

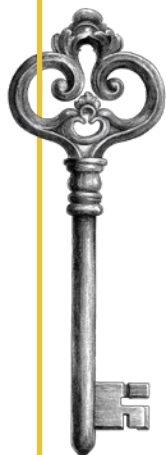
MECHANICS' INSTITUTE

CULTURE IN COMMUNITY



2025 Annual Report





Dear Friend,

Welcome to our 2025 annual report where we celebrate the people of Mechanics' Institute! Our community is a finely woven collection of members, staff, volunteers, tenants, community partners, donors and residents who live throughout the Bay Area. We come together to think, play, read, write, discuss, and engage in creative pursuits.

Reflecting on the past year, we recognize the richness and diversity of our programming that continues to expand in scope, voices, and impact. We are grateful for the many accomplishments that we've achieved this past year. And we have new mountains to climb as we grow our programs and events, expand our chess offerings, and provide more opportunities to read, write, gather and discuss.

Highlights of the past year include: rebranding Mechanics' Institute and creating an updated and user-friendly website (www.milibrary.org); building our tenant occupancy to 100%; hosting a stellar lineup of accomplished authors and emerging writers; partnering with an ever larger group of organizations to produce a range of diverse events; adding masters' writing classes for intermediate and advanced writers; introducing Music at Mechanics' with classical and jazz concerts; and launching a chess Grandmaster-in-Residence program.

Plans to renovate our library have been initiated. From member and community feedback and an assessment of our building, our changes include cosmetic upgrades of new paint, flooring, lighting, and furniture, as well as added private spaces for members to work and study. All this while we continue to deliver on a five-year financial plan to ensure strength and long-term sustainability for Mechanics' Institute.

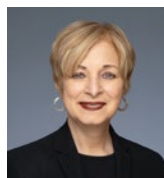
We thank you for the many ways you have engaged with us this past year. And we appreciate the many stories you've shared about why this wonderful place is so important to you. We share in that love as we continue to care for this unique and special organization and its people.

Our focus remains on bringing people together to spark dialogue and encourage new ways of thinking about the world. Our mission is to create opportunities for individuals to enrich their lives—through meaningful knowledge, valuable skills, and shared experiences. In a world that moves faster by the minute, Mechanics' Institute offers a place to slow down, engage humanely, and build something lasting—together.

With deep appreciation,



Tom Lockard
President, Board of Trustees



Katherine Bella
Chief Executive Officer



The People of Mechanics

Richard Laiderman

Donor, Lifelong Lover of Learning—and Mechanics' Institute Board Member

Favorite space: The spiral staircase stairwell and the entrance to the library on the 2nd floor

When Richard Laiderman moved to San Francisco in 1985, he found a slower, more curious city compared to his home of New York. He also found Mechanics' Institute. That connection with chess, lectures, books, culture, and community has kept him involved. Richard values Mechanics' as a rare space where intellect still thrives. "It's a place where ideas are central, where thought is cultivated, and where diverse minds are not only welcomed but encouraged to gather and grow. That never gets old."

Theodore Gercke

New Member, Student

Favorite space: Starting at the top of the building and wandering down to the stacks

A political science major at Hamilton College, Theodore found his way to Mechanics' Institute while home in the Bay Area on summer break, searching for a place to read and think. What he found was transformative. "It's unlike anywhere I've studied," he says. Surrounded by books and thoughtful people, he finds himself more focused, more inspired. In contrast to the nonstop scroll of digital life, Mechanics' offers him grounding and calm. "Mechanics' Institute is a sanctuary, a rare place where learning is unhurried and deep." Even when he's far from San Francisco, Gercken plans to keep his membership. "It's a commitment to a different kind of learning—one that values the journey as much as the result."

Michael Warr

Mechanics' Institute author/presenter, Poetry Editor, Of Poetry & Protest—From Emmet Till to Trayvon Martin

"Mechanics' Institute will always feel like my personal Time Machine, where I coexist in the past, present, and future. Its entrance is a portal to knowledge and to citizens who are curious, creative, and committed to dialogue, inquiry, and cultural exchange. No other space more effectively reflects San Francisco's historic and contemporary life."



