(Em)Powering Community

ANNUAL REPORT 2025–2026

NASHVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY & NASHVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY FOUNDATION









Nashville Public Library



Children falling in love with reading and learning





Teens exploring promising futures



Seniors learning to navigate a digital world



Foundation Powers...



Adults finding new purpose and pathways to engage with society





Little ones becoming ready to read by day one of kindergarten



Learn more at NPLF.org





From the President

More than a century ago, Andrew Carnegie offered Nashville $100,000 to build a library, on one condition: the city had to commit to continue investing in it. Nashville said yes, and that promise has been kept every year since. It is, at its heart, a public-private partnership, and it is still exactly what makes this Library extraordinary today.

Here is one way we think about that relationship: Metro government builds the wiring: the buildings, the staff, the circuits that keep the lights on at all 21 locations. NPL Foundation is the electricity running through it. Private investment is a current that turns a building full of books into a thriving, ever-evolving community hub—a place where a little girl falls in love with story time, or a man in mid-life gains the skills to start a new chapter. Metro keeps Nashville Public Library open. Your gifts make it come alive.

Fiscal year 2026 was a year in which that current ran stronger than ever. I am pleased to share a few of the highlights:

Begin Bright rolled out in its pilot phase and has continued steady expansion, on-time and on budget, while NPL Foundation raised more than $22.5 million toward the campaign's $27 million goal.

Signature Events Picnic with the Library and Literary Award Weekend generated nearly $1 million for the library and a record number of attendees enjoyed a lively conversation with honoree Amor Towles and Nashville's own Jon Meacham.

Friends Raising Funds Next Chapter Society led the community in a week of small business support for Check Out Nashville, now in its second year, a campaign that turns local favorites into library partners. Our Carnegie Society enjoyed another record-setting year, adding more than 50 new members.

Expanding Access Donors and corporate partners gave $5.4 million, fueling improvements like an expanded collection, a new Puppet Truck, and support for branches to provide more programs for Nashvillians of every age.

Advocacy with Impact Targeted conversations with city leaders, along with our first dedicated investment in NPL's collection, created a historic year for collections funding which is already visible on shelves across all 21 locations.

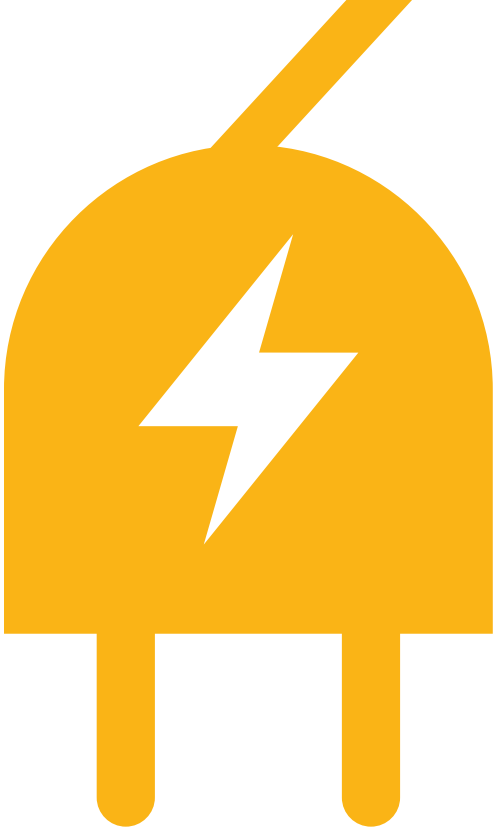
Our commitment to our Library is also about the lives touched, the minds expanded, and the connections forged. With NPL's innovative programming, NPL Foundation's strategic partnerships, and your unwavering support, we have extended the reach of our Library beyond its physical walls—to power literacy, life skills, and connection for all. Thank you for being a part of that.

In the coming pages, you will read just a few of the library stories that exemplify NPL Foundation and NPL's impact this year. None of it happens without you. Every gift, at every level, is what keeps the energy flowing through our system and into every program in this report. If you have already given this year, thank you. If you have not yet, I hope you will be inspired to join. Either way, thank you for the light you help this Library cast on our whole city.

Gratefully,



Shawn Bakker
President, Nashville Public Library Foundation




POLICE

From the Director



When a community embraces a library the way Nashville embraces NPL, the possibilities are endless—and so is the joy. Thanks to the support of Mayor O'Connell and Metro Council, we were able to serve the community in meaningful ways.

