

Project Justification

One of the largest problems facing Dade County (pop. 16,285) is a high recidivism rate. In 2018, the Dade County Jail booked 1,464 male and female inmates—almost 9 percent of the current Dade County population. Most of these adults were booked on drug charges, and about 70 percent of them were repeat offenders. A large percentage of inmates lack basic digital literacy. They don't know how to use a computer, much less how to create a resume, or navigate the Internet in search for a job. Topics like basic household finances, budgeting, how to care for a car, how to maintain a home, how to open a bank account, how to pay bills online—this is knowledge many inmates lack, but need to function lawfully in society. Many do not have a high school diploma or equivalent—this severely limits the number of employment options available to them post-release.

The problem is this: most educational resources are made available at the State Prison level. Local jails must rely on local funding to provide rehabilitation and educational resources to their inmates, but most rural areas cannot afford to fund resources of this type. We believe this is too late into the lives of these inmates. These resources are needed at the local level, when incarceration periods are short and there is still a chance for these individuals to remake their lives, and prevent a lifetime of incarceration and separation from families. To date, representatives of the library and the Dade County jail have visited two prison facilities in Georgia to investigate best practices for implementing a program of this type. The knowledge we have gathered from these in-person interviews has informed our approach.

For the past ten years, the Dade County Public Library has partnered with the Dade County Jail by using Trustee labor for small projects—moving furniture, hanging decorations, etc. In the course of this relationship, the library has been a positive role model in the lives of many inmates. These inmates have discovered that the library is a place where they can learn about computers, technology, and more. More than one inmate has asked the library—can you teach us while we are in jail? And can you do it in a way that will help us change our lives once we've been released from jail?

The Dade County Public Library is uniquely positioned to assist the Dade County Jail as a branch of the Cherokee Regional Library System and the only library in Dade County, Georgia. However, the Dade County Public Library is considered a small rural library that operates at 34 hours a week with a budget of \$172,000 a year and a FTE staff of 2.75. To assist with this project, additional staff and resources are needed.

In preparation for this project, the library conversed with current jail inmates, asking those who were repeat offenders what resources they thought they needed to keep them out of jail for good. The answers heard time and time again were: technology education, GED certification, and help getting identification and

documentation. The library has worked directly with the Dade County Jail to develop three different tracks of coursework (See supportingdoc1).

Primarily, this grant will benefit the inmates who go through the Next Chapter program. Those who go through the program from start to finish will complete with basic computer/technology information, with a focus on one of three paths: Self Enhancement, Family, or Stability for Seniors. Some courses are shared within all three paths, but the foundation of each is to help these individuals become stable, self-sufficient citizens with the ability to navigate both the real and digital world. For those who opt-in, live GED classes will be held on a regular basis, using a portable projector cart. Other live lecture series will be offered using the same equipment.

The families of graduating inmates will also benefit from this program. Children thrive in stable homes with stable parents. The current caregivers of these children, whether they are grandparents, single parents or family members, will benefit by having their loved one home, and taking care of him/herself.

If the recidivism rate is lowered, the community will see an economic impact. The cost to house inmates is high. As the number of Dade County inmates decreases, the Dade County Jail can then make money by offering empty beds to surrounding counties who do not have enough space in their jails. Money that is being funneled into the jail system can then be funneled into other civic programs. Those inmates who successfully become stable, contributing members of society will also have the opportunity to strengthen the local economy with their taxes and their purchases.

We are creating a controlled digital environment where inmates can be guided through a series of courses that consist of lectures, and existing online tutorials to which the library already subscribes. Each course will end with a quiz, testing inmates on the information they have learned. Inmates will receive a certificate for each course they have completed. This resource will give digital access and an inclusive educational opportunity to an entire subgroup of the population that is currently not being reached. Inmates are completely cut-off from the outside world. This time away from their families can be used to increase their ability to live a stable, fruitful life, and enable them to become lifelong learners.

Project Work Plan

In partnership with the Dade County Sheriff's Office, the library proposes to create a primarily online enrichment program entitled "Next Chapter" that covers a variety of topics designed to promote digital literacy, economic self-sufficiency and stable living for inmates of the Dade County Jail. Most of these courses will be pre-recorded, and will live on a digital platform called Niche Academy.

