



**East Side
Freedom
Library**

2019 Annual Report





Dear ESFL Friends and Supporters,

This — our fifth year — has been a great one! Our collection has reached 20,000 books, cataloged and shelved by collaborators. More than 30 individuals have become collaborators — shelving books, co-hosting evening programs, staffing the front desk, and working with us to shape programs. More than 1,300 individuals and 25 unions have supported our work. We've benefited from the support of many local foundations — **Saint Paul Foundation, Bigelow Foundation, Mardag Foundation, McNeely Foundation, Marbrook Foundation, and the Katherine B. Anderson Family Foundation** — as well as public funding from the **City of Saint Paul's Cultural and Neighborhood STAR programs, the government's Metro Regional Arts Council, and the Minnesota State Arts Board.** We have initiated a recurring donors program we call the "Solidarity League," and 67 individuals are now providing monthly or quarterly support, enough to cover our immediate overhead expenses.

More and more of our programs grow out of partnerships with community and educational organizations, such as the **Saint Paul Public Schools Adult and Community Education Program, the Minnesota Humanities Center, the Ramsey County Historical Society, Park Square Theater, and the Karen Organization of Minnesota.** We are also working with unions, such as the **St. Paul Regional Labor Federation,** and community organizations like the **Japanese-American Citizens League.** These partnerships help us to build stability and sustainability into our programs and to expand our reach into communities with whom we have had little contact on our own. Participants in our programs have grown in diversity as well as numbers.

We continue to expand our methods to let people know about our resources and our programs. This year, we increased our electronic newsletter production to twice a month, in order to do justice to the many activities and programs we are hosting. More than 5,000 individuals receive our newsletters. Our Facebook page provides in-depth analytical articles as well as news of events. It has received more than 4,000 "likes"! Our Facebook presence has been so successful that we feature a link to its feed on the front of our website. We have a great team, led by visual artist **Keith Christensen,** who continues to improve our website. This year, we've added Twitter (thank you to our Associate Director **Clarence White**) and Instagram (thank you to intern **Sophie Mazullo**), both of which are linked to the website (**eastsidefreedomlibrary.org**). We even have a regular radio

The best way that we can celebrate the East Side Freedom Library is by supporting the creation of new knowledge. At a difficult time in American history, the East Side Freedom Library is alive and well.



presence on the first Saturday morning of every month, on AM950, the Voice of Progressive Minnesota. Co-executive Director **Peter Rachleff** brings guests from upcoming ESFL programs to speak on air with "Connections" show host, **Laurie Fitz**. We have been fortunate that a neighborhood business, **Brunson's Pub**, has been our commercial sponsor.

Our efforts to build bridges between communities finds us building bridges among the activities of teaching and learning, labor and equity, and cultural work. Truth be told, there are so many interfaces between these projects that our work looks more like a spider web than a set of boxes. These emerging syntheses feel organic, even as our planning process tries to make them more intentional.

Twice, we brought more than 100 of our community members together to celebrate our work - in October to listen to local writer **Patricia Hampl** as she explored the importance of stories, and in June to listen to historian/journalist **Jelani Cobb** connect the history of Reconstruction to the challenges faced in our struggles of freedom and equality today. The food was great and funds in support of our mission were raised; but, most importantly, serious conversations took place in which new ideas and new commitments were hatched.

Sincerely,
Peter Rachleff and Beth Cleary
Co-Executive Directors



ESFL Program Area: teaching and learning

Our Teaching and Learning work got off to a dynamic start in early June, with a symposium ***Working for Freedom: The Making of an Activist Scholar Tradition***. A great audience of more than 100 neighbors, students, and activists came together to hear thirty presentations from young scholars in a wide range of disciplines. They came from New York to Oregon and from Mexico to Minnesota, to address critical social issues, such as racism, economic inequality and immigrant rights. We heard from young professors like **Ryan Murphy** (Earlham College) and **Westenley Alcenat** (Fordham University), grad students **Rahsaan Mahadeo** (University of Minnesota) and **James Robinson** (University of Iowa), community researcher/activists like **Aaron Miripol** (Urban Land Conservancy) and **Stacy Mitchell** (Institute for Local Self-Reliance), artist/activists like **Sha Cage** (film) and **Alessandra Williams** (dance), and more.

Over the course of the year, ESFL provided mentorship for young people, from National History Day projects to the writing of college entrance essays. **Our History Day workshop team of (hardly) retired teachers and college students helped more than 100 middle and high school students shape projects on the theme of Triumph and Tragedy.** Some won state prizes and one even won the national first prize for senior website (a project on Upton Sinclair and *The Jungle*). We know that all these students' projects were success stories as they learned research and presentation skills, built new self-confidence, and took ownership for the telling of formerly overlooked stories. Our colleague **Lucia Pawlowski** introduced her new project, *The People's Writing Center*, which helped more than a dozen local high school students craft their college application essays.

