstorming sessions of ways to raise funds for underfunded college programs"

Conclusion
The concurrent sessions generated some of the most complicated feedback of the entire conference. On
one hand, the concurrent sessions seemed to be incredibly well-received, as most of the exit surveys
indicated most of the conference participants could agree or even strongly agree to their overall value
being positive. At the same time, the tenor and tone of much of the written feedback suggests that without
care, there are real problems afoot in the overall culture of the NCHEP conference. There is a clear record
on display that at least a small minority of the conference feels genuinely excluded from the conference,
and for reasons that seem to be linked (primarily) to their experience within the concurrent sessions.
Partly this seems to be a concern of in-session pedagogical strategies used by the presenters and
moderators. Partly it seems to be a concern of rhetoric. In part, it is also a reflection of very concrete
realities—inequalities within and among institutions, within access to funding and revenue/support
streams, and of course within categories of identity. Solutions to these problems are undoubtedly much
more vexing for future planners. When given space to imagine how a conference might be better run, it is
telling that for the most part respondents opted out of that labor, and instead spoke to their own
experiences. This is understandable and valuable work on its own, of course, but it also suggests that
conference planners, presenters, and session moderators have much to do in helping to close the gap
between the positive experiences revealed in the exit surveys alongside the more resentful statements they
seemed to elicit, often at the same time.
II. The Plenary Sessions

Introduction

If the concurrent sessions were popular with conference participants as the data (more than the written feedback) suggests, the plenary sessions were more popular, with nearly 80% of the respondents suggesting they agreed that the topics addressed in the plenary sessions were interesting and relevant to their needs. The majority of the feedback from a vocal minority (the roughly 4 percent who could not agree that the sessions were interesting and timely) suggested for the most part that what frustrated them about the plenaries was not their overall value or format, but their topics. It is hard to say what exactly this means given (again) the vagueness and lack of justification space for the comments, but perhaps they should be read to mean that while participants valued the plenary sessions as a whole, and apparently found them advantageous for the conference in the composite, a good number of the participants were nonetheless lukewarm on the topics addressed. At minimum, it might be worth investing some time on what the plenary sessions are meant to accomplish, and how they can be best utilized to meet the goals of the conference.

Fig 4.4 Plenary Session Topics

Planning Future Plenary Speakers/Topics

Perhaps the most striking thing about the feedback on the plenary sessions is that while 46.4 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that the topics addressed in the plenary sessions were interesting and relevant, 53.6 percent could not strongly agree to the same statement. Again, as with the feedback on the concurrent sessions, a fairly palpable sense of ambivalence, missed opportunities, and even resentment pervaded the written feedback on what suggestions participants had for future plenary speakers and topics. Examined closely, it is possible to see some of the tensions alive in the conference making their way into the written feedback. A tantalizing piece of commentary said, "Loved the plenaries. We discussed keeping the audience members on track so they don't digress too much."
Tips for Planning Future Plenary Sessions

The conference exit surveys asked respondents to offer their suggestions on how to improve plenary sessions in the future. Again, this work proved a challenge for many of the respondents. Instead, most offered tips for better topics better suited to their own needs, sometimes (though certainly not always) untethered to consideration for how this would improve the life of the conference as a whole.

Several offered their own suggestions for topics

The exit surveys again need to be treated with a grain of salt here. Nearly 80% of the total respondents found that they could either agree or strongly agree with the statement that the plenary sessions were interesting and relevant. Reading the comments, it is easy to lose sense of the positive experience in the plenary sessions many seemed to have. It is also worth noting that perhaps the exit survey itself has limitations. Many of the following comments make great suggestions for topics, but lack the space for specifics or justifications. More closely examined, they also raise questions in a more practical sense as to how they would work as a viable plenary session presentation.

- "Race relations in higher ed. classrooms in prison; gang affiliation and higher ed. in prison"
- "Financial Aid Guru from the Department of Education, Financial Aid experts from 2 years as well as 4 year colleges, private and public as well."
- "How to be more respectful of those working within prisons/how to collaborate with them"
- "Educational resources for students with mental health issues"
- "Expanding higher education resources and student achievement with technology. 2. Building partnerships with DOC for programs expansion with technology for higher education achievement and digital skills for reentry. 3. Sharing education resources for a greater good."
- "Funding and fundraising ideas"

Some suggested the plenary session topics were not timely, relevant, or had missed an opportunity

One of the most compelling of the responses wished the Conference had seized better upon the "Weinstein moment," referencing the recent sexual harassment scandal of disgraced Hollywood Producer Harvey Weinstein. At heart, the comment urges conference planning flexibility in terms of bringing news items current to the news cycle more centrally into the conference content. Once more, commentators sometimes used the space to suggest the plenary sessions should reflect their own interests with no explanation for how such a topic would benefit the conference broadly.

- "Could we talk about "the Weinstein moment"? I suspect we will still be having it a year from now. I find myself struggling--often--in conversations about sexual harassment, predation, assault, and rape. A couple years ago Nate Parker released a provocative film about Nat Turner, and conversation about the film was immediately eclipsed by the controversy around his sexual assault charge 20 years earlier--I believe it was a racist conspiracy. Parker was accused and acquitted in college; he has gone on to become an "activist filmmaker" and has been in no trouble since then. Progressives like Roxanne Gay gutted him in the press. I--we--do this work because I fundamentally believe that people should not be defined by the worst thing they do, and also because I believe that a person who commits a violent act can come to terms with it and live the rest of their life as a nonviolent person. But you can get in a lot of trouble with your academic friends saying that about someone like Parker, or any of the countless others now being called out for assault. Sexual violence can never be tolerated; it must be stopped, and people who speak out about sexual violence must be supported and believed, but the "national discourse" is deeply
problematic. What can those of us in this community do to bring nuance to the conversations about assault?"

- "Very interesting, but not exactly relevant to our specific needs from my area."

Relatedly, some found the sessions topics useful, but inappropriate to the plenary format. Here participants are addressing what might be considered a more robust critique, one useful to future planners.

- "I loved the relaxation opening plenary, but would suggest that it be repeated, but not as a plenary, nor the opening. Again, I really did like the session."
- "This is not directly answering your question, but I wish the plenary on trauma had been more related to the work and less science-y."
- "I appreciated the trauma presentation, and also appreciated the research presentation by Lois Davis from RAND last year. I would appreciate having both types of presentation in the future."
- "Perhaps too many panels as plenary sessions this year. But good if we could have some funders appear on a panel."

Several believed the plenary sessions were formatted in a way that made them inaccessible. Many respondents continued to chafe at the formality of the sessions, their format, and the performance of elitism many appeared to latch onto as a conference flaw.

- "More dialogue between the audience and panel. I suggest some panels with practitioners and researchers."
- "More plenaries from formerly incarcerated students and a larger variety of presenters. Perhaps folks not from the AHEP."
- "Diversify who is considered an 'expert.' Are experts only from wealthy, private programs?"
- "As above: more bi-directional work (both in topics and in presentations)."
- "As was mentioned last day, having a plenary focused on students."
- "I was very disappointed that no formerly incarcerated person was listed as a plenary speaker. It seemed remiss of the board and alliance. I was so happy that Bianca included someone else in her final talk, even if unlisted, and I would love to see so much more representation next year. Also, high five to conversations about trauma and self-care. So critical for any aspect of this work."
- "These should be collaborative - invite people from different programs to work in small groups through a set of discussion questions and then collaborate across groups on a particular theme."
- "Robust inclusion of formerly incarcerated voices"
- "I would like to see additional DOC involvement either via speakers or topics"

A respondent suggested using the opportunity to explore more philosophical, open-ended problems. An extreme minority, but perhaps useful to consider organizing principles or ideas as a potential topic.

- "Can we forgive and accept people accused of doing violent things in the past?"

A Respondent Also Spotted a Decline in Quality from Previous Years. Conference planners might take this as a cautionary reminder to strive to keep improving the plenary sessions year-to-year.

- "I enjoyed the fundraising plenary but the others I saw were not the same quality as in past years. I did not see the Sunday plenary."
One Offered A Reminder to Tell Success Stories, Too
A useful reminder to foster some positivity in the culture of the plenary sessions.

- "More success stories"

One Empathized with the Difficulty of Choosing a Topic
Conference planners should take heart that respondents seem to recognize that organizing a plenary session is no easy task.

- "I didn't love the topics chosen for the plenary but on the other hand, to choose topics that will meet everyone's needs/interests is challenging."

Conclusion
Like the concurrent sessions, the plenary sessions received rave reviews from the conference participants as a content element of the conference. Unlike the concurrent sessions, however, the plenary sessions fared even better in the exit surveys—soliciting nearly 80% of respondents indicating they either agreed or strongly agreed to the statement that the concurrent sessions were valuable. Where the concurrent sessions generated ambivalent and sometimes frustrated or even despairing feedback on a variety of fronts (form, value, topics) the plenary sessions only received critical feedback on discussions related to the topics, which means that for the most part, perhaps conference planners can take heart that the plenary sessions are largely working. Still, it makes sense to invest some real planning energy into the question of how the selection of topics can best serve the entire conference community, while also advancing the broader needs and goals of the organization.