Projects to build new branches at Hadley Park and Richland Park—where the demand for programs and services has outgrown those spaces—moved forward. A major renovation is underway at the Green Hills branch, one of NPL's busiest locations, with plans to renovate the Hermitage branch.

Metro also invested a historic $5.8 million in the Library's collection of free books and materials.

Meanwhile, thanks to the support of private donors and corporate sponsors through the Nashville Public Library Foundation, we were able to take NPL's mission even further into the community with initiatives such as Bringing Books to Life, Limitless Libraries, the Nashville After Zone Alliance, Studio NPL, Be Well at NPL, and NPL's Digital Inclusion initiative.

At NPL, the joys of reading, learning, and coming together begin and end with our customers. From the songs and laughter of story time to the transformational moments in tech classes for seniors, our customers fill NPL with hope and positivity with every visit.

On behalf of the NPL staff, I want to thank you for supporting the library—as customers, as volunteers, and as donors. Thank you for making the 2026 fiscal year one of excellence.

We are grateful for you. And we look forward to serving you in 2027.

Sincerely,

Terri M. Luke

Terri M. Luke
Director, Nashville Public Library

Nashville Public Library visitors borrowed more than **7.1 million items** from the library collection, attended nearly **17,000 programs**, **visited our 21 locations more than 2.3 million times**, and signed up for nearly **38,000 library cards**.

A LIBRARY NASHVILLE USES EVERY DAY

7.18M

CHECKOUTS PER YEAR

LITERACY

1.4 MILLION CHILDREN'S BOOKS BORROWED

Families made children's books the most borrowed type in the system in FY26, and NPL Foundation support enabled the story times and puppet shows that build a love of reading before a child can read on their own.

A LIBRARY RENEWED

31,118 NEW PRINT BOOKS IN THREE MONTHS

Main Library reopened in April, and by June its monthly checkouts had tripled from the July before. Record collections funding put new books on shelves across the system, including 5,355 children's books in June alone.

ADVOCACY THAT DELIVERED

RECORD YEAR FOR COLLECTIONS FUNDING

Metro invested $5.8 million in Library collections, and the state added $400,000. The NPL Foundation committed $500,000 more for FY27.



2.37M

VISITS PER YEAR

37,852 NEW CARDS

Nashville kept its Library busy, checking out nearly 20,000 items every day.

LIFE SKILLS

673,731 COMPUTER & WI-FI SESSIONS

559,990 DATABASE SESSIONS

Neighbors came to the Library to apply for jobs, finish homework, learn a new skill, and research what mattered to them, using the programs and resources your gifts help provide.

CARNEGIE SOCIETY
NASHVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY FOUNDATION

CARNEGIE SOCIETY BOOK CLUB

Harpeth Hall graciously hosted the annual Carnegie Society Book Club in March. Members explored *James* by Percival Everett.



PICNIC WITH THE LIBRARY

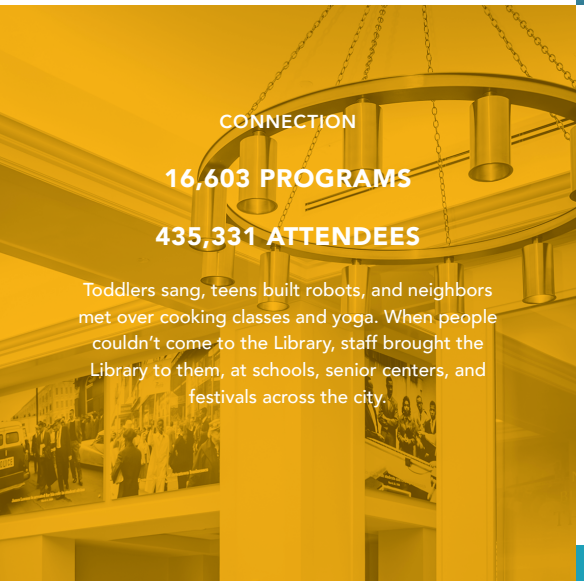
In April, families celebrated a return to the reopened Main Library with Picnic with the Library, raising more than $100,000 for teen's and children's programming.

"The puppet show and story time were sweet reminders of how enjoyable being in an age-appropriate atmosphere can inspire my child's desire to learn. She was as inspiring to me as the puppets were to her."