A particularly exciting project was hosting the Minnesota Humanities Center's *Why Treaties Matter* exhibit in March-April 2019. **We worked closely with Dakota elders, scholars, and activists, and partnered with the Lower Phalen Creek Project.** On four Sunday afternoons, neighbors of diverse generations and backgrounds came together to discuss the significance of this history, not just in itself, but its consequences for the East Side's present and future. **In one panel, Native youth educated us with exceptional expertise and historical knowledge about their own histories. On another occasion, East African and Latinx immigrants engaged with Native Americans about their historical relationships to land and how those relationships had been torn asunder, with severe consequences.** This series was a remarkable learning experience for all of us, and it left us with ideas and relationships which continue to inform our work.

We were so pleased with the results that we are planning a "Second Biennial Activist Scholarship Conference" for June 4, 5, and 6, 2020. Mark your calendars!

(continued)

Over the course of the year, ESFL also provided workshops for activists in non-violence, using art for social justice, and practicing community journalism. Scores of neighbors and friends improved their skills and strengthened their relationships with each other in these workshops. ESFL hosted self-organized book groups, such as a Hmong Women's Book Group led by East Sider **Wennicha Yang**. We also introduced a new approach to book groups, our very own **Book Geek Story Hour(s)** on the first Sunday afternoon of each month. We invite people to come and read whatever they want for an hour and a half, then engage in a short conversation about what we are reading. Several — including members of the ESFL family — have commented that our lives are “so busy” and “so full of distractions” that setting aside 90 minutes to read in a beautiful setting, embraced in the energies of other people who are also reading, is a rare and treasured gift.

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ESFL also provided other learning opportunities, including readings and discussions with authors, historical films, and walking tours which engaged the history of immigrants, past and present, to the East Side. In partnership with the **Ramsey County Historical Society**, we have hosted *History Revealed*, a monthly author series. Both the presentations and the conversations have been delicious! On other occasions we have introduced our special methodology for a book event — to have 2-3 community members read the book and then engage the author after her/his presentation. We have found these to be effective ways to generate discussion. We are especially excited to be an anchor for the **New Brookwood Labor College**, which launched in early 2019 as a project to introduce labor leaders and activists to critical thinking and to building relationships with each other across organizations and work experiences, from healthcare to the building trades and from the public sector to manufacturing.





ESFL Program Area: labor and equity

Our partnership with New Brookwood Labor College is a part of ESFL's endeavors in Labor and Equity. Its courses—*Working Class History*, *People's Leadership*, *Theories of the Labor Movement*, *The Global Labor Movement*, and *Organizing Strategies*—are designed and taught to enable the current generation of labor activists to develop understanding of the labor movement as one of the vehicles available to working class people in their efforts to create a more just society. In a similar vein, ESFL has organized and hosted a series of panel discussions using the concept of *The Labor Movement and...* as a way to broaden the scope of labor activism. Topics have included *#MeToo*, *Black Lives Matter*, *Environmentalism*, *Healthcare Reform*, *Immigrant Rights*, and *Housing Justice*.

The last topic touched such a nerve that it generated a remarkable series of programs, including films and focus groups, and it has been built by—and built —a dynamic partnership including ESFL, ABC Realty, MICAH, Dayton's Bluff Neighborhood Housing Services, the Cookie Cart, Habitat for Humanity, Project for Pride in Living, Twin Cities Public Television-2, and staff from a number of city and state offices. Hundreds of our neighbors have attended a series of gatherings and discussions, which are continuing. The series culminated in November when this diverse and energized collection of individuals and organizations gathered for our first ever **East Side Housing Summit!** We are proud to be the incubators of this work.

ESFL Program Area: cultural work

ESFL has also deepened and expanded our Cultural Work, which of course intersects with our Teaching and Learning and Labor and Equity work. From our very start in 2014, we have seen cultural work as a vehicle to promote our mission:

"To inspire solidarity, advocate for justice, and work towards equity for all."

Poetry, visual art, theater, story-telling, dance, music, are all means for members of our communities to tell their stories and for us to listen to them.

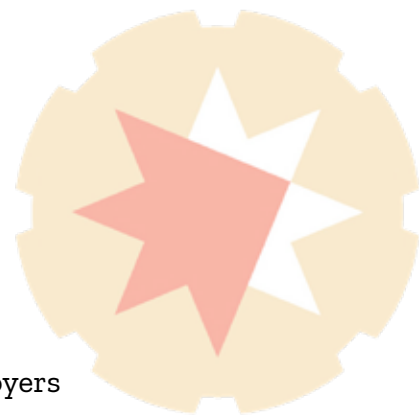
This past year has seen us achieve a number of exciting projects. Photographer **John Matsunaga**, supported by the **Minnesota State Arts Board**, mounted his exhibit *Nidoto Nai Yoni*, which brought images of the remains of the concentration camps in which Japanese-Americans were imprisoned into a lens which asked us to consider the otherization of Muslims today's in social and political climate. We grew through our engagement with John's project. We learned how to hang visual art in the big downstairs room, how to organize panel discussions which mixed artists with community activists, and how to think more about using art to generate discussions. It also brought us a collaboration with the **Twin Cities Japanese-American Citizens League**, which led to their donation of the entire JACL library to ESFL. Their books got a lot of use from History Day students working on *Triumph and Tragedy*.