III. Networking

Introduction
NCHEP conference planners face a daunting challenge when it comes to fostering good network opportunities for the conference participants. The data generated from the exit surveys, however, suggests that NCHEP planners have largely alleviated some of the biggest potential problem areas in this category. For the most part, participants believed they had adequate built-in time for networking. Still, only 45.7% of the overall exit survey responses expressed "strong agreement" that they had enough time to network at the conference. The majority of the conference who could not strongly agree might be easily acquiesced with a few innovative solutions in terms of networking design. Their own comments are again useful—interesting ideas came forward for a better organizational use of community contact information, more down time (and designed, intentional social and "down time" more broadly) as well as the cultivation of more specific and targeted networking communities, such as mixers or events specifically for graduate students. Other commentators noted that the meals remain a memorable part of the conference experience, particularly as a networking opportunity. As with most aspects of conference planning, not everyone loved the assigned seating idea at the meals, but at the same time, some clearly did. Perhaps the greatest lesson to take from the networking discussion is that having a plethora of options is key. A diverse conference should give rise to creative and diverse networking solutions.
Planning Future Networking Opportunities
When asked if NCHEP 2017 provided them with adequate time to network, respondents to the exit survey were again positive, with nearly 80 percent of the respondents saying they agreed that the conference provided adequate time to interact and network with other attendees. Once again, nonetheless, people had a lot to say about ways planners could facilitate more interaction between conference attendees.

General Networking Facilitation Tips
For the most part, respondents had very specific ideas on how networking could become a more central part of the experience. In some cases, respondents made more generalized comments. Following a theme established throughout all aspects of the conference content discussions, at least one of the respondents again touched on the themes of elitism and interactivity, i.e. "making sessions interactive rather than one-way." Another urged that planners devote more design energy to the networking sessions, making sure there were dedicated time slots to networking throughout the conference itself. And building on yet another common feedback theme, one of the respondents believed that too many concurrent sessions got in the way of networking opportunities.

- "Make sessions interactive rather than one-way information sharing."
- "Designed networking time slots"
- "There were too many sessions. Having sessions from 8am through 6pm is simply too much. I would create some built-in networking time - maybe at 5pm - 6pm."

Share Contacts
One of the respondents called for the creation of a contact list to be published within the conference materials. This would presumably include information that the attendees would give permission to share; an organization Listserv is indeed already underway. This information and permission to distribute following the conference, could be collected during registration.

- "List everyone's contact information in the back of the conference booklet (for those who are willing)"
Build an Inclusive Culture
Building on the many comments expressive of perceived elitism, hierarchy, or inaccessibility within the concurrent sessions or plenary panels, one of the respondents noted that the rhetoric used by conference goers made it very difficult to network, noting that offensive terms like "offender," "felon" and other terms were still being used, leading to "embarrassing" situations.

● "Also, it seems that in the informational packet to prospective conference attendees, it is necessary to include a discussion of the proper language to use when talking about incarcerated or formerly incarcerated persons. People at this year's conference were still using "offender" "felon" etc. when discussing the incarcerated. I recall that in Pittsburgh this issue of language was already hammered out. Maybe the informational packets need to reiterate the position the conference has on language, so as to avoid more embarrassing presentations like the one from this year."

Get Down, Get Up
Respondents cited a number of issues with planning that they believed might have created more networking opportunities; most of the feedback here seemed to imply that trying to do less might mean more productive work in this direction. Some called for allowing more down time between the concurrent sessions; some suggested replacing one of the film nights with a more dedicated and relaxed networking event; some called for an even more informal gathering, like a dance party. Night-time activities were in fact commonly referenced as a potential solution.

● "More time in-between sessions or less full days, perhaps"
● "I appreciated that things did NOT start at 8:30am. There was time for meals and breaks between sessions. Instead of a film both nights, there could be some kind of event for the whole conference. I mentioned how they do Life of the Law storytelling at Soros. It usually is really good and people come. It could be awful if not done right, however. I fully acknowledge that. I joked with Mary about having a dance party but even a cocktail hour at the end, something celebratory. We are all such masochists and workaholics. It's nice to have spaces to just acknowledge and enjoy each other and everyone is exhausted by the end of 3 days."
● "Night time activities that encourage conversation in a relaxed but fun atmosphere. Many conferences have a wine, beer and hors d'oeurve evening environment that fosters conversation."
● "We are all such masochists and workaholics. It's nice to have spaces to just acknowledge and enjoy each other and everyone is exhausted by the end of 3 days."
● "Lets have a time where people are suggested to walk and meet people"
● "I like the format of the Nashville conference where there was one evening where folks interested in the same topic went out for dinner together. I think that worked a bit better than the random table assignment."
● "Include a Social Hour on either Friday or Saturday night"
● "I liked the 1/2 hour spaces between sessions--really allowed for some stretching! The pacing of the whole was good..."
● "This was actually the best conference I've been to for making connections!"
● "More free time"

Invest in Design
In addition to the creation of more down time and more social opportunities, many advocate some design energy be dedicated to a more organic approach—bringing local connections together, bringing common
constituencies together, creating opportunities for those with shared interests to intermingle, and using venue spaces more carefully.

Graduate Students
Graduate students are experts, and they need a supportive community and space at the conference.

- "I would have loved the opportunity to have had time to meet with other doctoral students who are also studying postsecondary ed. in prison systems."
- "I highly recommend creating sub-groups for attendees to sign up for in future conferences and maybe also for the org in general? You all have probably considered this already but I am more than willing to offer my time in setting up such a doctoral student sub-group. Or maybe master's students and doctoral students in one sub-group? I think other such sub-groups would be worthwhile creating, too, such as formerly incarcerated individuals now working in prison higher ed. programs; prison higher education faculty members; prison higher ed. graduates; etc."

Mental Health
One respondent volunteered their time to set up a networking community for those with interests in mental health advocacy.

- "I'd be willing to help set up such groups if you'd like (have done such or before within mental health advocacy orgs). Anne Weaver"

Regional
Conference planners need to find a way to leverage interactions for people who might have regional connections.

- "Networking and programs within the states is necessary, but also finding out what programs and funding are available in other states."

Use the Venue To Your Advantage
Several of the respondents felt that the venue might have been better utilized for networking. Conference planners might consider careful study of the space in order to bring about these networking opportunities more efficiently.

- "I think the communal space outside the plenary hall was a great idea, just to have a place for people to meet up or even run into each other."
- "Promote outside walk a-bouts. There was a nice scenic trial around a pond near the convention center."

Meals
Respondents had generally positive but also mixed feelings about the assigned seating at the meals. Again, most responses suggested very positive experiences with the networking opportunities with the conference. Only a small number offered criticism, and while those who did outnumbered those with positive feedback, it is important to take note of the divided views. Perhaps the best way to remedy is to give people an option? One of the respondents makes a good point—assigned seating is a turn-off for some.
Critical of the Meal Seating Arrangement
Most of the comments seemed critical of the assigned seating arrangement.

- "More regional and interest-related lunches. Do lunches at tables rather than in panel rooms."
- "Networking is the most important part of this conference to me. More round tables would help with this. Not assigning tables during dinner would also help."
- "I really disliked the dinner with assigned seating. I followed the rules and ended up at a table with one stranger. Bad for an introvert! Could the conference planners, many of whom are leading high-profile programs, fan out to smaller groups and lead conversations? It would be really great to have topic tables where someone is in charge of facilitating introductions and leading a conversation. That might work better at lunch than at dinner."
- "More of the same! Sharing meals and coffee breaks was key. And having lots of time at the concurrent sessions helped."
- "I liked the assigned dinner seating which allowed people who were a bit reluctant to socialize, become engaged in conversations with people they might not have met on their own. Also, a big plus in facilitating interaction was having breakfast, lunch, and dinner served in the hotel. The food was a big plus for fostering interaction between attendees."
- "As mentioned before, I would choose another location that 'forces' attendees to stay at the hotel for everything. At other conferences, 'dine arounds' or having folks go out independently for their evening meals doesn't help with networking. Loved this set-up."

Enthusiastic About the Meal Seating Arrangement
Others found the seating arrangement complimentary to their hopes for the conference.

- "I thought eating together was magical. I suggest we keep doing that and allowing for people to self-organize like this year. I also liked the different topic lunches for gathering."
- "Great idea to give the table numbers out for one of the meals. That worked well in my experience. Maybe do it a couple of times next year."
- "Random table assignment at dinner was a fantastic idea!"

Conclusion
The 2017 NCHEP National Conference used several vehicles and formats to enrich the experiences of its participants, from plenary sessions, to concurrent sessions, and to dedicated times for on-site networking, including two film screenings. Based on the exit survey data, all of the formats satisfied the participants, though some of the content formats fared better than others. The plenary sessions, for example, seemed to satisfy participants the most, but only slightly more than the still-quite-popular concurrent sessions. The built-in networking opportunities generated the lowest favorability of the contents overall, but still provided many great and memorable opportunities that the participants seemed to really cherish. While data was not collected on the film sessions, moreover, it only seems fair to conclude that the films generated good experiences, too. It seems incontrovertible, then, that this year's conference participants were pleased with the conference content.

There are several areas, nonetheless, in which clear room for improvement stands out. What looms largest in these discussions is the overall experience of the participants—far more important than any idea, concept, innovation, abstraction, theory, data set, fact, or insight generated by the conference speakers or presenters, it was the personal experience of the conference that seemed to resonate most in what people said about the conference content. While most spoke glowingly about their experience, the few who had a less than favorable experience tended to isolate a few instances of conduct, especially examples rooted in exclusionary status or posturing that should give future conference planners pause. While the exit surveys
offered (perhaps a problem of their own) altogether little insight into what these episodes actually involved, or how serious they were, it appears as though, for some, the conference experience was not always positive, and AHEP would be wise to work against these circumstances arising in its content venues in the future.
5. Cost and Scholarships

Summary
Of all the major planning considerations that went into organizing NCHEP 2017, it seems the conference planners achieved the greatest success in keeping the conference costs low for its participants. Some of the strongest consensus expressed within the exit surveys suggested that most of the conference participants found the conference affordable, and for a couple key reasons.

- First, a good share of the conference participants received travel scholarships (30%). Having a fellowship played a clear role in shaping the experience of many participants—scholarships tended to cover all the conference costs, and were a strong predictor of the decision to attend or not attend.
- Second, most of the participants who did not receive fellowships (a majority of conference goers) had access to outside support, and usually through their employers (usually institutions of higher education).

