



# FREE MIND

ENTREPRENEUR NETWORK

## **SPRING 2024 REPORT**

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# INTRODUCTION

Free Mind is dedicated to establishing a network that empowers formerly incarcerated individuals to achieve financial independence through entrepreneurship, all while spotlighting the discriminatory practices entrenched within a profit-driven, privatized justice system.

Through the provision of training, employment opportunities, and additional resources, the organization aims to enhance the trade skills acquired during individuals' time in incarceration. Embracing the principle of second chances, Free Mind is driven by a mission to reduce recidivism rates and confront the systemic injustices pervasive in a punitive criminal justice system that obstructs genuine rehabilitation efforts.



# INTRODUCTION

The recent overhaul of The Free Mind Entrepreneur Network's online platform has been a deliberate and strategic effort to not only address previous shortcomings but also to enhance user engagement and consistency across social media channels. Recognizing the importance of spreading awareness for Second Chance Awareness Month, also known as Fresh Start Awareness, we have embarked on a journey to amplify our online presence.

Our focus has shifted towards crafting more engaging social media posts filled with insightful information from diverse voices connected to the Fresh Start Awareness theme. This summary outlines the key enhancements made to our social media strategy and the measures taken to align Free Mind's online activities with its mission and values, particularly in promoting awareness for this significant event.



# DESIGN QUESTION

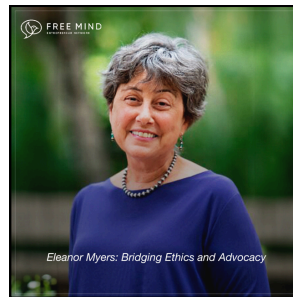
When meeting with Stacey we first wanted to make sure that we were on the same page about the work we will do this semester. We started off talking about the event to try to define a theme and identify speakers. Then, we talked about creating newsletters and campaigns that go hand in hand with the event. We asked about what his expectations were and then we presented him the design question. After presenting him with the finalized design question, he agreed and gave us tips to successfully achieve it.

Our original question was "How can we use popular media (podcasts, social media) to promote resources that combat negative perceptions of formerly incarcerated people?" After our meeting with Stacey, we determined that the most effective way to reach people is by hearing stories directly from victims of the prison system. Our question now became a little more refined: "How can we utilize social media campaigns and presence to promote the stories of people who benefitted from a second chance after their incarceration to promote a better perception of victims of the prison system?" This question better frames the work we'll be performing with Free Mind and sets a clearer objective with the voices of formerly incarcerated people that we can also use to keep sight of our goals.



# DESIGN QUESTION

## Social Media Content



# DESIGN QUESTION



This project must achieve the necessary result of raising awareness about discrimination against formerly incarcerated people in the workplace. To do this, we'll need to keep the newsletter going, organize and prepare for our April speaking event, and lastly organize a month-long of posts for our social media campaign during April (Second Chance Awareness Month.) This is something that's been our driving factor since the beginning of our work with Stacey and with Free Mind, and something that we've been achieving as of late.



# COMPARATIVE MEDIA ANALYSIS

When looking for our mentor accounts we were able to find three organization accounts that do a really good job especially when it comes to both their newsletter and website. The good thing about finding these three specific accounts is that they all have similar objectives and values as the Free Mind network. For instance, all three accounts support second changes by providing resources to help returning citizens. Overall these accounts aim to lower recidivism rates which is why we thought it would be great to have them as our mentor accounts. Not only that, but the accounts also use media in a very effective way.

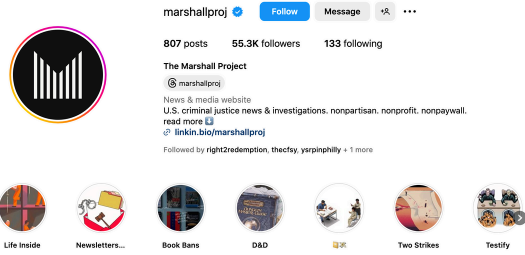




# COMPARATIVE MEDIA ANALYSIS

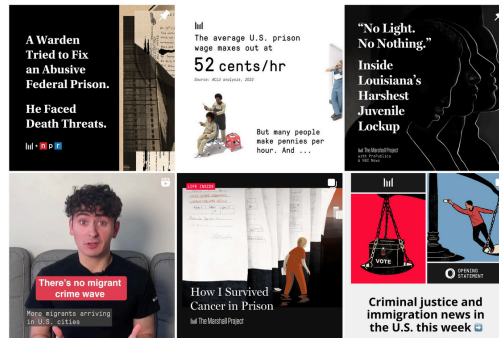
## The Marshall Project

This a newspaper focused on criminal justice issues. Their Instagram is very striking, with a distinct visual style without sacrificing navigability. It also has a plethora of information on the organization in addition to the news stories they publish. The result is a really strong sense of ethos that feels distinct from other organizations and something by which Free Mind could absolutely be inspired.



