

# Reimagining the Public

## Library Services to People in Jails and Prisons

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# This Webinar Will

Describe how incarceration impacts the communities that have typically been considered underserved within library literature.

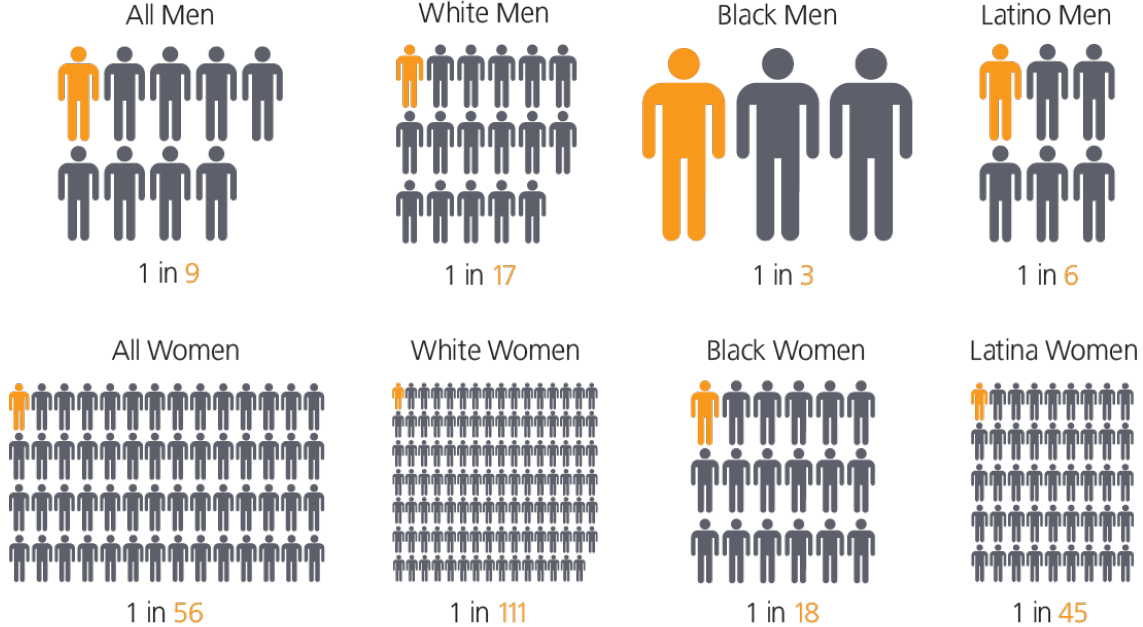
Identify barriers to information access that are created by jails and prisons and ways to address these barriers.

Justify library services to people in jails and prisons as part of public library services.

Provide examples for creating partnerships within LIS for furthering jail and prison information service.

