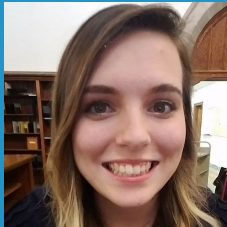


Presented by:
Adam Pitts
Gwinnett County Public
Libraries



Megan Phifer-Davis
St. Louis County Libraries



Libraries supporting small business skills for formerly incarcerated individuals

December 2, 2025

Who is in the room?

- Put a 1 in the chat if your library offers small business programs.
- Put a 2 in the chat if your library offers programs and services to justice-impacted individuals.



GWINNETT COUNTY
PUBLIC LIBRARY

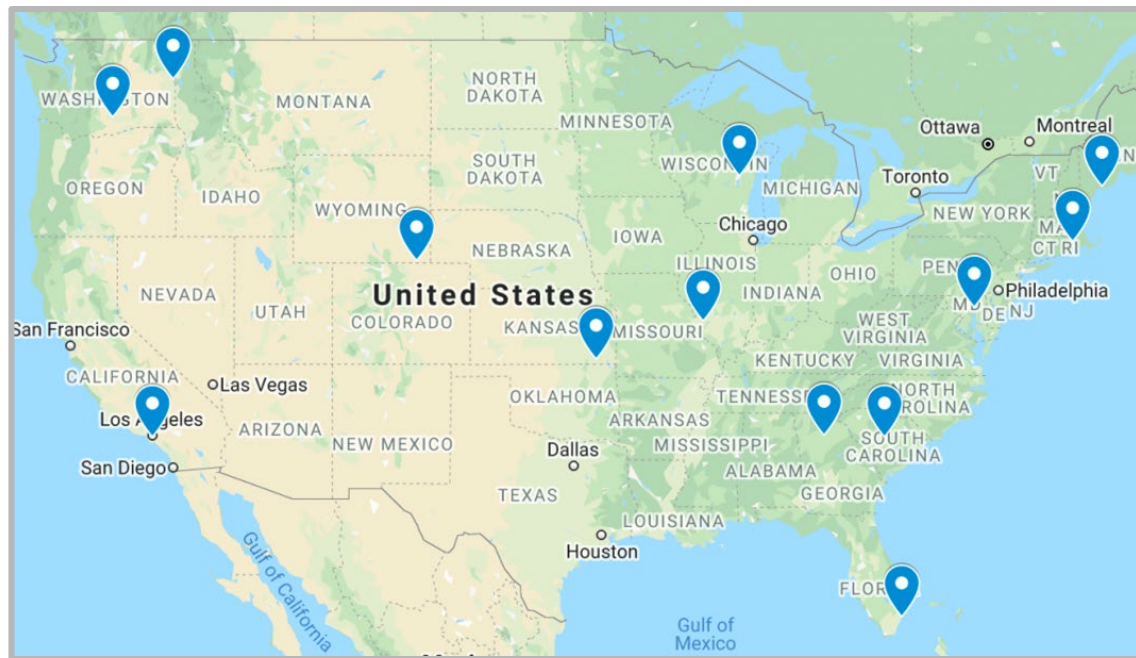
A New Start

Entrepreneurship Initiatives for the
Justice-Involved Community





- Funded by ALA in partnership with Google
- 13 libraries selected nationally
- Prioritizes low-income and underrepresented entrepreneurs





LIBRARIES BUILD BUSINESS **PLAYBOOK**

FEBRUARY 2022



**LIBRARIES
BUILD
BUSINESS**

ALA American Library Association



- Six-month course
- Designed exclusively for formerly incarcerated individuals
- Completely FREE



Stigma

Barriers

Recidivism



- **The Gwinnett County Jail has over 2,500 inmates.**
- As the second most populous county in the state, **Gwinnett has the highest population of citizens affected by the stigma of prison, jail, parole, or probation.**
- Those who are incarcerated in Gwinnett are **disproportionately minorities with an average education level of 10th grade.**