# COMPARATIVE MEDIA ANALYSIS

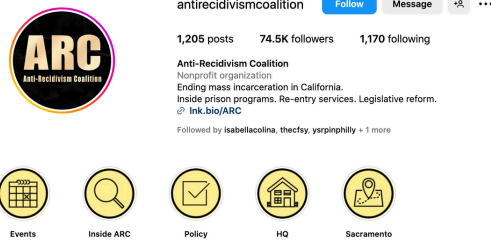
## The Marshall Project



# COMPARATIVE MEDIA ANALYSIS

## Anti-Recidivism Coaliton

For our second mentor account, we chose the Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC). This mentor account does a really good job, especially with their social media. Because of this, we've used this as one of our top mentor accounts ever since Free Mind was founded. They do a really good job with their Instagram presence. They stay on top of trends which makes their content engaging and reach a lot of people. I think we should start using them as an example to start to incorporate Instagram reels rather than just posts and stories. While doing so we should also be mindful of trends so that our content can be engaging.



# COMPARATIVE MEDIA ANALYSIS

Anti-Recidivism Coalliton



# COMPARATIVE MEDIA ANALYSIS

## Pennsylvania Prison Society

Our third mentor account is the Pennsylvania Prison Society. Their engagement on social media is really good. They know how to effectively utilize social media as a means of communication. Their posts not only share valuable details about their events and services but also vividly portray their active involvement in the realm of prison reform on a daily basis. Their successful social media presence is particularly evident in their follower count, which stands at approximately 2,018, a significantly higher number compared to other regional prison reform organizations around the Philadelphia area.



# COMPARATIVE MEDIA ANALYSIS

## Pennsylvania Prison Society



# COMPARATIVE MEDIA ANALYSIS

## Conclusion

Some of the biggest takeaways we found in this media analysis was an emphasis on consistent online presence and a cohesive visual style. The Marshall Project is perhaps best with this, especially on the visual design front. However, their content wasn't quite as matched with Free Mind's goals and purpose. In this sense, the Pennsylvania Prison Society allowed for a mentor whose existence as an organization was closer to Free Mind's. They focused mostly on the same type of prison reform resources as Free Mind promotes. This has shaped the way that we plan our social media content and think more specifically about our presence.



# GOLDEN CIRCLE

The golden circle is an alternative viewpoint to existing assumptions about why some leaders and organizations are able to command such disproportionate influence. The Golden Circle is essential to our project because it helps Free Mind clarify our purpose, communicate it effectively, and build strong connections with others who share their values. This clarity and alignment can lead to greater success, fulfillment, and impact.

Free Mind's Mission is to create a network that supports formerly incarcerated individuals to create their own financial freedom through entrepreneurship while raising awareness of the justice system's discrimination in a for-profit, privatized model. The organization provides training, employment, and other resources to build on any trade skills individuals may have learned during their incarceration.





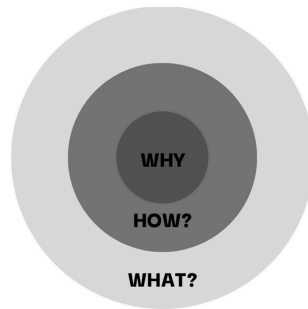
# GOLDEN CIRCLE



Through our panelist events and our social media presence, we are able to create awareness and resources in order to achieve this goal. In addition to this, we are conducting a panelist event in April "Second Chance Awareness month" which will also be a big social media push, highlighting stories of second chances from real individuals affected by the criminal justice system. Focusing on our social media presence will raise awareness for these issues and demonstrate and make available the resources that Free Mind aims to create. This all serves as the "what" aspect of our mission, but it's heavily influenced by what we've been trying to accomplish conceptually. As Simon Sinek often repeats, "people don't buy what you do they buy why you do it." (TEDx).



# GOLDEN CIRCLE



**WHAT-** Networking service that aims to provide equal job opportunities for returning citizens.

**HOW-** The Free Mind Entrepreneur Network provides a networking opportunity for returning citizens. The network plans to use newsletters and a renewed website to keep people informed and updated about professional opportunities. We plan to remove the stigma behind previously incarcerated individuals by sharing the reality of parole and the criminal justice system. Free Mind wants to serve its community by providing equal job opportunities and communicating these issues to a broader audience.

**WHY-** Free Mind believes in second chances. The network believes in lowering recidivism rates by giving previously incarcerated individuals equal job and networking opportunities.



