This document was submitted to the 2020 Annual Survey of Higher Education in Prison for inclusion in the National Directory of Higher Education in Prison Programs (https://www.higheredinprison.org/national-directory). The document was created by and remains under the sole ownership of the individual higher education in prison program. Further, the document was not edited, modified or otherwise altered by the Research Collaborative on Higher Education in Prison at the University of Utah, the Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley and/or the Alliance for Higher Education in Prison.

To learn more about the Higher Education in Prison Landscape Project, visit: https://www.higheredinprison.org/higher-education-in-prison-landscape-project
THEI Employee Handbook 2020

How we take care of ourselves and each other

Welcome to the Tennessee Higher Education in Prison Initiative!

On behalf of your colleagues, we welcome you to the Tennessee Higher Education in Prison Initiative (THEI) and wish you every success here.

We believe that each employee contributes directly to the growth and success of THEI, and we hope you will take pride in being a member of our team.

This employee handbook describes some of THEI’s expectations and outlines the policies, programs, and benefits available to eligible employees. Employees should familiarize themselves with the contents of the employee handbook as soon as possible, as it will answer many questions about employment with THEI. If you have any questions about these policies or policies not described in this handbook, please see Operations Manager Chad Carter.

We hope your experience here will be challenging, enjoyable and rewarding.

Sincerely,

Molly Lasagna
Executive Director
Our Vision

We envision a world where all people – no matter where they reside – have the opportunity to transform their lives and communities through higher education.

Our Mission

Tennessee Higher Education in Prison Initiative is a non-profit organization working to disrupt systems of harm and create opportunities for autonomy and success by providing college access to people inside Tennessee prisons, preparing students for skillful re-entry, and reducing barriers to continued education and achievement.

Our Value Add

• We facilitate student-centered education while mitigating institutional interests
• We have the capital and resources to convene agencies and stakeholders across the state
• We have specialized competencies in working with and connecting incarcerated students and institutions of higher education
• We have a tested and established model
• We are geographically portable
• We do all of this more efficiently and cheaper than institutions can
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Organizational Information

**Name and Address**

Tennessee Higher Education in Prison Initiative, Inc.
1006 Shelby Avenue
Nashville, TN 37206

**Phone Numbers**

Office: 615-879-8857
Program: 615-979-7884
Fax: 615-829-8707

**Federal Status**

501(c)(3) organization

**Staff**

Chad Carter | Operations Manager | chad@thei.org
Karla Coleman Garcia | Director of Policy & Strategic Partnerships | karla@thei.org
Chris Greathouse | Academic Coordinator | chris@thei.org
Molly Lasagna | Executive Director | molly@thei.org
Ka-Rhonda Porter | Academic Coordinator | ka-rhonda@thei.org
Rachel Zolensky | Director of Student Success & Re-Entry Services | rachel@thei.org

All THEI staff report directly to the Executive Director and/or their identified supervisor. Contractors and other temporary employees will work with the Executive Director unless otherwise stated. An organizational chart is included in employee onboarding binders, and can be requested at any time.

Staff working hours can vary by person, and are established at the time of hiring. Staff wishing to change their work hours need to get approval from their immediate supervisor.

Staff must abide by the guidelines articulated in this Handbook. It is provided upon employment, but can be requested again at any time.

**Board of Directors**

The purpose of the Board of Directors is to advise, assist, support, and advocate for the mission, the students, and the financial sustainability of THEI. Members of the Board of Directors act as ambassadors of THEI, provide financial oversight and sound governance, engage in strategic thinking and planning with the Executive Director and other members of the leadership team, and provide supervision of the Executive Director. The Chair of the Board of Directors is a resource for all staff and should be contacted with employment issues if the issue cannot be directly addressed with the Executive Director. The current Board Chair is Lila McDowell (2018-present), who can be reached at lmcdowell@hudsonlink.org.
Disclaimer

This Employee Handbook is designed to outline and explain the practices and policies of THEI. This handbook should be regarded as a set of guidelines only and is not intended to be comprehensive or to address all of the possible applications of, or exceptions to the general policies and procedures described herein. Furthermore, the policies in this handbook will be interpreted by THEI in its sole discretion and THEI retains the right to apply these policies with some flexibility and for that reason, the policies in this handbook may be amended, modified, deleted, or otherwise changed by THEI without prior notice. This handbook is not a contract. The policies in this handbook are not intended to create a contract of employment, express or implied, or a warranty of benefits, and do not alter the at-will status of THEI’s employees. This handbook supersedes and replaces all prior employee handbooks.

