

## 2024 ANNUAL REPORT ON

# Donor Impact



*Magician Maritess Zurbano performed a series of magic shows for children at the library in 2024, including at the Magnolia Branch. (Photo by Leo Carmona)*

Libraries are magical places. They bring us together like nowhere else can. At this moment in history, it is vital that we come together in support of our libraries, and we are grateful for your commitment.

2024 was a complex year for our society and for our library. The Seattle Public Library weathered a cyberattack that took systems offline for months. At the Foundation, we said farewell to our longtime leader Jonna Ward and began our next chapter under the leadership of our new CEO Brian Lawrence.

Through it all, our family of donors has amazed us with your support and generosity. You funded more than \$6.4 million for the library to support and inspire our neighbors. You helped us reach our fundraising goals and reach out to elected officials.

In this report, you will read more about how your support enhances literacy, enriches our community, and empowers our neighbors. Every day, the library helps more people read, discover, smile, connect, and find the knowledge they seek. Every day, the library welcomes us to come together at a time when some are trying to pull us apart.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, thank you for believing in the power of libraries.

With gratitude,

Sarah Stanley  
Board President, 2024-25





Librarian Jenny Craig (standing) kicks off the 2025 Global Reading Challenge at the Central Library. (Photo by Anthony Martinez)

# Literacy through reading and discovery

Recent studies show alarming trends in youth literacy. Educational disruptions from the pandemic have led to diminished reading skills. Systemic barriers have exacerbated gaps in reading scores based on race and disability. The percentage of young people who read for fun every day has dropped by double digits in the past decade.

Programs at The Seattle Public Library recognize these challenges. They are designed alongside community members and partner organizations with a goal of appealing to young people with the highest barriers to literacy. They bring youth together and help them discover joy and fun through reading.

## Making literacy fun

Research shows that late elementary school is a pivotal time for youth literacy. Many children begin to lose interest in reading, and habits developed at this age can stick.

For the past three decades, Seattle students have discovered how fun books can be through one of the library's most beloved programs. The Global Reading Challenge provides free books to 4th and 5th graders at public schools, inviting them to read and form trivia teams. Teams compete with their knowledge of the books, first at their schools and then in the semifinals and finals at the Central Library.

The competition is an exciting way to engage reluctant readers. In 2024, more than 3,400 students participated from 71 schools. Donor support

## Making literacy fun (cont.)

provided nearly 10,000 free books for school libraries and students.

Participating families and schools always report clear benefits from joining the Challenge. "[One

## Empowering communities to read

What makes young people interested in coming to the library? Often, students seek books and activities that affirm and relate to their culture.

The library's programs for K-5 readers engaged 1,325 families in 2024. Creative programs encouraged book discussion and community building at branches across the system. Foundation donors helped provide free books and staff support for these efforts.

At the Rainier Beach Branch, library staff helped start a book group series for tweens. The group focused on titles appealing to Black and Brown girls and non-binary youth. The organization LitiArts curated lesson plans,

student] had such a sense of efficacy and self-worth, seeing all the books she read and how much growth she had made as a reader," said Sara Betts, a librarian at Louisa Boren STEM K-8. "Students become better readers by reading. GRC creates the excitement and opportunity to read read read!"

led conversations, and facilitated social-emotional learning activities.

Other branches like NewHolly and Lake City hosted family reading nights that included fun activities and a shared meal. Participants received free books to build home libraries as well as resources to encourage reading outside of school. Teens helped lead sessions through a paid internship program.

Families expressed appreciation for the library's focus on community and joyful reading. "Thank you for the free books in my language," said one Rainier Beach father. "I want my children to learn their native tongue."

## Reaching children of all abilities

The library strives to create spaces that are inviting, inclusive, and accessible. Often, families catering to a child's disability or neurodivergence can find it especially difficult to enjoy public spaces.

Last year, Foundation donors helped expand ways for families to feel welcomed and celebrated. The Greenwood Branch offered All Abilities Story Time and made its popular communal reading sessions more accessible. Sensory Friendly Music programs encouraged musical literacy for kids with different learning styles. "Sensation Station" programs with special educator May-Ling Joa offered interactive learning with sounds, smells, and tactile stimulation.