—PICNIC GUEST

THANK-A-THON

On National Library Workers Day, gift baskets arrived at each branch—filled with treats, stickers, and a handcrafted guest book brimming with handwritten cards from library users of all ages. Notes came from families with young children, graduate students, longtime patrons, the Mayor, several Metro Council members, NPL and NPLF board members, and the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Nashville's sister city. Council Member Terry Vo, chair of the Arts, Parks, and Libraries Committee, personally rallied her council colleagues to participate alongside everyday patrons.



CONNECTION

16,603 PROGRAMS

435,331 ATTENDEES

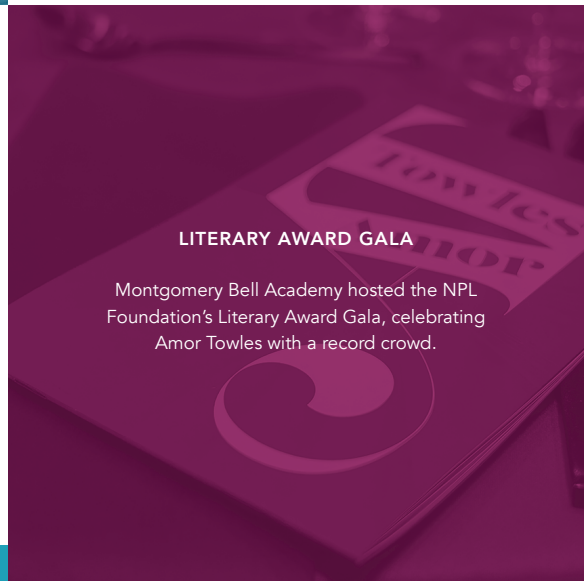
Toddlers sang, teens built robots, and neighbors met over cooking classes and yoga. When people couldn't come to the Library, staff brought the Library to them, at schools, senior centers, and festivals across the city.

NEXT CHAPTER SOCIETY • CHECK OUT NASHVILLE

Next Chapter society organized the second annual Check Out Nashville in June, doubling the number of small businesses that participated in the week long event of shopping and dining to support NPL.

"Borrowing business books was one of the main ways I learned how to start a small business."

—STEPHANIE STYLL · KILLJOY, CHECK OUT NASHVILLE BUSINESS PARTNER



LITERARY AWARD GALA

Montgomery Bell Academy hosted the NPL Foundation's Literary Award Gala, celebrating Amor Towles with a record crowd.

LITERACY

Reading shapes lives. Children who are not reading on grade level by third grade often struggle throughout their school years, and adults who cannot read face worse health outcomes and longer stretches of poverty than their literate peers. Nashville Public Library meets that need at all 21 locations, offering free books, training, and support to readers of every age, and all made possible by private donors.

WISHING CHAIR PRODUCTIONS

Puppet shows are one of the most effective ways to introduce a child to the power of story, combining voice, movement, and character to bring books to life before a child can read independently. Wishing Chair Productions and its outreach arm, the Puppet Truck, carry that experience across Nashville, from the Main Library stage to schools, senior living facilities, hospitals, and community festivals throughout Davidson County.

"The wordless show was perfect for our hearing-impaired pre-schoolers just to relax and enjoy the show, not missing anything."

—Teacher of the Deaf III, Mama Lere Hearing School at Vanderbilt Bill Wilkerson Center



38,729 SMILES

Together, Wishing Chair Productions and the Puppet Truck delivered **546 performances** to children, adults, and seniors across Nashville in FY26

2 EMMY NOMINATIONS

Wishing Chair Productions' original musical "Goldilocks" earned two Emmy nominations for **Best Audio Recording, Mixing and Design**, and **Best Musical Composition Arrangement** for a puppet show made inside a public library

Begin Bright

Begin Bright is Nashville Public Library's groundbreaking, new early literacy program, that aims to prepare children for kindergarten reading-readiness.

The program gives every childcare center in the county a Little Library filled with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Books, NPL training resources, access to on-demand digital early literacy training for caregivers and teachers.

Tennsco has generously donated Little Library carts for every participating childcare center. The carts are delivered to GEODIS, our global logistics partner, where they are assembled, packed with resources, and delivered to 10 childcare centers each month. Once the carts arrive, Junior League volunteers step in as our **Begin Bright Concierges**. They visit each childcare center to deliver the educational resources that accompany the Imagination Library books and help childcare workers download and get started with the professional development app. They answer questions, provide monthly hands-on support, and make sure each center has everything it needs. It's a great example of what can happen when Nashville organizations come together—each partner bringing its expertise and resources.

