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# Library projects awarded \$1 M. in national grant competition



The New York Public Library. (AP Photo/New York Public Library, Jonathan Blanc)



By Nidhi Prakash 10:01 a.m. | Jan. 30, 2015

Three New York City-based projects focused on digitizing library collections and fostering community engagement have been awarded grants from the Knight Foundation.

The three projects, one in Manhattan, one in Queens and one based in New York City but working in Haiti, will receive close to \$1 million from the News Challenge, a twice-yearly nationwide competition sponsored by the foundation. The Manhattan and Queens projects are within the city's public library systems.

“What we’ve seen is an emergent set of new leaders in libraries who really are passionate about transforming the institution so that it’s responsive to 21st century opportunities,” said John Bracken, vice president for media innovation at the Knight Foundation.

The New York Public Library’s [Space/Time Directory](#), a project of NYPL Labs, was awarded \$380,000 to digitize more than 20,000 New York City maps in the library’s collection. The maps will then be enriched with historical data and input from the community, part of a project called [Building Inspector](#).

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“If you think about how you use maps today, they’re a very fluid environment that you can ask questions of and bring a lot of data to bear ...,” said Ben Vershbow, director of NYPL Labs, who is leading the project. “And so we wanted to figure out how we can get our historical maps to



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work in such a way.”

Vershow said getting people to participate and re-think their ideas of what a library should be is one of the goals of the directory.

“Here’s a new way of thinking about the public library. It’s a project that we all collectively build and work on together,” he said.

Maintaining the theme of community collaboration, a project that originated in Queens was awarded \$330,000 to digitally

record community artifacts and stories.

**Culture In Transit**, which grew out of the Queens Public Library's **Memory Project**, will bring scanners, cameras and librarians to local branches throughout the city. Residents will be to discuss their memories and the cultural heritage of their neighborhoods.

“What we’re missing is these newer stories of people coming in post-1964 and really making Queens the diverse borough that it is,” said Natalie Milbrodt, director of the Memory Project who is also heading up Culture In Transit.

The grant money will be used to hire three specialized staff members—one each at Queens Public Library and Brooklyn Public Library and the private Metropolitan New York Library Council. The libraries will host a series of events with cultural heritage organizations and the public to contribute their stories and memorabilia to a larger digital collection.

“There are really excellent collections that are often maintained by professional archivists in small historical societies, but there is no way that those organizations have a digitization program,” Milbrodt said.

Bracken said the project stood out because of its approach to working with local library users.

“What really impressed me was the empathy and the understanding they have for the human element when it comes to archiving materials and digitizing archival materials,” he said. “They’re not just creating a software program to do it, but really working closely with the patrons.”

The third project, Library for All, was awarded \$265,000 to develop tablet-based access to books in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The project is independent of the public library system.

The Knight Foundation holds its News Challenge competition twice a year and the theme varies for each round of funding. Previous themes have included building a stronger internet, open government data and health data.

A library theme was chosen this time because of their accessibility to the public and their potential to build on collaborations with communities, Bracken said.

Nationwide, more than 600 organizations submitted applications and 22 were awarded grant money.

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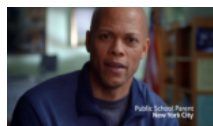
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