San Mateo County Libraries

Agenda Item III.

To:	JPA Governing Board
From:	Anne-Marie Despain, Director of Library Services
Date:	September 10, 2025
Meeting:	September 15, 2025
Re:	Director's Report

This report summarizes significant library operations and program activities that have occurred since the last meeting of the Governing Board. Services and activities are aligned with our Strategic Plan Goals.

We listen to our community and create responsive services and spaces where everyone belongs

Makermobile Outreach

In FY 2024–25, our Makermobile rolled innovation and creativity into our communities with fun and engaging maker activities. Our focus this year included Coastside locations where residents aren't geographically close to a library, ensuring that everyone has access to our hands-on maker experiences. The Makermobile energized local elementary school arts and sciences days, engaging more than 75 students with our interactive maker carts and inspiring students to explore our library makerspaces. We also connected with farm-working families at a local food distribution event, partnered with the Boys & Girls Club to bring the Makermobile to summer camps, and joined California State Parks for the lively Coastal Wildflower Day.

Our inland adventures were equally exciting. The Makermobile starred at Library Night in China Basin Park, giving Giants fans a chance to try free-hand 3D printing with 3D pens. It made multiple stops at Big Lift Inspiring Summers enrichment camps, engaging more than 900 students in essential maker skills like tool handling and creative problem-solving. We joined the fun at Summer Fest at Coyote Point and brought playful engineering to the County's Disaster Preparedness Day.

Our Makermobile continues to showcase the library's ability to connect, inspire, and support our community. Looking ahead, we're excited to expand school visits, spark new partnerships, and keep fueling curiosity, creativity, and joy for all.

Belmont Library Reopening Celebration

On Saturday, August 23, we held a wonderful celebration to mark the completion of the Belmont Library Improvement Project with the community. Following a few months of closure, the library reopened in July, receiving enthusiastic praise from the public for the beautiful interior and exterior enhancements.

The morning was made even more special by remarks from Belmont Mayor Julia Mates, joined by all City Council members, as well as a presentation from Friends of the Belmont Library President Pat Barkett, who awarded a generous $125,000 contribution toward the project. Once the ribbon was cut, a traditional Chinese lion dance blessed the doors to welcome this new beginning— inviting happiness, good fortune and positive energy.

With its fresh, updated look and new Makerspace, patrons were delighted to celebrate their beloved community space, while enjoying a day filled with engaging programming including a live jazz performance, henna painting, a traditional Aztec dance and maker activities for all ages.

We sincerely thank our partners, the City of Belmont and the Friends of the Belmont Library, for their invaluable support in revitalizing this beautiful library and fostering a vibrant community hub. The celebration was a wonderful success!

Foster City Makerspace Update

San Mateo County Libraries is pleased to share that progress continues on the Foster City Makerspace project, a dedicated new space inspired by community input and guided by our Makerspace Master Plan. The Makerspace will be created by converting an existing 660-square-foot teen room into a flexible, technology-rich environment. Designed to welcome learners of all ages, this innovative space will spark creativity and support learning through access to both traditional and emerging technologies. Library staff recently met with Foster City staff and architect Brad Cox to revisit the design, update the cost estimate, and define next steps to move the project forward for final plan review and permitting. Once approved, the City will begin the bidding phase in early 2026. The Foster City Makerspace will help nurture curiosity, and expand educational opportunities, and empower our communities to design, create and collaborate together.

East Palo Alto New Library Update

The City of East Palo Alto has approved a new direction for the community's long-planned new library. Originally envisioned as a standalone 24,000-square-foot facility adjacent to the EPACenter, the library will now be a cornerstone of the City's Civic Commons project at 2535 Pulgas Avenue. This centralized, four-story, 102,478 square-foot civic building will include a new library, community space, City Hall, and office space, alongside a new police station and public parkland. The library's anticipated design includes 24,000 square feet of dedicated space on the first and second floors, an outdoor children's area, and shared spaces that enhance access to civic and community resources.

On July 29, 2025, the City Council approved moving forward with this integrated vision, streamlining public services, expanding library capacity, and creating a vibrant civic hub to serve East Palo Alto for decades to come.