The impact is clear from the overwhelming response from teachers:

- At Premier Learning Academy, staff stopped the delivery team at the door to ask, "who do we thank for this?"
- At T's Tots, a home-based daycare, the owner hugged the team and lit up learning her teachers' training hours would count toward state certification.
- At Patricia's Creative Day Care, a home-based center, the owner put it simply: "everyone always forgets the home-based centers."
- At Invictus Charter School, a teacher called the team "a fairy godmother."
- At Brighter Day Childcare Center, manager Ticoya has watched her students grow more vocal, experimenting with new words and forming full sentences.

Every Little Library is stocked with **Dolly Parton's Imagination Library** books and Nashville Public Library early literacy resources; participants have access to 260 minutes of digital training

70 centers equipped with a Little Library, resource guide, and coaching.

Active partnerships with Tennsco, GEODIS and Junior League ensure success is community-wide

22.5M raised for Begin Bright—with a $27M goal to endow the program permanently, so it will be funded forever



Vanderbilt University's Prenatal-to-3 Policy Impact Center is actively studying the rollout to ensure the program's success. Begin Bright will launch in the community once the research is completed.

LIFE SKILLS

Every adult deserves the tools to live an informed, choice-filled life. Nashville Public Library delivers on that promise through free technology classes, jobseeker resources, language learning, wellness programs, and connections to social services, offered in branches in the neighborhoods where Nashvillians already gather. This work runs on a public-private partnership: private philanthropy is what lets library staff travel to senior communities, welcome new English speakers, and meet adults exactly where they are on the road to stability and opportunity. A library card unlocks doors for people of all ages.

STUDIO NPL FINDING A NEW WAY TO BE HEARD

Last fall, at a site in South Nashville, Studio NPL's Mobile Lab robotics program introduced a young man, a recently arrived refugee, to recording software connected to a programmable robot. The boy discovered he could type messages and have the robot play them back, and he began driving the robot up to people to start conversations, a way to connect that felt safe and comfortable when his English language skills did not. A year later, when Studio NPL staff returned to the school, he greeted them with confidence, eager to share his enthusiasm.

When words felt difficult, technology gave him a new way to be heard.



11,500+ PATRONS

Studio NPL served more than **11,500 patrons** through in-person programs and outreach in FY26, plus **150+ virtual attendees**

90%

of teens report **growth in confidence** and soft skills through Studio NPL programming

COMMUNITY GARDENS / BE WELL / YOGA /SEED EXCHANGE /DIGITAL INCLUSION / NASHVILLE

ADULT LITERACY MEETING ADULTS WHERE THEY ARE

At Project Return, a reentry program for people leaving incarceration, NPL's Adult Literacy team shows up each week. In one month alone, 28 adult learners attended digital skills classes there, and 11 walked out with brand-new library cards. For many, this was their first step in years toward workforce readiness. Nashville Public Library has the tools and resources to support a fresh start.

NAZA FIFTEEN YEARS, STILL GROWING

On December 17, 2025 more than 120 guests gathered at the Adventure Science Center to celebrate the Nashville After Zone Alliance's 15th anniversary. Former Mayor Karl Dean, who established NAZA in 2010, joined city and library leadership to reflect on its legacy, while former program participants shared their own stories alongside a performance by NAZA partner Girls Write Nashville. NAZA recognized the partners and advocates who have shaped fifteen years of youth development in Nashville, honoring Martha O'Bryan Center and the YMCA with the Crystal Partner Award, Councilmember Burkley Allen with the Champion Award, former NAZA Youth Leaders with the Youth Leadership Award, and Allie Duke with the Youth Visionary Award.

SEED EXCHANGE A SHARED LOVE OF GARDENING

Started in 2014 at a handful of pilot branches, Seed Exchange now distributes vegetable, herb, and flower seeds at most Library locations, in response to community interest in gardening and healthy living. Community partners and volunteer Seed Liaisons handle packaging, outreach, and social media, and the program has built partnerships with organizations like Metro Parks, Metro Water, and Master Gardeners of Davidson County, and at community events from the Shelby Bottoms Seed Swap to the Tomato Art Fest. What started as a small seed giveaway has grown into a citywide network of neighbors teaching neighbors how to grow their own food.