CORE Team



Adam Pitts

Branch Manager, Collins Hill



Terry Preston

Volunteer Program Manager



Ann Serrie

(Former) Volunteer Program Manager

Ron Gauthier

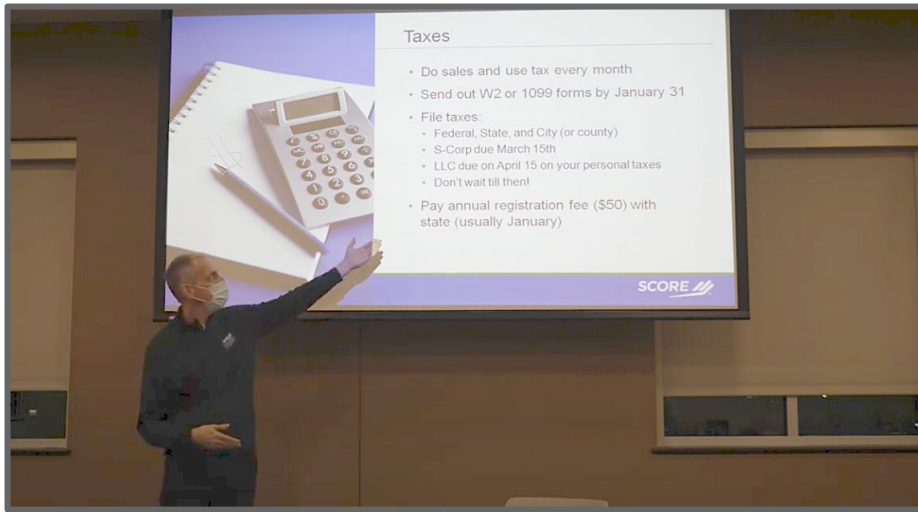
Youth Services Community
Partnerships Manager

Heather Smith

Administrative Support Librarian

Andrea Devereux

New Start Outreach Coordinator



Month 1: Mindset

Month 2: Creating a Business Plan

Month 3: Financial Basics

Month 4: Marketing & Branding

Month 5: Legal Considerations

Month 6: Finding Funding

**Monthly
Topics**

Curriculum

- Supplements the monthly presentations
- Consists of freely available online resources and library databases
- Includes an assessment component

Month 3

Topics: Pricing / Basic Financial Practices

Speaker: Peter Hildebrandt, SCORE

Online content:

- Brian Hamilton Starter U
 - [Money Management](#) (13 mins)
 - [Accounting and Finance](#) (26 mins)
- *LinkedIn Learning:* [Finance Essentials for Small Business](#) (51 mins)
 - Includes glossary of financial terms discussed in course.
- Score Startup Roadmap: [Ch. 9 - Pricing, Sales, and Distribution](#)

Support content:

- *IRS.gov:* [Recordkeeping](#)
- *QuickBooks* article: ["How to Choose a Pricing Strategy for Your Small Business"](#)

Assessment: Complete the quizzes for each of the Brian Hamilton modules listed above.

Month 4

Topics: Marketing Basics / Branding

Speaker: Stephanie Sokenis, SmallBiz Ally

Online content:

- *LinkedIn Learning:* [Small Business Marketing](#) (1 hour)
- [Entrepreneurial Mindset Academy](#)
 - Module 6: Building your Brand (1 hour)

Support content:

[SBDC: Guide to Starting and Operating a Small Business](#)

- Chapter 5: Marketing Your Business (pages 66 - 85)
 - Marketing Plan Guidelines
 - Sample Marketing Action Plan and Budget

Assessment: Brainstorm and sketch a rough draft of your business logo.

