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To: ejackson@ashevillenc.gov
Cc:
Subject: [Test] Progress & Learning at the Reentry Hack Day

News, updates, and announcements from Code for Asheville

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Community Night This Thursday

Civic tech and the ideas of 21st century government are young and still being actively shaped and re-imagined by leaders and participants all around the U.S. and the world and, indeed, right here in Asheville.

So thatâ€™s what weâ€™re going to do together this Thursday at the Montford Recreation Center, 5:30pm. Weâ€™ll build on the conversation that we had with Jen Pahlka last month and talk about things like whatâ€™s important to us in interacting with our local government, how Code for Americaâ€™s and the brigade councilâ€™s principles do or donâ€™t reflect our own values, how we and other parts of the community fit into solving local challenges, or how we might use funding or support opportunities whether from local government, our own fundraising, or grants.

We plan to keep it active and fun and, as always, pizza will occur (cheese & pepperoni - if you have other dietary needs, let us know: code4asheville@gmail.com).

Progress & Learning at the NC Reentry Resources Hub Hack Day

The NC Reentry Resources Hub project is a website providing high-quality information and resources relevant and valuable to NC citizens reentering society after a period

of incarceration or dealing with collateral consequences of a previous criminal conviction. Last year Code for Asheville volunteers created a site for Buncombe County. Now Code for Asheville and Code for Greensboro are partnering on a project to serve all 100 counties in North Carolina. As a multi-brigade collaboration, we are developing the open source project under the Code for North Carolina banner.

On Saturday, July 22 over 20 people gathered at the Nussbaum Center for Entrepreneurship in Greensboro and another 7 people met at the Montford Recreation Complex in Asheville to work together to move the new statewide North Carolina Reentry Resources Hub project forward.
Live-streaming via Google hangout, Jason Marshall kicked off the event with an introduction to Code for America and the plan for the day, followed by an overview of the purpose and history of the project from Eric Jackson. To engage all volunteers in attendance regardless of skillset, we formed technical and non-technical teams focused on various project tasks. While the technical group worked on bug fixes, feature development, deployment of the public site, and design and architecture for an interface for content editors, the non-technical group focused on usability testing, and writing guidelines for website topic content. For those interested in contributing code to the project but still learning the tech stack, Greensboro set up a tutorials corner to learn Git, Javascript, HTML, React and GraphQL.

What Worked

All-in-all the event was an awesome success. Not only did participants help us make significant progress during the 3-hour event, but the activity has continued on Github and Slack over the last couple weeks. Equally exciting, several new people became engaged in the project and taken on longer-term tasks. The project now has a core group of contributors that are collaborating to push the project forward. That gives a tremendous boost to the overall sustainability of the effort. Thank you all!

Another thing that worked well: using a Google hangout for shared presentation. The hackday achieved a sense of connectedness and participation in something bigger than ourselves, at least in part due to the remote communication. This worked especially well in Greensboro, where the livestream was up on a big screen. In Asheville the streaming laptop was co-opted for testing, although collaborations continued via Slack chats between GSO and AVL folks. Next time around we will definitely make sure we have big screens on both ends.

What Worked â€¦ Not So Much

There were also a couple things that didnâ€™t work so well. Our attempt to set up Google Hangouts for collaborations on specific topics ended in general disarray. Fortunately, the collaborations via prepared Google docs and *ad hoc* Slack discussions kept things moving productively forward. We will definitely focus on these rather than hangouts for the next event.

We could also have done a better job specifying some of the GitHub issues - sometimes we over-specified things when we werenâ€™t actually clear ourselves, others we just failed to communicate that we wanted to leave the figuring-out up to the participants. It came out all right in the end, given the talented and engaged volunteers in

attendance.

Where From Here

We expect to launch the new NC Reentry Resources Hub public site this fall and hope to have the administrative tools available on the same timescale. If youâ€™re interested in playing a role, reach out to one of us, or check out opportunities on the reentry project center.

By Eric Jackson & Jason Marshall

Have a Story to Share?

We'd love to have your contribution. You can write something up about a Code for Asheville event or share something else going on in the civic tech world. Email us at code4asheville@gmail.com.

Upcoming events

Monthly Community Meetup

Our next meetup will be at the Montford Recreation Center on Thursday, August 10. You can RSVP here. Community nights occur on the second Thursday of each month. The location rotates around the different Asheville community centers.

Monthly Planning Meetup

Our next brigade planning meeting is on Tuesday, August 22, at 5:30pm at the Battery Park Book Exchange. RSVP here. These planning meetings take place on the second Tuesday after each community night.

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