All branches benefited from Sensory Kits in 2024. These tools help patrons who feel overstimulated by bright, busy, and noisy space with calming items



Families enjoy a Sensory Friendly Music program at the Greenwood Branch. (Photo courtesy of Erin Moehring)

like earmuffs, fidget items, and visual timers to help young readers feel comfortable.

The library continues to improve accessibility and inclusion. In early 2025, SPL installed the first interactive Sensory Wall in the Northeast Branch as a pilot to test the program for future expansion.

The **Books Unbanned** program grew in 2024! Nearly 14,000 young people nationwide signed up for free access to the library's digital collections. Youth checked out more than 334,000 items. Books Unbanned is fully funded by Foundation donors.

Donor support enhanced the collection by adding **more than 100,000 books** and materials in 2024. This represents one in every three new titles available to library patrons through collections and programs.

With Foundation help, the library's **Spanish collection became available at all locations** for the first time in 2024. "I want to express my gratitude to SPL for now offering books in Spanish," said one grateful University Branch patron. "*¡Muchísimas gracias por incluir libros en español!*"

**YOUR GIFT TO THE FOUNDATION** helps promote literacy by expanding opportunities for people of all ages. Please give today at **supportspl.org** to invite more families to read and discover at the library!





Vaquero Azul's sugar skull workshop at the Lake City Branch. (Photo by Leo Carmona)

# Enrichment through joy and connections

The library is one of the few places where people from all walks of life come together for shared experiences. At a time when people report high levels of loneliness, isolation, and social division, libraries offer collective joy.

The Seattle Public Library provides enriching programs that connect patrons with art, music, literature, and each other—all for free. From meeting a favorite author to learning a traditional craft, there is always a reason to come together at the library.

## Reflecting communities through art

The library plays an essential role in the local arts ecosystem. It supports artists while offering unique and resonant cultural experiences for patrons. Last year's Artist in Residence program demonstrated the value of engaging people through art at the library.

The program supported 10 artists in 2024. The artists curated experiences from a photography exhibition to live cello concerts in branches. One artist, Vaquero Azul, emphasized how art can help more communities feel welcomed and seen at the library.

Azul created a Trans Pride Ofrenda (or altar) to mark both Día de los Muertos as well as Transgender

## Reflecting communities through art (cont.)

Day of Remembrance. Installed at the Central Library, the ofrenda honored trans lives taken by violence in Mexico and the U.S. Azul also engaged the folklórico dance group Danza Monarcas to perform at an author event celebrating LGBTQ+ and Hispanic/Latino stories. Maria, a librarian at the Lake City Branch,

noticed that not enough artist programs reflected the local Hispanic/Latino community. The library worked with Azul and another artist, Teresa Martinez, to create workshops on building dioramas, sugar skulls for Día de los Muertos, piñatas for Christmas, and more. More than 225 children and adults attended.

## Sharing the reading experience

As everyone who belongs to a book club knows, the reading experience is elevated when shared. Seattle Reads, the library's "citywide book club" program, provides the joy of reading together with thousands of neighbors.

The 2024 selection was "Parable of the Sower" by the late Octavia Butler. It marked the first time the program featured a work of science fiction or a deceased author. Written in 1993 but set in 2024, the prescient novel explores many contemporary themes ripe for discussion.

To provide additional ways for the community to engage, the library greatly expanded Seattle Reads programming. Twenty events were held at branches and partner locations with more than 9,000 people getting involved through reading and program participation. Programs such as an immersive art



The Foundation's Seattle Reads Launch Party featured community leaders and library staff leading the 2024 programming around "Parable of the Sower." (Photo by Will Livesley-O'Neill)

exhibit and a panel discussion on Afrofuturism complemented traditionally Seattle Reads activities.

"The community's reverence for Octavia and their depth of involvement in creating the programs meant that this year's Seattle Reads felt particularly special," said Stesha Brandon, who oversees Seattle Reads at SPL. The library's partners included Langston Seattle, the African-American Writers' Alliance, Wa Na Wari, and many more.

## Bringing teens together

The library is always listening to what the community needs. Donors help support teen and young adult listening sessions to infuse youth voices into programming decisions. Sessions with teenagers at the Douglass-Truth Branch last year provided a popular suggestion: video games.

In response to this interest, library staff collaborated with high school students to develop a summer gaming program. The goal was to create a safe space for youth of color to enjoy gaming while building positive relationships.