28 PROJECT RETURN ADULT LEARNERS

11 Project Return learners left with **brand-new library cards** that same month

2,804 adult learners and community partners served through 138 classes and workshops in FY26, in partnership with 38 local agencies

NAZA IMPACT

Since its founding in 2010, **NAZA has funded more than 30 nonprofit youth organizations** and enabled nearly **30,000** middle school students to participate in free out-of-school time programs

NAZA has trained thousands of youth development professionals citywide over the past fifteen years

SEED EXCHANGE GROWS

Seed Exchange has grown from 4 pilot branches to **20 Nashville Public Library locations** since 2014

CONNECTION



The library is a gathering place that turns connection into community. Nashville Public Library hosts more than 17,000 free programs and welcomes 2.3 million visits a year, at all branches, giving neighbors a place to learn Nashville's history, encounter new perspectives, and find each other. Special Collections alone draws 30,000 visitors a year to the Civil Rights Room and Votes for Women Room, where the events of the past become tools for understanding the present.

17K
Free programs per year

2.3M
Library visits per year

7,362 VISITORS

to the Civil Rights and Votes for Women Rooms —with Main closed 9 months of the fiscal year

103 Special Collections programs for 4,316 patrons across 269 hours

15 high school students from 7 Middle Tennessee schools completed 32.5 hours of curriculum across 15 learning modules, guided by 12 Nashville community mentors

Participants rated the Pathfinders program 4.75 out of 5 for overall satisfaction and gave it **a perfect 5** out of 5 for likelihood to recommend it to others

Archives answered 1,186 research requests, including one that led to a new historical marker for the Compton-Burton house and farm

The Home Movie Project digitized roughly 150 films in its first year, a quarter of the Center's entire digitized collection and the largest single-year addition in its history





SPECIAL COLLECTIONS PATHFINDERS PROGRAM

Each June, high schoolers from across Middle Tennessee spend a week inside Special Collections' Civil Rights Room and Votes for Women Room, learning civic leadership skills built directly from the history housed there. Now in its second year, Pathfinders paired foundational lessons on Nashville's civil rights and suffrage history with strategic foresight training and speed mentoring sessions alongside Nashville community leaders. Working in small teams, students spent the week developing original Youth Leadership Plans addressing issues like youth health equity and food insecurity, then presented their plans to the full group.

"Pathfinders showed me that leading conversations and starting a movement begins with a single step. Even a small community can create meaningful change when it comes together with purpose."

—Pathfinders participant

METRO ARCHIVES FINDING ISAAC

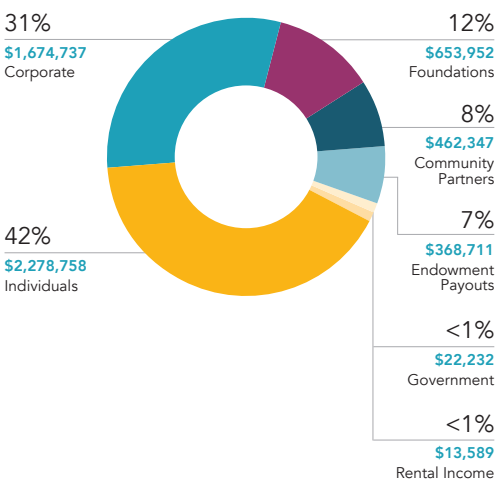
For several years, Metro Archives staff worked with a researcher tracing the life of her ancestor, Isaac, who was enslaved. Piecing together probate and deed records, they discovered Isaac lived in Nashville with the Walker family until the mid-1840s and settled in Arkansas after emancipation. She turned those findings into a quilt documenting Isaac's journey, submitted it to the Quilt Alliance's national "Tell Your Story" Quilt Challenge, and sent Archives staff a photo of the finished piece along with a video explaining what it meant to her.

That same spirit of preservation is happening at scale. This year, Metro Archives' Audiovisual Heritage Center launched the Nashville Neighborhood History and Culture Home Movie Project, collecting and digitizing home movies donated by families before analog film, VHS, and Super8 tapes deteriorate beyond saving, each one paired with an oral history from the donating family.

