

## **PROPOSAL NARRATIVE**

In 50 words or less, synthesize the key elements of your proposal in a summary statement.

Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop supports 1,600 incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals annually in Washington, DC, through literacy, mentorship, and reentry support. Our programs foster educational opportunities, job placement, community connections and personal growth, focusing on populations impacted by systemic racism to promote lifelong learning and successful reentry.

**Briefly describe your organization's history, mission and vision. Include specifically who your program serves.**

Television journalists Kelli Taylor and Tara Libert founded Free Minds in 2002 to fulfill the wish of Glen McGinnis, a young man sentenced to death row as a teenager. Glen dreamed of a book club and writing program for teenagers in the adult criminal legal system. The name Free Minds reflects the belief that while one's body may be incarcerated, exposure to new ideas and a caring support system can liberate the mind.

Free Minds has grown from a single book club to four book clubs at the DC Jail, a program at DC's juvenile detention facility, a long-distance book club serving members in federal prisons nationwide, and an intensive reentry program helping individuals achieve their education and employment goals.

Our one-of-a-kind pre- and post-release program serves 1,600 incarcerated and formerly incarcerated Washington, DC residents who have experienced systemic racism, over-policing, and disinvestment. Our mission is to build community to foster personal development through education, the literary arts, and workforce development.

97% of members home from prison are employed, in school, or in vocational training programs. We envision a DC where Black and Latinx communities have abundant resources for healing and growth and where mass incarceration no longer exists.

**Please describe how your organization would use a \$100,000 grant from [REDACTED]. Please include the unmet need you plan to address, including any historical information about the problem and the population that will be served.**

### **The Unmet Need**

Thousands of Black and Latinx DC residents who have been failed by systems of education, health, and child welfare find themselves trapped in the carceral system, abandoned without a safety net. For those returning to their communities after decades of incarceration, there is a severe lack of wraparound support programs to address the trauma, systemic barriers, and gaps in skills and experience they face. The passage of DC's Second Look Amendment Act in 2021 has further highlighted this gap. This groundbreaking law allows individuals who received long-term sentences as youth to seek resentencing, leading to a surge in demand for our proven services.

The majority of Free Minds members, 99% of whom are Black and/or Latine, were charged and

incarcerated as adults when they were under the age of 25. Free Minds members have endured over-policed DC neighborhoods with historical disinvestment, inequitable health and education systems, a shortage of affordable and quality housing, and food insecurity. As a result of these disinvestments, 100% of Free Minds members experienced childhood trauma and violence prior to their incarceration. Formerly incarcerated people return to the community facing 40,000 collateral consequences affecting someone given a felony charge, severely restricting access to employment, housing, education, and financial opportunities.

Since 2022, Free Minds has onboarded over 400 new members, with an additional 200 expected this year. Despite this rapid growth, we currently have a waiting list of individuals seeking our support. A \$100,000 grant would help us expand our intensive reentry programming to meet this urgent need, ensuring every member receives the resources to successfully transition, pursue their educational and career goals and rebuild their lives.

The majority of our members coming home are in their 30's and 40's and have been incarcerated since they were under the age of 25, effectively 'growing up' in prison. On their return, they continue to contend with the immense trauma of their incarceration. The prison system denied them quality formal education and the skill-building opportunities necessary to transition successfully into a modern work environment. Many have no experience using smartphones, computers and other digital technologies which are essential for participation in today's society. They are blocked out of living wage, career advancing employment, education, and housing opportunities due to their felony convictions. Many have little to no social or financial support—and yet the expectation society places on them is that they immediately reestablish their identities and lives as independent and self-sufficient adults. The reality is that our members require intensive and specialized support structures to successfully transition back to their home communities in DC, which have changed drastically during their incarceration.

Free Minds is a vital support system for our incarcerated and formerly incarcerated members, providing the necessary resources and services to help them learn, grow, and thrive. Through our comprehensive, intensive reentry services, we equip formerly incarcerated individuals with the tools needed to achieve their career and education goals.

