

# **NYSCU GRANT PROGRESS REPORT**

ORGANIZATION: Unitarian Church of Staten Island, NY

DATE OF REPORT: September 30, 2026

PURPOSE OF GRANT:

Our purpose is to better educate all visitors of the justice-involved faithful history of the congregation, their achievements over the years, and our church grounds through the creation of a proper viewable archive.

AMOUNT OF GRANT: \$3,000

**1. How was the money actually spent?**

In a complete breakdown, the funds were allocated accordingly:

-For the purpose of setting up our new archival storage space, we required Q-Tips and isopropyl alcohol (\$9.09) for carefully cleaning mild cases of mold from historic documents, 7 packs of acid-free polypropylene sheets (\$279.93) and 3 packs of acid-free, lignin-free file folders (\$74.97) to organize and put away our collection of documents from 1820 to present day into filing cabinets, and a digital hygrometer (\$49.97) to assess the continued safety of the room for our fragile papers.

-For upgrading present storage conditions of aging items, we needed three archive-safe binders (\$28.32) to replace aged, rusted binders containing records of plays and musicals held on our stage through the 1970s, 2 large archive-safe poster tubes (\$61.38) for older building plans that cannot be laid flat for fear of cracking, and ten reams of copier paper (\$58.99) to photocopy our collection of newspaper articles referencing our church that have severely degraded due to high acidity.

-For education to our visitors, we needed to first make the space safe by installing UV-blocking window film (\$41.56) on the windows in our church library where our displays will be, which was completed by church members using a film application kit (\$16.98). We bought a large aluminum tabletop display case (\$224.89) to be placed on the table in the library, which can fit four documents side by side for viewing. Inside the display case, we place humidity indicator cards (\$38.79) to monitor environmental changes that may become unsafe for our rotating display of historic documents. To display our newspaper collection safely, we bought 2 more archive-safe binders (\$18.88), one to keep originals in our archive, and one to keep copies for visitors to flip through in the library.

-For digitization efforts of our archive to reach the wider community, we partnered with a local photographer to photograph and professionally clean 16 binders of our collection that were no longer safe to keep due to water and mold damage over the years (\$1900). We also used a local film transfer business to digitize 3 film reels of plays and events our church has hosted in the 1960s (\$200). This adds up to a total of \$3,003.75, and the dollar amount that exceeds the grant will be taken on by the church.

**2. By your best estimate, how many people were/are being reached/served?**

As a church, we have 51 signed members who we reach through online and in-person services. Through our social media and wider-community events, we reach many more, coming to about 3,500 visitors annually. By website traffic alone, we reach much of the Staten Island community looking into the history of our island and learning about us from one-time visits.

**3. How well have the *goals* of the program/project been met, and how has this determination been made?**

We set out to organize, transfer, digitize, and display our entire archival collection from the 1820s to present day, which is an incredible task. Hundreds of these documents from the 1820s through the 1960s have been restored, organized, and either filed away or set aside for copying and/or display, while the next 50 years remain in processing. The documents in poor condition have taken much time through cleaning, copying, and outsourcing methods of preservation and digitization. Documents in fair to excellent condition have been safeguarded and separated if applicable for display. The educational portion of our goals is soon to be set for the community through the rotating displays of our historical archives in cases and interactive binders, as well as a digitization project in early stages. The determinations of condition and needs of the archives have been made by Joanna Pittari, a library & archives-educated student member of the church. The determinations of the extent of our work meeting goals and expectations were made by our History Committee. We are confident in what our continued effort will bring to our community, but understand that it will take longer to complete.

**4. What *concerns* developed in the course of the program/project?**

A major setback in our organizational efforts came from the discovery of severe water and mold damage to a large portion of our collection, which was not confined to a certain set of years. Many documents from before 1910 were in very good condition considering their age, but some had significantly faded ink, or (iron gall) ink that is certain to eat away at the paper as it ages further. Some documents from 1910 through 1950 were safe, but many had crumbling pages due to the highly acidic nature of the cheap paper used, or had mold damage that was unsafe to work with indoors. Molded pages that had minimal damage were able to be gently cleaned, sterilized, and dried, but many did not have a chance and had to be separated from the rest of our collection until we found someone to digitize that portion of the collection. Still, many negatives and film had deteriorated to the extent that no recognizable characters could be made of the photographs anymore, and sadly some of our collection between the 1950s and 1970s is lost to storage issues of our past without a proper archive and safety measures. Documents from the 2000s and on had been digitized, but some were lost due to systematic computer issues. Each decade of paperwork had its own issue with aging, especially when chemicals used in film and paper were not known to either deteriorate poorly over time, contain compounds that cause major safety issues, or react sensitively to changes in environmental factors. Because molded documents and highly flammable film compounds cause safety concerns and create unforeseen needs for careful examination of documents, professional help, and separation of collections into different environments, the expected time frame of the project had to be extended.

**5. Is this program/project complete?**

No, as the organization of our archive has proven a larger task than anticipated.

**A. If no, when will it be completed and evaluated, and by whom?**

By December 2026, Ruth Benson, Christine Johnson, Sally Jones, Randy Leason, and Joanna Pittari as members of our History Committee will evaluate the project as our goals are expected to be completed by then. We are supported by our Reverend Daniel Lawlor who found this grant opportunity, as well as our Treasurer, John Adrian, and President of the Board of Trustees, Benjamin Maxwell.

**B. If yes, what are the implications for the future?**

All financial exchanges for the purposes of this grant have been completed in accordance with the grant timeline. The incomplete portions remain as organizational efforts that exceeded our understanding of the size of our collection that has been hidden away for so long. Due to this, display of these documents has not begun circulating, though we have all required display materials and safeguards to begin doing so once we have completed separating out our circulating collection. We are also waiting on receiving back the recovered documents and film from both the photographer and film transfer studio for our future digitization project.

**6. Would you do the program/project again, or recommend it to others? Explain.**

The discussion that preparation of this display stirred by committee members engendered a connection and recentering of the covenant of the church. This is something that will surely reverberate further once the decision making on what items to display are made, and of course the discussion that the piece will initiate after it is placed. This is a wonderful opportunity for many congregations to strengthen the bonds of members and highlight the unique nature of their history.

Name of respondent: Joanna Pittari

Address: 312 Fillmore St, Staten Island, NY 10301 (UUCSI)

Phone: (917)588-1688

Email: [jpittari6@gmail.com](mailto:jpittari6@gmail.com).