# IMPACT STORY

Our main social object is lowering recidivism rates while shedding light on the issue. But with this social object, many other sub-objects come into place. For instance, the root of the issue would be both racism and mass incarceration. The Free Mind Entrepreneur Network wants to provide support for individuals who have been previously incarcerated, their families, and their communities as a whole. By providing support and the right resources we want to work towards making recidivism rates decrease.

The Free Mind Entrepreneur Network also looks towards highlighting and supporting those who chose the route of entrepreneurship. This is why the network partners with entrepreneurs to build and maintain meaningful connections. Examples of this include Muhammad Abdul-Hadi, founder and owner of Down North Pizza. Muhammad was formerly incarcerated and now operates his own small business, giving back to Free Mind by being an advocate for fresh starts and offering insight and advice about life after incarceration.

In addition to this, the network also uses social media and the website to tell the stories of the people who need their stories out there. We want to create awareness around these issues so that the general public can see exactly what's going on. By posting blog posts that highlight these issues, talking to people who have been affected by these issues, etc., we want to make sure we create a network where conversions are happening so that there can be change. Through doing this, we've seen a 2.72% increase in Instagram followers in the months since we've started our social media presence this year. We've averaged four posts per month, in addition to a monthly newsletter highlighting what professionals on the subject of the criminal justice system and incarceration add to these conversations.

Lastly, our April social media campaign highlights the ways in which Free Mind's resources, among others, have afforded formerly incarcerated individuals a second chance at life beyond their incarceration. This fresh start allows them the life the criminal justice system so often deprives from them.



# STORYTELLING STRATEGIES

Free Mind's origin story began with Stacey Torrance, who was sentenced to life without parole at the age of 14 - a punishment that seemed too harsh for his young age. After 30 long years behind bars, Stacey was finally released and decided to become an entrepreneur. Unfortunately, many ex-convicts struggle to find work upon release, resulting in high recidivism rates. Starting a business is a daunting task, and not everyone has the courage to take the leap, as Stacey did.

As an entrepreneur, Stacey realized the value of having a support system. He observed that formerly incarcerated individuals lacked this essential support system in their business and professional relationships. To fill this gap, Stacey founded The Free Mind Entrepreneur Network, a Philadelphia-based organization that offers networking and resources to people who have taken the bold step of entrepreneurship. Established in 2021, Free Mind is still in its early stages, and Stacey plans to expand its reach geographically and add more entrepreneurs to the Network.

To aid in achieving these objectives, Stacey created a website with a podcast, newsletter, and testimonials from past participants of Freemind. The organization is continually evolving, and with the help of B.Social, Stacey hopes to expand and enhance Free Mind by sharing stories of individuals who have faced similar experiences. We are thrilled to be a part of Free Mind's growth and eagerly anticipate what the future holds.

The story aligns with the golden circle because our "why" is Free Mind's belief in second chances. Lowering recidivism rates by providing previously incarcerated individuals with equal job and networking opportunities is crucial to Stacey's story and his advocacy for such issues.



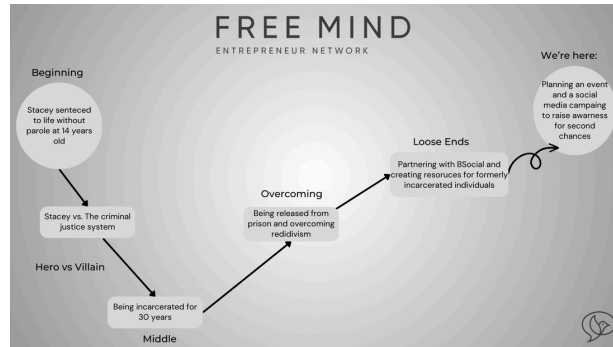
# STORYTELLING STRATEGIES

Free Mind employs various media, including a Podcast, social media, website, newsletter, and images, to present not only Stacey's story but also those of others. Platforms such as the podcast and newsletter enable Free Mind to share other people's stories that relate to Stacey's. Many other success stories of formerly incarcerated individuals exist, and this offers them a platform to share their experiences. Other media, such as the front page of the website, provide a brief summary of Stacey's story. Moreover, during Second Chance Awareness Month in April, Free Mind intends to use its Instagram account to honor individuals, communities, and agencies across the country recognizing the significance of reentry and their role in supporting the safe and successful reentry of adults and youth. Using various mediums, Free Mind highlights the importance of Stacey's story and similar stories to provide different perspectives to the audience.

We think we've mostly accomplished all these goals, albeit with plenty of challenges and changes to our plan along the way. It's something we've learned throughout the process to keep our team able to adapt to new situations and alter the way we go about things to yield better results.