At-Will Employment

Employment with THEI is entered into voluntarily. While THEI hopes that its relationships with employees are long-term, all employees of THEI are employed “at-will” and therefore may resign at any time, with or without reason or notice. Likewise, THEI may terminate an employee at any time, with or without reason or notice. No manager or other representative of THEI has any authority to enter into an agreement for employment that alters this at-will status. Any written or oral statement to the contrary by any other representative of THEI should not be relied upon by any prospective or current employee. Further, THEI has the right to manage its workforce and direct its employees. This includes the right to hire, transfer, promote, demote, reclassify, change job titles, positions, job responsibilities, terminate, or change any term or condition of employment at any time, with or without a reason and with or without notice unless otherwise required by law.

Equal Employment Opportunity

Tennessee Higher Education Initiative is an equal opportunity employer. It is our policy to comply with all federal, state and local equal opportunity and non-discrimination laws. Our policy is to afford equal opportunity in all aspects of employment to all employees and applicants for employment without discrimination on the basis of race, color, ancestry, national origin (including language use), citizenship, religion or religious creed (including religious dress and grooming practices), sex (including pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and medical conditions related to pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding), marital status, domestic partnership status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or gender expression, military or veteran status, family care or medical leave status (including denial of family care or medical leave), age, physical/mental/visual/sensory disability, medical condition, genetic characteristics or information, political affiliation or any other basis protected by applicable federal, state or local law, rule, ordinance or regulation.

This policy applies to all areas of employment including recruitment, hiring, training, promotion, compensation, benefits, transfer, disciplinary action, and social and recreational programs. It is the responsibility of every manager and employee to conscientiously follow this policy.

Any employee with questions or concerns about any type of discrimination in the workplace is encouraged to bring these issues to the attention of Tennessee Higher Education in Prison Initiative. Employees can raise concerns and make reports without fear of reprisal or retaliation. Anyone found engaging in any type of unlawful discrimination will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.
Onboarding and Orientation

Once hired, all new employees undergo a 90-day introductory period. The first 90 days are focused on assessing the candidate’s fit with the role and organization. The introductory period is not a probationary period and does not invalidate the at-will nature of employment in Tennessee.

All new employees receive an Onboarding Binder that includes but is not limited to:

- Introductory Period Policy
- Standard Operating Procedures
- Technology Use Policy
- Discipline Policy
- Confidentiality Policy
- Code of Conduct Policy
- Employment Contract
- Employee Handbook

Professionalism

Dress Code

All employees should be able to dress comfortably and engage in the work environment without fear of body shaming or harassment. It is expected that all staff discuss and address any topics related to dress code with appropriate, body-positive language. Likewise, all employees are free to wear clothing that expresses their self-identified gender or religion without fear of discrimination.

THEI maintains a business casual expectation for all staff. This means attire should be nicer than casual clothes and have a reasonable sense of modesty for an office environment. For guidance, below are examples of some items that would or would not be appropriate.

Appropriate items include:

- button down shirts or polo shirts
- blouses
- jeans (free of holes, rips, or other distressed features)
- linen/cotton pants
- khakis or slacks
- dresses or knee-length skirts
- leather shoes or sandals
- jackets or blazers

Inappropriate items include:

- hats (not including religious headwear)
- sweats
- pajamas
- flip flops
- t-shirts
- shorts
- mini skirts
- running or exercise shoes

It is explicitly unacceptable to wear any items that contain profanity, nudity, hate speech, or other threatening words or images.

When attending conferences or work meetings with outside audiences (in or out of the office) on behalf of THEI, business attire is expected unless indicated by the event host. Dress shoes, full suits or slacks/khakis with jackets/blazers, and dress shirts are examples of the dress code expectations. Questions about the dress code are welcomed and should first be directed to the Operations Manager.
**Substance Use at Work**

THEI maintains a strict *no alcohol* policy during work hours. Consumption of alcohol during the workday, including during THEI-sponsored or hosted events, is expressly prohibited unless sanctioned by the Executive Director.

**Code of Ethics**

We want our employees and volunteers to feel safe, healthy, and supported in their work. We also want to present a consistent set of values and ethics to the larger Nashville community. To do this, we ask our employees and volunteers to align themselves with our mission and code of conduct and sign the Code of Ethics form. All forms are filed in employee files.