As Figs. 5.1 and 5.2 show (below), the costs of the conference hotels and other expenses (flights, meals, registration, etc.) were kept low for the participants. Indeed, for a good number of participants, meals, ground transportation, and registration incurred no expenses at all.

Fig. 5.1 Cost of Conference Hotels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hotel</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheraton Arlington (primary)</td>
<td>$140/night (including tax)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoubleTree (overflow)</td>
<td>$125/night (including tax)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 5.2 Other Conference Costs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Cost of Flight</td>
<td>$385 Based on travel agent cost for Travel Scholarships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Cost of Meals</td>
<td>$286 All meals during the conference were covered by AHEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Registration</td>
<td>$0-$200 Registration was considered a &quot;donation&quot; and making a donation was not a requirement to attend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Ground Transportation</td>
<td>$0-Unknown Both hotels had airport shuttles and free parking. However, intermittent service caused some participants to hail a cab, adding to ground transportation costs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Still, the exit surveys revealed at least a few areas for improvement among the minority of critical responses on the issue of conference cost. Concerns about the conference location loomed especially large in the minds of many participants, an indication that the hotel and flight costs, for a small subset of the conference, proved limiting. Others felt that the slow release of conference information (especially the presenter schedule) complicated their travel plans, which in some cases increased costs. Finally, there were also issues with the reimbursement process that in the end passed on costs to participants—not in dollars, perhaps, but in time, as the process sometimes worked to confuse. Asked to provide suggestions on how issues of cost might be improved for the future, it becomes clear that NCHEP has room to improve in extending accessibility to the conference fellowships, in choosing a conference location that will be accessible to all, and in ensuring the availability of support to those both affiliated with advantaged institutions and those not affiliated or even unemployed.

I. Cost of Attendance

Introduction

According to the exit surveys, the overwhelming majority of the conference participants found NCHEP 2017 to be an affordable and accessible (at least economically) event. Of the factors that helped ensure these glowing appraisals of the conference's low costs, the conference's travel scholarships seemed most decisive, playing a transformative role in the decision to attend and participate or not attend and participate in the lives of those with the most expressed economic anxiety. Beyond the scholarships, most of the participants also benefited from some kind of existing institutional support. Faculty and administrators within higher educational institutions, for example, tended to rely on their institutions for support. Of the critical voices about the cost of attendance (these voices were again a small minority) most commented on the complicated administrative and sometimes legal factors that made it difficult to attend, citing (for example) problems in using their existing institutional funds (as in grants) for conference travel, or, more seriously, laws that made it difficult for certain individuals (from Texas and California, for example) to attend. Asked to make suggestions on how future planners might improve these situations, exit survey respondents most often turned to points about the conference location, an indication, perhaps, that for many the hotel and flight costs were still high, despite the various channels of support. Others advocated for expanding the pool of available fellowships to include low-income participants and improving the process by which participants can make donations to NCHEP or AHEP.
Most Found the Cost of Attendance Reasonable. Why?
Most of the conference participants who offered responses to the exit survey (over 95%; a prompt that generated some of the strongest consensus within the entire exit survey) said "no" when asked if there was an aspect or aspects of the conference that made it financially difficult to participate. The exit survey also asked those who replied "yes" (those citing financial difficulty) to explain why, but most responders (the "yes" and "no" responses) used the opportunity to explain their situations. As a result, most of the written feedback on cost generated by the exit surveys stressed the affordability of the conference.

Scholarships
Easily the most important factor in determining the accessibility of the conference for those with economic need, the travel scholarships played a decisive role in determining its affordability for many participants.

- "You all provided me with a full scholarship which I so much appreciated!!!!"
- "You did a fantastic job with scholarships."
- "It was only possible for me because of the traveling scholarship--thank you so much again."
- "Thank you for keeping registration and meals free for those that need it. As a graduate student, this was a lifesaver."
- "Without scholarship support and no support from my organization, attending would have been financially difficult."
- "I was lucky to receive a travel scholarship."

Strength of Institutional Support
Because most of the conference participants had an affiliation to higher education or other economically supportive institutions, pre-existing institutional support also helped many of the participants attend the conference.

- "I had institutional support. Otherwise, it would have been expensive to get to Texas!"
- I was fortunate that my department covered the airfare and hotel expenses; in the future, I may not be able to come because of this expense (grad student)
Low Overall Costs
The NCHEP 2017 planning committee also appears to have made several decisions that helped keep the costs down on-site and overall.

- "Finanically, I thought the conference was incredibly affordable."

For Others, The Conference Still Proved Economically Inaccessible. Why?

Institutional and Legal Complications
A confluence of complicated institutional and sometimes legal entanglements made it hard for many to use or allocate their funds in the right way. For others, it prohibited travel in more severe ways. Some, for example, received support from their institutions, but not enough to fully cover costs. Others, because of institutional rules, could not use their grant support to attend events like NCHEP 2017. A handful, driven by economic consideration, removed themselves from the conference site in order to seek cheaper accommodations. Finally, some also noted prohibitive laws: sex offender registry laws in the State of Texas, for example, or a California provision that bans the use of funds in traveling to a state that discriminates against the LGBQ community. In short, it appears that even with the many steps and great care the conference planners took in ensuring the economic accessibility of the conference, many participants still found the cost of attending prohibitive.

- "I did need to find a grant as my organization is private and $1000 for flight, lodging, food was a bit much."
- "I worked under a grant and the grant cannot make donations to an organization."
- "I stayed in a cheaper hotel nearby. In future, maybe a list of hotels in the near vicinity that aren't 'conference hotels' but which may appeal to some of us on a shoestring budget could be included on the conference website."
- "The hotel would have been expensive, but I had friends that lived about 25 minutes away, so I stayed with them. I missed some things at the conference because of the driving back and forth."
- "Not me, but my alum on the registry. It would be good to have the conference in a location without stringent registry laws."
- "California state employees are barred from using state funds to travel to states with statutes that discriminate against LGBQ people. As a state employee, I was in a position to use private grant funds for travel, but others might not be so fortunate."

Suggestions for Easing the Financial Burden in the Future
Conference respondents were asked in the exit surveys what future NCHEP conference planners could do to make the conference more affordable. Only 14 of the total exit respondents answered the question, an unusually low responses rate, and perhaps a point that should underscore the overall affordability of the conference. Most of the respondents in fact further assured NCHEP that the 2017 conference was an affordable and accessible one. Beyond these assurances, the main suggestion offered in this section of the exit surveys involved not making a financial suggestion, but instead a renewed appeal to better consider the conference location—an indication that the hotel and flight costs, in particular, seemed expensive to many participants. A few responses also mentioned offering scholarships for low-income participants (above and beyond the formerly incarcerated); expanding flexibility in terms of who is allowed to give donations to the organization (and how); and, using emerging organizational leverage to advocate or lobby for greater institutional travel support within affiliated workplaces and especially higher educational institutions. This last point resonated with the overall spirit of many of the exit survey responses on this prompt, given that a good number of those who expressed economic anxiety were
graduate students and others without clear access to either good institutional support or the conference travel fellowships.

Sample Responses

Consider Future Locations More Carefully
When asked what future conference planners could do to make the conference more affordable, most of the responses focused on the conference location. Hotel and flight costs loom large in the minds of conference participants. Beyond that, people value having access to a large nearby (or ideally) surrounding city.

- "Have it in Arlington, Virginia instead of Arlington, Texas"
- "If it was closer but it is what it is."
- "I stayed with a friend in Dallas to save costs; I would have preferred a location more accessible to the closest big city where that is an option."
- "Good to have it in a city with good access to major airport and one served by Southwest."
- "I'd say host the conference in a state that isn't on the CA state travel ban list, but it was apparent from the conference that CA folks were not deterred from attending. I suspect most folks received travel scholarships from NCHEP or were able, like I was, to use private grant funds."

Do Nothing (4 responses)
Beyond offering suggestions to more carefully consider the conference location, most underscored how affordable the conference was.

- "Impossible. This is the least expensive conference ever!"
- "Nothing"
- "No suggestions. Thought it was very affordable."
- "You guys are amazing. There's nothing you could have done."

More Expansive Notions of Scholarship Applications
One of the more specific and potentially useful ideas to emerge from this section of the exit surveys advocated the creation of an expanded scholarship pool, one that could focus on supporting low-income attendees or those without clear access to an institutional funding mechanism. Expressions of economic anxiety from graduate student and undergraduate student participants should also resonate here.

- "Scholarships for low-income attendees"

Donations
One of the responses advocated for an improved methodology in making and soliciting donations.

- "I can't remember if there is a sliding scale for donations (there probably is), but that's a great idea."

Advocacy for Expanded Institutional Travel Support
Sometimes, participants expressed resentment toward their employers in supporting conference travel, highlighting a potential opportunity for organizational advocacy.

- "I don't work for a place that will pay for it."
II. Scholarships

Introduction
In total, 121 conference participants requested scholarships, and in the end, AHEP granted 91 of the applicants travel funding. On account of a few participants who then turned down their funding, or decided not to attend the conference, or cited other factors in their decisions, AHEP in the end awarded 83 travel fellowships. These went to 55 formerly incarcerated participants, including 2 family members of currently incarcerated people. AHEP was not able to provide funding for 30 travel scholarship requests. All told, AHEP allocated $90,563.00 in its support of travel scholarships. This funding helped cover nearly all the conference costs for participants, including travel, hotel, meals, and all incidentals. Fig. 5.4 (below) displays these figures as a table.