Much of the groundwork for this program has already been laid. We have spoken to local judges: they were excited to have an educational resource to include in the

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sentencing of inmates and have indicated that they will use the resource. Hands-up Ministry is a program that helps inmates find housing and employment once their sentence is served, but their effectiveness is hindered by the time spent getting things like Social Security Cards, State issued identification, and Birth Certificates. They've asked us to assist the inmates enrolled in Next Chapter to retrieve these items, and in return they will help our graduates find housing and jobs. Vanguard and Gill Manufacturing have agreed to hire inmates who have graduated from our program. Four Points, Dade Family Connection, Sexual Assault Victims Advocacy Center, Dade County Extension Office, Vanguard, Dade County Commission, Sharp's Auto Sales have agreed to create digital content for the Next Chapter program. Georgia Northwestern Technical College has agreed to teach GED classes if we can provide the equipment for a live classroom. The Dade County Jail has already purchased one cart, but one more is needed so that both men and women can be taught at the same time.

The library will use Niche Academy as the online platform for this curriculum. This is a digital platform that is currently provided by Georgia Public Library Service to all member libraries at no cost. We have contacted the owners of Niche Academy, and they are thrilled to see the platform used in this way. They have offered to help create content for use on their site. Staff from Cherokee Regional Library System, Bank of Dade and Dade County Jail have already planned the curriculum for the pathways of Next Chapter. If we receive this grant, the following activities will need to be carried out by the following people:

Chelsea Kovalevskiy, Grant Administrator: The Grant Administrator will hire and train the Digital Content Manager, order technology hardware, collect and analyze usage statistics, and prepare the final grant report. They will act as the day-to-day supervisor for the Digital Content Manager and will also serve as the contact for the communities of practice and mentor organization. The Grant Administrator is responsible for checking in with all key project staff and ensuring that the project as a whole is moving smoothly. We estimate this will take 16 hours a month.

Digital Content Manager, currently unfilled: The Digital Content Manager is a temporary position that will be hired to edit and upload content (lectures, tutorials etc.) to Niche Academy, build quizzes for the content, and create other content as needed. They will also assist the local community in creating this content, in whatever manner necessary. We estimate that this will take between 9-12 months to complete at 40 hours/week. This position is crucial for the success of the project, and is currently unfunded.

Marshana Sharp, Education Coordinator: The Educational Coordinator will network with community content creators, and assist where needed in the creation of content. They will dictate the direction of new coursework creation. As the Digital Content Manager is a temporary position, the Education Coordinator will take over the day-to-day maintenance of the digital platform once the Digital Content

Manager's term is complete. We estimate this will take 2-4 hours a month during the first year of the project, and 1-2 hours a week during the second year of the project.

Captain Joseph Chambers, Program Administrator: The Program Administrator will identify inmates and invite them to the Next Chapter Program, follow inmate progress/assign courses as needed. As inmates graduate from the program, the Program Administrator will help transfer them to the Hands-up Ministry program by ensuring that they have a social security card, birth certificate and photo ID. We estimate this will take 5 hours a week.

Seth Houts, Technology Specialist: The Technology Specialist will be on loan from the Bank of Dade and will install and maintain the technology needed for this project. We estimate this will take 40 hours, primarily at the front end of the project.

The key to this being a successful project is in the hiring of a staff member dedicated to building this online learning environment. By utilizing tools that are already available to us, such as Niche Academy, much of the time spent will be in organizing the content in a meaningful way, rather than creating everything from scratch. We want community buy-in with this project, and have already asked several organizations to help create additional content. But—even if no one follows through—we feel that by having a full-time employee dedicated to nothing but the management of digital content, we are safe from stagnation.

Another issue is that, for security purposes, inmates are not allowed free-reign access to the Internet. We will utilize a firewall device to filter all traffic to any devices that are given to the inmates. This will allow us to create a white list of acceptable sites associated with the program and block everything else. Acceptable sites will be void of web links leading to the general web; only closed-content will be allowed. In this way, we will create a controlled web environment.

During the testing period, Captain Chambers will identify his most computer savvy inmates and pay them if they can break through to the Internet. In addition, inmates cannot have access to cords, wires, or power supplies, and must be under constant supervision when using a computer. The hardware list we've supplied will provide five wireless laptops, mice and headphones that inmates can use to access their Niche Academy coursework. A room in the jail has already been identified that has both enough space for five inmates to work, and sightlines for an officer to guard the inmates.