### **How Free Minds will meet the need with an [REDACTED] Grant**

With support from [REDACTED], Free Minds will reach more people through our in-demand pre- and post-release programming as one of the only pre- and post-release service providers in the DC area for youth and adults incarcerated in the adult criminal legal system building long-term, consistent relationships with our members throughout their incarceration in local and federal facilities, and into reentry. Free Minds operates three core programs: 1) the Jail Book Club held at the DC Jail and juvenile detention center includes book clubs for all genders in English and Spanish; 2) the Prison Book Club serves members incarcerated in 110 federal prisons across the country; 3) the Reentry Book Club serves members released from jail or prison and includes personalized case management, peer support, a weekly book club and writing workshop, job readiness and personal skill building workshops, one-on-one job coaching and placement, therapy that utilizes healing-centered engagement (a holistic approach rooted in culture and civic action that highlights how trauma and healing are experienced collectively), and leadership, advocacy and professional development training.

### **Jail Book Clubs**

The **Jail Book Clubs** are held at the DC Jail and juvenile detention center and consist of a youth book club, an emerging adults (18-24 years) book club, men's and women's book clubs, and a book club for Spanish speakers. During our Jail Book Clubs, we engage in bibliotherapy (a proven technique to heal from trauma allowing for stronger educational attainment), reading and discussing literature that is representative and relevant to our members' lives, and guest authors visit to share stories and inspire members. We also provide books to members of their own choosing in addition to the book club titles. These meetings are a safe space for processing traumatic life experiences, where members engage in therapeutic writing exercises that both develop their literary abilities and inspire them to imagine new possibilities through literature.

### **Prison Book Club**

The **Prison Book Club** is a correspondence-based program serving members incarcerated in 110 federal prisons across the country. As DC does not have a long-term facility, most Free Minds members spend the larger part of their sentences in federal prisons across the country. During their incarceration, members receive writing exercises, the Free Minds "Connect" literary magazine (written by members and community volunteers), personalized letters, feedback on their poetry, and reentry preparation resources. These activities develop self-efficacy, counter isolation, develop critical thinking and literary skills, heal trauma, and help members feel a sense of community acceptance, a critical factor in reentry success.

Members receive books individually selected and tailored towards their interests. Members vote on the "Books Across the Miles" (BAM) book, which is sent to every member along with discussion questions. Their responses are featured in our bi-monthly Free Minds Connect, our magazine which features poetry, essays, and artwork from Free Minds members, staff, and friends.

Our monthly Write Nights, events through which incarcerated members receive feedback and encouragement on their poetry, are critical to the success of our Prison Book Club. Each month members at home join other Free Minds supporters and community members via Zoom to share personal stories before each participant reads and responds to poetry on a digital platform by our incarcerated writers. All responses are collected, printed out, and mailed to the poets following the event. Several Free Minds members have shared that they would not have made it through the most difficult times in prison were it not for our correspondence and resources, particularly the words of support and encouragement that our community back home provides on their writing.

*"I was in the 9th grade when I was arrested and went to jail. That's where I learned to read, in the Book Club. When I learned to read, it was like, 'I can do this!' I realized I actually wanted to learn. It was like the whole world opened up to me when I started reading."* ~ Free Minds Member Decario

### **Reentry Book Club**

Building upon a sustained connection made in the Jail and Prison Book Club programs, Free Minds connects its recently released members to resources and programs in the community that will help them achieve their educational and career goals, while also receiving social emotional support. In addition to our weekly Reentry Book Club sessions, Free Minds provides intensive, personalized support for our formerly incarcerated members including job readiness and personal skill building workshops, one-on-one job coaching and placement, therapy that utilizes

healing-centered engagement, peer support partners, and leadership, advocacy and professional development training.