The THEI Code of Ethics is as follows:

- Don’t make promises to students (i.e., “we can get you a job”).
- Don’t enter into romantic relationships with people who are receiving our services or have received our services in the past or with other staff members, volunteers, or board members.
- Use great discretion in giving out your personal information.
- Don’t do things you’re not trained to do.
- Don’t give money directly to people receiving our services. Don’t continue to spend your own money on THEI things without discussing with your immediate supervisor.
- Don’t share someone’s personal information with other people, other agencies, or the public (on blogs or social media posts) without permission. *Always* change names and identifying information when telling stories and *always* get permission before posting photos.
- For THEI employees, don’t abuse your employment benefits, including paid time off and flexible scheduling
- DO show integrity and professionalism in the workplace and whenever you are representing THEI.
- DO respond to calls, texts, and emails from THEI staff in a timely fashion. But don’t feel like you need to constantly answer your phone or email after 6:00 p.m. or on weekends.
- DO pay attention to your intuition, your gut. Listen to feelings of discomfort and uneasiness in yourself. Don’t do something that makes you feel uncomfortable.
- DO reach out to your supervisor or another staff member if things get weird, even if it’s something small.

Violations of the Code of Ethics can result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.
Sexual Harassment Policy

THEI is committed to providing an environment free of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment by any member, employee, or non-employees who have contact with our employees is strictly forbidden. Sexual harassment will not be tolerated and will be dealt with promptly by the THEI administration.

Definition of Sexual Harassment

Sexual Harassment is illegal and is defined as any unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual’s employment or career advancement; (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual; and/or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

A “hostile environment” is a work atmosphere contaminated by a pattern of offensive conduct directed at an individual’s protected class status. It is prohibited in every form of harassment.

Sexual harassment can occur between any individuals, regardless of their sex or gender. The victim as well as the harasser may be a person of any gender. The victim does not have to be of the opposite sex, and does not have to be the person harassed, but could be anyone affected by the offensive conduct.

Unlawful harassment is not limited to the physical workplace itself. It can occur while employees are traveling for business or at employer sponsored events. Calls, texts, emails and social media use can constitute unlawful workplace harassment to the extent it interferes with the work effectiveness of employees, even if it occurs away from the workplace, on personal devices or during non-work hours.

THEI is committed to the prevention and elimination of sexual harassment of employees and will (1) take reasonable care to prevent sexual harassment; and (2) take reasonable care to promptly correct sexual harassment that has occurred.

What to do if you are sexually harassed

1. Know your rights. Sexual harassment is illegal, and THEI policy prohibits employees from engaging in sexual harassment.
2. Speak up at the time. Say “NO” clearly, firmly, and without smiling. This is not the time to be polite or vague.
3. Don’t blame yourself. Sexual harassment is an unwanted action that the harasser decides to take. It is not your fault.
4. If you have a reasonable belief that you or any employee has been the victim of unlawful harassment, you must write or verbally report the conduct to the Executive Director Molly Lasagna, (434) 284-1463; the Operations Manager Chad Carter, (907) 306-8010; Board President Lila McDowell, (212) 518-1459; or any member of the Board.
Process and Procedure

Complaint Resolution

The Company will promptly investigate any allegation in a fair and thorough manner. The investigation will include, as applicable, private interviews with the person filing the complaint, the person alleged to have committed the inappropriate conduct and relevant witnesses. Once the investigation is complete, we will, to the extent appropriate, provide the results of the investigation to the person filing the complaint as well as the person alleged to have committed inappropriate conduct.

Complaint Investigation Confidentiality

The Company has a compelling interest in protecting the integrity of its investigations. In every investigation, the Company has a strong desire to protect witnesses from harassment, intimidation and retaliation, to keep evidence from being destroyed, to insure that testimony is not fabricated, and to prevent a cover-up. The Company may decide in some circumstances that in order to achieve these objectives, relevant witnesses and employees must maintain the investigation and their role in it in strict confidence.

Protection Against Retaliation

In compliance with state and federal law, the Company does not retaliate against individuals for (1) filing or encouraging one to file a complaint of unlawful harassment, whether internally or externally, (2) participating in an investigation of unlawful harassment or (3) opposing unlawful harassment.

Any retaliation that is substantiated will also result in corrective action, including possible termination.

Violations of Policy

Employees who are found to have violated this policy prohibiting harassment, discrimination and retaliation are subject to disciplinary measures, up to and including termination. Likewise, employees who are found to have made false accusations are subject to disciplinary measures, up to and including termination. Such violations can also result in personal legal and financial liability.

Where to go for help

Lila McDowell  Molly Lasagna  Chad Carter
Board President  Executive Director  Operations Manager
212-518-1459  434-284-1463  907-306-8010
Non-Discrimination/Non-Harassment Policy

In addition to the anti-Sexual Harassment policy, THEI is committed to promoting a productive environment that is free of unlawful discrimination and all unlawful harassment. THEI will not tolerate verbal or physical conduct by an employee that harasses, disrupts, or interferes with another’s work performance or that creates an intimidating, offensive or hostile environment. THEI prohibits discrimination or harassment on the basis on any protected classifications including race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or presentation, national origin, ancestry, age, disability, pregnancy, genetic information, military status, or any other classification protected by applicable local, state or federal law.