**Fig. 5.4 Scholarship Figures at a Glance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Travel Scholarships Requested</th>
<th>121</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel Scholarships Offered</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Scholarships Awarded</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formerly Incarcerated</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants Awarded Travel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship Requests Not</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Conference Support</td>
<td>$90,563.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offered for Travel Scholarships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As fig. 5.5 (below) shows, most of those who completed the exit survey did not receive scholarships, but nearly 3/10 who attended the conference (29%) did, a reminder that scholarship recipients formed an important subset of the larger conference community. All of the evidence suggests that receiving a fellowship had the desired effect—it covered all the conference costs for most of the recipients, and often proved decisive in their decisions to attend or not attend and participate. As a result, perhaps unsurprisingly, the most common type of feedback offered on the travel scholarships expressed gratitude for the program existence.
Fig. 5.5 Scholarships Received

Did you receive a scholarship for the conference from the NCHEP Planning Committee/Alliance for Higher Education in Prison?

69 responses

71% Yes
29% No

Of the critical voices regarding scholarships, and again these constituted a tiny minority within the exit survey responses, most commented on difficulties with the reimbursement process (unclear, not transparent, confusing) or issues related to the release of the conference schedule. For example, some of the exit survey respondents said it was difficult to arrange their travel plans without clear information on whether they were a) accepted to the conference in the first place, or, b) would be asked to present and/or, c) when and where. Finally, the exit surveys made it very clear that most of those who did not receive travel scholarships were able to attend the conference because of funding streams available through their existing institutions. Of these institutions, those affiliated with higher educational institutions fared the best in securing outside support.

Fig. 5.6 Scholarships and Covered Costs

If you received a scholarship, did the scholarship cover all of your costs?

24 responses

41.7% Yes
58.3% No
Application of Scholarship Funds
The receipt of a scholarship made a big difference. More than 58% of the exit survey responders who were offered a travel fellowship indicated that they were able to cover all of their conference costs with the support. As we have seen, several participants also noted that they could not have attended the conference without such aid. A majority of the participants also noted that the scholarships they did receive helped cover all costs. Rare were the instances in which an awarded fellowship did not help cover all the conference costs.

Suggestions for Future Scholarship Applications
The exit surveys also solicited responses on what suggestions participants might have in making the scholarship application process easier to navigate. For the most part, participants again seemed really pleased with the application process. The majority of the comments simply expressed gratitude for the program and support for its continuance. The reimbursement process, however, did elicit some critical feedback.

Positive
The majority of the exit survey-generated responses to this prompt simply offered thanks for the scholarship program.

- "It was so easy and such a gift-- thank you"
- "Everything was perfect and I am extremely grateful for the support. Without the scholarship, I would not have been able to attend. Thanks NCHEP!!"
- "Everything was great for me, thank you."
- "It was perfect. The scholarship made it possible for me to attend. Thank you."
- "It was a very simple process. Thank you!"

Clarify and Streamline the Reimbursement Process
Of the critical feedback, three responses focused on concerns with the reimbursement process.

- "There were no information or process on where to submit receipts for reimbursement."
- "Just have a ready-made procedure for us to submit receipts for any expenses immediately after the conference."
- "Not sure yet because I haven't gone through reimbursement (in regards to question above) it was easy to navigate."

Re-Consider Timing of the Process
Another set of responses noted that it was difficult to make travel plans without a reliable conference schedule in place early in the process. Conference planners might consider ways to schedule the conference presenters, especially, very early on in the process.

- "Perhaps just do it earlier. I had already booked my flight and hotel before hearing about the scholarship."
- "Earlier notification of acceptance"
Consider Scholarships for Economically Marginalized

Once again, a comment stressed the importance of extending the fellowship program to others with economic anxiety. Given that travel scholarships were given to both formerly incarcerated and not formerly incarcerated individuals, having a clearly articulated process at the start, when scholarships are announced, would benefit the applicants and planning committee.

- "I was never incarcerated, so I was not able to receive a scholarship."

Spread the Word
- "Didn't even know there was one."

**Fig 5.7 Outside Support**

If you received financial support from an organization/entity other than NCHEP or Alliance for Higher Education in Prison, please list the organization (e.g., college/university; HEP program; foundation).

33 responses

Outside Support

Fig. 5.4 reflects the data collected when exit survey respondents were asked if they received financial support from an organization or entity other than the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison. If they did, they were asked to identify specifically from where the funding came. Thirty-three of the respondents answered the question, and the overwhelming majority of these listed higher educational institutions as being the major funders. While this conclusion may not be readily apparent from figure 5.4, it becomes clear once the exit survey responses are clustered and grouped. Second to institutions of higher education, other higher education in prison-affiliated organizations (and this included a diverse range of groups) supplied the most funding to conference participants. These included organizations like Laughing Gull and Underground Scholars. Others noted that their process of obtaining funding for the conference remained uncertain and not very transparent. Graduate students offered a good example of this final category. Many had applied to their institutions for additional support, but had not received word on their institution's decision by the time they traveled. Faculty, by contrast, generally do have such information on hand by the time they make plans, or can act with confidence of their institutional support arriving once they arrive home and complete their travel reimbursement process.
Higher Educational Institutions (@15-20 responses)
Figure 5.4 (above) is somewhat misleading in that it suggests a much wider diversity of outside funding opportunities than were actually available. When the individual responses are clustered together, it becomes abundantly clear that institutions of higher education provided the most "outside" support to conference participants. In reality, in other words, "outside" support tends to go to organizational insiders, with graduate students being an obvious exception, as they tend to have access to funding streams within their organizations, but these streams are often unclear, competitive, and administered along semester or year-long timelines that make it difficult to allocate funding specifically for a conference. To help illustrate the role higher education institutions had in allocating support, here are some of the specific institutions cited in the exit survey.

- Cal State
- Calvin College
- Emory University
- Georgetown University
- Alumni Board Grant
- Personal Travel Funding (Faculty Grant—Unspecified Institution)
- Life University
- Penn State University
- Prison University Project
- University of Maine System
- University of Arizona
- University of Tennessee
- Salt Lake Community College

Other Existing Programs
Two organizations had an outsized role here. Laughing Gull especially, with a clear additional footprint from Underground Scholars

- Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program
- Laughing Gull (9 responses)
- Underground Scholars (2)
- Salt Lake Community College

None (@5-10 responses)
Third to institutions of higher education and other groups, most of the remaining participants received no outside funding support.

Unsure
Many were not able to answer the question because their reimbursement process remained open-ended.

- "I applied to my graduate program—we shall see."
Conclusion

NCHEP 2017 proved quite affordable to the vast majority of the conference participants, and as a result, most of the participants offered glowing reviews of the conference in terms of cost. Yet in a few places, participants offered more critical feedback that future planners would do well to consider. First and foremost, it seems important to expand access to the conference scholarships, as they had a transformative effect on the experience of the participants who received them. There are a couple groups that seem under-served, at present, by the existing scholarship process. Broadly, there is evidence of a small group of economically under-resourced participants who could use access to perhaps a special scholarship; graduate students, undergraduate students, and independent researchers or advocates loom large, potentially, in this discussion. At the same time, while the formerly incarcerated were well-served by the existing scholarship process, there is undoubtedly room for improvement in expanding access to such participants in the future. Beyond these points, it seems the conference location loomed as the biggest consideration in most of the exit survey responses. As affordable as the Arlington location and hotel were, it still proved prohibitive to a small but at least vocal subset, and this begs the question as to whether future NCHEP planners might find ways to further limit travel and hotel costs while still providing the broad-based positive experience that NCHEP 2017 very clearly did.
Summary
With the end of the conference, the 278 participants were asked to fill out exit surveys. Again, roughly 70 eventually did. Within the exit surveys, a final section turned to give the participants an opportunity to express any last comments they hoped to share with the planners. Another prompt asked specifically if there were more suggestions for the 2018 planners. The first question solicited mostly expressions of thanks and gratitude toward the planners, and (like much of the exit survey) revealed an indisputable case for a well-run and administered conference that was for the most part a positive experience. A good number of the exit surveys, in fact, said that the conference was one of the "best" they had ever attended.

The second question, crafted more specifically to generate suggestions for the future planners, offered a space that many more participants took advantage of. There, they pointed to basically two areas where they hoped to see improvement. The inclusion of more formerly incarcerated speakers along with Department of Corrections officers and employees. Second, efforts to undermine perceptions of elitism and bias within the conference planning, both in the rhetoric people use (especially toward the formerly incarcerated) and in the planning itself, with some of the statements pointing to regional and funding bias toward especially the coastal states of New York and California. As the survey has revealed, there are good reasons why institutions and representatives from these states have an over-representation at the conference, in part demographic, in part funding, in part fellowships and scholarship opportunities, in part a story of access as well. But on the other hand, these comments ought to give future participants pause. Statements of real resentment of "cliques" and "silencing" simply must be taken seriously, and the conference needs to do a better job of putting elite-tier institutions alongside community colleges and smaller state and local institutions. At the same time, vitally important to be inclusive toward all, and no better way to do that than to listen to suggestions that diversity be reflected in the leadership and conference panels. As the chapter on attendance shows, well on its way, but many used the final comments to suggest room to grow still exists. The Appendices, meanwhile, hammer home these points even further.

I. Final Comments

A Sample of Final Comments
At the end of the exit surveys, conference participants were asked if they had any final comments they hoped to share with the conference planners. Given the overwhelmingly positive feedback generated by the exit surveys, it makes sense that most of the comments offered thanks or expressed gratitude to the conference planners. Yet many suggested NCHEP 2017 was in fact the best conference they had ever attended.

"Best Conference"
As the following comments suggest, at least eight of the participants referenced NCHEP 2017 as the best conference they had ever attended. This means that more than 10% of the exit survey respondents believed NCHEP 2017 to be an exemplary conference.
"One of the best conferences I have attended, but I am biased. The food, timing of panels, communication about the event were all very thoughtfully done and of a much higher caliber than other conferences."