We provide a variety of high-quality reentry programming designed and facilitated by members:

- Over 140 members regularly gather together to read and discuss books, exchange advice, and offer emotional support to heal from the trauma of incarceration at our weekly reentry book club called **“The Build Up.”**
- Members stay connected through personalized reentry coaching, where they work with staff to receive referrals to vetted service providers, receive digital support, assistance with job applications, and connections to job opportunities, vocational programs, and educational opportunities.
- Participants of our week-long **Job Readiness and Personal Skill Building Apprenticeship** practice essential job skills including public speaking, computer literacy, professional writing, and building social capital.
- **The Peer Support Training Program** equips members home after incarceration with the knowledge and social emotional skills to provide support to fellow members as they navigate the stressors and challenges of reentering society. Program graduates known as “Peer Supporters,” are paired with members newly home, and conduct weekly social wellness check-ins with their partners.
- Our **Leadership and Learning Program** expands the leadership and advocacy of our members through educational offerings, leadership and professional development, community building opportunities, and paid work experience. Through this program, members receive training in areas of interest such as group facilitation, transformative justice, digital literacy, public speaking, and organizing and movement building. Alongside training and educational opportunities, members also participate in experiential learning through supportive employment with Free Minds and organizational partners. In 2024, our members took on full leadership responsibility for the Thrive Under 25 Coalition, working to prevent youth from entering the criminal legal system.
- **On the Same Page** peacebuilding and racial equity education and public engagement program, led by members of the Reentry Book Club called Poet Ambassadors, is a bridge connecting incarcerated and formerly incarcerated poets with the greater DC community. Each month members home in the community join other Free Minds supporters and community members to share personal stories before each participant reads and responds to poetry by our incarcerated writers.

### **What is the envisioned outcome of those activities?**

Free Minds will support incarcerated and formerly incarcerated youth and adults to achieve personal and educational growth while reducing recidivism. Through literacy and reentry support, we will help members secure employment or education, develop reading and writing skills, and successfully transition back into their communities. Our programs foster transformation and measurable outcomes in building brighter futures for our members.

1) Outcome: Members home from prison find employment, education, or job training services.

Indicator: We track employment, school placement, and vocational program placement for Reentry Book Club members. 85% will gain employment or enroll in an educational or vocational program.

2) Outcome: Non-readers become readers.

Indicator: We track participation in weekly reading assignments at the DC Jail and juvenile detention center. We also measure engagement in reading in the correspondence-based Prison Book Club. 65% will complete reading assignments.

3) Outcome: Non-writers become writers.

Indicator: We track participation in weekly writing assignments at the DC Jail and juvenile detention center. We also track engagement in creative writing in the correspondence-based Prison Book Club. 75% will complete writing assignments.

4) Outcome: Members home from prison do not re-offend.

Indicator: We measure the rate of recidivism, including probation violations and new convictions. We will maintain a recidivism rate below 15%.

5) Outcome: Develop formerly incarcerated leaders by providing opportunities for members to contribute to a changed DC.

Indicator: 100 Members will participate as Book Club facilitators, Peer Supporters, Poet Ambassadors, and Changemakers (advocates), giving testimony, serving on coalitions and participating in leadership training and professional development opportunities.

**How will you measure the impact of your work and/or evaluate success? Please include relevant tools.**

Free Minds measures success based on the impact we have on our members' lives. We track members' participation and progress by utilizing customized data points in our outcomes and case management tool Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) to track impact within each program. In our Jail Book Club, we track members' reading, writing, and participation. In the Prison Book Club, we track member engagement through the level of openness and trust displayed in their correspondence, and whether or not they request specific book titles. In the Reentry Workforce Development Program and Reentry Book Club, we use weekly checklists to track attendance, surveys and participation in sessions (to measure engagement, prosocial behavior and self-efficacy) and track our active members' employment and enrollment in schools or vocational programs, participation in community outreach events, and monitor recidivism rates.

We actively solicit feedback from members on how we can strengthen our services to best meet their needs. Our program grows and evolves based on their continuous feedback. For example, our Leadership and Learning Program was designed in response to members' requests for experiential learning leading to career success, paid work experience, educational offerings, and leadership and professional development. Our high levels of participation and success can be attributed to meeting each individual at their point of need, while recognizing each individual's interests, passions and talents.

**Why should your organization receive this grant? Summarize your organization's**

**competencies and successes. Describe the experience and knowledge your organization brings to ensure successful execution of your proposed expenditure of impact funds. Include information about the staff who will execute this program and their relevant expertise.**

Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop is uniquely qualified to receive this grant due to its more than 20 years of experience transforming the lives of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals through literacy and reentry support. Under the leadership of Co-Founders Tara Libert and Kelli Taylor, our team has built a nationally recognized program that fosters personal development and reduces recidivism. Tara, as Executive Director, and Kelli, who now runs the Jail Book Club, maintain decades-long relationships with members, building trust and creating a foundation for impactful programming.