Employees are expected to maintain a productive work environment that is free from harassing or disruptive activity. Each manager, supervisor, and employee has a responsibility to keep the workplace free of any form of unlawful harassment or discrimination, including any work-related setting outside of the workplace, such as during business trips, business meetings, business related social events, and while on site at a customer’s premises.

For purposes of this policy, unlawful harassment generally includes unwelcome verbal or non-verbal conduct based upon a person’s protected classifications, that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion to the person because of the classification, and which affects the person’s employment opportunities or benefits, has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with the person’s work performance, or has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment, including, but not limited to: epithets; slurs or negative stereotyping; threatening, intimidating or hostile acts; denigrating jokes and display or circulation in the workplace of written or graphic material that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion toward an individual or group based on their protected classification.

Any inappropriate or offensive conduct, directed at individuals because of their classification protected by applicable local, state or federal law is prohibited.

Any employee or contractor, who believes that a supervisor’s, manager’s, other employee’s or non-employee’s (e.g. contractor, vendor, customer, etc.) actions or words constitutes unwelcome harassment or discrimination, should immediately report or complain about the situation as soon as possible.

All complaints of harassment will be investigated promptly and in a manner that is as impartial and confidential, to the extent possible. Employees are required to cooperate in any investigation. Retaliation against any employee for filing a complaint or participating in an investigation is strictly prohibited.

THEI prohibits any form of retaliation against employees bringing forth complaints in good faith, or providing information about discrimination or harassment. However, if an investigation of a complaint shows that the complaint or information was false, any individual who knowingly provided false information will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including immediate termination.
Any employee, supervisor, or manager who is found to have violated this harassment policy will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Evaluations and Professional Growth Plans

THEI employees and supervisors complete a competency-driven Employee Growth Plan annually to discuss employees’ progress toward goals, areas of reinforcement, and areas of refinement. Employees complete a self-assessment on individual performance, a list of job responsibilities, and a goal setting section. Supervisors complete an assessment of employee’s individual performance, a list of job responsibilities, and areas of reinforcement and refinement. Both employees and supervisors use a rubric for a description of each indicator.

After the employee and supervisor have separately completed their sections, the employee and supervisor set up a summative conference to discuss the evaluation. At the conference, supervisors and employees may agree to amend portions of the evaluation. Supervisors complete the performance review summary, providing quality feedback to the employee on his/her performance and summarizing the conference discussion. At the end of the conference, managers and employees sign and date the growth plan and file it in the employee’s HR file.

A progressive discipline policy sets standard procedures for responding to employee performance or conduct issues. The stages of the progressive discipline policy include:

- Verbal Warning
- Written Warning
- Suspension
- Recommendation for Termination

In the event that an employee has a concern about another employee, he/she/they should report the concern immediately to a supervisor or the Executive Director.
Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act, known as the ADAAA, are federal laws that prohibit employers with 15 or more employees from discriminating against applicants and individuals with disabilities and that require providing reasonable accommodations to applicants and employees who are qualified for a job, but need a reasonable accommodation in order to assist them in the performance of the essential job duties of the position.

It is the policy of THEI to comply with all federal and state laws concerning the employment of persons with disabilities and to act in accordance with regulations and guidance issued by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Furthermore, it is THEI’s policy not to discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities in regard to application procedures, hiring, advancement, discharge, compensation, training or other terms, conditions and privileges of employment.

THEI will reasonably accommodate qualified individuals with a disability so that they can perform the essential functions of a job unless doing so causes a direct threat to THEI’s employees or others in the workplace and the threat cannot be eliminated by reasonable accommodation and/or if the accommodation creates an undue hardship to THEI. Contact the Executive Director with any questions or requests for accommodation.

Departure from Employment

Resignation

After completion of the first ninety (90) days of the probationary period, employees are encouraged to give at least two (2) weeks’ notice of any resignation.