Statistics

ADDITION OF NEW BOARD MEMBERS:

Evette Davis
Ace Elliott-Hernandez
Cindy Hill
Dana Jemison
Chris Orsega

ADDITION OF **600** NEW MEMBERS

representing a nearly 15% growth rate in membership year over year.

Launch of new website and rebranding of logo and materials completed on July 1.

A TOTAL OF **18,500**

LIBRARY VISITS

an 8% increase from the previous year.

TENANT OFFICE SPACES FILLED TO

100% CAPACITY





What Our Community is Saying

Music at Mechanics' debuted March 2025 with the Berlin-based Aris Quartet, one of the top-ranked music ensembles worldwide. Aris' dynamic and expressive performance captivated our audience, and we knew that offering concerts at Mechanics' would resonate with the community.

Dedicated to supporting writers, Mechanics' offered its first master class conducted by Tommy Orange, internationally acclaimed author of works including *There, There* and *Wandering Stars*, and 2025 MacArthur Fellow.

With year-round programming of contemporary award-winning established and emerging authors, writers, and poets—many from the San Francisco Bay Area—our year included an array of extraordinary authors, writers, and poets like Rita Bullwinkel, Karen Wang Diggs, Kevin Fagan, Arlie Russell Hochschild, Cathy Park Hong, Obi Kaufmann, Maxine Hong Kingston, Andrew Lam, Genny Lim, Melissa Ludtke, Lauren Markham, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Larry Tye, Jenny Odell, Tommy Orange, Aimee Phan, David Rieff, Rebecca Solnit, Ocean Vuong, Michael Warr, and Chun Yu.

Patricia Kristof Moy

Executive Director, Music at Kohl

Favorite space: 2nd floor, and the wood-paneled classroom surrounded by books on the 3rd floor

"The opportunity to collaborate with partners like Mechanics' allows Music at Kohl to expose new audiences to music through touring world class musicians. Being surrounded by beautiful books in the historic library was heaven for the Aris Quartet and we're so pleased that music lovers were enthralled. We are looking forward to ongoing collaborations in 2026."

Chun Yu, Ph. D

Author, Poet, Translator

"Mechanics' Institute is a jewel, there's no place like it. What sets Mechanics' Institute apart from other cultural arts groups is the special connection to the audience, many who are writers and editors—all of whom are very supportive. As I publish new works, Mechanics' continues to provide a venue to support writers working in partnership."

Dr. Mark Calkins

*Lecturer Emeritus,
San Francisco State University*

Favorite spot: Board room on 4th floor where the seminar takes place

"Mechanics' has been a home for Proust for nearly 25 years. What a joy it has been to spend so much time with smart articulate people engaging with a book that I love and, in the process, that they have come to love. Members of the seminar are smart, engaged readers from various backgrounds and careers. When I tell others that I lead a Proust seminar, I am always sure to tell them about Mechanics' Institute, an independent private library founded in 1854 to educate laborers—what a great foundational intention."



Event Statistics

NUMBER OF ATTENDEES
AT ALL EVENTS

5,135

NUMBER OF AUTHOR TALKS

40

BOOK GROUPS

42

MOVIES' AT MECHANICS'

40

LECTURES AND LITERARY
SEMINARS

24



Library Highlights

Ben and Mary Ann Whitten
Members and Legacy Society Donors

Favorite space: Ben—3rd floor reading room; Mary Ann—the book stacks.

The Whitten's main interest is the library with its unique atmosphere: the beautiful building, the elegant and quiet reading room, the quirky maze-like stacks, the warmth of both the staff and the physical space. "That's what drew us in and continues to do so. Mechanics' is and will continue to be our cultural haven in the heart of downtown, always an integral part of our ever-changing San Francisco. For us, it's as essential as Hetch Hetchy water is to San Francisco."

John King
*Retired Urban Design Critic,
 San Francisco Chronicle*

Favorite space: Circular staircase

"The setting is terrific from the moment you step in the door. Mechanics' has an almost unchanging, but very egalitarian club-like feel which is a rare thing in a constantly changing city."

Marcia Leath
Volunteer

Favorite Spot: The library

Marcia Leath discovered Mechanics' Institute by chance, attending an author event that led her to join on the spot. "I just knew it was for me," she recalls. Today, she's one of its most dedicated ambassadors, volunteering at author talks and Movies at Mechanics' screenings to ensure visitors feel welcomed. For her, the library remains the beating heart of it all. "...What a treasure Mechanics' Institute is—for all of us."