"This was one of the best conferences I have ever attended. Having people from a variety of backgrounds as presenters and attendees gave the conference more meaning. I learned a lot and hope to attend next year. The conference planning committee did an exceptional job. I know this was no easy task. Please know that your efforts did not go unnoticed and I appreciate the time and effort you all put into planning the conference. Your hard work was evident by the success of the conference."

"A+ to the Alliance for a great first conference."

"This was my first conference and I was very impressed. I have attended all kinds of conferences and this was definitely one of the best. Communication, accommodations, food, networking opportunities, and the sessions were excellent. GREAT JOB!!"

"This was by far the best conference I attended all year. from the beginning to the end, it was amazing. The communication was impeccable the support was helpful and the organization was seamless. Thank you!"

"This was the best conference I’ve attended, due to the organization, the format, the content, and the people who organized and who attended. I was plugged in and inspired the whole time. Thank you so much for the work you did!"

"This conference was the best yet! Thanks for all your service, and kudos to all of you. I loved it."

"Wonderful conference as always. Really appreciate everyone’s hard work."

"Diversity of Ideas and People"
Second to statements that the NCHEP 2017 offered the "best" conference they had ever attended, another common theme solicited from the final section of the exit surveys emphasized the diversity of the conference's ideas and people.

"I truly appreciate the diversity of people and ideas at this conference. I left feeling excited about my own research. I tend to work in a 'silo' so knowing how many people are in the country trying to challenge the system is heartening."

"Excellent opportunity to network and experience first-hand the great work that is being done now in the field."

"I really liked the intentional attention to community at this conference."

"Excellent conference. This conference is such an important convening for the growth, vitality, and development of the movement. Thank you."

"I thoroughly enjoyed the NCHEP and found it to be an excellent source of relevant information. The chance to hear about programs across the country and to learn what supports are in place provided me with insights on how to improve the programs at our facility and better support our incarcerated student population."

"I thought it was a fantastic conference. Keeping it centrally located and affordable was a great decision. The vibe was friendly and enthusiastic. The food was good--I appreciated the healthy options and attention to vegetarians. I appreciate AHEP and NCHEP very much."

Thank Yous, Offers to Help, and Vows to Attend Again in the Future
Another common theme in the final section of the exit survey offered expressions of thanks with proposals to either attend or help with the conference in the future. This should again underscore the positive experience many conference participants had.
"Really enjoyed being there. Def plan to attend in future years and am willing to help the org develop in whatever way I can."
"It was a remarkable experience. I will definitely attend next year."
"I would like to attend every year"
"I loved it. I plan on coming every year."

Positive
At least a handful of the conference comments were simply positive and supportive.

"It was an amazing experience."
"I had a really great experience."
"It was a very enlightening experience."

Thanks
A fair number of conference participants used the space to offer a "simple thanks."

"Thank you!!!!!!"
"I really enjoyed it and am grateful for the opportunity to learn what other programs across the US are doing to facilitate the education of incarcerated persons."
"Thanks for the hard work to pull together a great conference!"
"Great Conference thank you for your planning and the scholarship"

II. Exit Survey-Generated Suggestions for 2018 Conference

Majority Emphasized Greater Inclusion, Less Exclusivity, More Diverse Content
In addition to the more open-ended solicitation to share "any final comments" with the conference planners, respondents were also asked if they had any suggestions for the planners of the conference for 2017 or the planners for 2018. Asked specifically to offer suggestions, the respondents had much more to say, offering 37 detailed and often specific and pointed responses to the question. Two issues seemed to be recurring ones, and both had to do with concerns over the conference content and demographics. First, the exit survey respondents often spoke of their desire to involve more Department of Corrections employees and formerly incarcerated participants. Second, the exit survey respondents shared their broader concerns about some of the participant's tendencies toward elitism and exclusivity.

Involve (And Center) the Formerly Incarcerated and the Department of Corrections
A handful of the suggestions spoke to the need to involve more formerly incarcerated people in the conference; another common genre emphasized the need to include Department of Corrections workers. Many of the suggestions also said it was important to include more from both groups.

"I met a FI person who has been to prison who is now a professor. This gives me hope. I want more persons like me to see these persons. I also saw that this system needs work. I would like to see more Orgs. to have and hire FI persons."
"Have more individuals who are formerly incarcerated attend"
"1) Are partnering correctional officers and administrators really welcome? If so, let's please make that clear in our words and actions. 2) Please diversify the panels and presenters. Tap people from community colleges, state colleges, poor programs, one-person run programs, too. It was so unfortunate that this conference had a lot of the same folks presenting again and again---"
all mostly from wealthy, well-funded, well-staffed programs from New York and California. Let's work to really show the diversity of higher education in prison!"

- "I really appreciated the scholarship initiative, and the provision of meals and absence of registration costs. There seemed to be more POC present this year than in Pittsburgh, and more folks who had formerly been incarcerated (though no sessions of incarcerated people presenting, via video conference?). But real work needs to be done to involve people who work for the DOC; they need to participate in this conversation."

Resentment
A small number of the responses (less than 5) contained expressions perhaps best described as resentment toward the conference planners. For the most part, the negative statements expressed suspicions of regional bias and more broad-based inequality or the development of "cliques" within the leadership of the organization. Some of these resentments also seemed to derive from some of the rhetoric used at the conference by at least a few of the participants.

- "You let the 4-year schools take over when much of the education in prison is done through community colleges"
- "I have two major issues with this conference and the organization. The first is how it silences people and the second is the continued clique that exist among its first members. The clique has been muttered about during the last three conferences I have attended and seems to be both impenetrable and still controlling the conference and AHEP. The silencing comes in many forms such as selections on committee members and by literally not allowing people to speak during question and answer sessions."
- "I heard some very biased remarks from individuals but that is their karma."

A Small Number of Comments Touched on Logistics and Networking
Some of the scattered commentary suggested by conference participants touched on the need to improve a few aspects of the conference logistics and networking opportunities.

Less Sessions
Some of the conference participants felt overwhelmed by the overlapping topics of the conference sessions.

- "Fewer tracks, more coordination of tracks with schedule (less 'double-booking' of track topics in the same time frame)."

Remember Sunday Travel Days
Many conference participants traveled on Sunday; attendance figures from the Sunday sessions did indeed drop.

- "Perhaps wrap up the conference on Sat. evening with a plenary session. Many of us needed to return on Sunday, and the only flight from Dallas to Grand Rapids MI left in the morning."

More Contact Information
Conference participants also asked for greater access to participant contact information.

- "Names, Titles, emails and where people were from."
Break the Ice on Funding

One of the conference participants saw a need for better-used "ice breakers"

- "Since funding seemed to emerge as an area of central concern to folks, it would be nice in future conferences if more funders could be invited for organizations to meet with face to face. We were able to do that with Laughing Gull by chance, but a more structured approach to that would be really helpful to organizations that trying to secure grants, etc. Overall, the conference was well done!"

Networking and Social Opportunities

Again, nearly every aspect of the conference solicited glowing reviews in the exit surveys. Some saw scattered room for improvement, including the conference networking and social opportunities.

- "Not so thrilled with the mixer, otherwise things were great"

III. Written Testimony from Conference Participants

Finally, some of the conference participants took it upon themselves to generate feedback for the conference planners outside of the exit surveys. In two instances, conference participants drafted letters and submitted them to the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison, via the NCHEP 2017 website, subsequent to the conference conclusion. They are attached (as complete texts—without edits, as submitted and with the permission of the submitter) as Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. It is worth noting that the letters reinforce the findings of the final sections of the exit surveys in substantive ways, notably:

- **There is real disparity on display.** Formerly incarcerated participants face real and serious disadvantages that are simply not shared by the other conference participants. Appendix 1 (below) offers a powerful reminder that for many of the formerly incarcerated participants, there is a very real possibility that simply attending the conference means riding on an airplane for the first time, or having "a hotel room to myself" for the first time. These are aspects of a working life one might take for granted, but among the formerly incarcerated, these are experiences conference planners simply must take into better account. The risk of not doing so is to evoke precisely the charges of elitism and exclusivity that seemed to permeate the final comments section.

- **Exclusivity was widely felt and perceived, not just by the formerly incarcerated participants.** Another perspective on this issue comes from Appendix 2 (below) where again the sense that certain members of the community were "not welcome" became a concern. Notably, this participant again called attention to the "language" used at the conference, as well as the more structural issues connected to the design and especially staffing of the panels. Appendix 2 calls special attention to the issue of inviting several of the speakers to appear again and again throughout the conference. Some might read this as favoritism or exclusivity.
The following letter was written after the conference by a conference participant, and addressed to AHEP.

"Dear AHEP—

What a disappointment to return to the quotidian flow this week after such a great conference!

I just wanted to thank AHEP first for giving me opportunity for my voice/experience to be heard. It was encouraging to meet so many re-entering peoples who are also in, or working toward Ph.D. programs, and I made several contacts who want to help me be admitted to different programs.

I thank you not just for giving me this opportunity, but for making it possible. I, like many others there, could not have attended had it not been for your traveling scholarship, and the quality of the conference was so much richer having so many formerly incarcerated person present.

Please know this was the first airplane flight I’ve ever taken, and it was the first time I’ve ever had a hotel room to myself. (I didn’t consider it till I arrived, if I’d be rooming with anyone else. The same thoughts came up as in prison: who will my roommate/bunkie be, will we get along, will develop into conflict, etc.) Then I saw I had a room to myself. That was so amazingly thoughtful and respectful of AHEP to provide us, the formerly incarcerated who were always forced to live with others for so many years, to have our own space.