- July 29, 2025 City Council Meeting, Agenda Item 15.1, The New Civic Commons
- Despite looming deficit, East Palo Alto eyes new civic building, Palo Alto Online, June 20, 2025
- Jobs' widow offers land for new city hall; she has property she wants to develop, Palo Alto Daily Post, July 28, 2025
- A once in a lifetime opportunity': East Palo Alto advances plan for new civic center, the Almanac, July 30, 2025
- Consortium of Private Funders' Land Offer Sparks Hope and Questions in East Palo Alto, California City News, August 5, 2025

Technology Enhancements and Resilience

Our IT team has been hard at work making some improvements to keep our libraries running reliably. Behind the scenes, we've improved our network by upgrading switches, servers, and Wi-Fi access points—so things run faster and more smoothly. We also updated all library computers (for staff and visitors) to Windows 11, offering improved performance and stronger security. In addition, we have deployed emergency power equipment to all library locations, strengthening our ability to maintain critical service delivery during power outages. This new system helps us keep essential services running even if the power goes out, so patrons can still count on the library during unexpected power events.

We connect people and build partnerships to achieve shared goals

San Mateo County Pride

In June, we participated in the County Pride celebration at Central Park in San Mateo, joining neighboring Redwood City Public Library and San Mateo Public Library in activating the outreach space. Isaac Fellman, a Bay Area author we brought in for the event, enthralled participants with the craft and inspiration behind his futuristic novel *Notes from a Regicide*, a trans family saga about believing in yourself to achieve the impossible. We introduced over 425 event attendees to library services, successfully registered fifteen people for new library cards, and distributed 200 celebratory books with pride representation and themes to excited and grateful families, teens, and adults.

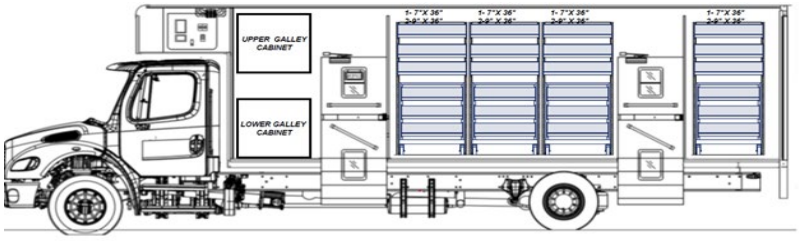
Immigration Workshop Series

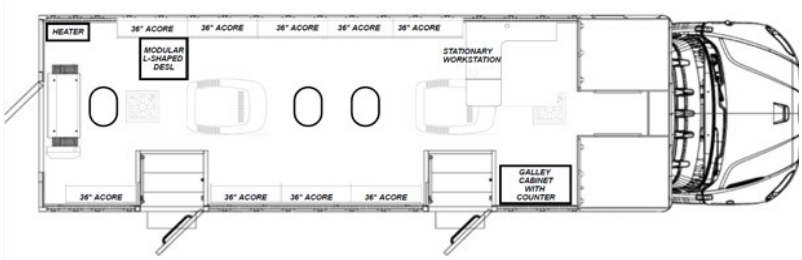
On July 25th, we hosted our third immigration workshop of 2025 at East Palo Alto Library. Over 40 community members attended, seeking legal support and guidance from an immigration attorney. Through this event, we were able to provide critical assistance on a range of immigration matters, including citizenship, U-visas, Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and general consultations. This workshop is a continuation of our successful partnership with the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), as part of a broader effort that included events in Half Moon Bay and Millbrae. Together, these workshops have supported a total of 70 individuals, with 10 successfully submitting their U.S. citizenship applications as a result of this collaboration. We were also pleased to welcome the Mexican Consulate to the East Palo Alto event, where they hosted an informational table and engaged with attendees while they waited for their consultations.

We engage our communities through meaningful outreach and expanded access to resources

Bookmobile Update

Our new hybrid bookmobile combines accessibility, technology, and modern design to deliver library resources directly to our communities. The purchase of a new bookmobile to replace our aging vehicle was approved by the JPA Governing Board on February 3, 2025.





The hybrid bookmobile will be a Freightliner M2 with a 22-foot body, which allows for a well-equipped mobile library. Notable features include comfortable bench seating for interactive reading sessions and modular workstations that adapt to the diverse needs of patrons. The interior is climate-controlled, ensuring a pleasant experience in any weather. It's equipped with a versatile hybrid driveline, enabling efficient travel between communities while being environmentally conscious. To enhance the visitor experience, windows and LED lighting will warmly illuminate the space, making it conducive for all activities. Accessibility is a key focus; the bookmobile includes an ADA-compliant wheelchair lift to ensure that all community members can easily access its offerings.