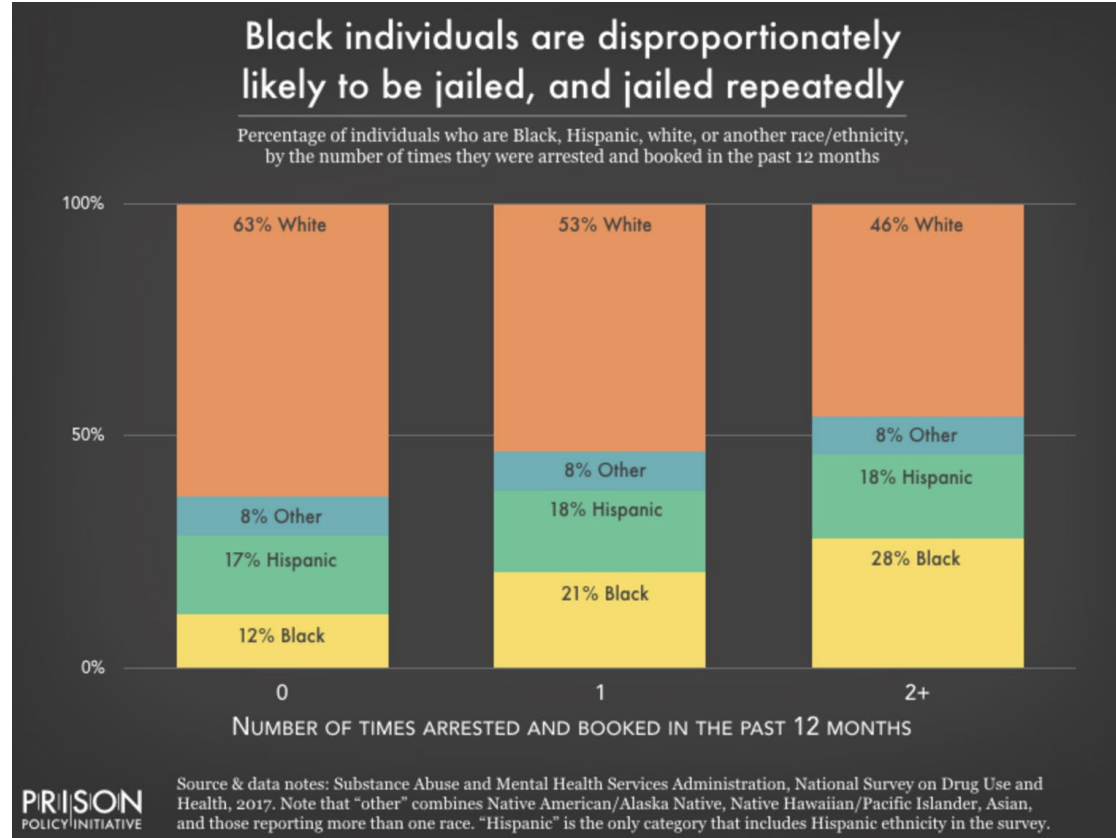
# Scope of Policing and Incarceration

## Lifetime Likelihood of Imprisonment of U.S. Residents Born in 2001



Source: Bonczar, T. (2003). *Prevalence of Imprisonment in the U.S. Population, 1974-2001*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

# Reimagining the Public: Local Jails, Large Impacts



# Reflection on Information Practice

How do you personally access information? Think through a day of access. How might this differ from the possibilities for accessing information that are available to people who are incarcerated?

Some people have been incarcerated for the last twenty years. While they may have seen depictions of technology on television or in other media, they may not have had direct interactions with the types of technology we use everyday. How would you describe a social media platform or online database to a person who has never seen one?

# Role of the Public Library

“public library as an emerging leader in leveraging ethical models of serving families impacted by the justice system, in direct opposition to the for-profit services that continue to proliferate across the country.”

- Higgins, [Get Inside: Responsible Jail and Prison Library Service](#), p. 52

# Service Models

## Direct

Request system for materials

In-person service and readers' advisory

- Circulating public collection
- Inside-only collections

## Indirect

Book Redistribution

Programming

- Inside
- At the library

Reentry Support

Reference by Mail

- System-wide
- Specialized

# Reference by Mail

Hello to you all.

This is my second time writing you all at the San Francisco Library. First off let me say thanks. Thanks for aiding and assisting people like me in prison who have no one on the outside to do it. Information is very valuable to someone who is physically restrained and can only travel by thought.

With that being said I have a few requests I would like to ask for.



# Changing LIS through Student Engagement

Snapshot of University of Rhode Island's Graduate School of Library and Information Studies:

ALA Accredited

Specializes in leadership, management, School Library Media, and general LIS education

Small, New England based public state school (average of 100 students a year)

Overwhelmingly white cisgender women- very similar to nationwide LIS enrollment in race, ethnicity and gender

Average age is in the mid-30s with a wide variety of students, from Post-Bacc to second career