What sets Free Minds apart is our integration of bibliotherapy—a proven technique to heal from trauma allowing for stronger educational attainment—into all pre- and post-release programming. This innovative approach fosters self-expression and builds community, trust, and self-efficacy, preparing members for successful reentry. By providing a safe space for vulnerability and growth during incarceration through the use of literature and creative writing, members return home to a supportive and stable community. This continuum of care is especially critical for those who entered the system as youth. They become powerful agents of change utilizing the skills they have learned through a wide variety of diverse books, community connections through their writing and the essential peer support system Free Minds provides.

Our model has proven highly successful: 97% of members home from prison are employed, in school, or in vocational training programs, and 92% of members did not return to jail or prison in 2024, compared to only 38% for people released from the DC Department of Corrections. These outcomes reflect our long-standing relationships with members and the continuity between our jail, prison and reentry programming. Our innovative approach also builds social capital, which is vital for economic advancement.

Free Minds members have achieved significant milestones in 2024. Among Jail Book Club members, 69% completed weekly reading assignments, and 79% completed weekly writing assignments. Prison Book Club members wrote 1,108 letters, 69% of which demonstrated openness and trust—key for reentry success. Additionally, 192 members proactively requested books, while others trusted staff to select titles tailored to their interests. In our reentry program, 78 members completed our Job Readiness and Personal Skill Building Apprenticeship, and 33 graduated from our 12-week Peer Support Training Program, further developing leadership and workplace skills.

Our staff combines extensive expertise with lived experience, including team members directly impacted by the criminal legal system. Their diverse skill sets include advanced degrees in literature and writing, nonprofit and corporate leadership, and specialized training in trauma-informed care, ensuring high-quality, impactful programming.

Free Minds' success has been widely recognized. We were spotlighted by the NFL Foundation Inspire Change Initiative in 2022 and featured on the NFL Network in 2023. Our accolades include the 2021 Global Fund for Children's Juliette Gimon Courage Award and the 2017 National Criminal Justice Association Outstanding Criminal Justice Program Award. These

honors, along with citations as a best practice by the DC Corrections Information Council, underscore our effectiveness and dedication to creating opportunities for our members to lead successful, fulfilling lives.

**How well does your board of directors and/or your staff reflect the diversity of the community that this proposal would serve? What, if any, recruitment steps have you taken to increase diversity at the organization (board level and within organization leadership and staff).**

Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop is deeply committed to ensuring our board, staff, and leadership reflect the diversity of the communities we serve. Our organization employs 15 full-time staff, of which 3 are directly impacted Free Minds members who hold full-time positions, while an additional 162 Reentry Book Club members are employed as Poet Ambassadors and Changemakers, facilitating community outreach and advocacy.

Our team also includes the Free Minds Congressman John Lewis Fellow, a unique 7-month leadership role designed to empower a Reentry Book Club member to lead peacebuilding initiatives and systems change work with DC youth and the broader community. This position exemplifies our commitment to creating pathways for directly impacted individuals to take on leadership roles.

Our board of directors, led by our directly impacted Board Chair, is composed of thoughtful community leaders and experts in criminal justice reform, with 63% identifying as BIPOC and many working directly in the field of criminal legal system reform. To promote ongoing diversity, equity, and inclusion, Free Minds prioritizes recruiting individuals with lived experience, diverse perspectives, and expertise in areas that align with our mission.

This commitment to diversity extends to our broader community engagement. 2,593 volunteers from across the country contribute to Free Minds' mission through activities like writing letters to incarcerated members, transcribing poetry, and providing constructive feedback during our On the Same Page events. This collective effort ensures our programs are community-centered and grounded in the experiences of those we serve.