Our new vehicle is currently queued for production at Freightliner. Construction of the chassis is scheduled to begin in October with a build time of approximately four weeks. Once finished, the truck will be shipped for the installation of the hybrid system. By the end of the year, it will be sent for installation of the truck's body. In early 2026, the truck will arrive at TechOps for its full library customization and is expected to be delivered to San Mateo County Libraries in June 2026.

We champion a culture of continuous growth and discovery for all

Bestselling Author Janelle Brown

On Saturday June 7th at Atherton Library, we shared an unforgettable community experience with Janelle Brown, Atherton native and the acclaimed author behind multiple national bestsellers. Brown engaged an audience of 104 attendees with a thrilling discussion of her latest page-turner, *What Kind of Paradise*, followed by light refreshments and a book signing. San Mateo County Libraries distributed 300 giveaway copies of *What Kind of Paradise* across all libraries, with 100 of the copies reserved for author talk attendees. Brown touched on themes of her book that revolve around Silicon Valley, the tech world, and the rise of artificial intelligence. It was a special opportunity to celebrate a captivating storyteller in her hometown, reunite her with former community, and provide fans the chance to meet and ask Brown questions about her writing process.

Jennifer and Matthew Holm Author Visit

Best-selling authors Jennifer L. Holm and Matthew Holm visited Foster City Library for an amazing author talk, live drawing session, and Q&A for their newest novel, "Sunny Figures It Out." The sibling team are the authors of several beloved children's graphic novel series such as "Babymouse" and "Squish."

A crowd of 101 excited kids and families heard firsthand how they bring their stories to life before meeting the duo for a book signing and photos. In total, we provided the community with 150 copies of the book to keep. Jennifer Holm previously lived in Foster City and shared fond memories of bringing her children to the library. We're thrilled to have welcomed her back for this inspiring and creativity-filled event.

Culinary Author Talk Spotlight

Zareen's Pakistani Kitchen, by local Bay Area restauranteurs Zareen and Umair Khan, offers an engaging introduction to authentic Pakistani cuisine, drawing on the authors' upbringing in Karachi and the culinary traditions of their community. Umair Khan and his two children, Amara and Sahlik, joined us on Wednesday, August 13, at San Carlos Library to share their stories, traditions, and the spirit of gathering around food. The warm and engaging atmosphere captivated the audience of 180 attendees from start to finish, concluding with a keepsake copy of the cookbook.

Summer Trending Titles

Readers of all ages took advantage of the summer season to engage in captivating stories, both online and in print. Adult readers soaked up the sun and stories using our digital collections to explore themes of love, resilience, and self-discovery. From beach-read

romances like Great Big Beautiful Life, The Wedding People, and Funny Story, to learning how to make positive impacts in your life with The Let Them Theory, adult readers devoured these titles on their phones, tablets, and e-readers.

Teen readers eagerly turned the pages of their most-loved YA fiction and manga series all summer long. Books that inspired television shows like One Piece and The Summer I Turned Pretty, and soon to be a motion picture, Sunrise on the Reaping, were big hits with young adult readers this summer.

Kids made a splash with their favorite graphic novel series on hoopla, diving into school drama and epic adventures with The Baby-Sitters Club: Mallory and Trouble with Twins and Big Nate: Attack of the Cheez Funk Breath. Readers also delved into magical worlds with The Dragonet Prophecy and experienced fresh beginnings with The New Girl.

Professional Development & Training

We continue to invest in the growth and development of our staff to advance innovation and service excellence. In fiscal year 2024-25, over 5,104 hours of training were completed in our Learning Management System, supporting continuous learning across the organization. Training themes included workplace safety, leadership and management, wellness and diversity and inclusion. Staff members also attended professional development conferences, bringing back new skills and insights to enhance our programs and operations. These opportunities reflect our strategic commitment to building a forward-thinking, well-equipped workforce that meets the evolving needs of our communities.

County-wide Employee Engagement Survey

At San Mateo County Libraries, we continue to build a workplace culture rooted in pride, purpose, and connection. This year's county-wide employee engagement survey revealed strong improvements in how our staff experience their work, supervisors, and leadership. More than 230 staff members participated in the survey, sharing that 92% feel proud to work here, 89% value the relationships they have with their teams and supervisors, and

87% believe in the quality of service we provide to our communities. Participation in the survey rose by over 50%, earning recognition from the County Engagement Committee as having one of the most improved year-over-year response rates County-wide. The survey also pointed to opportunities to further strengthen career growth and professional development. These results reflect our ongoing commitment to fostering an inclusive, responsive, and high-performing workplace.