The program started as a pilot but proved to be a big hit. Library staff quickly expanded it to twice a week and offered refreshments. Teen gaming programs were also held at the Broadview, Rainier Beach, and South Park branches. Across the system, the programs engaged 332 teenagers in shared gameplay and connection.

Importantly, it also facilitated new dialogue between participants and with library staff. One session at Douglass-Truth was held the same day as a dangerous incident at nearby Garfield High School. Staff reported that the gathering provided time and space for teens to discuss and grieve together.

The library hosted **24 authors at free public programs** at the Central Library in 2024, including writers J. Kenji López -Alt, Ijeoma Oluo, Amy Tan, and Rachel Kushner. The Bullitt Lecture in American History brought renowned historian Manisha Sinha to Seattle to discuss her latest book on the Reconstruction era.

The annual **Guest Curated series** featured two local writers, Nisi Shawl and Angela Garbes. Shawl curated a series on "own voice" literature, while Garbes focused on the experiences of middle-age. The series was watched by more than 1,300 people.

**Civic Engagement** programming at the library featured documentary screenings, screen printing, citizenship workshops, and more. Policy discussions were held prior to the election. "I felt relieved to come to a space with really grounded perspectives from sources with integrity," said one participant.

**YOUR GIFT TO THE FOUNDATION** supports enriching experiences for people from all backgrounds at the library. Give today at **supportspl.org** to continue bringing joy and powerful connections to our community.





Digital learning instructor Rogelio (left) works with student Abel (center) at the Delridge Branch. (Photo by Leo Carmona)



# Empowerment through skill building

Most adults juggle complicated lives and responsibilities. Learning a new skill or working toward a new career can be challenging. For many immigrants and refugees, added barriers like language access stand in the way.

The library's programs for adult learners aim to remove barriers and empower people to achieve their goals. Free, accessible, welcoming classes are built in partnership with community. Adults work together at the library to expand knowledge and fulfill dreams.

## Reducing obstacles to digital access

Community partnerships are essential in library programming. A key partner in 2024 was Villa Comunitaria, an organization offering many Spanish-language programs in South Park. They knew that immigrant community members wanted to pursue digital skills and designed a program, Aula Digital en Acción (Digital Classroom in Action).

Unlike many community programs, participants had the option of free childcare during classes. Working parents were asked to make a significant time investment: twice a week in the evening for 13 weeks.

Offering childcare made it easier for parents, especially women, to commit. Women made up a notably higher

## Reducing obstacles to digital access (cont.)

percentage of participants than previous digital skills classes. To address technology gaps, students received refurbished laptops on completion of the

program. Assessments at the beginning and end of the courses captured significant improvement in confidence, skill attainment, and digital independence.

## Working toward employment

In another first in 2024, the library worked with Hopelink to offer Seattle residents access to the English for Work program. EFW is aimed at learners with intermediate to advanced English proficiency who seek the next steps toward employment. The new partnership allowed more people to pursue their job goals while continuing to develop English skills.

EFW classes are offered both online and in-person at Hopelink sites and now at the Rainier Beach Branch. Advisers can also meet with students one-on-one outside of class to gain knowledge about job searches, interviews, and expectations.

Participants in the inaugural 2024 courses represented 10 countries. They rated the program as highly effective, measured by two goals: preparing to get a job and improving speaking. "Interview prep was very helpful," reported one student. "The experience gave me a lot of opportunity to think about how I should present myself to potential employers."

"Honestly, this course helped me break the glass



Luz, an adult learner who joked that she is from the "dinosaur age," felt more prepared to find a job. (Photo by Leo Carmona)

ceiling about my English," reflected another student. "And it helped me to take the time to consciously reflect on my professional experience and skills."

## Mapping a path to success

Nuriya is a student in the library's Adult Education Tutoring program. Her experience exemplifies the dedication of many adult learners. She works a full-time job, takes care of her children, and volunteers at a food bank. She takes classes at Seattle Central College.

Despite her busy schedule, she still makes time each week to attend tutoring sessions at the Broadview Branch. The program helps her better understand her coursework and has helped her with multiple writing assignments.