I feel the whole experience allowed me to see beyond my own struggle, identify with the larger movements, and encourage me to feel part of this vast and dedicated national community.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you."

A second letter supplied after the conference, this time addressed to the NCHEP Planning Committee.

"Hello NCHEP Planning Committee!

I want to thank you for all of the time and energy it took to organize this beautifully run conference. I was able to connect with many people and fantastic practitioners; I have gotten so many ideas that I want to work on now that I'm home. This was my second year attending, and I loved seeing so many friends and mentors. Thank you for all the hard work, long hours, and organizing! I was very impressed with the conference food-- delicious vegetarian options, lots of fresh vegetables. I have to tell you that I have never had conference food that I would describe as really good and thoughtfully planned. Thank you for that attention to detail.

I also want to talk about two concerns regarding this year's conference and questions that I feel compelled to ask:

1) Who is this conference for? After last year's conference, the planning committee (on which I served) discussed how we could reach out to more state and federal correctional agencies. The question was asked, what if this conference was a place of dialogue and best practice sharing that helped our partners in corrections evolve? This year, Vera invited two principals from VADOC and I invited our community college's Administrative of Justice professor. In his career, this ADJ professor will be responsible for
preparing hundreds if not thousands of police officers, correctional officers, probation officers, and future wardens. Having him integrate research and best practices of postsecondary correctional higher education into his class learning objectives could potentially positively impact our state, reduce resistance, and strengthen partnerships of DOC and colleges. My concern is that I'm not sure the VADOC principals and the ADJ professor were really welcome. There was a concerning tone by several presenters that "others" people in that world, complete with remarks that lump all correctional officers together and assume the worst intentions of DOCs/BOJ.

As I was listening, I kept thinking that if our justice system is deeply broken and dehumanizing for our incarcerated students, it is also broken and dehumanizing for our correctional officers, wardens, and DOC administrators. Why are we using language and judgment that alienates, separates, and others the prisoner to talk about the officer? Why are we using the master's tools? If this conference is not designed for our partners from DOC and BOJ, I think we need to be clear about that.

2) I observed that there were several people who were tapped for a lot of panels. Lila McDowell is just one example; undoubtedly, she is outstanding, and I'm sure she does a fabulous job for Hudson Link. I was concerned, however, that one person served on so many of the panels. Looking through the schedule, there's a list of "usual suspects" who are tapped as "experts" and most of them seem to work for private, well-funded programs and many of them are located in New York or California. NY and CA have done so much excellent work to organize consortia, fundraise, earn grant monies, and tell their stories. I am beyond impressed with work coming out of NY and CA, but aren't there also many impressive examples of expertise and good work from poor programs, southern programs, state college and community college programs? The majority of the higher education in prison work is done by community colleges; unfortunately, those programs often work on the "one person department" model.

The conference would benefit from more diverse voices from a broader spectrum of programs, locations, and models tapped for panels. When I hear about experience from programs like Bard College or PUP, they often don't connect with my experiences working for a small, rural, poor, southern community college program. I doubt I'm alone in that feeling.

Again, I thank you for putting together a wonderful conference, and I appreciate your listening to my questions and suggestions."

**Conclusion**

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the final section of the exit surveys came in one of the letters prompted by the invite to share feedback. One of the letter writers (Appendix 2) asked who the conference was for. Which—as a conclusion—is well-worth considering for the future vitality of the conference. It cuts to some of the core issues raised by the final questions in the survey, which revealed that while as a whole, the conference was a smashing success, there were clear lines of improvement. The tension or problem raised by the suggestions for improvement, however, was that they force some basic questions about who the conference is meant to serve. If program directors and administrators of higher education programs, formerly incarcerated of course important, but perhaps in a different way. If conference is more directly for their needs, then absolutely find ways to bring them forward and support them better. In any case, it is the key question worth answering as NCHEP 2018 begins its planning.
Conclusion

This final section of the 2017 NCHEP Exit Report is meant to operate as a handy set of "tip sheets" for our future NCHEP conference planners. While much of the information presented here duplicates other sections of the report, these concluding notes have been streamlined and re-presented for clarity, in order to draw out a set of straightforward summary suggestions for the future. As a result, this conclusion can be approached as a stand-alone tip sheet for the 2018 conference planning committee, or "how to" manual, (formatted as lists of "Do's and Don'ts"), and with the broader hope that any future NCHEP planners will have a ready-made bank of ideas available at their quick disposal. Again, given that the 2017 NCHEP Conference proved a resounding success, it should be remembered that these points are meant to address a very small overall range of comments on how the conference might improve, and in many instances, speak to concerns that can be easily remedied. Others are more substantive and deserve our close focus, but none are impossible to overcome.

Attendance and Participation

General Points

Do's

- **Do seek to diversify and more strategically curate the participation and leadership on display in the conference.** This is especially important for two key stakeholder groups: the formerly incarcerated, and employees of the department of corrections (DOC).
- **Do remember that a wide array of travel restrictions apply when selecting the conference location and dates.** Sunday, for many working people, will be a conference travel day; it makes sense to organize fewer activities for Sunday (and especially Sunday afternoon) as a result. Similarly, the very first day of the conference (Thursday, likely) may also see no-shows for similar reasons. Most of the conference participants will focus their energy on events held Friday and Saturday. Be mindful, too, of prohibitive state laws (regarding sex offender registries, for example, as well as broader considerations such as existing State law; factors to at least weigh include anti-LGBTQ legislation, transgender bathroom legislation, race-based boycotts (such as the ongoing NAACP boycott of Missouri and travel restrictions imposed by the California legislature) and any labor protests underway or planned at restaurants/catering services, within local transportation networks, or (especially) the local hotel industry.
- **Do strive to capture attendance figures from ALL conference events, not just the concurrent sessions (not fully captured in 2017) and plenary sessions (not at all captured).** Reliable attendance figures from all conference venues (the social activities, the plenary sessions, the concurrent sessions, the film screenings, lunches, breakfasts, dinners, etc.) are all extremely useful to our understanding of the conference experience. After the conference concludes, this information will be essential for our grant reporting process, as well. Real resources and organizational goals are at stake here; the longer it takes to assemble our attendance figures, the
longer it takes us to generate our post-conference reporting, and this means greater investments in what are always going to be limited staff hours and pay.

Don’ts

- **Do not too readily dismiss how complicated an accurate accounting of conference attendance can be.** Assembling attendance figures involves high levels of attention to detail, as well as substantial investments of time and energy by support staff, and at both the front end and back end of the conference planning process. Do not overlook how important this work is.

The Registration Process

Do's

- **Do devote planning and design time to both the front-end and back-end registration processes necessary to capture reliable attendance figures.** Give careful consideration, especially, to processes both online and on-site, and at the front and back ends of the overall administrative conference workflow. While the registration process (for participants) worked very well, it produced headaches for administrators both on-site and behind the scenes, as forms went incomplete and had to be corroborated with one another, produced misleading and/or incomplete information, and/or presented confusing questions to participants that could be more directly put. It is important to directly capture the precise information conference administrators will need most for the exit report and the grant reporting processes that will follow the conference. The number of formerly incarcerated participants who attended and participated in the conference, for example, needs to be captured directly from the online registration process. In other words, ask this question, and all other questions where data is needed, in a direct and clear way on the registration form. On-site, staff will need to ensure that they're capturing everyone who registers, and that everyone who registers fills out the on-site form completely. It also makes sense to corroborate information routinely between the multiple likely check-in stations, and thereby ensure that (by the time the conference ends) a single master list of on-site registrations exist. Otherwise, it will fall to staff after the conference to do so, and this will create opportunities for greater confusion.

- **Do present questions to conference participants during the registration process directly, and with administrative back-end processes in mind, so as to capture reliable attendance data efficiently and quickly.** Investing in the administrative design of the registration process well in advance of the conference will help us transition from hosting the conference to producing our post-conference reporting more efficiently, again saving our organization time and resources. A good example: the online registration process should ask participants directly if they are formerly incarcerated, and preferably early in the form, so that the question does not go overlooked.

- **Do try to design the registration process in a way that helps minimize possibilities for excessive duplicate online registrations, errant information in the instance of conference no-shows, and missed on-site registration captures.** All again can slow or complicate the generation of reliable post-conference attendance data. It will be wise for our conference planners to enhance their knowledge of Google Forms; the platform works well (and for cheap) in capturing large amounts of necessary registration data, but the platform also generates a fair amount of misleading or confusing data (especially in its tendency to generate—or perhaps fail to weed out—duplicate online registrations). A simple solution is to ensure that the “automatic email capture” function is on, which also has the added benefit of sending a confirmation email to registrants. Another suggestion is to ensure that participants can edit their registration after
original submission. Finally, there should be an online mechanism for participants who have registered to cancel their registration so that this is not left to an email exchange.

**Don'ts**

- **Do not create opportunities for the on-site registration forms or "check-in process" to go incomplete.** Make sure our conference staff are required at the on-site registration desks to capture information on all on-site registrants. Similarly, have our staff ensure that registrants are answering all the prompts presented in their on-site registrations. Finally, make sure everyone who physically attends the conference is registered when they present themselves.

**The Exit Surveys**

**Do's**

- **Do encourage (and perhaps incentivize) all conference participants to fully complete the exit surveys.** The exit surveys provide essential qualitative measure of the conference experience for participants; they are essential for giving space to conference participants to communicate their impressions and ideas. Is there a way we can somehow incentivize greater participation? Enter the names of those who complete their surveys into some kind of conference raffle, perhaps?

- **Do put questions we want answers to directly to the conference participants.** When we ask what they liked about the concurrent sessions, for example, we might ask conference participants to specifically identify which sessions they liked. When we want them to make suggestions for how the conference might be improved in the future, we should ask them specifically to make those suggestions in the exit survey—too often, participants offered vague or unclear summaries of their personal experience—information that was useful, but not precisely useful in the way conference planners might hope.

