



Colorado Library Consortium

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May 10, 2019

Ms. Fuller:

Again, thank you for visiting with Diane Walden, Sara Wright and me during our last phone call in March, providing us with guidance for how to proceed on our National Leadership Grant (LG-97-18-0127-18) in light of difficulties involving a key supporting agency for the planning grant work. We are enclosing a memo, detailing how we plan to proceed, and we welcome any questions.

#### MEMO

When the Colorado Library Consortium and its partners submitted preliminary and full proposals for the PRISM planning project, we believed we were doing so with the full support of the Colorado Department of Corrections (CDOC).

Between December 2018 and March 2019, unanticipated changes involving agency leadership resulted in CDOC denying approval of the planning project research request. Despite ongoing communication with the Office of Planning and Analysis (OPA) staff, and after three attempts to address the concerns they expressed, we have come to the realization that the support of this key office is no longer in place. With turnover at the executive level, we believe support will not be forthcoming.

OPA is the "gatekeeper" between CDOC facilities and data and organizations seeking to plan or conduct research. The absence of this office's support means that the PRISM planning project will not have access to basic information about existing data elements and file specifications (notably, not actual data) on currently incarcerated offenders. It also means our researchers will not be permitted to explore the possibility of surveying and/or interviewing current or recently paroled offenders who are under CDOC's jurisdiction. Believing that we have made every possible



effort to gain CDOC's support for PRISM planning activities without success, the best option is to restructure the project to gain needed insights in other ways.

Our intended plan for moving forward involves the following key changes:

**New partnerships.** We will form a new primary partnership with Remerg, the Denver-based, non-profit, online clearinghouse whose mission is “to reduce recidivism by providing current re-entry information to people involved in Colorado’s criminal justice systems.” Remerg is engaged with a network of public agencies and other non-profits that address a wide variety of issues faced by those re-entering the community, including: benefits, education, family, health care, identification, jobs, legal assistance, life skills, parole and probation, re-entry help, transportation, and veteran services. Many potential subjects should be reachable via those organizations. Remerg director Carol Peeples is a leading member of the PRISM Advisory Committee, and she and the project co-directors have an ongoing relationship via the ReConnect working group to provide prison and public library best practices to support people transitioning from prison to their community.

We will take advantage of CLiC’s long standing connections to Colorado’s public and academic libraries to identify and recruit library partners. Public libraries can serve as a valuable link in the re-entry information chain for areas such as jobs, continuing literacy education, and indeed as a general locus of community resources. Academic libraries, especially community college libraries, support returning citizens as part of their college’s student population. Like Remerg’s partner non-profits, public and academic libraries will be asked to facilitate PRISM’s proposed surveying and interviewing of former offenders.

Via Remerg and CLiC, PRISM will seek to enlist the support of this new constellation of potential partner organizations—a range of non-profits as well as libraries—in the proposed study and, if they are willing to participate in the proposed study, to have them estimate the numbers and types of returning citizens to whom they may be able to provide access as research subjects.

**New subject population—same experience.** In the absence of access to and official data about people who are currently incarcerated, the only alternative subject population who can address the research questions is those who have been released from prison and who are no longer under CDOC jurisdiction. This population might be surveyed and/or interviewed about how and how much they used prison libraries, how that library use helped them cope with incarceration, and



how it prepared them for release from prison and re-entry into the community. While those currently incarcerated might only have speculated about the impact of prison library use on their re-entry experience, this new subject population should be able to respond from actual recent experience in the community. Notably, too, this change of subject population will enable us to explore the possibility of expanding the subject population to include those released from federal and private prisons in addition to state prisons (to which the original proposal was limited).

**A twist on the research questions.** In the absence of official data about incarcerated offenders, their participation in various programs (e.g., academic and vocational education, mental health, substance abuse), and the documented outcomes of such program participation, the research questions will have to be given a twist—asked from the viewpoint of the respondent. The newly-worded, potential research questions would be (key changes underlined for emphasis):

1. Which prison library collections, services, and programs do former offenders value most for their contributions to the development of their pro-social behavior and information and learning skills, and their pre- and post-release success?
2. How and how well do former offenders perceive that prison libraries helped to bridge the digital divide for them while incarcerated?
3. How does collaboration between prison libraries, other prison-based programs, public and academic libraries, and social service organizations support and encourage offenders in their use of prison libraries while incarcerated and preparing for re-entry?
4. What motivated offenders to begin using prison libraries in various ways, and what conditions and incentives encouraged them to sustain such library use through their period of incarceration?
5. How do the custody level, demographic and socio-economic characteristics, and personal interests and life goals of former offenders influence their self-reported use of prison libraries and its perceived impact?
6. How and how well do former offenders perceive that their prison libraries contributed to the development of their pro-social behaviors and information and learning skills?
7. How and how well do former offenders perceive that their prison libraries helped to address and ameliorate obstacles to mastering information and learning skills (e.g., language barriers, learning disabilities, mental health issues, social isolation)?
8. How and how well do former offenders perceive that prison library use occupied them constructively while incarcerated, prepared them for release, and reduced their risk of recidivism (e.g., helped them to create future education plans, prepare for and find employment)?
9. How and how well do former offenders perceive that prison libraries supported them in maintaining contact with family members, especially children, and facilitate offender participation in family literacy activities?



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10. What do former offenders perceive that prison libraries could do differently, do more of, or do better—either alone or in collaboration with other organizations—to maximize their positive impact on current and former offenders?

Notably, this approach to assessing the impact of prison libraries will put PRISM in step with the Public Library Association's Project Outcome for Public Libraries and the Association of College and Research Libraries' Project Outcome for Academic Libraries. Both of those efforts also rely exclusively on gathering data on outcomes from library users themselves.

**What won't change.** Other than these changes, the PRISM planning project will continue as originally planned.

- The partnership among Colorado Library Consortium, Colorado State Library, and RSL Research Group remains strong, with all parties committed to the planning project's success.
- The Advisory Committee, including CDOC staff and recently released offenders, will continue to meet. Authorization was received from CDOC Director of Prisons in November. This highly participatory group has held 6 meetings to date, with no imminent plan to disband.
- All remaining activities not involving CDOC will be pursued.
- While the research questions under consideration must now be asked in a self-reporting context, the content of the questions is otherwise unchanged.
- The research design developed by the PRISM planning project will continue to rely on survey research and key informant and/or focus group interviewing. The only difference is that these methodologies will not be augmented by analyses of official CDOC data.

**We ask that IMLS approve the above changes to the PRISM planning project and approve a six-month, no-cost extension.**

Should you have any questions, please contact us.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'James Duncan'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

James Duncan, Executive Director  
Colorado Library Consortium