Employer Property

Upon termination of employment for any reason, all items of any kind created or used pursuant to the employee’s service or furnished by THEI including but not limited to computers, cell phones, mobile hotspots, reports, files, diskettes, keys, manuals, literature, confidential information, or other materials shall remain and be considered the exclusive property of THEI at all times, and shall be surrendered to the Executive Director, in good condition, promptly and without being requested to do so. All work completed during the course of employment with THEI is considered the property of THEI pursuant to the Copyright Act, and may only be replicated or used after departure from THEI with explicit permission from THEI Executive Director.
Confidentiality and FERPA

All information concerning students, former students, our staff, volunteers, financial data, and business records of the Tennessee Higher Education in Prison Initiative (THEI) is confidential. “Confidential” means that employees, board members, and volunteers are free to talk about THEI and about the program and your position, but are not permitted to disclose students’ names or talk about them in ways that will make their identity known. Absolutely no program information may be released without appropriate authorization. THEI expects all employees, board members, and volunteers to respect the privacy of clients and to maintain their personal, financial, and demographic information as confidential.

All records dealing with specific students must be treated as confidential. All materials should be assumed to be confidential unless explicitly stated otherwise. This includes student names and all related data. Staff members are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of information relating to other staff members and volunteers, in addition to students.

THEI requires all students to complete a Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) release form, giving permission for specific staff persons to have access to academic information that would otherwise be confidential under FERPA laws and policies. THEI staff roles that should be given FERPA release include: Executive Director, Assistant Director, Education Director, and Program Coordinator(s). All THEI staff and volunteers who have not had FERPA release forms signed should not have access to student grade information. FERPA is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. All confidential information, including student names, grades, and enrollment information, should not be discussed with persons who are not employed with THEI, including family members of students, and program/facility partners.

Employee Files

THEI maintains a personnel file on each employee. The information in the employee’s personnel file is confidential and the property of THEI. Access to the information contained in personnel files is restricted to those who need to know such information in order to perform their jobs. The personnel file includes such information as the employee’s job application, job description, resume, performance appraisals, and other employment records.

Current employees who wish to review their own file should make a request in writing. With reasonable advance notice in writing, employees may review their own personnel files in THEI’s offices in the presence of an individual appointed by THEI. In no case will an employee be allowed to remove items from the employee’s file or take the employee’s file off-site.
Expense Incurrence and Reimbursements

It is the policy of THEI to reimburse staff for reasonable and necessary expenses incurred in connection with approved travel on behalf of the organization, including travel to prison sites outside of Middle Tennessee. THEI strongly encourages use of travel discounts when making travel arrangements. Travelers seeking reimbursement should incur the lowest reasonable travel expenses and exercise care to avoid impropriety or the appearance of impropriety. Reimbursement is allowed only when reimbursement has not been, and will not be, received from other sources. If a circumstance arises that is not specifically covered in this travel policy, then the most conservative course of action should be taken.

Travel policies are aligned with organization reimbursement rules. All business-related travel paid with THEI funds must comply with company expenditure policies.

Staff travel must be authorized. Travelers should verify that planned travel is eligible for reimbursement before making travel arrangements. Within 30 days of completion of a trip, the traveler must submit an Expense Reimbursement Form and supporting documentation to obtain reimbursement of expenses. Original receipts are required for reimbursement of all expenses.

An individual may not approve his or her own travel or reimbursement in excess of $500. The Expense Reimbursement Form must be signed by the Executive Director or Board Chair.

Designated approval authorities, including the organization’s accountant, Executive Director, or Board Chair, are required to review expenditures and withhold reimbursement if there is reason to believe that the expenditures are inappropriate or extravagant.

Transportation authorized for THEI travel includes car, rail, airlines, buses, taxicabs, and other usual means of conveyance. All travel is to be by the most economical mode of transportation consistent with reasonable convenience.

For air travel, travelers should secure the least expensive direct route to their destination. Connections and one-stop flights may be used if they are not unreasonable in time loss. Airline preference will not be considered to gain frequent flyer mileage. Travelers who want to be selective in their airlines will be responsible for the cost differential.

- Air and rail travel is to be coach or economy class.
- Automobile travel when a traveler drives his or her own car, the allowance is at the current federal reimbursement rate per mile, plus cost of tolls and parking. The reimbursed cost for mileage cannot exceed what would have been the cost for coach or economy airfare for that trip.
- Rental car must be approved in advance by the Executive Director.
- Taxicabs or shared car services like Lyft or Uber may be used in cases where less expensive means of public transportation are unavailable or demonstrably less convenient. When transportation to and from airports by public transportation, airport limousine, or bus, is available and convenient, it should be used in lieu of a taxi.
Every effort should be made to book hotel reservations at the best rate available in the locale.

While traveling for work-related purposes outside of Middle Tennessee, THEI covers the cost of one meal per employee per day, not in excess of $35 unless prior approval is received. Exceptions are allowed for meals connected to official meetings or functions.