In regards to live instructional classes (GED & others), we must accommodate large groups of inmates of both genders at the same time (Male and female inmates are prohibited from being in proximity to each other.) Distance may also be an issue for instructors—so a live classroom setting is ideal. The Dade County Jail has already purchased one presentation cart—so only one more is needed to solve the problem of these distance learning live classes. All pieces of equipment (laptop, projector,

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speakers, battery) are locked within the presentation cart. This keeps the equipment and inmates secure.

Much of the success of this project relies on the partnership between the Dade County Sheriff's Department and the library. Without access to the inmates, this project cannot succeed. Our relationship with the Dade County Sheriff's Department is strong—it has been built over a decade. The Dade County Sheriff's Department helped come up with the Next Chapter project—they have buy-in. To date they have purchased over \$3,000 in live classroom equipment, provided five inmates as “test subjects” as we develop a framework for our course plan, and signed a letter of commitment to the project (see supportingdoc3).

The first 9-12 months of the grant project will be spent in creating the controlled digital learning environment. We will need to complete 2 units a week to have the program ready to launch by June of 2020. As units are completed, we will have a group of inmates test each unit, and provide feedback to the Digital Content Manager to evaluate effectiveness. If at any time the Grant Administrator feels that sufficient progress is not being made, additional staff resources will be directed towards the project from the Cherokee Regional Library. Once the Next Chapter Program launches, it will be the responsibility of the Next Chapter Program Administrator to ensure that inmates complete course curriculum regularly. Inmates serve 4-7 months on average at the Dade County Jail, which means we should be able to graduate and track usage rates on most inmates who enter the program from June-December 2020. Though the grant period will end after two years, it is the goal of those involved to continue the program indefinitely, so long as the program proves effective.

Project Outcomes

Our primary goal for this program is to increase access to an underserved population. Our secondary goal is to reduce the recidivism rate in Dade County.

Performance Outcome	Source	Measurable Goal
Reduce recidivism rate	Dade County Jail	50% of program participants stay out of jail
Complete Next Chapter Digital Coursework	Niche Academy	80% of participants graduate from program
Increase library card usage	PINES	Card used 4 times a year
Participants are confident they can apply what they learned in the Next Chapter Program	Participant Exit Survey	80% of participants agree or strongly agree
Participants are confident they can use the computer to find and apply for a job	Participant Exit Survey	80% of participants agree or strongly agree