**How are the voices of the people you serve incorporated into your organization's decision-making processes?**

Free Minds members serve as leaders within the organization, actively engaging in all aspects of our work and continuously providing input and assessment. They help develop and design programming, ensuring it meets their needs. Their ongoing feedback guides our planning, execution, and adjustments, allowing us to strengthen and evolve our programs.

In February of 2024, Chris Turner was elected to Board Chair. Chris is the first formerly incarcerated Free Minds member to serve in this position. Chris was wrongfully convicted as a youth and spent over 25 years behind bars. He has since dedicated his life to bringing awareness and change to the carceral system, regularly speaking as a Poet Ambassador with law enforcement, youth in the community, and prosecutors, and serving as a transformative role model for all Free Minds members.

We currently employ 3 formerly incarcerated members as full-time staff, and work with additional 9 members on a part-time and contract basis. Members choose books for book club sessions, develop ideas and contribute writing for our "Connect" magazine, represent Free Minds as "Poet Ambassadors" while facilitating community conversations on system change, and serve as Peer Supporters offering social emotional support to fellow members. Through our Leadership and Learning Program, 168 members receive supportive employment and work part-time within the Free Minds organization as book club facilitators, peer supporters, program specialists, community outreach ambassadors, restorative justice facilitators, and "Changemakers" advocates.

We solicit feedback on our programming with interviews and surveys, and consistently request responses from our members on how we can better meet their needs. Incarcerated members suggest and vote on book selections and contribute writings, articles, and ideas for future topics for our Connect magazine. Reentry members also serve on the Connect editorial team.

**Are there other community-based organizations with whom you work who are critical to your success? Briefly identify and describe up to three such collaborations.**

Free Minds collaborates with a wide range of community-based organizations to meet our members' diverse needs. Through these partnerships, we connect members with educational and employment opportunities while also providing pathways for them to serve as mentors. By giving back to the community, members not only make a positive impact but also develop valuable personal and professional skills.

Free Minds Members serve as reading mentors at our book club for middle school students ages 10-14 at [REDACTED], a nonprofit that uses artistic expression to develop character and leadership in African American boys and young men. In 2024, three Free Minds members began serving as [REDACTED] Fellows with the organization. As Fellows, members underwent youth development training and served as youth mentors to African American boys, receiving hands-on experience in best practices in the field of youth development.

We partner with the [REDACTED], which is an integral component of our Job Readiness and Personal Skill Building Apprenticeship workforce development program for reentry members. Apprentices take a field trip to the library, where they apply for a library card and learn about the facility's resources.

Through our partnership with [REDACTED], members participate in the [REDACTED] program through which they learn to create and perform for the community original dramatic works using their own lived experience. This process fosters creativity, builds self-esteem, reduces isolation, and enhances communication and critical-thinking skills.

**Describe the role of your organization's Board of Directors.**

Free Minds has an active board of directors consisting of thoughtful community leaders, leaders in the nonprofit sector, and experts in the criminal legal system reform field who are passionate and knowledgeable about our work. The Board is led by Board Chair Chris Turner who is directly impacted by the carceral system, having served 26 years in prison after a wrongful conviction. The Board operates the Executive, Governance, Fundraising, and Finance

committees and is responsible for setting policy, approving the budget, and annually evaluating the executive director. Board members meet quarterly in addition to an annual meeting, and committees meet regularly between the quarterly board meetings. The board is enthusiastically involved in fundraising efforts, and 100% of board members make personally meaningful contributions to the organization. Board members are recruited through personal connections from current board members as well as city-wide board matching opportunities.

### **Short bios of staff essential to the success of this project:**

#### **Tara Libert, Co-founder and Executive Director**

Before co-founding Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop in 2002, Tara worked as a radio and television news and documentary producer for twelve years. After producing many features on the US criminal justice system, showcasing such topics such as the death penalty, prison overcrowding and juvenile justice reform she was drawn to direct service. Tara began volunteering with Georgetown University's Family Literacy Program, tutoring incarcerated parents at the District of Columbia jail. She trained as a tutor with the Literacy Volunteers of America and a mediator with The Conflict Resolution Center of Montgomery County, MD. Tara trained at the Freedom Writer's Institute and her writing has been included in Teaching Hope: Stories from the Freedom Writer Teachers ([www.freedomwritersfoundation.org](http://www.freedomwritersfoundation.org)). In 2022, she was selected for the Equity Lab Seeding Disruption Fellowship, a DC-based fellowship to build knowledge, skills, and community across racial difference and youth-facing professional fields—and to catalyze movement toward racial equity. She is certified in Restorative Justice and the Deep Elements of Human Energy Dynamics. She won the Linowes Award for “Unsung Community Heroes” and the DC Department of Corrections George Strawn Volunteer Award. Tara oversees all aspects of Free Minds and works with the Board of Directors to fulfill the organization's mission.