Our experience with John's work shaped other projects here. With support from the **Marbrook Foundation**, we supported artists from five communities who created an exhibit, *Human Proof Fence*, in which they used visual art to express their experiences of dislocation, confinement, and migration. Hmong photographer **Pa Houa Her** brought her exhibit *The Fruits of My Mother's Labor* to ESFL. Not only was her art stunning—printed on newsprint which she intended would curl and age over time—but she engaged in a remarkable conversation with Somali visual artist **Mohamud Mumin** about the ways that immigrant artists are using photography not just to document but also to interrogate their cultures and their relationship to American culture.

It's never been "art for art's sake" at ESFL, but art in the service of critical thinking, open discussion, and community-building.

The **Metropolitan Regional Arts Council** provided grant support for ESFL to curate a series of literary readings by African American and Native American writers. Support from the **Minnesota State Arts Board** enabled ESFL to sponsor an after-school African Drumming program, taught by master drummer **Babatunde Lea**. With support from MRAC, the assistance of **Saengmany Ratsabout of the University of Minnesota's Immigration History Research Center**, and the **English Language Learning program at Washington Technology Magnet High School**, we ran an intensive digital storytelling project that involved five teens, who created videos about the place of food in their cultures and communities. ESFL also hosted a series of jazz concerts by **Le Voyage**, a series of jam sessions called *Sonic Expressions*, on the one hand, and, on the other, art installations which generated discussions about gun reform and the predicaments of refugees in European encampments.





By the Numbers

- >**4000** Attendees at events in FY2019
- >**30** Artists involved
- >**12** Arts group partners
- >**25** Union Job & Resource Fair employers & apprentice programs
- >**125** Union Job & Resource Fair job seekers
- >**12** History Day Learning Center mentors
- >**100** History Day Learning Center students
- >**100** Neighbors at National Night Out

Courses hosted:

Saint Paul Schools Adult & Community Education:

- two six week courses in Immigration History

New Brookwood Labor College

- Working Class History
- People's Leadership
- Theories of the Labor Movement
- The Global Labor Movement

Class visits from:

- Hamline University (African American Lit)
- Macalester College (Historical Methods)
- University of St. Thomas (Critical Ethnography)
- University of Minnesota (African American Studies)
- Metro State University (Masters in Policy & Leadership seminar)
- Minneapolis Community & Technical College (Library Science)
- St. Catherine's University (Library Science)

Interns from:

- Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs (HECUA)
- Metro State University
- Macalester College

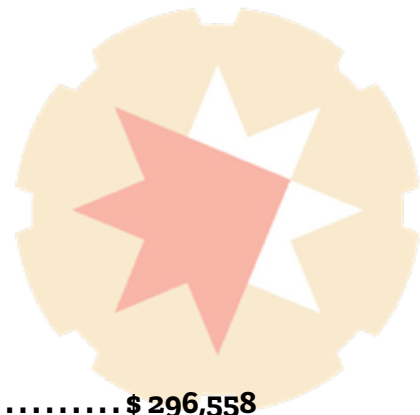
Thank You to our Organizational Sponsors

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While many non-profit organizations list their donors by the size of their donations, at ESFL we think about our collaborators and donors as part of a community, a community that we are building through our work and through the contributions of labor, time, ideas, books, rocking chairs, and money. Our emphasis is on the community-building, so we do not want to call attention to specific individuals or specific donations. We know—and honor—what so many have contributed.



Financials

2018 REVENUE

Contributions and grants.....	\$ 296,558
Program service revenue.....	\$ 19,928
Investment income.....	\$ 290
Total revenue.....	\$316,776

2018 EXPENSES

Grants and similar amounts paid.....	\$ 4,000
Salaries, other compen., emp. benefits.....	\$50,305
Professional fundraising expenses.....	\$ 40,668
Other expenses.....	\$ 140,017
Total expenses.....	\$ 234,990



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Creation in Common, Board development

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Keith Christensen, Design

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David McAllister, Space management

Mission Statement

The ESFL's mission is to inspire solidarity, advocate for justice and work toward equity for all.



East Side Freedom Library • 1105 Greenbrier Street, St. Paul, MN 55106 • eastsidefreedomlibrary.org



Please Join Us! Participate • Watch • Donate • Share • Like • Link • Spread the Knowledge!