# Course Planning: Reference by Mail

## LSC 504: Searching for Answers: Meeting Users Information Needs

### Learning Objectives:

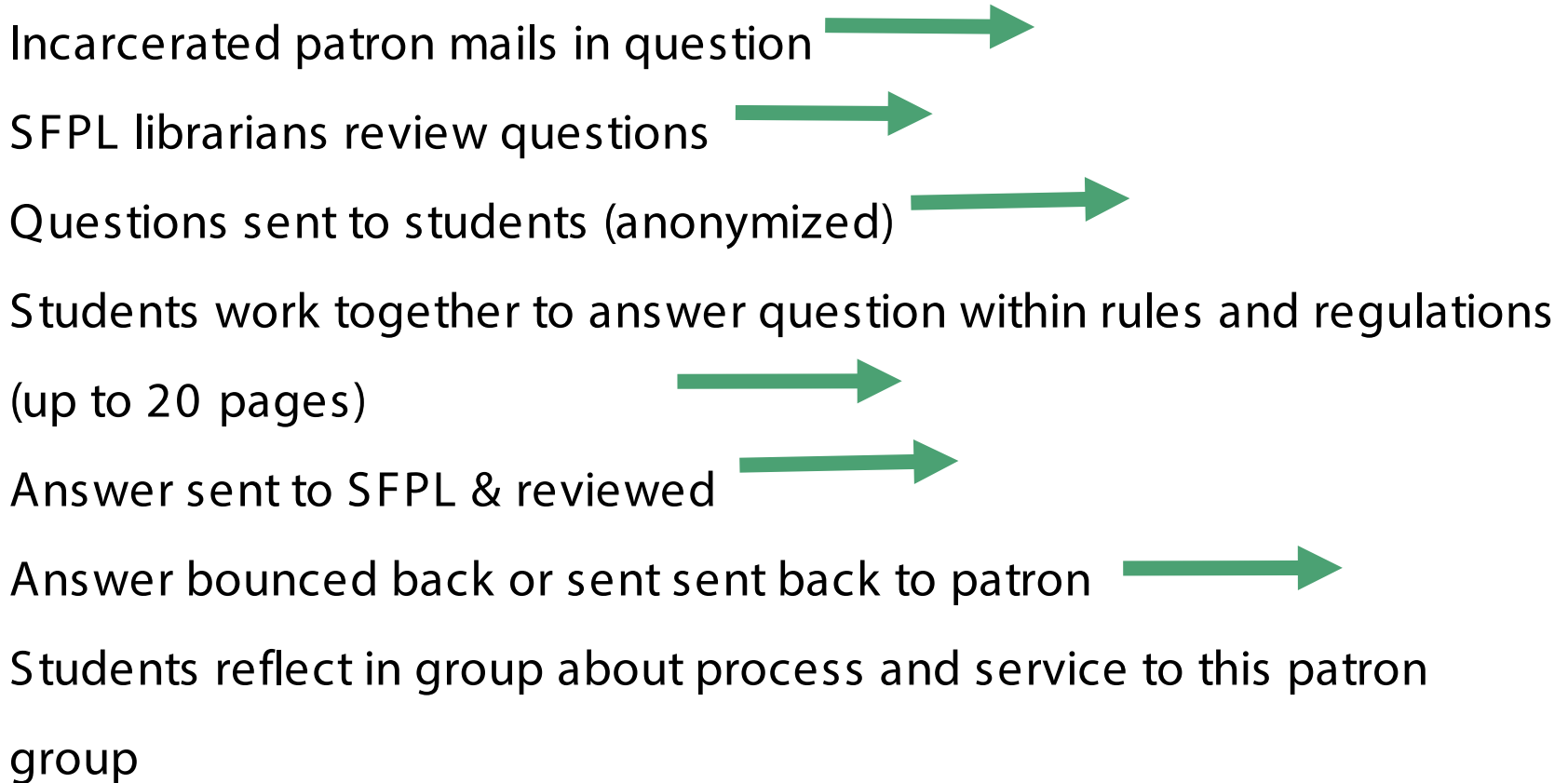
Consider equitable access to information.

Locate retrieve, evaluate, and synthesize information from diverse sources to meet users' information needs.

Explain and apply the concepts, principles, theories, philosophies, and techniques of reference and user services in providing diverse individuals and groups with access to relevant and accurate recorded knowledge and information.

Demonstrate critical thinking skills.

# Process: Patrons, Librarians, and LIS Students



# Rules and Regulations, Formatting



[date]

Dear [First name OR Mr/Ms/Mx Last name],

Thank you for writing to SFPL's Jail and Reentry Services. You requested information on [restate their request]. [Explain what you are sending them, and where you accessed that information. It's ok to state that their request was too broad to fully answer in 10 pages, and/or to explain that you're sending something that isn't exactly what was requested.]

Please don't hesitate to write with additional reference requests.