**Procurement Policy**

In an effort to establish controls on our spending, THEI seeks to both enable our staff to make sound decisions as well as set sensible boundaries for a system of checks and balances. To that end, the following guidelines should be followed for purchasing and procurement:

1. For staff members with approved purchasing power: standard, recurring purchases such as office supply replenishment, textbooks and school supplies under $250 do not need prior approval.
2. Any non-recurring, one-time purchases above $100 need written or email approval from the Executive Director or a member of the Board of Directors.
3. All purchases should be made in consideration of the best price, best value, and within the confines of our annual budget. Please see the Operations Manager and/or the Executive Director for advice in regards to our budget actuals.
4. When using our in-house checkbook, two signatures are required on all one-time purchases above $100.
Timekeeping

Hours of Work

The regular office hours for THEI vary depending on the day. It is expected that employees with site-based positions are present at Turney Center at least three days a week and twice a month at any site further than Turney Center. When employees are not on site at the prisons, it is expected that staff will be available from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. On days when Program Staff are traveling to Turney Center, it is expected that they will be in the office from 12 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Employees may also be expected to work some other hours as requested or required.

Employees are required to notify their supervisor, in advance, of planned days away from the office. Unplanned absences from the office should be reported to the employee’s supervisor as soon as could reasonably be expected. At the discretion of the Executive Director, depending on circumstances, employees may be allowed to work from home for specific periods of time.

Breaks

Any staff member (full- or part-time) working an 8-hour day should incorporate a one-hour lunch break (or a 30-minute lunch break and two separate 15-minute breaks) into their day. No additional breaks beyond those allowed under this break policy may be taken unless requested and approved. Part-time staff working less than a full day (7 hours or less) should incorporate reasonable breaks into their day (approximately two 15-minute breaks), which are not deducted from their work time.

Flex Time

Flex time should be used sparingly, but is an option on rare occasions. For example, if arriving an hour late to work due to a doctor’s appointment, staff can shift their work day an hour later (e.g. 11am-7pm instead of 10am-6pm). Similarly, if a member of Program Staff works for four hours at a facility on a Saturday, she/he/they may “flex” those hours during a day the following week. Staff must notify their supervisor if they plan to use flex time.

Paid Time Off and Leave

Each full-time employee accrues 20 days of Paid Time Off (PTO) per year. Employees are encouraged not to take more than 5 consecutive PTO days per semester without special permission from their supervisor. PTO taken will be subtracted from the employee’s accrued time bank in one-hour increments. PTO does not roll over from year to year and must be used within 12 months of accrual. Any accrued but unused time will not be paid, either at the end of the 12 month period or at the termination of employment. Temporary employees, contract employees, and interns are not eligible to accrue PTO. The time that is not covered by the PTO policy, and for which separate guidelines and policies exist, includes paid holidays, bereavement time off, required jury duty, and military service leave.

To take PTO requires two days of notice to the Executive Director and documented approval, unless the PTO is used for legitimate, unexpected illness or emergencies. Employees track their own PTO usage in a
designated document in the THEI drive. PTO taken in excess of the PTO accrued can result in progressive disciplinary action up to and including employment termination.

In addition to 20 days of PTO, THEI closes its office and observes the following holidays (12 days total):

- New Year’s Day – 1 day – January 1
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – 1 day – Third Monday in January
- President’s Day -- 1 day
- Memorial Day – 1 day – Last Monday in May
- Independence Day – 1 day – July 4
- Labor Day – 1 day – First Monday in September
- Thanksgiving – 3 days – Fourth Wednesday, Thursday and Friday in November
- Christmas Holiday – 3 days – December 24, 25, 26

THEI recognizes that jury duty is a civic responsibility of our employees. Employees must provide a copy of the jury duty summons to the Executive Director within 3 days of receiving the summons. THEI provides paid leave when an employee must serve on a jury.

When a death occurs in an employee’s family (immediate or chosen), THEI full-time employees may take up to three days of paid bereavement leave. THEI full-time employees may take up to one day of paid bereavement leave in other cases. This time off will be considered by the Executive Director on a case-by-case basis. Full-time and part-time employees called to active military duty, military reserve or National Guard service may be eligible to receive time off under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994. To receive time off, employees must provide notice and a copy of their report orders to the Executive Director. Military leave is granted on an unpaid basis. The employee’s eligibility for reinstatement after military duty or training is completed is determined in accordance with applicable federal and state laws.
Employee Benefits

Medical/Dental

THEI offers its employees group benefits provided by Blue Cross Blue Shield. Single benefits are 100% paid by the employer, with the option for staff to add a family plan out of pocket. Employees are enrolled in the plan when they begin full time employment at THEI, and may select Single or Family coverage as required. Employees are required to pay the premiums for their share of LTD premiums on a monthly basis. The plan also includes dental.