Celebrating Our LEAD Graduates

This February, we proudly launched a new cohort of our in-house leadership program LEAD (Leadership, Education, and Development), designed to nurture talent, strengthen succession planning, and empower staff to grow within our organization. Over the course of the program, participants engaged in monthly sessions covering essential leadership skills such as public speaking, emotional intelligence, and strategic thinking. Guided by seasoned leaders and enriched by diverse perspectives, the cohort developed the confidence, capabilities, and vision needed to take the next step in their careers.

We are thrilled to recognize the 2025 LEAD cohort for their achievements and dedication. Their growth reflects the spirit of innovation, collaboration, and service that drives San Mateo County Libraries forward, and we can't wait to see the positive impact they will continue to make in our communities.

Congratulations to Nancy Analco, North Fair Oaks Senior Librarian, Nick Hernandez, Atherton Librarian, Nicole Fernandez, Brisbane Librarian, Jenna Varden, Foster City Librarian, and Julia Wright, Pacifica Senior Librarian!

Employee Service Awards

Several employees are being honored by the County for reaching significant milestones in their years of service: Nineti Fanua, East Palo Alto Library Assistant (10 years), Lynne Fetter, Atherton Librarian (10 years), Susan Hoff, Millbrae Library Assistant (10 years) Rachael Hood, Portola Valley Library Assistant (10 years), Winnie Kuang-Todd, Accountant (20 years), Danae Ramirez, Deputy Director (10 years), Kelly Reinaker, Atherton Senior Librarian (10 years), and Amy Selmi, Foster City Senior Librarian (20 years).

Congratulations to these Library Champions for their many years of service and invaluable contributions to the San Mateo County Libraries!

Personnel News

We are excited to share the following personnel announcements:

Annie Malley, Half Moon Bay Library Manager, will be retiring at the end of October, after 20 years of service. Annie started her career at San Mateo County Libraries in 2005 as the Assistant Branch Manager at San Carlos and Brisbane Libraries before promoting to Library Manager of the Half Moon Bay Library. Annie's nearly 40-year career in libraries also included 18 years at the California Academy of Sciences.

Annie was instrumental in building broad community support for the new Half Moon Bay Library. Her tireless advocacy and ability to rally and inform the community were critical to the success of the project. Thanks to her leadership, the new library opened in 2018 and reflects the needs and dreams of the people it serves. Annie has a rare talent for bringing people together and is deeply valued by the community. With a keen understanding of the diversity across our coastal communities, she brings a deep and genuine commitment to reaching everyone.

Annie leads with heart. Her warmth, responsiveness, and thoughtfulness shine through in every interaction, whether she's cultivating new partnerships, responding to community needs, or celebrating the success of her team. Under her guidance, the Half Moon Bay Library has become a place where something special is always happening, innovative programs, meaningful volunteer opportunities, and a deeply engaged team that reflects the community it serves.

Julie Smith has accepted a transfer to the Half Moon Bay Library. Julie is currently the Manager of Pacifica Libraries and has been deeply involved in increasing outreach services while also serving as the library liaison to the Pacifica Library Advisory Council, focused on helping to gain support for building a new library. Prior to being promoted to Manager, Julie worked as a Senior Librarian at Half Moon Bay and Belmont Libraries. She also served as the Half Moon Bay Youth Services Librarian. Before joining SMCL, she was a Librarian at Ingrid B. Lacy Middle School, where she developed a passion for providing excellent library services to young people. Julie holds a master's in library science from San Jose State University, a Doctorate of Pharmacy from UC San Francisco, and a bachelor's degree in biochemistry from the University of Oregon.

Ismael Betancourt has accepted the position of Community Library Manager at the East Palo Alto Library. With 9 years at San Mateo County Libraries, Ismael has progressively taken on more responsibility as he has grown in his career. Ismael has held various positions including Community Technology Specialist at Belmont and Atherton, Librarian at Belmont Library and most recently Senior Librarian at Half Moon Bay Library. Ismael graduated from our Leadership, Education and Development (LEAD) program in 2023. He holds a BA in Digital Media with a minor in Graphic Design and a master's in library science from San José State University. Ismael is bilingual in Spanish.