#### **██████████ Deputy Director**

██████████ started at Free Minds as an intern in the summer of 2010. After graduating from Vassar College with a BA in English she moved to Cusco, Peru to teach English for eight months. When she returned to the US, ██████████ became the Free Minds Interim Program Manager until September 2012, when she entered graduate school. ██████████ earned her MFA in Creative Writing from Emerson College in May 2015. ██████████ returned to Washington, DC, and became the Director of Development and Communications in 2015. In 2017 she became the Deputy Director. She is a published author whose fiction has appeared in several literary magazines, including Witness, Bellingham Review, District Lit, and Buffalo Almanack.

#### **██████████ Director of Finance and Operations**

██████████ joined the Free Minds staff in 2019. As Director of Finance and Operations, ██████████ is responsible for the following areas: financial administration, business planning and budgeting, human resources and administration. Previous to this role, ██████████ served on the Board of Directors as Treasurer. Before Free Minds, ██████████ worked as Chief Financial Officer for the following media organizations: ██████████ and ██████████. He is a Certified Public Accountant and holds a Bachelor of Business Administration in Accounting from James Madison University.

#### **Kelli Taylor, Co-founder and Jail Book Club Manager**

Before co-founding and serving as Executive Director of Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop (2002-2010), Kelli worked as a television news and documentary producer. She is a published writer and trained in oral histories, which she uses to amplify the voices of incarcerated individuals. She has served as a trained volunteer for Offender Aid and Restoration, mentoring and sharing literature with incarcerated youths at the Arlington County Jail. Kelli uses her expertise to develop curriculum, research and locate books that will engage

and excite new readers, and lead the weekly book club sessions at the DC Jail. Kelli continues to nurture Free Minds members' love of reading and writing with frequent letters to our Prison Book Club members in federal prisons across the country.

#### **Prison Book Club Manager**

manages the Prison Book Club program, a program that uses the arts and humanities to support incarcerated individuals in building self-efficacy, preparing for reentry, and contributing to the larger public narrative. She has lived experience of incarceration, having been charged and incarcerated as an adult when she was 16 years old, and participating in the Free Minds Jail and Prison Book Clubs. She is herself a poet, whose work has been published in the Free Minds anthology *When You Hear Me (You Hear Us): Voices on Youth Incarceration*.

#### **Reentry Manager**

started working at Free Minds in 2012 as the first-ever Reentry & Family Coordinator before taking over the Program Manager position. Her son has been an active participant in Free Minds since 2007. has worked in the DC Public Schools and at . Keela attended Trinity University in DC. She brings her extensive knowledge of positive youth development and of the DC community to Free Minds.

#### **Member Experience Manager**

began working with Free Minds in 2013 as an office assistant. She now provides programmatic support for all phases of our program, ensuring continuity of services for Free Minds members throughout incarceration and reentry. Additionally, she coordinates the Prison Book Club volunteer program, the internship program, and works closely with the Congressman John Lewis Fellow. She has a BA in Business Administration and is a graduate of Trinity Washington University. is a native Washingtonian and the first member of her family to attend college.

#### **Reentry Programming & Training Manager**

Born and raised in the Washington, DC metropolitan area, worked for more than seven years in Workforce Development at , where she held many titles, working specifically with the Culinary Job Training Program. There she assisted adults facing high barriers to employment in the food services industry. earned her Bachelor's in Human Ecology from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore with a concentration in Fashion Merchandising and a minor in Business Administration. She also gained a Leadership certification from the Princeton AlumniCorps Emerging Leaders Program. She brings deep commitment and expertise in this field to her role as the Free Minds Reentry Programming & Training Manager, helping Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop members achieve their desired goals.