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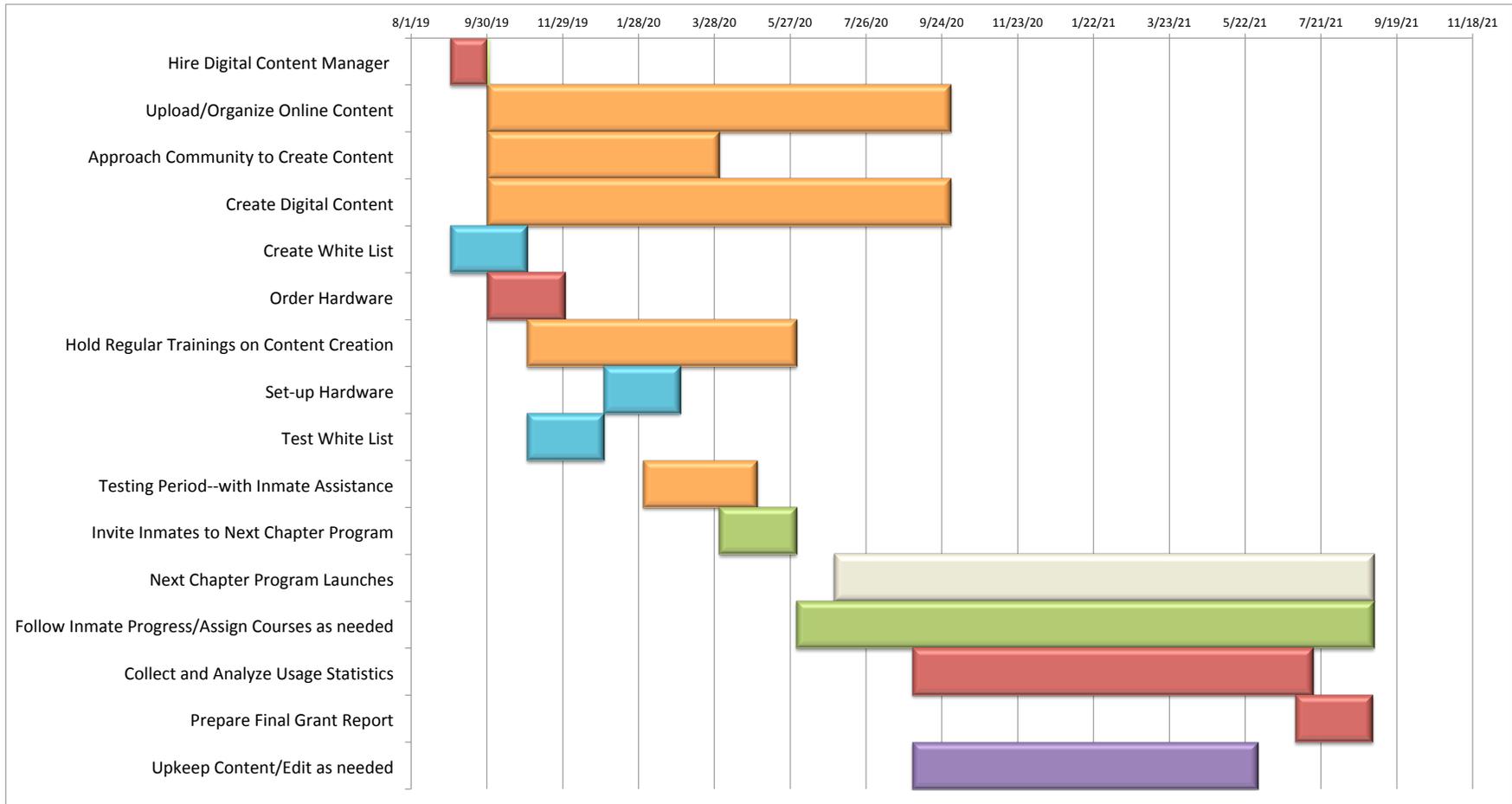
Participants intend to use the library physically or digitally after release	Participant Exit Survey	80% of participants agree or strongly agree
Participants understanding of basic computer skills has increased as a result of the Next Chapter Program	Participant Exit Survey	80% of participants agree or strongly agree
Participants have accessed the library's digital resources	Participant 6 month post-release survey	80% of participants surveyed have accessed digital library resources 3 times or more.
Participants are employed full-time	Participant 6 month post-release survey	80% of participants surveyed are employed 30 hours or more a week

Every inmate will be issued a library card at the beginning of the Next Chapter program as they will need it to access some of the digital resources. We will tag these accounts, and track whether they are used after the inmate has been released from jail. We believe that regular usage (4x a year) is a positive indication that the individual in question has begun a habit that will lead to a lifetime of learning. In addition, the Dade County Jail will track the recidivism rates of the individuals who go through the Next Chapter Program. The project will be deemed a success if more than 50 percent stay out of jail.

The Grant Administrator will run library card usage reports on Next Chapter graduates on a quarterly basis, beginning after the first Next Chapter graduate has been released from jail. The Next Chapter Program Administrator will keep a record of any Next Chapter Graduate who is rebooked into the Dade County Jail, and will share those totals with the Grant Administrator in July of 2021. Niche Academy, the digital content platform, has real-time statistics of course completion and can be accessed at any time by both the Grant Administrator and the Next Chapter Program Administrator. Inmates will be surveyed upon completion of the Next Chapter Program with an exit survey. Six months after their release, they will be e-mailed with another optional survey.

The beauty of using Niche Academy as our online digital platform is that all content that we create can be shared with every Niche Academy user—and all Georgia Public Libraries have access to Niche Academy through the Georgia Public Library Service. It is the goal of Dade County Public Library and the Dade County Jail to create a partnership that is duplicable across the state of Georgia—it would only require forging a partnership between local jails and local public libraries. If the Next Chapter Program is deemed successful—this program has the potential to benefit jails and communities across the state of Georgia.

Next Chapter Project Schedule



- Digital Content Manager
- Grant Administrator
- Technology Specialist
- Next Chapter Program Administrator
- Education Coordinator