Sincerely,

San Francisco Public Library



San Francisco Public Library Jail & Reentry Services staff is happy and excited to answer your reference questions. In order to offer you the best service possible, we ask that you be aware of the following rules and regulations that we are required to follow:

- 1) Due to the volume of letters we receive, we cannot answer more than two letters per patron per month. If you send more than two letters in a month, your requests will not be answered. We have limited staff and volunteers, which may mean that you will experience a delay in receiving a reply. Please do not send the same request more than once. We appreciate your understanding.
- 2) We can only send you ten (10) pages of information at a time. As a result, we may not be able to send all of the information you request.
- 3) We do not get into contact with a third party for you nor can we send any mail or correspondence on your behalf. Any requests for this will go unanswered.
- 4) We are unable to offer legal advice of any kind. We will not respond to any direct request for legal information or advice. Please note that PARC may have a list of resources relevant to your legal needs. **You can request this legal information by mailing PARC - P.O. Box 70447 Oakland, CA 94612.**
- 5) We do not send any adult materials, including images or text. This includes the name of companies that produce adult materials.
- 6) We do not send information promoting violence or the use of weapons, including lists of weapons/ammunition or any information pertaining to acquiring weapons.
- 7) We are unable to send you individual books/magazines/newspapers/etc. **Please contact the Prisoners Literature Project - % Bound Together Books 1369 Haight St. San Francisco, CA 94117 - with book requests.** (Prisoners Literature Project may only be able to fulfill one request per year).
- 8) We do not act as a personal correspondent (pen pal) for any individual, nor can we contact a pen pal service on behalf of anyone.
- 9) We do not send individual's contact information. This includes phone numbers, addresses, or email addresses for any individual.
- 10) We do not send maps or directions.
- 11) If any part of your letter requests prohibited information, the entire letter will not be answered.

Please be advised that a team of volunteers answers letters. To protect your privacy, all identifying information, including your name and facility, is only seen by SFPL staff. SFPL shreds your letters after they are answered and does not keep your information after you receive a response.

While every effort is made to provide accurate information, SFPL specifically disclaims all expressed and implied warranties with respect to the information and materials provided to patrons. SFPL and representatives shall have no liability for any damages, including, without limitation, direct, indirect, consequential, compensatory, special, punitive or incidental damages arising out of or relating to the use of our services.

We look forward to your questions.  
Send your questions to: SFPL Jail & Reentry Services  
100 Larkin St.  
San Francisco CA 94102

# Example: good letter

vs.

# bad letter

- **Market strategy.** How will you generate sales, promote your product, and what media will you use to promote your product or services?
- **Management.** Can you manage the business and also serve your customers?
- **Financial.** Can you make money?

Recently published an excellent business plan guide; also consider reviewing startup information provided by the IRS. Help from experienced mentors is free through organizations such as SCORE, an organization of volunteer business mentors who provide specific advice and resources to newly created and growing businesses on a no-cost basis. There are many other organizations, such as your local chamber of commerce, that can also provide mentoring and guidance.

*Cost: \$0*

**2. Web Identity.** Nearly everyone is online today. Customers access and search the Internet for services and sellers through searches. Suppliers and banks look at your website for credibility and presence.

But your web identity is more than just a website. It starts with an email address with your business name (for example, youname@legalconsultants.com) and a domain name (www.legalconsultants.com).

A few years ago, creating a website was expensive and required outside technical consultants. Now it is quick and easy to do it yourself. Consider companies such as GoDaddy.com to choose a domain name, email address, web hosting, and website design. GoDaddy will even do your online billing.

*Cost: \$300 per year*

**3. Office Space.** Even if 52% of all small businesses are home-based, that does not mean you need to look like you work from your home. Customers looking at an office address can usually tell the difference between a professional address and a home address. Also, if you're meeting with clients, you'll project a more professional image if you meet in an office setting versus a home office. For this reason, consider signing up with a fractional executive office service.

A very economical service is Regus, with office locations worldwide; office space is readily available for startup entrepreneurs on a just-in-time basis. Regus offers several membership levels: Blue, Gold, Platinum, and Platinum Plus. For example, a Regus Blue membership card is free, while a Regus Gold membership card costs \$59 per month (with the first month free). With a Gold card you get shared space, Internet connection, and telephone access at Regus locations worldwide, 8 hours a day, 5 days a week.

If you're a frequent flyer, don't forget to check out your airline as many airlines provide Regus cards free to their elite members.

An added bonus of using executive office space is that you will be working beside other entrepreneurs. Hanging out at Starbucks between meetings will be a thing of the past.

*Cost: Free (Regus Blue card); \$0 from an airline, or \$649 per year (Regus Gold card).*

**4. Business Cards:** Believe me, you will need them. A paper carryover from the past, they are still widely used and critical to a new business. There are many online business card services, but companies such Office Depot and Staples offer quality cards for as low as \$10.