#### **Digital Literacy Trainer & Special Projects Coordinator**

is the Digital Literacy Trainer and Special Projects Coordinator at Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop, where she works with members recently home from jail or prison to build digital literacy skills and supports a variety of other program areas. graduated from the College of William & Mary in 2020 with a bachelor's degree in Public Policy and in 2021 with a Master's in Elementary Education. started at Free Minds as an intern in 2018 and returned to host the Letter Writers Circle from 2021-23 before beginning her current role. previously worked as an elementary school teacher and enjoys reading and exploring local parks in her free time.

#### **Peer Support Specialist**

is a Free Minds member and DC native. At 17 years old, he was convicted as an adult and sentenced to 35 years to life. was released in 2019 after serving 22 years through a DC law offering young people with extreme sentences an opportunity for resentencing. is

passionate about mentoring youth and offering them the guidance and support he did not have when he was young. He is a member of the Incarcerated Children's Advocacy Network, a network of leaders who were formerly incarcerated as children. In 2021, [REDACTED] was selected as the sixth recipient of the Congressman John Lewis Fellowship for Free Minds. Following the completion of the fellowship, [REDACTED] helped develop the Free Minds Peer Support Program, and currently serves as Peer Support Specialist. [REDACTED] continues to write poetry and serve as a role model for youth, in addition to providing essential peer support for fellow Free Minds members.

### **[REDACTED] Program Assistant**

[REDACTED] Incarcerated at seventeen, he served twenty-five years and connected with Free Minds in 2009. During his incarceration, [REDACTED] became a mentor in the Challenge and Residential Drug Abuse Programs, focusing on substance abuse and mental health. Released in 2020 under DC's Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act, which allows for resentencing of youth with extreme sentences, [REDACTED] He [REDACTED] a co-facilitator for Free Minds' On the Same Page community peacebuilding initiative, finding healing in storytelling and fostering connections between Free Minds members and the wider community.

### **[REDACTED] Lead Facilitator, The Build Up**

[REDACTED] first discovered the transformative power of books and poetry at age 17 as a member of Free Minds' Jail Book Club. After his release, he joined the Reentry Book Club, "The Build Up," where he found a supportive community that helped him navigate the challenges of reentry. In 2024, he graduated with a BBA in Business and Entrepreneurship and now serves as a Lead Facilitator for "The Build Up," guiding peers through book discussions and community-building sessions. [REDACTED] is also a member of the directly impacted leadership team for an advocacy coalition supporting youth under 25 in the criminal legal system. He is a Free Minds Changemaker, Poet Ambassador, and published writer, with his work featured in the Free Minds Connect magazine and the award-winning anthology *When You Hear Me (You Hear Us)*.

# Initiative Proposal Budget

**Name of Organization** Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop  
**Proposal Title**

Revenue attributed to proposal initiative	Revenue Source Description	Committed	Pending	Total	Pending Decision Date
	██████████ Grant			\$100,000	\$100,000
	<i>Grants/Contracts</i>				\$0
	Local/State/Federal Government	\$581,250	\$380,025	\$961,275	
	Covid-related funding (including Paycheck Protection Program, etc.)				\$0
	Foundations	\$455,172	\$974,000	\$1,429,172	
	Corporations		\$4,000	\$4,000	
	United Way/Combined Federal Campaign/Other federated campaigns		\$22,000	\$22,000	
	Individual donors		\$408,000	\$408,000	
	Other Grants/Contracts (specify)				\$0
	<i>Earned Revenue</i>				\$0
	Events	\$16,000		\$16,000	
	Publications		\$1,500	\$1,500	
	Fees				\$0
	Other Earned Revenue (specify)				\$0
	Membership Income				\$0
	In-kind Support		\$96,000	\$96,000	
	Other (specify) Interest Income		\$90,000	\$90,000	