Jeff Gibson has accepted the position of Community Library Manager at the Millbrae Library. Jeff joins us from Pleasanton Library and Recreation Department, where he currently serves as a Senior Librarian, overseeing the digital resources and adult literacy divisions. His 14 years of public library experience also includes seven years with the Contra Costa County Library. Jeff holds a master's in library science from San José State University, a bachelor's in English from UC Santa Barbara, and an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of San Francisco.

Francis Hébert has accepted a promotion to Library Services Manager, Access Services Division. Francis is currently the Community Library Manager at the San Carlos Library. Francis joined San Mateo County Libraries last year from Salinas Public Library where he served as the Technical Services Manager managing the library's physical and online

collections, and information technology services. Francis holds a master's in library science and bachelor's in philosophy from the University of Montreal and a Bachelor's in French Language and Literature from McGill University.

Rachel McDonnell has accepted a promotion to Library Services Manager, Facilities, Fleet and Projects Division. Rachel started as a Senior Library Assistant at the Portola Valley Library in 2007. She was promoted to Associate Management Analyst in Administration and has since served as a Management Analyst for over fifteen years, most recently as Project and Facilities Manager. Rachel holds a Bachelor's degree in International Relations and Diplomacy and an MBA from Schiller International University in Paris, France.

Giselle Mendoza Leonardo has accepted a transfer to the position of Librarian at the Half Moon Bay Library. She previously served as a Librarian at the North Fair Oaks Library. Giselle holds a Bachelor's degree in sociology and Latin American and Latino studies from the UC, Santa Cruz and an MLIS from San José State University. She is bilingual in Spanish.

Angeles Ramirez has accepted the position of Librarian at the Half Moon Bay Library. Angeles joins us from TSA, where she worked as a Transportation Security Officer. Angeles holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from California State University, East Bay, East Bay and an MLIS from San José State University.

Grant Thompson has accepted the position of Librarian at the North Fair Oaks Library. Grant comes to us from the County of San Luis Obispo Public Libraries, where he served as a Senior Library Associate – Branch Manager. Grant holds a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies from San Diego State University and an MLIS from San José State University.

Leida Bocobo has accepted the position of Library Assistant at the Woodside Library. Leida previously worked as an Extra Help Library Assistant at the San Carlos Library.

Geoleen Noguera has accepted the position of Library Assistant at the Atherton Library. She previously worked as an Extra Help Library Assistant at the Foster City Library. Geoleen holds a bachelor's degree in global studies from California State University, East Bay.

Dulce Nuno has accepted the position of Library Assistant at the North Fair Oaks Library. She previously worked as an Extra Help Library Assistant at the East Palo Alto Library. Dulce is bilingual in Spanish and holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from California State University, East Bay.

Brenda Robles has accepted the position of Library Assistant at the North Fair Oaks Library. She previously worked as an Extra Help Library Assistant at the Pacifica Libraries. Brenda is bilingual in Spanish.

Best wishes to Annie on her retirement, and welcome and congratulations to all our Library Champions!

FY 2024-25 Invoices and Contracts Over $50,000

The County's Open Data Portal (checkbook.smcgov.org) continues to provide an easily accessible view of library expenditures and activity data to both the public and policy makers and a list of invoices with a total amount of $50,000 or more that were paid or executed between January 1, 2025 and June 30, 2025 is provided on the next page.