The Wellness Fund

THEI full time staff are entitled to monthly reimbursement for items related to personal wellness up to, but not exceeding $120 per month. Staff must complete a Wellness Reimbursement Form within 30 days of their wellness purchase, attach receipts to the form, and submit for approval by a direct supervisor. Wellness reimbursements will be distributed with the employee’s next paycheck following approval of the reimbursement request.

Wellness reimbursements may be requested for any purchase related to any of the following wellness goals, or any other wellness goal identified by the staff member and approved by the Executive Director: Relaxation, Fitness/Physical health, Pain reduction, Healthy sleeping habits, Healthy eating habits, Happiness/joy, Spiritual health, Mental health, Self-exploration.

IRA

THEI offers a Simple IRA plan with up to 3% matching for all staff members making $5,000 per year or more. Employees are eligible for the plan when they begin full-time employment at THEI. The company reserves the right to terminate the Plan at any time.

Continuing Education Policy

THEI full-time staff are encouraged to pursue opportunities for professional development (PD) and continuing education. Unless otherwise directed, each full-time staff member will be expected to attend The National Conference on Higher Education in Prison, as a representative of the THEI team, to help keep us abreast of emerging trends in our field. Additionally, each member of the full-time staff will work with their supervisor to identify opportunities that align with their personal development goals and, to the extent possible based upon annual budgets, THEI will financially subsidize the costs of travel, registration and lodging for an event of the staff’s choosing.

Process for PD request: A minimum of 6 weeks in advance, staff will submit the PD Authorization Form articulating cost of event registration, lodging and travel as well as the rationale behind attendance. If approved, staff will be expected upon return from the event to complete a brief reflection narrative and share learnings at an upcoming staff meeting.
Communication

Communication is the effective exchange of meaning or understanding in formal and informal communication. It applies to communication up, down and across the organization. Everyone in the organization is accountable for the effectiveness of his or her own communication. This especially applies to those who manage others.

THEI staff hold weekly internal team meetings. Staff are expected to respond to emails and voicemails in a timely fashion, and to set up out-of-office responses when unavailable for extended periods of time.

We are committed to the goal of open communication. Unless something is confidential, it can be communicated in a complete, unambiguous and timely manner. Unless told otherwise, managers are authorized to communicate. Being too busy is not an acceptable excuse for inadequate or ineffective communication. Care should be taken to decide what requires formal communication and by whom, and what can be communicated informally.

Obtaining feedback and listening effectively are critically important for good communication. Effective communication will only come if communicators at all organizational levels seek out feedback and take appropriate action to ensure the intended meaning is passed on to the relevant audience. We are always committed to acting on feedback, either with clarifying communication or relevant action. Written or electronic messages should be supplemented by face-to-face communication where feasible.

After Hours Availability

THEI maintains a boundary around respecting staff work hours, meaning work-related communications and productivity should be restricted to the regular 8-hour work day (for full-time staff) or designated work hours (for part-time staff). After hours communications and/or work are not expected or preferred, unless there is an emergency or urgent situation.

Communication While Travelling

When traveling for work, the expectation is that staff discuss with the full team how they prefer to receive communication (e.g. email, text, call, etc) during that time. If the Executive Director is out of the office, she/he/they will determine how meetings will progress in their absence, including changing venue or delegating leadership to another staff member.

Sharing Space in the Office

The culture of this organization encourages sharing. This means that every member of the staff is permitted to partake of items in the kitchen unless notified otherwise. If you own something in the kitchen, and it is not meant for everyone, it needs to have your name on it. Anything left over from a THEI event is available for any and everyone, with the exception of alcohol during the workday. Please refer to the document posted on the office refrigerator for a more detailed articulation of this policy.
Google Calendar Guidelines

THEI relies heavily on the use of Google Calendar to set appointments with one another and to keep everyone apprised of their daily schedule. Employees shall manage and share their own work calendar with the entire staff, keeping it updated daily. When collaborating or meeting with co-workers, be sure to add the event to your own calendar, then invite those whom you'd like to invite. Please be sure to accept invitations when you agree to the invitation, so that it appears on your own calendar. Helpful hints on Google Calendar can be found here: https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/google-calendar-tips

Diversity

THEI is committed to fostering, cultivating, and preserving a culture of diversity and inclusion. We embrace and encourage our employees’ differences in age, color, ethnicity, family or marital status, gender identity or expression, national origin, physical and mental ability, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, veteran status, formerly incarcerated status, and other characteristics that make our employees unique.