Month 5

Topic: Hiring / Business Licensing & Laws / Customer Service

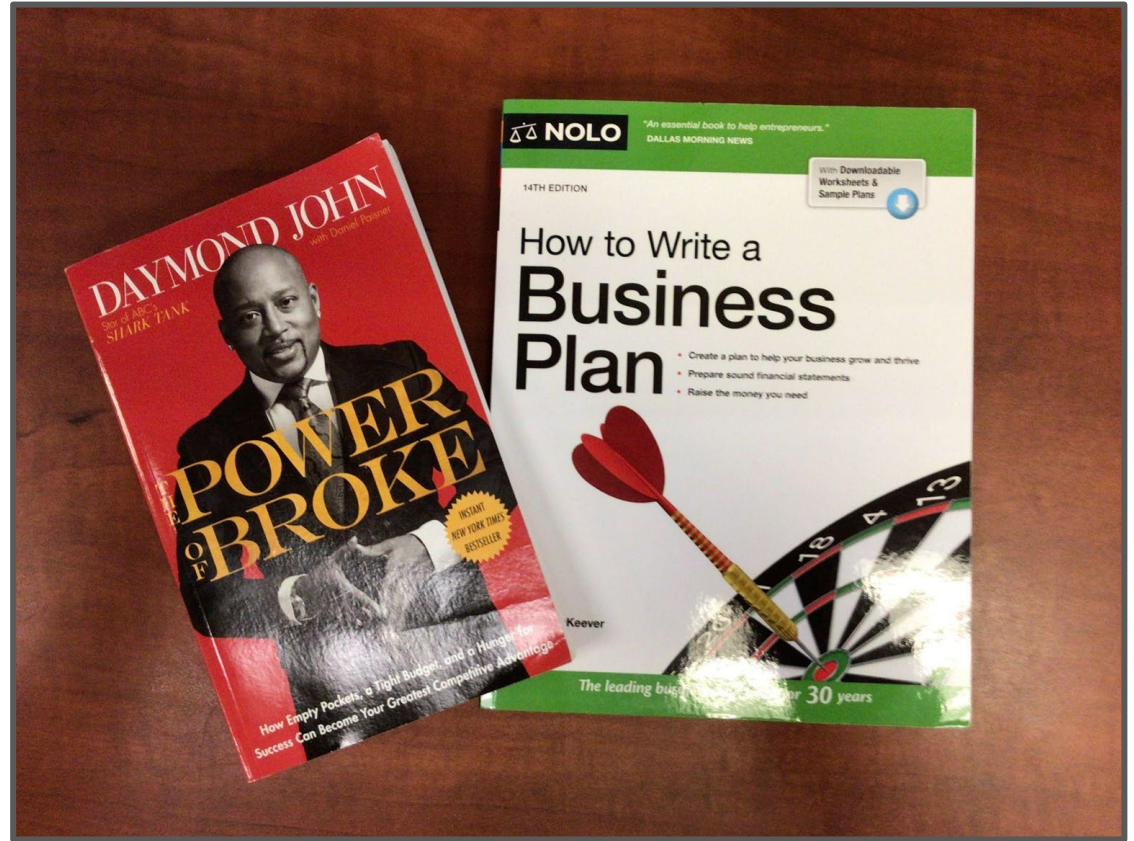
Entrepreneurship Kits



Books

Free at each class

Correspond to
monthly topics



Incentive Laptops

Refurbished laptop to
keep at the end of the
course

Must complete class in
good standing





Mentors



GWINNETT COUNTY
PUBLIC LIBRARY

Graduation





Launchpad





Panelist Name: _____

Presenter Name: _____

Criteria	1	2	3	4	Score
	Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Some Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations	
Introduction - Strong and engaging introduction; draws the listener/audience into presentation.					
Preparedness/Organization - Thoroughly prepared and well-organized. Logical sequence of information that the listener could easily follow.					
Knowledge - Clear, thorough description of product or service. - Communicates benefits and/or how product/services solves a problem.					
Persuasion - Compelling pitch that successfully convinces listener/audience that the product or service is beneficial and why it is the best on the market.					
Delivery - Effectively and creatively delivers pitch with eye contact and enthusiasm. - Speaks clearly and distinctly.					
Close - Ends on a strong, memorable note. - Accents the purpose of the pitch.					
Timing - Presentation lasts up to 5 minutes and was obviously rehearsed.					
TOTAL SCORE:					