Long-term, Nuriya wants to work in public health. She has a plan to pursue basic studies and then healthcare-focused classes. She understands how important it is to master each step before moving to the next. She credits tutoring with helping her advance. "Because of you, I can speak with people with comfort," Nuriya told her regular tutor, Leslie. "And also I can get a better job, a better life."

The library saw 517 visits to Adult Education Tutoring at the Broadview, Lake City, and Rainier Beach branches in 2024. Participants hailed from 29 countries.

**Future Pathways** provided free classes for teenagers focused on skills needed after high school. Topics included financial aid and scholarship tips for those seeking a college degree, financial literacy courses on budgeting and banking, and GED training.

The **Library to Business** program reached more than 2,000 people through business information appointments, consults with attorneys, and free programs and resource fairs.

The **English Conversation Circle** program served adult learners representing 67 countries of origin and 49 different languages. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 80. "Learning English here is happy, relaxed, and friendly," shared a participant at the Northgate Branch.

**YOUR GIFT TO THE FOUNDATION** ensures people who seek knowledge are empowered to learn. Give today at [supportspl.org](https://supportspl.org) to provide more people with welcoming spaces to pursue their goals at the library.



# Our Board

Our Board of Directors is composed of dedicated volunteers who oversee our budget, fundraise and advocate for the library, spearhead our diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, and much more. We extend our sincere gratitude to the public servants who made up our Board in 2024:

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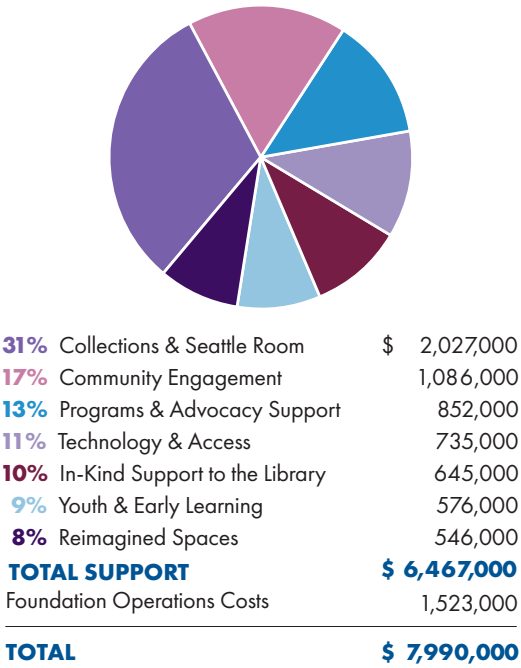
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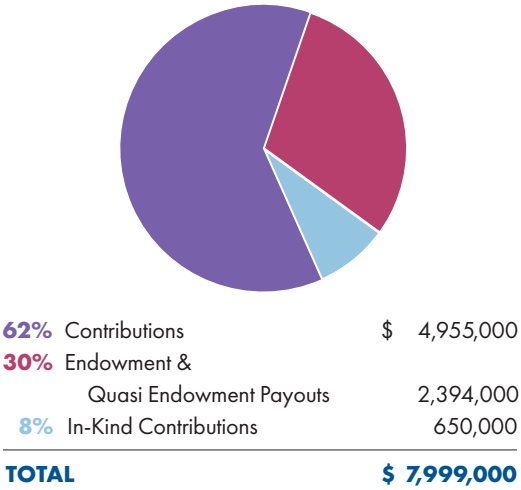
# 2024 Impact Information

Year ending December 31, 2024\*

## SUPPORT TO THE LIBRARY



## SOURCES OF SUPPORT



\*Not audited financial statements



The Seattle Public Library Foundation has earned a platinum seal of transparency from Candid (GuideStar) and a rating as a Four-Star Charity from Charity Navigator, the highest honors of financial transparency from leading independent charity evaluators.



Seattle library advocates at the Washington State Capitol for 2024 Legislative Day. (Photo by Will Livesley-O'Neill)

# Advocacy

More people than ever are raising their voices for our library—and policymakers are taking notice. Sign-ups for the Public Library Action Network (PLAN), the grassroots advocacy alert tool led by the Foundation and Friends of The Seattle Public

Library, more than doubled in 2024. Hundreds of supporters sent messages to local, state, and federal elected officials to speak up for library resources.

Advocates were especially vocal when the library had to reduce branch hours due to the citywide hiring freeze. Outreach to the Mayor and City Council helped protect library funding and stabilize operations during the biennial budget process.

