

Richmond Public Library

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City of Richmond Public Library Wins Record Grant from Mellon Foundation to preserve Richmond memories

(RICHMOND, Va. December 7, 2023) - Richmond Public Library Director Scott Firestine today announced the Mellon Foundation has awarded the City of Richmond Public Library a record \$900,000 grant to expand and modernize the Richmond Public Main Library's [Memory Lab](#). The Memory Lab is part of the national Memory Lab Network and the only Memory Lab in Central Virginia. The five-year grant builds a state-of-the-art Memory Lab with equipment that enables all Richmond individuals and communities to preserve fragile documents, old photos, and memories by digitizing them for long term safety, preservation, and sharing.

Firestine explains, "Richmond Public Library is deeply engaged in this work at the request of patrons and members of the public. We are excited that Richmond Public Library will be able to offer City residents top tier public resources for preserving and sharing their personal Richmond stories and memories."

Mellon Foundation funding also enables Richmond Public Library to digitize and make publicly accessible large numbers of City Records and donated files. Historic documents from local clubs, civic organizations, almanacs, yearbooks, photos, unusual and out of print periodicals, and ephemera will be searchable online by the end of the grant timeline.

The Memory Lab is located at the Main Richmond Public Library on East Franklin Street. Personal and oral history workshops will be offered at all nine library branches and with community partners including the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia, Library of Virginia, The Valentine, Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia Museum of History and Culture, Virginia Union University, and others.

Work outlined in the grant is supported by Richmond Public Library's 2022-2027 Strategic Plan under "Uniquely Richmond" which expands narratives and voices reflected in Richmond history.

Chris Peterson, key Library Board of Trustee in this initiative said, "This grant competition was challenging. The Mellon Foundation demanded a lot in terms of a clear vision and rigorous implementation plans. And of course, we were competing with many wonderful library systems. Our team worked tirelessly to meet every obstacle, learning at each turn. The result is the largest grant we have ever received, from one of the most significant charitable foundations worldwide. I'm so proud of this award - for Richmond Public Library and all of Richmond."

“Now is the time to expand and deepen knowledge around Richmond history and have open conversations about how to build a better future for our city.” Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney said. “To do so requires that we acknowledge that historically underserved Black communities risk major losses of personal, historical, and cultural documents. With this critical grant for Richmond Public Library, all Richmonders will be able to add their voices to the record, readily preserving family legacies for the generations to come.”

See more about the Mellon Foundation efforts in Richmond visit [here](#). To learn more about the Mellon Foundation’s Public Knowledge grant work, visit [here](#).

The Richmond Public Library System serves Richmond and its bordering communities with day, evening, and weekend hours. Nine library locations are easy to access for all city residents. This grant benefits all of Richmond and efforts will be city-wide. By offering free access to vetted information and a wide range of resources to Richmonders of all ages, our mission is to Inform, Enrich, and Empower Richmond residents.

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