**Don'ts**

- **Do not de-incentivize the completion of the exit surveys.** Again, completed exit surveys provide some of the most useful information available to the conference planners—if anything, the conference should be investing more energy in making sure more responses are captured.

**Logistics**

**Do's**

- **Do incorporate a wellness room.** Few aspects of the conference were as popular as the wellness room. Maintain all of its features—the painkillers, the white noise machine, everything. And if possible, we might even expand its offerings and scope. We could also offer to host Yoga classes or meditation classes (and enlist trained participants to lead such classes—plenty of the 2017 participants volunteered to do precisely that in the exit surveys). We might also advertise it better.

- **Do ensure that the exhibit hall is centrally located, has ample technology and space, and in all ways supports a contemporary, working group of professionals.** Nearly every conference participant spends time in the hall, and the experience in the room can significantly impact the overall participant experience. The exhibit hall simply needs to have adequate facilities while providing ample space to get the conference's important work done.
• **Do ensure that the conference participants can all be housed in one location.** Participants value the feeling of community and belonging this conference creates. Having everyone under one roof, and operating in a single building, matters.

**Don'ts**

• **Do not select a conference location that is likely to present transportation surprises (ground transportation especially) to economically anxious participants.** When ground transportation from the airport via a shuttle is unreliable or non-existent, for instance, (as it sometimes was in Arlington) participants can be hit with unexpected fares, such as what happened when a few participants needed to hail a taxi in order to get from the airport to the hotel. For a group with economic worry, these unexpected costs can be a very negative experience. In general, transportation (ground transportation especially) needs to be accessible, cheap, and easy to access.

• **Do not be regionally insensitive in the selection of the conference site, hotel, and amenities.** The conference location and its hotel and amenities need to be accessible to all people, including people from all across North America's regions and states.

• **Do not let understandable organizational imperatives get in the way of livability concerns with a conference site.** The conference site in Arlington seemed to edge pretty close to being an unforgiving site for a conference, given the complaints it gave rise to as being, as one participant put it, "nowhere." To be clear, there is work to do, and important work to do, at a conference such as this. Conferences are very clearly not vacation opportunities. Still, exit survey feedback suggested that participants spend their time in a space where they can fully thrive, and a more holistic approach to conference location might make sense. Walkability and sociability of a site might deserve greater consideration in the future.

• **Do not assume anything below $140/night for a room is "cheap" for conference participants.** With the help of travel scholarships and their host institutions, most of the participants found the conference easy to afford, and very low-cost. Yet the exit surveys also make it clear that even with rooms at around $120-$140 a night, at least a few participants were forced off-site out of consideration of cost. Some stayed with friends; some commuted in from an entirely different city.

**Communication**

**Do's**

• **Do let people know as soon as possible 1) If they have been admitted to the conference 2) If they will be presenting or moderating at the conference 3) When their presentation will take place 4) If possible, with whom.** All of these factors were cited as being important to participants, especially as the receipt of such information had a direct impact on their travel plans and (necessarily) shaped their securing of conference travel funding and support. As we do have a major goal to keep costs low for participants, it makes sense to communicate this information as soon as possible.

• **Do send daily emails.** Participants loved the daily updates and for the most part turn to their email for regular conference news and information.

• **Do conduct outreach with existing networks and known HEP leaders and supporters, as well as previous conference attendees.** For the most part, institutions of higher education will do
the heavy lifting in spreading news about the conference and getting participants interested. On campus, prison programs and their directors are an essential outreach goal; beyond them, it makes sense to directly approach affiliated faculty members, or known researchers and entities working in the field. Another obvious group are the wide array of non-profits and other organizations working in HEP; in all communications, it makes sense for us to ask for conference information to be dispersed through existing institutional email listservs and other common channels. In most instances, these are the venues through which people learn about the conference and get excited to attend. This appeal might should include an invite to join the AHEP listserv.

- **Do consider ways to better use social media at the conference and beyond.** The exit surveys prove that for the most part, social media is not essential to the functioning of a good conference. At the same time, social media does provide at least a few tools that might be better considered. The conference might adopt a conference #hashtag for example (to draw in Twitter and Instagram usage); AHEP in general might benefit from the creation of a Facebook group that can become a hub for communications over time (both in conference and outside of the conference). As a few negative recent experiences at professional conferences can attest, however, it is again worth some collective thinking about how (and whether) to utilize these tools. Participants can abuse #hashtags and sometimes shame or post derogatory comments about speakers and others in attendance through these venues.

- **Do consider new communications platforms.** Several professional organizations (the American Studies Association (ASA) comes to mind) are turning to the development of organizational apps or even conference-specific apps to aid with their conference experience and broader organizational goals. It is easy to imagine (based on exit surveys, especially) that participants would benefit from the existence of such an app; it could make for a handy place to locate all participate contact information, for instance, in the form of an AHEP directory. It could obviously host the conference program and streamline communications. It could be useful for our workflow, including the offering of easy access to the exit surveys, the reimbursement process, even on-site check-ins. The app could even theoretically hold or host some of the talks, if we moved to, for example, online streaming or video formats. This may be a long-term goal given the likely costs in staff investment and time, but it seems worth thinking about. Other similar organizations (the American Historical Association, the Modern Languages Association) are moving in this direction and it is increasingly becoming a part of professional conferencing culture.

**Don'ts**

- **Do not let some of the despairing tendencies on display regarding conference culture (and especially its rhetoric or "language") grow worse or more commonplace.** At least a handful of conference participants had negative experiences with what they perceived as hurtful, derogatory, or exclusionary comments at the conference, and indeed, subsequent unsolicited letters to the conference planners reinforced a sense that these behaviors were in fact observed and experienced. As a conference made up of exceptional educators and administrators of higher education programs, it makes sense to use our existing abilities and skills to educate participants on what's at stake in these discussions, and perhaps curate a dictionary or culture of common language usage at the conference, so that there is an opportunity to address these concerns and have thoughtful conversation. It makes sense to be proactive and speak to these problems as an organization.
In General

**Do's**

- **Do cultivate better representation of the formerly incarcerated in the plenary sessions; the same can be said (though to a lesser extent) for the concurrent sessions and indeed all aspects of the conference.** None of the plenary sessions in 2017 featured a formerly incarcerated speaker, and obviously that needs to change for the future. Nonetheless, we did have success in getting representation of the formerly incarcerated into the concurrent sessions, and that needs to continue (and we still have room to grow there, too). But in general, it makes sense to center and prioritize their participation throughout all aspects of the conference.

- **Do support the development of formerly incarcerated conference participants.** While formerly incarcerated participants were well represented in the concurrent sessions, we can do more to support their development as presenters and moderators. Consider a pre-conference workshop on presenting research and/or personal narratives and/or develop materials to share with conference presenters and moderators prior to the conference. Keep in mind that many of the formerly incarcerated students presenting at the conference have not previously presented at many, if any, conferences.

- **Do reach out and cultivate participation of corrections workers.** In a similar vein, and perhaps more urgently given their under-representation at our 2017 conference, future NCHEP conferences simply need to include more department of corrections workers. They too need to be centered and given priority in the conference planning. It is easy to imagine that they, too, would benefit from a pre-conference workshop.

- **Do cultivate greater respect for expertise.** Hostility and distrust of academia (and expertise) is being cultivated from a number of directions, both within our conference and organization, and of course outside of it, too. As an organization made up largely of workers in higher education, and with clear investments in the mission and practice of higher education, credentials, and teaching, as well as expertise, it makes sense to cultivate a greater appreciation (not necessarily a knee-jerk defense, but a critical appreciation and empathy for) for what expertise entails, and what it can contribute to a functioning democracy. The conference, in general, should be transparent that it values expertise and the hard work that goes into achieving and articulating it, without resorting to practices and approaches that participants might dismiss as elitist or exclusionary.

- **Do consider eliminating one or perhaps both of the films.** Many of the exit surveys suggested that participants hoped for more time to network and socialize. The clearest opportunity for that comes through the elimination of one of the film screenings, reducing that option down to perhaps just one of the conference evenings.

- **Do ask what the plenary sessions are "meant to do."** It is telling that in the exit surveys, nearly everyone seemed to have an opinion on what kinds of topics they might better address in the future. Everyone seemed to enjoy the presentations, but not everyone seemed to find them very relevant to their own needs. People valued the plenary sessions; they seemed torn, however, on the issue of whether they might be yet somehow improved. It behooves the conference planners, then, to invest some time in thinking about what we hope to gain from the plenaries, and what we hope they can do, perhaps, in streamlining or focusing an organizational goal or conference goal/theme.

- **Do get people to share their contact information.** Exit surveys made it clear that people want to network and share information; many want to improve their access to institutions and
(understandably) advance their careers. We can help by creating opportunities for sharing of contact information.

**Don'ts**

- **Do not use the plenary sessions in a way that invites charges of exclusion or "cliques."** This is an issue of both representation (we should obviously get formerly incarcerated and department of corrections workers onto the plenaries) but also (as mentioned above) an issue of design and mission. What are the plenary sessions meant to do? What goals or problems or challenges do we have as an organization, and how can the plenary sessions be advance our goals or overcome these challenges?

**Concurrent Sessions Content**

**Do's**

- **Do encourage the creation of panels on how to navigate higher education, including panels in these broad related subject areas, and in these areas (by priority) (1) How to access institutions in the first place (2) How to transition between programs (3) How to advance from "poor" and underserved access points.** There were at least a few statements in the exit surveys that should help remind us that many of our formerly incarcerated stakeholders navigate the world of higher education from the vantage point of smaller and often-under-funded institutions, particularly community colleges, area and regional colleges, and generally not well-funded private or elite institutions. As a result, many are interested in how they can use the access points they have to advance toward the stronger and better-quality institutions.