Library advocates also built stronger relationships with state legislators and members of Congress through constituent meetings and lobbying trips to Olympia and Washington, D.C. Special thanks to

Congressman Adam Smith, who participated in a Foundation panel event about mental health and libraries and sponsored an important federal funding request for the Columbia Branch retrofit project.

Library advocates are making a real impact. Add your voice and sign up for the PLAN today!



## SIGN UP FOR THE PUBLIC LIBRARY ACTION NETWORK (PLAN)!

Take action when your voice is needed. Visit [bit.ly/PLANsignup](https://bit.ly/PLANsignup) or scan the QR code. Get with the PLAN!

# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The library is for all. Serving everyone requires additional resources to overcome historic inequities. The Foundation works to fund a more equitable library system and society.

To support these goals, the Foundation has made significant internal investments in DEI last year to center DEI in our culture and practice. This past year, we:

- Worked with our investment advisors to reposition our investment portfolio toward DEI-integrated holdings, a shift to ensure our finances align with our values.
- Used an equity lens to guide our search, recruitment, and hiring process for our CEO position, ensuring opportunities

for and fair treatment of a wide variety of candidates.

- Developed a new Board recruitment structure and priorities to help cultivate relationships and diversify our board.

The work is ongoing. While we have more work to do, the Foundation’s internal and external efforts reflect our commitment to creating a more equitable organization, library system, and society.

*The Foundation deepened our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in 2024. Read our full organizational DEI statement, in English and Spanish, at [supportspl.org/diversity-equity-and-inclusion](https://supportspl.org/diversity-equity-and-inclusion).*





Ann and Gordy read to their grandchildren at the High Point Branch. (Photo by Anthony Martinez)

# Legacy through a love of learning

Including The Seattle Public Library Foundation as a beneficiary in your will, retirement asset, or life insurance – or making a gift to an endowment – leaves a generous legacy that helps ensure the long-term vitality of the library.

## Sharing the gift of reading



Audrey Schatz (left) loved learning. She spent much of her time as a child at the Ballard Branch and went to the University of Washington to study education. Her first student was her young cousin, Mary Koss Branom.

Audrey taught Mary while she was in school and went on to work with students in Germany, as a Fulbright Scholar in New Zealand and Scotland, and at Seattle Public Schools. While she loved being a teacher, she found her greatest joy as a school librarian.

Mary went on to become a teacher herself. After retirement, she served as a teacher trainer with the Peace Corps in Azerbaijan. As Audrey aged, Mary became her caregiver. She helped her check out books and took her to library programs.

As a longtime supporter of the Foundation, Mary knew how meaningful it would be to honor Audrey with a legacy gift. She created the Mary Koss Branom Endowed Fund in Memory of Audrey M. Schatz to celebrate her cousin's legacy. The gift will help ensure that Mary's grandchildren and generations of future Seattleites, have more opportunities to discover a love of learning.

# Honoring our Legacy Society donors

We honor the forward-thinking library lovers who have partnered with us in planning estate gifts to The Seattle Public Library Foundation.

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Did you know that there are many ways to help The Seattle Public Library? Gifts of any size and type are appreciated. You can donate stock, vehicles, or through an IRA or donor advised fund.



To see all the ways you can help the library you love, please visit [supportspl.org/ways-to-give](https://supportspl.org/ways-to-give) or scan the QR code.

## Estate Gifts

We pay tribute to the memories of those who left generous bequests realized in 2024 to enrich the community through The Seattle Public Library Foundation:

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Estate of Audrey Armstrong  
Estate of Susan Gayle Ash  
Estate of Janet Maurer Daggatt  
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Estate of Dolly Gerstenberger  
Estate of John F. Gregory  
Estate of Janet Hesslein  
Estate of Helen Marie Larramendy  
Estate of Paul Dennis Newman  
Estate of Janet S. Pliske  
Estate of Adrian Lee Ricketts  
Estate of Janice J. Sorensen  
Estate of Susan Laurie Tusa  
Estate of Leon A. Uziel

You can help guarantee the vitality of the library for generations to come with a charitable bequest. For more information on our free estate planning webinars and creating a legacy at the library, contact [foundation@supportspl.org](mailto:foundation@supportspl.org).

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