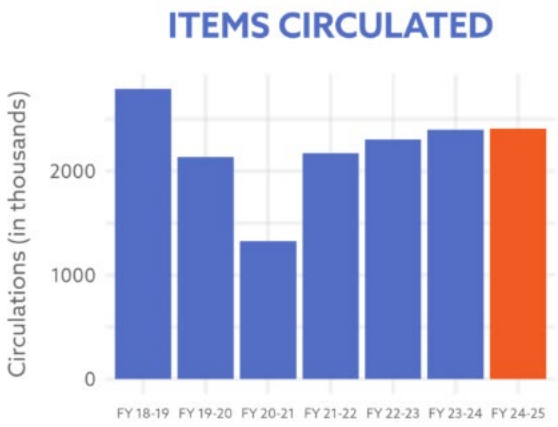
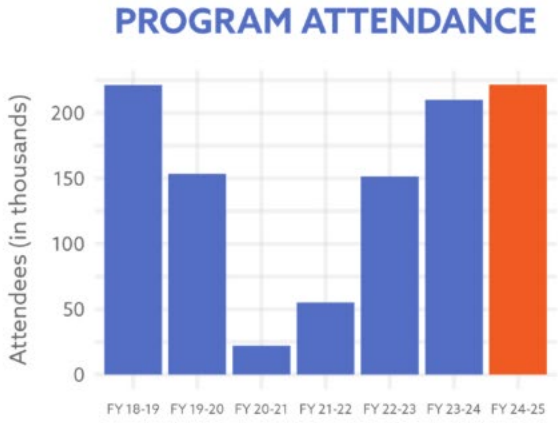
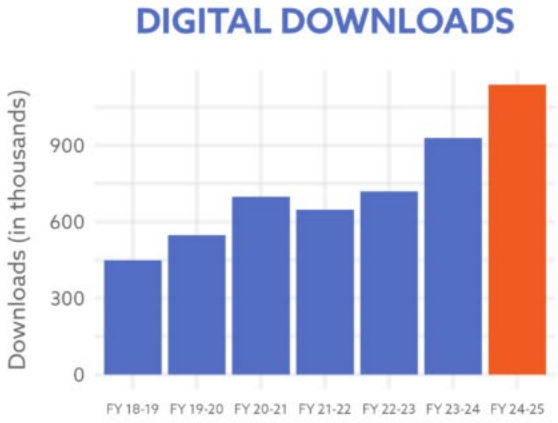
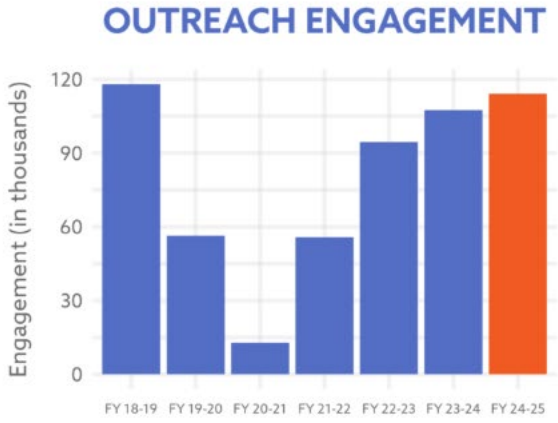
Vendor	Amount	Description
AMF Media	60,000	Literacy Marketing Campaign
AVI Systems	63,271	Library AV Equipment
Coupa	62,663	Procurement Software Annual Fee
CRI	55,843	Library Furniture Deposit
Dell	80,563	Annual Laptop Replacement
Dell	198,619	Annual PC Replacement
Kaseya	63,308	Windows Software Systems Management
Midwest Tape	360,000	Hoopla Digital Resources Annual Fee
Peninsula Library System	70,751	Wireless Access Upgrade
Ross McDonald Company	92,045	Library Shelving Deposit
TechOps	351,260	New Bookmobile Deposit

Libraries in the News

- Summer Reading Challenges Aren't Just for Kids, New York Times, May 30, 2025
- San Mateo Grant Funds go Toward Libraries, Daily Journal, June 12, 2025
- Library Passes for State Parks Survive Budget, The Almanac, July 7, 2025
- Parks & Rec & Libraries, Library Journal, July 7, 2025
- An Unexpected Mays Museum, Daily Journal, July 10, 2025
- Libraries Pay More for E-Books. Some States Want to Change That, New York Times, July 16, 2025
- Public Libraries as our High Street Anchors, Lorensbergs, July 21,2025
- Why you should make the library a model for your business, Fast Company, August 5, 2025
- Bay Area Libraries Have a New Strategy for Attracting Visitors, Mercury News, August 18, 2025
- Maine Library of Things, New York Times, August 20, 2025
- How Libraries Became 'First Responders' for America's Opportunity Gap, Carnegie Corporation of New York, August 21, 2025

Annual Report

We are thrilled to share our new 2024-2025 Annual Report at https://smcl.org/annual-reports/. The stories and photographs featured in this year's report offer a compelling overview of the exceptional work, creative programs, and services we deliver to our communities. This impactful report will be shared with all JPA members, stakeholders, and library partners in the coming months.

Annual Data Update for FY 2024-25

The following charts summarize full year systemwide totals for key library services from FY 2018-19 through FY 2024-25. Library visitors and physical item circulation are at parity with last year, program attendance and outreach engagement have increased slightly, and digital downloads continue to grow at a rapid pace.