<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$1,052,422</b>	<b>\$2,075,525</b>	<b>\$3,127,947</b>
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Expenses	Description of Expense	Year 1 Amount	Year 2 Amount	Applicable Amount	
Salaries		\$1,552,078		\$1,552,078	(\$ 47,073.00)
Benefits		\$149,400		\$149,400	
Payroll Taxes		\$98,457		\$98,457	
Consultants and Professional Fees		\$236,034		\$236,034	
Travel		\$26,964		\$26,964	
Equipment		\$23,200		\$23,200	(\$ 6,500.00)
Supplies		\$20,000		\$20,000	
Printing and Copying		\$31,980		\$31,980	(\$ 5,090.00)
Postage, Shipping and Delivery		\$15,700		\$15,700	(\$ 1,862.00)
Telephone and Telecommunications		\$9,384		\$9,384	
Technology and Maintenance (if budgeted separately, specify hardware/software capital spending, maintenance, and/or training)	Software subscriptions	\$27,567		\$27,567	
Rent and Utilities		\$125,640		\$125,640	
Evaluation				\$0	
Books		\$119,500		\$119,500	(\$ 29,875.00)
Insurance		\$17,723		\$17,723	
Reentry Programming	Stipends, essentials for members, workshops	\$539,550		\$539,550	(\$ 9,600.00)
Events		\$6,000		\$6,000	
Staff & Member Development		\$31,600		\$31,600	
In-Kind Expenses		\$96,000		\$96,000	
Other (specify)	Depreciation & Bank Charges	\$2,122		\$2,122	
<b>Total Expenses</b>		<b>\$3,128,899</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$3,128,899</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>

**[REDACTED] - 2025 Proposal Budget Narrative**

The [REDACTED] grant would be used to fund the following expenses:

**Salaries - \$47,873** - A portion of the salaries of the following Free Minds programs and staff:

Jail Book Club (JBC)

[REDACTED] Co-founder and Jail Book Club Manager

Prison Book Club (PBC)

[REDACTED] - Prison Book Club Manager

Reentry Book Club (RBC)

[REDACTED] Reentry Manager

[REDACTED] - Reentry Programming & Training Manager

[REDACTED] Digital Literacy Trainer & Special Projects Coordinator

[REDACTED] - Member Experience Manager, who ensures seamless continuity of services for members through all of the above program areas, both during and after incarceration.

**Equipment - \$6,500** - 26 Chromebooks for members in the Free Minds reentry program; this equipment is essential for employment and pursuit of life goals.

**Printing and Copying - \$5,090** - A portion of the printing costs of our bi-monthly Connect magazine and postcards sent to incarcerated DC residents in federal prisons.

**Postage, Shipping and Delivery - \$1,862** - A portion of the postage and shipping costs of our bi-monthly Connect magazine and postcards sent (see above).

**Books - \$29,875** - A portion of the books purchased for our Jail Book Club, Prison Book Club and Reentry Book Club.

**Reentry Programming - \$9,600** - Stipends to members in reentry program for an educational training program to learn social emotional skills and become peer supporters.

**Budget Summary (50 words)**

**In 50 words or less, qualitatively describe what you will fund (staff, activities) with the [REDACTED] grant if awarded. (Tip: As with the Proposal Summary, above, this section is intended to serve as a concise summary of the key elements of your budget and budget narrative.) What is the total budget for this proposal if different from the grant amount of \$100,000?**

***In your response, include how budget amounts were determined (i.e. internal/external estimates, actual costs from prior/existing programs, etc.) and how costs will meet the overall needs of the program. Please also describe any contingency plans if actual costs are over budget or additional funding sources are not secured. Also include how much of your program budget will go towards organization wide operating costs. Is there any additional information you want us to understand about the financial need? For example, whether the program would be unable to launch without [REDACTED] funding or whether the program has the ability to be self-sustaining at a point, etc.? Note: if total funding need exceeds [REDACTED] grant amount (approx. \$100,000), clarify what additional funding has been secured to date and/or additional steps the organization is taking to secure additional funding.***

Grant will support direct programming expenses (salaries, equipment, printing, postage, books and reentry programming) to provide educational opportunities to incarcerated and formerly incarcerated learners. Amounts are based on actual costs from existing programs. We have secured \$1,052,422, with \$1,975,525 pending from a variety of revenue sources. (50/50)