*Cost: \$20 for 300 cards*

**5. Social Media:** Depending on your type of business, you will want a social media presence. , with more than 380 million members, is regarded as the business site for connecting with other businesspeople and offers excellent posting features for articles and blogs. is more of a social friends site than a business-focused site, but it's also an excellent tool



## If you're Mr. or Ms. Fix-It:

Does your ideal career involve getting your hands dirty—or, at the very least, working with your hands, as opposed to sitting in an office?

There are, of course, a million possibilities here; however, I've researched a few to get you started.

### 1. Start a plumbing, electric, or “handyman” type business

If you're a fan of tinkering and solving a problem, starting a plumbing, electrician, or general handy-person-type business might be a good fit for you.

While it's not as simple as, hey, go start plumbing, if you're looking for a hands-on career, you might want to consider seeking out a vocational degree in one of these fields and building a business around it. I've also linked our free sample plans below, including one specific to starting a plumbing business.

#### For more information:

- Your local community college is a great place to start when it comes to vocational training, as well as by searching local trade schools in your area
- For further reading, check out this article: [How a Self-Employed Handyman Earns \\$3,000 a Week](#)
- If you're ready to get started, check out our [construction and engineering sample business plans](#) or our [plumbing sample business plan](#)
- Look into your state's requirements for certification for [plumbers](#), [electricians](#), and [handy-persons or general contractors](#).

### 2. Start a construction business

Similarly, a construction business could be a great fit for someone who enjoys hands-on work.

If you've been doing this sort of work for someone else, it can be gratifying to start your own business and be the one calling the shots. If you're still more of an amateur, you'll probably need to complete either an apprenticeship or a trade program to get started; however, if you already have some of the skills or have worked construction in the past (or simply have interest in seeking the education), this might be a great fit.

# Pedagogical Background and Context

## Racial Capitalism

- The dehumanizing results of incarceration
- Inseparable with racial violence
- Social separateness

## Critical Theory approaches

- Schlesselman-Tarango - Become conscious of the savior complex-  
Move into co-conspirator model (Alicia Garza)
- Austin, Drabinski and Rabina:

Themes in letters : "Reference Services to Incarcerated People, Part I". : "...The information needs expressed in these reference requests..." fell into "...three broad categories: Re-entry, Self-help, and Reference" (Drabinski and Rabina, P. 45).

Restorative Justice: "Restorative justice provides a medium for addressing histories of power and oppression that have been reinstated by traditional library practices by engaging in a humanizing process..." (Austin P. 1).

# Long Term Results: Assess and Revise

Shared goals

Group work

Administrator reflections

“We get these letters at the public library.”

Unclear what system is in place to answer letters that come into the public library

Will those letters make it through random check

No critical pedagogy engaged



# Strengths and Weaknesses

## Strengths

- Experiential Learning about both reference and incarceration
- One on one work with a SFPL Librarian
- Real reference encounters (as opposed to practice)
- Raising awareness of services to people who are incarcerated (giving people context)
- Students: Skills transfer through e-reference (chat, social media)

## Weaknesses

- Limited number of letters (address through group work)
- Potential stereotype affirmation from previous assumptions
- No amount of preparation, planning or organizing can maneuver around racial capitalism (no soft skills, no relationships)
- The imagined patron

# Activity: Search a Reference by Mail Question

What are publishers that take free submissions of prisoners' writings through the mail? Does *Kludge* take submissions by mail?

May I please have images and information about the Korean drama Devilish Joy along with a one-page image of the promotional poster if it is available?

I'm getting out in six months and looking for housing for people with a sex offender conviction in the areas surrounding Tucson, AZ.

Please send me SOB x RBE "Anti" lyrics.

I am starting a cruelty-free cosmetics wholesale company when I am released. Please send me any and all information on what is required to start this company.

# Start Your Own Reference by Mail

## Institutional Needs

Point person/group who receive and distribute letters

Group of respondents - students, librarians, interns, volunteers

5-10 hours a week for review or answering letters

A way to promote your service - in jails, during jail family visits, at probation or courts

Scanner and post-its

## Resources

Books 2 Prisoners groups

Prison Activist Resource Center - <https://www.prisonactivist.org/resources>

PEN America - Prison Writing Program - <https://pen.org/prison-writing/>

SFPL creating form response templates

SFPL Rules & Regulations

# Conclusions

We need to reimagine our public.

Our patrons are increasingly affected by policing and incarceration.

Our philosophies of service influence what we provide.

Q & A

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