Library Statistics

NUMBER OF BOOKS

116,000

MEMBER ENTRIES TO THE LIBRARY

18,500

eMATERIALS IN CIRCULATION
 (eBooks, Audiobooks, and eAudio)

8,755

VISITORS

1,419





Chess Statistics

TOURNAMENT PARTICIPANTS

4,540

TOURNAMENT SESSIONS

112

TOURNAMENTS

64

CLASSES

34

Scholastic Chess

SCHOOL SESSIONS PROVIDED THROUGH THE YEAR

370

PARTICIPANTS IN ANNUAL SCHOLASTIC CHAMPIONSHIP

275

PARTICIPATING STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS

241

CLASS SESSIONS HELD

247

NUMBER OF YOUTH ATTENDING CAMPS

102

CLASSES PER SEMESTER

15

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

10

Chess Highlights

Our tournaments, classes, and on-site and community events bring players of all levels together on-site in our historic chess room, online, in after-school programs in San Francisco public and private schools, and at community events throughout the City.

This year, Mechanics' Institute's appointed Sam Shankland, American Chess Grandmaster and 2018 US Chess Champion, as Grandmaster-in-Residence. Mechanics' is the only West Coast chess club to offer a Grandmaster-in-Residence.

Community outreach programs bring the game of chess to locations throughout San Francisco through our partnerships with Downtown SF Partnership at Mechanics' Plaza; Union Square with the Union Square Alliance; UN Plaza with San Francisco Parks and Recreation Department; and Yerba Buena Gardens with Yerba Buena Conservancy.

Through school programs, on-site camps, and scholastic classes, our chess programs offer opportunities for youth from as young as 5 years of age. The academic year reached its peak with our annual youth tournament, held March 2025, with 275 students playing in a free all day event at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.

Vinay Bhat Board Member

Favorite space: The chess room and the entrance to the library on the 2nd floor

Vinay Bhat first walked into the Mechanics' Institute at the age of 12 as a rising chess talent. What he found wasn't just rows of boards or seasoned players, but a vibrant community. As a board member today, Bhat sees Mechanics' as his lifelong chess home. "I've spent 75% of my life connected to this place," he says. But, Mechanics' is more than nostalgia—it's a vital, physical space in an increasingly digital world. "It's a living bridge between San Francisco's past and future," he says—a place that still brings people together, still values ideas, and still makes space for quiet thought and connection.

Kayla Howe Parent of a Young Chess Player, Third Space Enthusiast

Favorite space: The chess room and the beautiful tile patterns on the 4th floor—small details that say someone cared

Kayla Howe's journey to Mechanics' Institute started with a simple Google search: her 7-year-old daughter was curious about chess. What they found was far more than lessons—it was a vibrant, welcoming community. After signing up for a spring break chess camp, they were hooked. The instruction is excellent, but what truly kept them coming back was the people: the staff who take time with every child, the friendly faces in the hallways, the warmth that "feels very San Francisco in the best way: welcoming, thoughtful, personable." While her daughter thrives in tournaments, Kayla has also found a kind of magic—a rare space where she can watch her child be engaged, curious, and challenged.

Our Building

Tenants John Alecca and Christell Lewis
Young Audiences of Northern California

Favorite space: Christell—staircase; John—library.

John Alecca, outgoing Executive Director of Young Audiences, first discovered Mechanics' Institute through a friend and longtime member while searching for a new home for the nonprofit. The fit was natural—a cultural and values-aligned match. Today, Young Audiences has settled comfortably into 57 Post Street, and for incoming Executive Director Christell Lewis, the space has been “a delight.” Renting at Mechanics' offers more than a physical home; it connects them to a wider community of members, staff, and tenants—with the bonus of working in a beautiful space.



Building Statistics

TENANT OFFICE SPACES FILLED TO

100% CAPACITY

Thank you to all of our donors

for their generosity during the July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025 fiscal year.