- **Do include panels on how to navigate a diversifying higher education landscape, including community colleges, two-year programs, smaller state and regional programs, for-profit and online programs, etc.** Related to the point made above, but in many ways distinct from it, participants are also dealing with a shifting terrain in higher education. Meaning, while many come from poorer or underfunded schools, it is also the case that within these institutions, changes are afoot that also prove bewildering. The experience of the classroom is becoming increasingly digitized and hosted online; staff upheavals are not allowing access to a regular cohort of instructors or support staff; lack of funding depletes a sense of institutional and student stability, etc. In short, participants are also asking for panels to provide help/perspective on how higher education itself occupies a changing landscape.

- **Do include panels on how to navigate higher educational procedural and especially financial processes, including/as well as securing financial aid, scholarships, admissions, etc.** We serve communities with real economic anxiety, and for clear structural reasons. We can better use the panels to help educate and strategize options for securing financial stability, both within higher education institutions and for students of these institutions.

- **Do host panels on technology (how to gain literacy, how to access it inside/in prison).** Similar to the points raised above, participants are calling attention to the role of technology as being a primary agent of the experienced and observed changes happening all over the place. Students feel anxiety about how they are to "keep up" and build the skills and awareness they know they need in order to achieve.

- **Do use the panels to give attention to conference and organizational rhetoric/culture (how the conference can build and practice a more inclusive vocabulary and culture).** A few of the participants wondered if there was maybe an opportunity use a brainstorming session to address some of the tendencies in language and rhetoric, and ask participants what words they prefer and why in referencing formerly incarcerated populations, for example.

- **Do emphasize pedagogy.** As the above comments attest, there is still plenty of room for addressing pedagogy issues, and at all levels of participants in the conference. As an organization
made up of (largely) higher education practitioners, it is important to think more about how this conference can be a better learning experience.

- **Do create space to address immigrant and undocumented concerns.** A small number also called attention the plight of undocumented and immigrant individuals/families caught in the prison system and who also need access to education.

- **Do give room to discuss re-entry and pathways to [traditional campus] opportunities.** It was evident in the concurrent sessions and exit survey feedback that there is a growing need for this type of information/support to be discussed at the conference. This need is supported by the exponential growth in the participation of formerly incarcerated people at the conference.

**Don'ts**

- **Do not forget that we are (to a significant degree) a community of educators, and have a vast array of skills and abilities in leveraging our content within the concurrent sessions to make the conference and our organization succeed.** We know the higher education landscape well; we are workers within that landscape; we teach a range of students at a variety of institutions; we too struggle with a lack of resources and under-funded institutions and opportunities. We also know what works and does not work in the classroom. We should have greater faith in our labor to make positive change. We should leverage and express these skills in our design and presentation of the conference.

**Concurrent Session Presenters**

**Do's**

- **Do share your contact information.** Participants are eager to collaborate, share ideas, and work together. Please help make that possible. Perhaps it is possible to add a question to registration about sharing contact information prior to the conference.

- **Do consider (and carefully design) pedagogical conduct to be more inclusive and engaging.** As mentioned above, a fair number of participants find (perhaps reflexively) the lecture format and the general "academic-style" of presentation off-putting. They want to be treated "as equals" and with respect, and this means that pedagogically, at least, there are some changes to conduct presenters might consider. For academics, it means more engaging and interactive content, perhaps, including an abandonment or more critical posture toward tendencies to use PowerPoint as a crutch for facts and information, for instance. It might also involve having presenters make a more explicit appeal for audience involvement and engagement in discussion. More transparency about personal investment in research, and why certain practices or methods are being used to convey information, too, might also be useful in breaking down obvious barriers of privilege and class on display in this space. Perhaps it is possible to have more concurrent sessions that are in a “workshop” style where presenters and audience are able to collaborate during the session. But it of course goes both ways—formerly incarcerated speakers might also consider ways to better respect and treat as equals their academic or non-formerly incarcerated peers, as well as appreciating the very real human and labor issues involved in working as a department of corrections employee. And the same can be said for audience members, in all directions. Intrinsic loathing or resentment of academics comes easy, given the political climate, the culture, who stands to gain from such widespread undermining. What comes less easy, perhaps, is an empathy for workers and institutions of all kinds; as educators, do we not strive to teach this empathy and sense of expanded horizon? Do we not strive to show that injuries to one injure all?

- **Do center and involve more formerly incarcerated participants and corrections workers.** In addition to the pedagogical implications alluded to above, this makes sense for practical reasons in a number of directions. But what we need to also do is make sure that corrections workers are present—this will change the tenor of the conversation rather dramatically, and hopefully productively.
• **Do consider creating or contributing to a conference "Dictionary" or "Guide" that helps participants think through issues of conference rhetoric and culture.** We might insert in conference registration materials a guide for vocabulary; a conference dictionary will also help us generate the kind of future conference culture we would like to see. Language is also a powerful tool for promoting cohesion and group identity. It should not be a device for division and hierarchy, as at least a few responses suggest might be afoot if left unchecked.

• **Do consider a resource guide/reference list for “conference protocol” distributed prior to the conference -- on the listserv or conference website.** Given that so many participants were new to attending a conference it might go a long way to provide some information/resources for ‘how to attend a conference’.

• **Do consider provide some overview/framework of the conference prior to the conference.** As noted in the point above, given that a significant amount of conference participants are new to the field and the conference, it might be helpful to provide some overview of what the conference is and its purpose (multiple functions). This will also require conference planners to answer the questions “what is this conference” and “who is it for.”

• **Do be conscious of logistics—honor time constraints, use PowerPoint slides and narration selectively, and be courteous and respectful of audience members.** Again, we are largely a group of people working in higher education, and the exact same things that work in our classrooms will apply to this conference.

• **Do remember to try and stay hopeful in your rhetoric and tone.** There are obviously real challenges facing communities across North America and the world today, and this is especially true within the landscapes of higher education and the prison system. Despair is real; it is, in some sense, vital to understanding the hard road to travel and the work yet to be done. But we have to remember to hope, too, and build a sense of possibility and vision into our goals and organizing.

**Don’ts**

• **Do not** automatically assume that a presentation within the concurrent sessions should involve, simply, a narrated PowerPoint presentation followed by a traditional Q and A session. For complicated reasons worth thinking about, this conference is both unique and not unique in what it asks its concurrent sessions presenters and moderators to do. Much of what is at stake comes down to the unique audience this conference brings together. The assumptions that guide typical audience issues in a college classroom do not apply here, necessarily. At the same time, as educators, many of us have the ability to think through our approaches and (in so doing) enliven the conference experience for everyone.

**Networking**

**Do’s**

• **Do create more opportunities for networking.** The exit surveys make it clear that participants would like to see more time between sessions, more social opportunities in the evening, and perhaps more targeted networking communities (regionally-based, work-based, professionally-based, and perhaps even demographically based in other ways, as well). Graduate students and other special communities should also have an opportunity to meet and greet.
Cost and Scholarships

Do’s

- **Do offer as many scholarships as possible, especially to the formerly incarcerated, but also consider expanding funding options to low-income participants in general.** The conference documentation makes it clear that many of the participants in this conference do not have financial security. The work of making the conference a positive experience begins with expanded opportunities for travel scholarships to the formerly incarcerated, but it might also include creating more opportunities for the community writ large, especially those in financial crisis (like graduate students).

- **Do consider expanding financial support to a low-income category (beyond formerly incarcerated); this might be especially useful for those alienated from clear lines of institutional support.** The exit reports reveal that most people funded this conference through support granted by their home institutions. But within these institutions, the wealth is not shared. (Graduate students come to mind; much of their fellowship or scholarship support may be offered in competitive competitions, or allocated on an award-basis; this can complicate processing or understanding of their own availability of funding, and indeed many of those who expressed financial worry were graduate students).

- **Do make the guidelines and timelines of the scholarship process transparent.** There seemed to be some confusion about who could apply for scholarships (formerly incarcerated only or anyone) and what the timeline was for acceptance and reimbursement.

- **Do consider coordinating the timing of scholarship announcement with panel/paper acceptance.** Getting accepted to present, for many, does not necessarily guarantee a plan to participate and attend. The reception of a travel scholarship announced alongside their panel/paper acceptance, however, does help make a convincing case that the conference would value their input.

- **Do continue to provide the formerly incarcerated with their own hotel rooms if possible.** This left a powerful impression on at least one of the conference participants this year, and even in the case of a single example, it is clear that this practice should continue. It means a lot, in short, for formerly incarcerated people to have their own space and the dignity it affords.

- **Do make sure the reimbursement process is announced prior to the conference.** Ensuring that scholarship recipients have the proper paperwork for reimbursement will alleviate anxiety about how the process works.
Big Picture Final Points

- **Do** cultivate the creation of regionally specific or local and/or professional networks, including for graduate students and practitioners, for example
- **Do** practice greater inclusion, less exclusivity, and seek out more diverse content
- **Do** use the conference plenary sessions to greater advantage
- **Do** involve and center the formerly incarcerated and the dept. of corrections
- **Do** share contact information as much as possible (and before the conference ideally)
- **Do** strive to get all the conference participants together, under one roof, and sharing of meals and social spaces
- **Do** work to make the conference even more affordable (especially in hotel and travel costs)
- **Do** build in more time for networking and down time, including more time for talk between sessions and more social events in the evening
- **Do** invest real time, energy, and resources into planning of the conference administrative and procedural workflows
- **Do** leverage the abundant skills, abilities, and expertise that the organization already has to ensure a positive conference experience for everyone
- **Do** have answers for the questions “who does this conference serve”; “who is this conference for”; “what is the purpose of this conference”