# STORYTELLING STRATEGIES



# CO-CREATION

The prototyping process has been inclusive, recognizing the importance of equity, trust-building, and reciprocity in the co-creation journey with our partner. We have engaged with various audiences, including those unfamiliar with Free Mind, aiming to ensure accessibility and relevance in our social media outreach. Simultaneously, we've strived to maintain engagement with our existing audience connected to prison reform. This endeavor has required a balance, varying the content to cater to both groups effectively.

Transparency has been a cornerstone of our prototyping process. We openly discussed and visualized our ideas on a whiteboard, encouraging an environment of collaboration and shared decision-making with our partner.

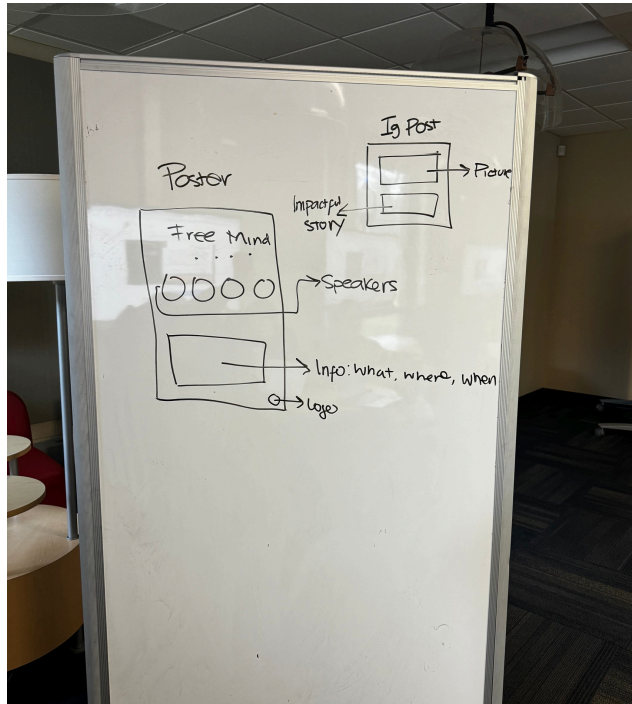
To determine the success of our prototypes, we considered usability, relevance, and alignment with our partner's vision. We also considered the feedback from Stacey, our event speakers, and the blog interviewees.

In testing the prototypes, we engaged in dialogue with Stacey, seeking alignment with their expectations and goals. Additionally, feedback from the event speakers provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of our materials. By actively involving different perspectives in the feedback loop, we aimed to refine our approach and ensure that our outputs accurately reflect the essence of the event and resonate with the intended audience.

Reflecting on the co-creation process, we've learned valuable lessons about power dynamics and the importance of inclusive decision-making.



# CO-CREATION





# REFLECTIONS

During the first half of the semester, our group excelled in ideation of our goals with Free Mind. We often had little to no difficulty finding different opportunities and ideas for how we can strengthen Free Mind's social media presence and continue ongoing projects like the podcast and newsletter. Our communication with Stacey was very effective and allowed us to accomplish what we needed to with a clear and defined purpose. This is something that was crucial to our group's work.

We've only run into two main problems so far in our group work. First, we had a habit of discussing different ideas and strategies in depth without writing them down or recording them anywhere. This required us to have to work backwards in remembering the specifics of everything that we had talked about the previous week. We solved this by committing ourselves to writing down our thoughts and notes on our meetings. Second, we encountered an issue with booking a room and picking a time for our panelist event. Our original date had worked out perfectly, but then we encountered an issue with the room and had to reserve a different room or a different date. Then, we had to coordinate with our speakers who tend to have busy schedules.

Finally, we were able to gather enough potential speakers so that we'd still have enough who would be able to attend our event even if the new date resulted in several people having scheduling conflicts. Communication was the biggest way that we overcame this. We had to simply commit to a date, time, and place and settle for whichever speakers were able to attend. This successful communication involved giving people deadlines to respond so that we could ensure an attention to the timeframes in which we were trying to work whenever messages were time-sensitive.



# REFLECTIONS

This was a point of tension for the group because we experienced a sense of frustration that felt as though we couldn't do anything or progress in any meaningful way. We remedied this by taking care of absolutely anything we were able to and by being patient with ourselves, understanding that we can't control things that are out of our control, such as waiting to hear back from speakers or confirming a room for our event. Our hope is to continue with our pace and magnitude of work and simply keep things developing so that we can continue to progress as a group.

On the other hand, co-creating with Stacey has been a really rewarding experience. Our communication is effective and we always find ways to find solutions in the most effective way. For instance, whenever we meet we share the progress we've made, any conflicts, or any other thing that Stacey has to know, and vice-versa. We guide each other and bounce on everyone's ideas until we come to a common ground with a successful outcome.

