

EMBARGOED

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SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC LIBRARY AWARDED \$2 MILLION TO EXPAND SERVICES FOR INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

A grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation will support a collaboration between San Francisco Public Library and the American Library Association to encourage greater access to information and resources for people in jails and prisons nationwide.

San Francisco, CA — Mayor London N. Breed announces a \$2 million grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support a collaboration between San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) and the American Library Association aimed at improving and expanding library services for incarcerated individuals both locally and nationally.

“For many who are incarcerated access to information and resources through the library is a lifeline and critical to their rehabilitation process,” says Mayor London Breed, “I want to thank The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for recognizing the pioneering work of this collaboration between San Francisco Public Library and the American Library Association, which will improve access to resources for incarcerated individuals nationwide.”

Co-led by SFPL's Jail and Reentry Services team and the American Library Association (ALA), the Expanding Information Access for Incarcerated People initiative includes a comprehensive survey of existing models for library services to people in jails and prisons and a revision of outdated standards in collaboration with formerly incarcerated people and librarians. Additionally, the project will involve the development of an interactive map that can be used to locate library services for incarcerated individuals nationwide and create a year-long virtual training series led by SFPL staff and other experts in the field. Lastly, the project will also pilot digital literacy trainings to support people in the process of reentry. The project will create three new positions at SFPL, an administrative position for grant fund distribution, a research analyst and a librarian to provide support for the Jail and Reentry Services team.

“Little information is publicly available about the types of library services available to incarcerated people. This project will allow us to see where library services exist, where they can be better supported, and to provide that support through collaborations and training that will ultimately increase the amount of library services inside of jails, juvenile detention centers and prisons. Our justice-involved patrons deserve more equitable access to the full spectrum of library programs and collections,” says City Librarian Michael Lambert.

This project will have national visibility and share models for providing resources to people in jails and prisons across the country. To do this, SFPL will convene librarians and library staff providing services to the incarcerated population for a half-day meeting prior to the ALA 2022 conference in Washington, DC. Additionally, at ALA 2022 the American Library Association will host a hearing on the standards for library services in jails and prisons.

“Low literacy and limited access to information-rich networks continue to be chief contributors to the prison pipeline. Research shows that increasing the literacy rates and strengthening the library and information access opportunities for detained and formerly detained individuals often correlates to successful rehabilitation and reentry,” notes Tracie D. Hall, executive director of the American Library Association. She continues, “This grant will allow us to address some of the gaping information access needs of incarcerated people by identifying and improving existing services and growing new access points for library and information services. As a nationwide advocacy body, the American Library Association can help create standards and programming that hold weight with prison and jail administrations and influence library policy to better serve this community.”

“For those who are incarcerated, access to literature can be the difference between rehabilitation or rearrest. The Sheriff’s Office welcomes all programs that encourage education and support for opportunities upon release. We strive to use any time of incarceration as an opportunity for growth and improvement. With The Andrew W. Mellon grant, we can provide all those within the justice system with more knowledge and resources they need to accomplish that goal. I would like to thank Mayor London Breed, City Librarian Michael Lambert, the San Francisco Public Library, and the American Library Association for investing in one of our most vulnerable populations,” says San Francisco Sheriff Paul Miyamoto.

Expanding Information Access for Incarcerated People will begin in early 2022 pending Board of Supervisors approval. The Mayor Breed will work with the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to approve an Accept and Expend Ordinance to receive the funds. The motion is expected to be heard at the Budget and Finance Committee in early 2022. Once the Ordinance passes, the Library can proceed with hiring staff to fulfill the roles outlined in the grant, which are additive to the Annual Salary Ordinance.

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