THEI’s diversity initiatives are applicable but not limited to our practices and policies on recruitment and selection, compensation and benefits, professional development and training, promotions, social and recreational programs, layoffs, terminations, and the ongoing development of a work environment built on the premise of gender and diversity equity that encourages and enforces:

- Respectful communication and cooperation between all employees
- Work/life balance through flexible work schedules to accommodate employees’ varying needs
- Employer and employee contributions to the communities we serve to promote a greater understanding and respect for diversity

All employees have a responsibility to treat others with dignity and respect at all times. All employees are expected to exhibit conduct that reflects inclusion during work, at work functions on or off the work site, and at all other organization-sponsored and participative events. Any employee found to have exhibited any inappropriate conduct or behavior against others may be subject to disciplinary action, including termination. Employees who believe they have been subjected to any kind of discrimination that conflicts with THEI’s diversity policy and initiatives should seek assistance from his/her/their supervisor or the Board Chair.
Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest can occur or appear to occur in a wide variety of situations. Generally speaking, a conflict of interest occurs when a director, officer or employee or such person’s immediate family’s personal interest interferes with, has the potential to interfere with, or appears to interfere with the interests or business of THEI. For example, a conflict of interest could arise that makes it difficult for a director, officer or employee to perform his, her or their corporate duties objectively and effectively where he/she is or they are involved in a competing interest. Another such conflict may occur where a director, officer or employee or a family member receives a gift, a unique advantage or an improper personal benefit as a result of the person’s position at THEI. Because a conflict of interest can occur in a variety of situations, the foregoing general principles should be kept in mind in evaluating both your conduct and that of others.

Outside Activities/Employment

Any outside activity, including employment, should not encroach on the time and attention employees devote to their duties, should not adversely affect the quality or quantity of their work, and should not make use of corporate equipment, facilities or supplies, or imply (without THEI’s approval), THEI’s sponsorship or support. In addition, under no circumstances are directors, officers or employees permitted to compete with THEI or take for themselves, or their family members, business opportunities that belong to THEI that are discovered or made available by virtue of their positions at THEI.

Relationships with, or Interests in, Competitors or Business Partners

Acceptance of gifts in the nature of a memento, e.g. a conference gift or other inconsequential gift, valued at less than one hundred dollars ($100) is permitted.

As a director, officer or employee, you may not have an interest in any business or property or an obligation to any person that could affect your judgment in fulfilling your responsibilities to THEI. Accordingly, you are expected to refrain from any activity or investment that constitutes, or might appear to constitute, a conflict of interest. You may not use your position at THEI to benefit yourself, your relatives, your friends or your private enterprises to the detriment of THEI.

Neither you nor any member of your family may solicit or accept from a business partner money or a gift that is, or could be reasonably construed to be, connected with THEI’s business relationship with that entity. Gifts include not only material goods, but also services, promotional premiums or discounts on personal purchases of goods or services. You cannot allow business associates to improperly influence your business decisions.

Civic/Political Activities

Directors, officers and employees are encouraged to participate in civic, charitable or political activities so long as such activities are to be conducted in a manner that does not involve THEI or its assets or facilities and does not create an appearance of THEI involvement or endorsement. Employees may not speak publicly on behalf of THEI without proper approval from the Executive Director or Board Chair.
**Loans to Employees**

THEI will not make loans or extend credit guarantees to, or for the personal benefit of, directors, officers or employees.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT FORM

The Employee Handbook describes important information about Tennessee Higher Education in Prison Initiative, and I understand that I should consult the Executive Director regarding any questions not answered in the handbook. I have entered into my employment relationship with Tennessee Higher Education in Prison Initiative voluntarily and acknowledge that there is no specified length of employment. Accordingly, either Tennessee Higher Education in Prison Initiative or I can terminate the relationship at-will, with or without cause, and with or without notice, at any time.

Since the information, policies, and benefits described here are necessarily subject to change, I acknowledge that revisions to the handbook may occur, except to Tennessee Higher Education in Prison Initiative’s policy of employment at-will. Any changes to the policy of at-will employment must be in writing and signed by both the employee and an Officer of the Board of Directors pursuant to approval by the Board of Directors in order to be effective. All other changes will be communicated, and I understand that revised information may supersede, modify, or eliminate existing policies in this handbook.

Furthermore, I acknowledge that nothing in this handbook is a contract of employment. I understand that it is my responsibility to read and comply with the policies contained in this handbook and any revisions made to it.

_____________________________________
EMPLOYEE’S NAME (Printed)

_____________________________________
EMPLOYEE’S SIGNATURE

_____________________________________
DATE