

Call for Presentation Proposals



5th Annual Rise Up Conference

Rise Up: A Movement of Lived Expertise - Where Culture, Systems, and Institutions Shift

September 9th, 2025 marks the 54th anniversary of the Attica prison uprising, during which hundreds of men incarcerated at Attica banded together, after years of abuse, to take control of the facility until their demands were met. The men's demands were simple: better living conditions and opportunities to improve their lives. The same spirit and belief in the transformative power of positive programming can be found in people pursuing higher education while incarcerated today. Directly impacted practitioners offer not only lived experience, but also expertise we've honed through academic study and training both inside and after prison.

In the first four years, the Rise Up conference drew over 4,000 registrants and raised over \$500,000 to fund the conference and compensate directly impacted presenters for their time, expertise, and experiences. The conference had speakers from throughout the US as well as from around the world! We were honored to hear the stories of system-impacted individuals who have been released and are now working in incredible positions once thought unattainable, including physicians, lawyers, directors, professors, accountants, and more. We hope to expand on this incredible start with our 5th annual Rise Up conference this September 2025.

Higher education in and after prison is a field that has experienced a period of rapid expansion over the last twenty years. Although the field has discussed the importance of including directly impacted people, it is rare to see directly impacted people are leading the conversation. Many college-in-prison programs include directly impacted people as tokens but rarely in leadership positions. The time has come for those with lived experience to set the full agenda for the conversations we believe need to be had. While there is value in working with those who were not incarcerated as collaborators and thought partners, these conversations must be led by those affected by college in prison programs. After all, our expertise and perspectives should be strongly valued in the field, because we lived through it and thrived!

Several partners have come together to work collaboratively and collectively to create this truly innovative conference. We are now seeking formerly incarcerated presenters to join us in advancing this work. Rise Up is especially interested in innovative yet unrecognized ideas, experiences, and informal experiences that challenge ways of knowing and being. We're also especially interested in submissions from incarcerated people and will work individually with these presenters to find a way to showcase their expertise. ***Note: Directly impacted scholars can present with non-impacted allies as second authors or contributors.***

Two-Day Virtual Event

Rise Up will be a two-day online convening hosted on **Monday, September 8 - Tuesday, September 9, 2025**. This conference will include a keynote, individual presentations, discussion, and networking. We're also hosting an online screening, the film will be determined later.

Rise Up: A Movement of Lived Expertise - Where Culture, Systems, and Institutions Shift

This year's conference is more than an event — it's a movement. A space where education liberates and action inspires. Formerly incarcerated leaders take the stage as experts, sharing hard-won truths to transform culture, systems, and institutions. Together, with our true allies we can **Rise Up!** Lived experience is and always will be at the core. We honor past struggles while strategizing for a future free from systemic barriers.

We are calling for proposals that spark transformation — stories of personal or collective change, bold visions for education inside and beyond prison walls, and innovative ideas rooted in your lived and learned expertise.

We move forward by drawing strength from our community members, both directly impacted and allies, fueling innovation through wisdom, resilience, and truth. Your voice has the power to liberate, to reimagine education, and to shift entrenched systems and narratives. This is your platform. Your moment. So, **Rise Up with Us!**

Subject Area Tracks

The six tracks include: **1) Advocacy, 2) Allyship, 3) Equity and Inclusion, 4) Programming and Informal Education, 5) Research, Science, Technology, and Math, 6) Pathways to Profession;** each track is described below:

- **Advocacy:** Policy change is a necessary and essential goal. We seek proposals that uplift advocacy efforts led by currently and formerly incarcerated people to increase access to education and opportunities for meaningful careers within the field of higher education in prison.
- **Allyship:** We understand that partnership with true allies is an essential part of liberation work. This year, the Rise Up Steering Committee warmly invites pairs or groups comprising directly impacted people along with their allies to showcase, as co-presenters, the best of what this kind of collaboration can produce. Presenters may describe programs, research projects, campaigns, or any other kind of collaboration that has borne fruit for the reform movement. Proposals should speak to the roles each presenter plays in the research, program, or initiative, and to the specific benefits of working across the lines of criminal legal system involvement.
- **Equity & Inclusion:** Classism and Racism are pervasive in all institutions in the United States including prison and higher education systems. We seek proposals that call to the surface the pervasive reality of oppression, as well as possibilities for true equity and inclusion to transform and abolish systems.
- **Programming & Informal Education:** Education is not limited to experiences recognized by institutions. We seek innovative models for education inside and outside of prisons led by currently and formerly incarcerated people.
- **Research/STEM:** Research allows us to better understand our experiences and contribute to collective knowledge. We seek proposals that demonstrate and uplift the transformative potential of research in all areas with an emphasis on STEM, which is often neglected in higher education in prison programming.

- **Pathways to Professions:** Are you working in a field in which formerly incarcerated applicants face particularly difficult barriers to entry, promotion and advancement, or professional success? In this track, we seek presenters from professional fields traditionally inaccessible to those experiencing lifelong collateral consequences of incarceration. We hope to see presenters from the fields of medicine, law, finance, business, academia, tech, and more who can speak to their experiences and explain how they overcame the barriers to work in their field.

Presentation Format

Individual 10-15 minute presentations will be grouped together with similar presentations to form symposia. However, those whose submissions aren't selected for presentations will have an opportunity to showcase their ideas and experiences in other ways.

Submission

Please submit your presentation proposal using [this google form](#) or by email as a single PDF that includes the presentation title, your name(s), affiliation, and email address; the track you're submitting to (Advocacy, Allyship, Equity & Inclusion, Programming & Informal Education, Research/STEM or Pathways to Professions); and a 250-word description of the ideas and experiences you'll be talking about as well as how these ideas fit with the conference's theme. If applicable, we recommend that your description include a brief introduction, overview of methods, results, and a discussion.

Evaluation Criteria

We'll review proposals according to how well the ideas and experiences fit with the conference's theme, how well the proposal fits with the track selected, the potential for ideas and experiences to contribute to liberation, the potential for the ideas and experiences to transform the broader field of education, and how clearly ideas are organized and communicated.

Expected Timeline

Submissions are due **July 3, 2025**. We'll review these the following month and notify presenters of our decision by **July 25, 2025**. Presenters will then have a month to prepare their presentations for the **September 8-9, 2025** convening.

If you have any questions about Rise Up and/or the process of submitting, please don't hesitate to reach out to us by emailing info@riseupconference.org