Launchpad Rubric



Challenges and Improvements

Retention



Curriculum



Curriculum

Month 1

Topics: Mindset / Reasons to Start a Business / Barriers & Fears / Generating Ideas

Speaker: Brendan Spaar, Vice President, Greater Gwinnett Reentry Alliance

Online content:

- Brian Hamilton Starter U
 - [What is Required to be an Entrepreneur](#)
 - [Reasons to Start a Business](#)
 - [Obstacles & Roadblocks: Why Businesses Fail](#)
 - [How to Come Up with a Business Idea](#)
- Entrepreneurial Mindset Academy
 - [Introduction: Mindset Defined](#)
 - [Module 1: The Power to Choose](#)

Support content:

- *Dummies.com* article: "[How to Generate a Successful Business Idea](#)"
- *Entrepreneur.com* article: "[11 Fears Every Entrepreneur Must Overcome](#)"

Assessment: Complete the quizzes for each of the Brian Hamilton modules

Month 2

Topics: Parts of a Business / How to Draft a Business Plan

Speaker: Peter Hildebrandt, SCORE

Month 3


Topics: Pricing / Basic Financial Practices

Speaker: Peter Hildebrandt, SCORE

Monthly Evaluation

When did you last meet with your mentor? *

Date

mm/dd/yyyy 

What difficulties or challenges did you encounter while completing the online coursework? *

Your answer

Please evaluate the Month 1 guest presentation: *

	1	2	3	4	5	
The presentation was not useful or interesting to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	The presentation was extremely useful and interesting to me.

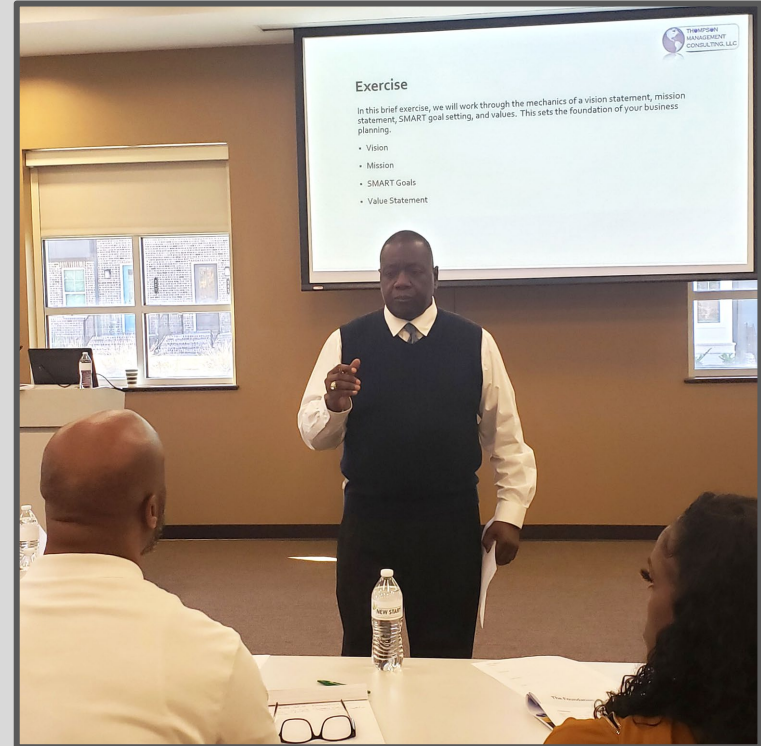
Please evaluate the Month 1 online coursework: *

	1	2	3	4	5	
The content was not useful or interesting to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	The content was extremely useful and interesting to me.

Workshops

Business Plan Workshop

Launchpad Prep



Impact story



Small Business Launchpad

Megan Phifer-Davis

Manager, Information Services, Justice
Services, Small Business Center



St. Louis County **Library**

How it Began

- PLA 2022 - Library Builds Business
- Met with Adam
- No funds at the start
- Reference by mail program
 - Lots of asks about jobs and business



Why do this?