Circle of Industry: \$50,000+

Robert Mailer Anderson and Nicola Miner
The Morris and Alma Schapiro Fund

Founders' Circle: \$25,000+

Estate of Byron W. Macdonald
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First Edition Society: \$2,500+

Katherine Bella and Jay Harris
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Post Street Circle: \$1,000-\$2,499

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Stephen M. Sagar and Susan Semonoff
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George Wilkerson
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Dinah Yee-Tom

Tribute Gifts

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Angela Di Martino, *in memory of Sandra Drissen*
Martin N. Krasney, *in memory of Rita Guiney*
Janet McKinley, *in memory of George A. Miller*
Steven H. Rosen & Virginia L. Miraglia,
in memory of Craig Jackson
Stephen Yeazell, *in memory of Jeanette Yeazell*
Manifold Fund, *in memory of Nini McCabe*
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Carolyn Daniel, *in honor of Sen. Corey Booker*
Gerald C. Frattali, *in honor of Richard Frattali*
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Donald H. Rubin, *in memory of Dr. Joseph L. Feingloss*
Stephen Yeazell & Ruth Fisher, *in memory of Jeanette Yeazell*

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David J. Colt	David J. Madson	Mary Ann Whitten
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Sheila Cunningham	Virginia L. Meyer	

Members 50-58 Years

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Members for 40-49 years

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Members for 25-29 years

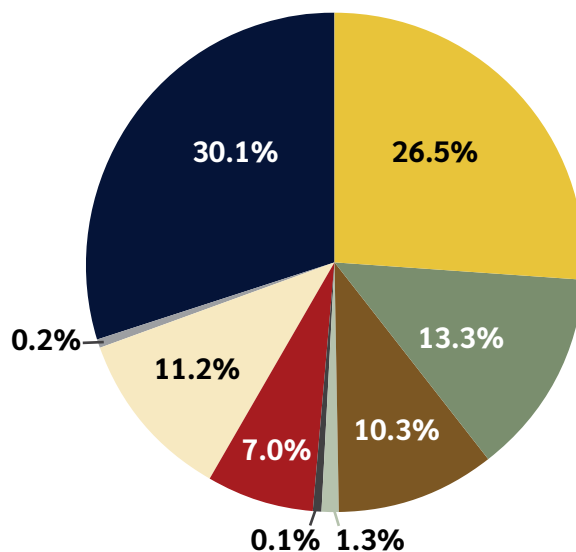
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Julie Connery	M. Elizabeth Graham	Richard S. Lowry	Richard F. Rovatti	

Financials

Income

Rental Income	\$1,165,728
Bequests, Donations, Grants	\$585,395
Chess Room Income	\$453,596
Event Income	\$55,841
Library Services Income	\$3,170
Membership Dues	\$308,539
In-Kind & Other Donations	\$491,157
Other Income	\$7,533
Restricted Funds Released	\$1,324,627

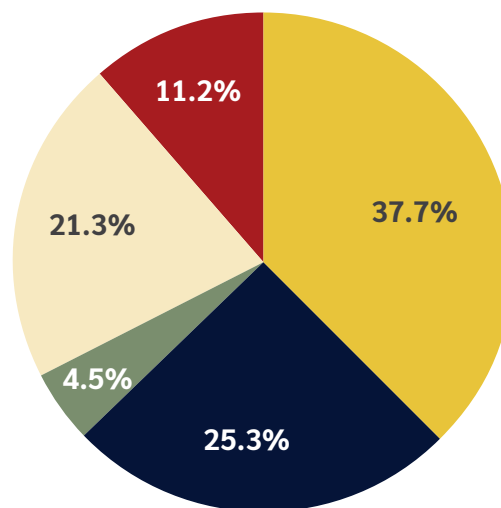
TOTAL Income **\$4,395,586**



Expenses

Library, Chess & Events	\$1,657,160
Building	\$1,113,165
Fundraising	\$199,372
Management and General	\$934,732
MI Special Projects— Professional Fees	\$491,157

TOTAL Expenses **\$4,395,586**



**Note: This financial report does not reflect the changes in the endowment returns.
For more information, please see our financial audit.*



Mission

The mission of Mechanics' Institute is to create opportunities for people to enhance their lives by gaining useful knowledge, skills and experiences in sharing ideas with others.

Vision

Mechanics' Institute provides resources and nurtures communities that inspire people to explore, be curious, and express their creativity in our historic downtown San Francisco building and anywhere they are.



Board of Trustees

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