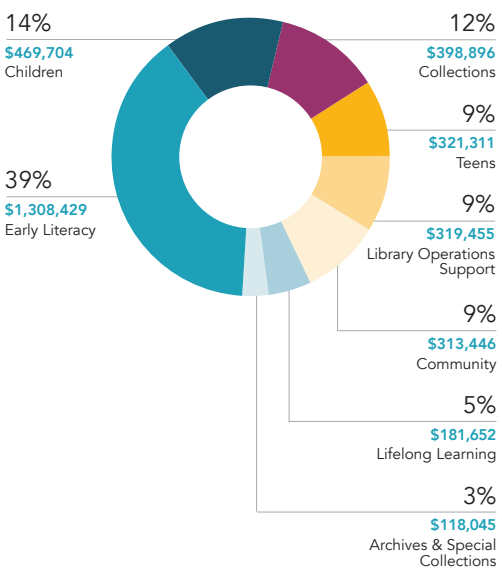
FINANCIALS

NPLF is working to build a steady stream of resources so that NPL can not only launch groundbreaking initiatives, but sustain them into the future.

Sources of Support



Support Granted to the Library



To view the Library Foundation's annual audited financial statements, as well as our IRS Form 990, visit www.nplf.org/annual-report.

FUNDS RAISED FOR THE LIBRARY: $5.4 MILLION

How donations are used

$3,430,938
Programs + Collections + Library Needs

$1,610,563
Restricted for Begin Bright Early Literacy

$1,258,862
Foundation Operations

As a department of Metro Nashville, Nashville Public Library receives the majority of its funding directly from the city. Nashville Public Library Foundation was created in 1997 to enhance the Library's programs, facilities, and collections beyond the city's budget.

STRATEGIC PLAN

The Foundation spent a year in listening sessions and long conversations about how to best serve our Library. We affirmed our mission, vision, and articulated two principles that shape our work. The Board adopted the resulting plan at the start of FY26, and it is helping us set our course.

TRUST IS THE VITAL CURRENT

The Foundation and Library are interconnected and our approach to working together reflects the best of that relationship. Trust-Based Philanthropy is about: accountability, openness, real partnership. We set goals side by side, the Foundation's network of supporters paired with the Library's expertise. It buys three things: seamless support, empowered leadership, amplified impact. Every story of success is a product of that trust. A donor trusted the Foundation. The Foundation trusted the Library.

A FOUNDATION THAT REFLECTS ITS CITY

A library serves everyone, which means an organization funding it should look like everyone. That commitment is written into our mission, vision, and values, and carried out through our policies and practices across staff, board, vendors, and fundraising. A wide range of perspectives strengthens our work.

Our thanks to the donors, NPL staff, & partners who shaped this plan.

Read it in full at ***nplf.org****.*

THREE PRIORITIES

1 Deliver Begin Bright

Begin Bright will succeed on deep collaboration and mutual accountability. We will build the shared leadership, resources, and momentum to bring it to every corner of Davidson County and create an early literacy model for Nashville to lead the country.

2 Grow the Circle

We will strengthen NPL Foundation's presence in branches and across the community and expand engagement from every corner of the city. We will encourage monthly, unrestricted giving because it funds innovation as well as the library's most urgent needs, including a robust collection.

3 Deepen advocacy

Building on our advocacy success, we will deepen Council relationships and activate Ambassadors to keep this library system thriving and to keep Metro investment strong.

Rose and Joe

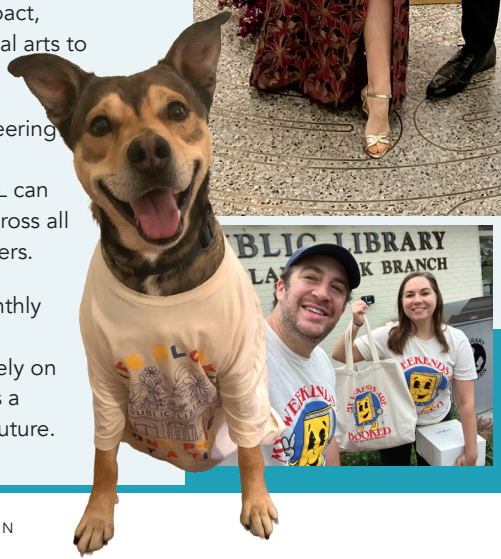
When Rosemary and Joe Rapolla joined the Next Chapter Society (NCS) in 2018, they were looking for a way to build community in Nashville. What began as a search for connection quickly blossomed into a core family value centered on giving back.