- Top sentencing area
- St. Louis unemployment - 4.7%
- Population *wants* to start their own business
- Second chance employers - not many
- **Strong** business ecosystem in St. Louis
- We're the Small Business Center

Table 10.1. Top Sentencing Counties with Individuals on Parole Supervision on June 30, 2024

Rank	County	Count	Average * Sentence	Percent of Total
1	St. Louis City	751	15.2	5.8%
2	Greene	687	7.7	5.3%
3	St. Louis County	597	11.8	4.6%
4	Jackson	565	12.8	4.4%
5	St. Charles	483	7.6	3.7%
6	Jefferson	355	8.2	2.7%
7	Butler	349	6.6	2.7%
8	St. Francois	337	8.1	2.6%
9	Cape Girardeau	283	6.9	2.2%
10	Clay	280	7.3	2.2%
11	Boone	278	7.9	2.1%
12	Lafayette	263	8.8	2.0%
13	Scott	261	6.8	2.0%
14	Buchanan	239	7.7	1.8%
15	Pettis	228	6.2	1.8%
16	Jasper	220	7.7	1.7%
17	Washington	190	7.1	1.5%
18	Taney	174	6.6	1.4%
19	Warren	172	7.7	1.4%
20	Dunklin	168	7.5	1.3%

Program Outline

Schedule

July 9, 5:30 - 8:00 pm: Entrepreneurial Mindset and Soft Skills

July 16, 5:30 - 8:00 pm: Legal Considerations and Pitch Introduction

July 23, 5:30 - 8:00 pm: Value Proposition and Business Canvas

July 30, 5:30 - 8:00 pm: Credit and Funding

August 6, 5:30 - 8:00 pm: Outsourcing Business Functions

August 13, 5:30 - 8:00 pm: Google Business Profile and AI Tools

August 20, 5:30 - 8:00 pm: Elevator Speech, Headshots, Pitch Practice

August 27, **5:00 - 8:00 pm**: Pitch Competition

- Libguide created that has:
 - Dates/times of meetings
 - Speaker information
 - Handouts
 - Extra homework
- Expectations:
 - Miss no more than 2 classes
 - Accountability tasks weekly
 - Book a librarian appointments
 - Pitch is *not* required

Program Specifics

2023 Cohort

- 6 months, meet twice a month
- Chosen by lottery
- Monthly themes:
 - Guest speaker
 - Library resources
- No funding
- No final event

After 2023

- 8-weeks, consecutive
- Interview candidates
- Two funding sources:
 - STL Port Authority
 - Bob Clark Foundation
- Accountability ask
- Lived experience speakers
- Pitch night

2023 Cohort

- 11 participants out of 52 applications
- Dinner supplied every night
- 6 completed

Lessons Learned

- 6 months = TOO long
- Establish trust *early*
- Set clearer expectations



2024 Cohort

- Received two funding lines
 - STL Port Authority: 2 years of laptop purchases
 - Bob Clark: \$10,000 pitch funds
- Interviewed each person to make selection
- Outcome:
 - 13 participants out of 53 applicants
 - 8 completed, 7 pitched



2025 Cohort



- Same funding sources
- New presenters; including 2024 cohort
- 12 participants from 59 applicants
- 8 completed, 6 pitched



In the News

- Newspapers
 - Spectrum News
 - St. Louis American
 - St. Louis Business Journal
- St. Louis Public Radio
- News Stations
 - KMOV
 - KSDK
- Library Journal - Jerry Kline Award
- More Life: The Reentry Podcast



Key Challenges

- Marketing; getting enough applicants
- Getting presenters
- Getting moderators
- Data tracking
- Dealing with pitch night feelings

Questions



GwinnettLibrary.org
@gwinnettlibrary



Adam Pitts

Branch Manager
Collins Hill Branch



St. Louis County **Library**

Megan Phifer-Davis

Manager, Information Services, Justice
Services, Small Business Center