

PLP Innovation and Technology Opportunity Grant Program Application

Library Name: Richmond Public Library

Project Title: Modernizing reading and learning for Richmond children

Select category you are applying under:

Category A: Innovation and Technology Opportunity Grant

Category B: Grant Replication Program

If Category B is selected, enter the name of the grant you are replicating:

1. Please provide a one paragraph project summary.

For many years the Richmond Public Library (RPL) has provided children’s audiobooks on CD, book/CD audiobook bundles, and early learning stations in library branches. As CD players become less common, children are not able to use audiobooks on CD as easily as in the past, and with the rise of tablets, the aged early learning stations can be replaced by a portable technology for in-home use. With this project the Richmond Public Library will make a significant investment in self-contained audiobook technology and dramatically expand early learning opportunities and portability.

2. Explain how this project fits with the library’s strategic directions.

RPL is committed to serving the residents of Richmond, including its youngest residents and those learning English as a second language. As CD audiobooks and RPL’s early learning stations approach obsolescence even as community needs increases, RPL must both modernize and expand its offerings. In reviewing present offerings, RPL has noted that use of its audiobook collection is dependent upon access to CD players and early learning opportunities were confined to Library buildings. Pandemic conditions have demonstrated to RPL the need to provide materials that can be used away from Library buildings. This project will represent a major expansion of the offerings of RPL’s Children’s Services Division, and will respond to the growing need to provide audiobooks and early learning opportunities that do not require patron-provided devices and can be used outside of Library buildings. This project will complement other RPL initiatives to remove technology-related burdens from patrons.

3. Please provide a detailed description of the proposed project including the population served and the demographics of that population.

Richmond is a city of over 110,000 persons. Some 8,000 residents are under the age of 5 (pre-Kindergarten) and thus a primary audience for the early learning Playaway Launchpads. An additional 8,000 residents are between the ages of 5 and 9, and approximately 6,000 between the ages of 10 and 14. These 14,000 primary school-age residents are also served by Children's Services and benefit from the availability of children's audiobooks.

The Richmond community is also diverse linguistically. Some 59.2% speak a language other than English at home and 42.4% speak English less than "very well" (American Community Survey, 2019). 37.4% speak Spanish and 10.6% speak an Asian/Pacific Islander language. Early learning Launchpads can assist students within these families by providing self-contained pre-Kindergarten skills and English language development. Playaways and Bookpacks expand access to books by providing both opportunities to hear a text read aloud as well as allowing those with developing language skills to immerse themselves in a book.

RPL intends to purchase 25 Playaway Launchpad Academy devices, chosen from both the Pre-K and Reading pathways. These devices will offer multiple learning paths for children developing pre-K skills and early literacy skills through 3rd Grade.

RPL will also select 30 Playaway Bookpacks, which consist of a Playaway device and the printed text, packaged together for circulation. These readalongs will help children develop literacy skills including comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency, as well as providing children with opportunities to engage with highly-desirable texts that may exceed their present reading abilities.

An additional 50 Playaway devices will be purchased, which will supplement and eventually supplant CD audiobooks within the children's collection. By providing audiobooks that do not require CD players, RPL will be removing a barrier to accessing these works. The self-contained device will also be easier for children to use and less susceptible to audio skipping should they be used while travelling.

4. What are the goals and objectives of the project?

The Richmond Public Library wants to support the school readiness of Richmond children, promote literacy skills, and offer opportunities to explore the world through books. The Playaway devices chosen for this project will allow children to engage with learning and books without requiring access to a CD player, computer, or tablet, as they are self-contained units, and will allow them to borrow and use the devices away from library buildings.

RPL has early learning stations at each branch which are at end of service life. Replacing these stations with Playaway Launchpads will allow Library users to take the learning to go, increasing opportunities for engagement and learning. By acquiring multiple Launchpad Academy devices RPL will be greatly expanding opportunity, access, and portability.

Recognizing that CD audiobooks are dependent on patrons having access to CD players, which are becoming less common, RPL recognizes the need to offer audiobooks that are not mediated by patron-provided technology. Playaways are self-contained devices that will be easier for children to use and have less risk of media deterioration (scratching, skipping, and bit loss). RPL will continue to expand the offerings within the Playaway collection, building upon the strong and broad foundation provided by this project.

Playaway Bookpacks will provide children, including emerging readers and ESL students, an opportunity to read and listen to a text of their choosing. While Bookpacks can be used to complement formal literacy instruction, they also provide the opportunity to engage with preferred texts that might exceed the fluency of a given reader. Audiobooks and audiobook/text pairings thus greatly expand access to desired books.

5. Please include your project timeline (include detail of activities).

- September/October 2021 – Submit acceptance request to City Council
- September/October 2021 – Design publicity materials and campaign
- November 2021 – Order and receive devices from Playaway
- November 2021 – Catalog and process devices locally (as needed); create surveys for use
- December 2021 – Make devices available at Children’s Room
- January 2022 – Launch publicity campaign in conjunction with post-holiday back-to-school, working with local Head Starts, public school district, charters, and private schools.
- May 2022 – Six-month review of project to determine uptake and need for additional publicity
- June 2022 – Preparation and submission of final report to PLP

6. Please indicate how you will evaluate success of your project.

The initial uptake of the project will be measured by following the circulation statistics of the devices and adjusting publicity to ensure awareness of these new resources. RPL will work with the local school district and other educational institutions to ensure that children and families are aware; teachers may also choose to borrow devices for use in their classrooms.

RPL will also design and administer surveys of borrowers to measure borrower satisfaction and child/parent/teacher perception of learning outcomes. These surveys will be both paper (included with the device) and electronic (via Project Outcome) to increase opportunity for response. RPL will also provide staff with a form for capturing informal feedback from children and families when devices are checked out or returned.

7. Please detail your project budget. (Note: Indirect costs are not allowed).

Project costs exceeding \$10,000 and any project costs not included below will be borne by the Richmond Public Library, including any processing not included in listed prices, staff time, and publicity costs. Costs listed for Playaways and Bookpacks represent average costs for these products; the Richmond Public Library will bear costs in excess of those listed.

Make	Product	Model	Cost	Quantity	Unit cost	Ext. Warranty	Total
Playaway	Launchpad	Academy	Fixed	25	\$159.99	\$10.00	\$ 4,249.75
Playaway	Playaway		Averaged	50	\$59.99	\$4.99	\$ 3,249.00
Playaway	Bookpacks		Averaged	30	\$79.99		\$ 2,399.70
						Subtotal	\$ 9,898.45
						Tax	\$ 965.10
						Total	\$ 10,863.55

8. Please indicate how the project will be sustained after the grant term is over.

This grant will provide the Richmond Public Library with a significant catalog of Playaway devices which would otherwise take considerable time to build up. Purchase of the extended warranty (two years) where available will help RPL ensure that the devices are maintained in an available state. As awareness and use of these devices increases, RPL will expand its catalog of Launchpads, Bookpacks, and Playaways. RPL will continue to expand and replace devices both as needed and to maintain an up-to-date collection of offerings, and expects that these devices will increasingly replace CD audiobooks. RPL also anticipates purchasing Playaways for its Young Adult and Adult collections to augment and then replace CD audiobooks.

Complete Only for Category B Grants:

9. Explain what grant was selected to replicate and why.
10. If there are changes or enhancements to the original grant, including budgetary changes, please detail the changes and your rationale for making them.