Rosemary and Joe fondly recall volunteering for and attending festive events like the Patrons Party and Gala, where the community's shared enthusiasm for supporting the library is always palpable. Rose highlights the exponential growth of the Next Chapter Society book club—particularly a vibrant evening for Malibu Rising at East Nashville Beer Works that drew over 40 attendees—as one of her proudest milestones. They also love seeing high-impact, collaborative programs like String City bring library stories and local arts to life across the city.

Through leadership roles on the Next Chapter Council and volunteering events. They have helped NCS become a vital social network that engages neighbors and anchors them to the library. To ensure NPL can continue providing essential programs and broad public access across all branches, Rose and Joe chose to become monthly Library Sustainers.

Looking ahead to their ten-year giving milestone, Rose says, "monthly giving is the ultimate "set-it-and-forget-it" option—offering total convenience while supplying predictable revenue the library can rely on year-round." Best of all, they view their ongoing investment not as a sacrifice, but as a fun, deeply rewarding way to shape Nashville's future.





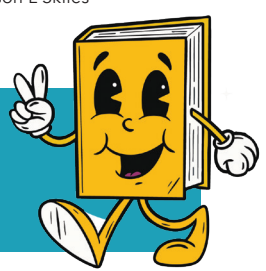


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Alese Adams
Amanda Adams
Madhu Babu Adiki
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Lessie Alderman
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Sally & Clay Bailey
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Maria Baker
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Linda Hamon
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Anne Stewart Lynde
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Jamie Redfearn
Hugh Reichley
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Kimberly Schramm
Karin Schulhauser
Paige Seals
Joshua Sedlak
Megan & Shawn Seliber
Cherie Sgambati
Noelle & Morgan Shaw
Mary Sellers Shaw
Sydney Shearer & Andrew Solarski
Elizabeth & Tom Sherrard
Lindsey Siebe
Alison L Skiles

LIBRARY SUSTAINERS

We are grateful to the many people whose monthly support provides a reliable stream of income for the library and enables it to innovate and respond to our growing community.



To learn more about the benefits of becoming a Library Sustainer or joining Next Chapter Society go to nplf.org/get-involved

Alec Smith
Emily Smith
Jennifer Smith
Tracy Smith
Kelly Sobel
Britt Stafford
Lisa Staggs
Marissa Starr
Tim Stewart
Kayla Stierwalt
Candace Surface
Seth Swihart
Liz Sze
Margaret Tarpley
Amanda Thomas
Sara Thomas
Julea Thomerson
Afua & Alvin Thompson
Allison Thompson & Robert Baum
Lane Tillner
Mallory Tober
Sarah Tomkinson
Samantha Triplett
Samantha Troup
Frances Vetters



Paul Wagner
Shannon Wagner & Brandon Cox
Martin Walker
John Wallace
Mandy Wallace
Jules Waller
Margaret Ward
Karin Waterman
Clayton Watts
Stephanie Waye
Anna Whorton
Sara Wigal
Phyllis & Stephen Wilburn
Ellen Wildman
Anna Wilhelm
Brandon Wilkerson
Arianna Wilkerson
Dana Williams
John Williams & Chad Sain
Kelsey Willman
Emilee Wilson
Savannah Wilson
Parker Wishik
Becca Zeglovitch
Morgan Zienkiewicz





A Lasting Legacy

Often, when asked what makes Nashville Public Library special, people will describe a person: the librarian who found the perfect book for a picky reader or the staff member who helped a job seeker navigate an online application.

A new endowment ensures these dedicated team members keep growing, too. Established in honor of Keith Simmons' decades of leadership, including co-founding the NPL Foundation in 1997 and chairing the Board of Trustees, and his wife Kay's years of dedicated fundraising, the **Kay and Keith Simmons Staff Development Fund** has grown from $114,665 to $280,000. As a permanent endowment generating around $14,000 annually, the fund acts as a lasting resource. It directly funds real-world opportunities: sending librarians to national conferences, offering leadership training, and hosting a system-wide Staff Summit.

When staff learn new technology, innovative literacy techniques, or better ways to serve evolving neighborhoods, that knowledge returns to the patrons. Strengthening library staff enriches everything they touch—from reference help and story times to the welcoming spirit at the front desk. Honoring Kay and Keith Simmons, this endowment will sharpen skills and elevate service across all 21 library locations for generations to come.



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