

Free Employment Workshops return to the Free Library to support displaced federal employees seeking assistance

PHILADELPHIA, August 21, 2025 –The Free Library of Philadelphia is once again offering Federal Employee Transition Workshops to assist federal workers considering career transitions. These free workshops will be held at a variety of locations and will provide tips and best practices for resumes, career searches, LinkedIn, and networking opportunities from human resource professionals.

“We’re proud to host the Federal Employee Transition Workshops at several Free Library locations and online,” said Kelly Richards, President and Director, Free Library of Philadelphia. “These sessions reflect our deep commitment to supporting our communities, especially during times of uncertainty. The Library is here to offer the resources, guidance, and encouragement individuals need to take the next step in their careers.”

The informational workshops will be returning late August to mid-September, taking place in three locations of the Free Library System, with an additional online option available. Registration is required to attend a workshop. The dates, times, and locations of the workshops are:

Monday, August 25, 2025, at 4:30 pm at the South Philadelphia Library

Monday, September 8, 2025, at 4:30 pm at the Business Resource and Innovation Center at Parkway Central Library

Monday, September 15, 2025, at 4:30 pm at the Joseph E. Coleman Northwest Regional Library

Thursday, September 18, 2025, at Noon will be held virtually.

More resources from the Free Library of Philadelphia for displaced federal workers and job seekers, including free online workshops, can be found on our website at freelibrary.org.

About the Free Library of Philadelphia

The Free Library of Philadelphia system, with 54 locations, advances literacy, guides learning, and inspires curiosity with millions of digital and physical materials; 22,000 yearly programs and workshops; free public computers and extensive Wi-Fi; and rich special collections, including those at the Parkway Central Library. With more than 5 million in-person visits and 5 million more online annually, the Free Library is one of the largest public library systems in the United States.

For more information about the Free Library of Philadelphia, visit [Freelibrary.org](https://freelibrary.org).

Join Musicopia String Orchestras: Alum Aljavar McFarland shares how MSO changed his life

PHILADELPHIA, PA, August 21, 2025 – Video auditions for the Musicopia String Orchestras (MSO) are due by Saturday, August 30, with the 2025-26 season beginning on September 9.

Alum Aljavar McFarland shares his experience with the program and highlights its role in transforming students by nurturing both their musical and personal growth. When McFarland first learned about the program and auditioned in fifth grade, he was hesitant to join. Today, as a sophomore at Arcadia University, he reflects on how that moment launched a journey of growth, confidence, and community.

McFarland, now a computer science major, dedicated seven years to MSO, rising to the position of concertmaster during the 2023-24 season. He also returned to perform at Musicopia’s 50th Anniversary Concert, emceed fundraising events, interned with staff, and mentored younger students.

Upon starting rehearsals with MSO, Aljavar was surprised by how much more he was challenged compared to his school’s music program. “I almost quit,” he said, but a friend in the program encouraged him to stay, a decision that ultimately changed his life.

MSO pushed him to grow. “Not gonna lie, Musicopia showed me just how unprepared I was at the time,” he said, likening the experience to having an older brother who humbles you and reveals how much potential you have. Through years of rehearsals, McFarland sharpened his rhythm, improved his music reading skills, and deepened his understanding of music.

The program provided McFarland with vital opportunities for growth, including speaking at events and interning during his senior year of high school. With encouragement from Orchestra Coach Ashley Vines, he overcame his public speaking nerves and became comfortable addressing audiences. Interning under the then-Artistic Director Taia Harlos allowed him to conduct and mentor younger students, helping him see himself as a leader and bolstering his confidence beyond music.

MSO opened doors to additional opportunities, including PMAY, Play On Philly, and Appel Farm. Now a student at Arcadia, McFarland plays in the chamber



Aljavar is pictured center.

orchestra and dreams of blending his passions for music and technology. Looking back, he describes life without MSO as “shameful,” “depressing,” and “empty.”

He encourages students to embrace challenges, trust the process, and remain open to growth. The Musicopia String Orchestras are still accepting video auditions for the 2025-26 season, beginning on September 9. Auditions are due by Saturday, August 30. The MSO is tuition-free and offers three ensemble levels for students of varying skill levels.

To learn more or to submit an audition, visit www.musicopia.net/mso-audition.

About Musicopia

Musicopia’s mission is to provide equitable access to music education and enrichment, fostering self-confidence, global awareness, dedication, and joy among Pre-K to 12th-grade students and their communities. Each year, Musicopia reaches thousands of children in the Delaware Valley/Philadelphia area through in-school music education, afterschool programs for string orchestras and drumlines, community arts programming, the Philadelphia Lullaby Project, and its Gift of Music Instrument Donation Program.

Founded by Musicopia in 2005, the Musicopia String Orchestras program serves youth aged 7-18 living in the Greater Philadelphia region. MSO is open to all youth regardless of their families’ financial circumstances. Approximately 80% of students come from low-income schools, many of which do not offer an orchestra program. This tuition-free initiative makes music education opportunities accessible to all youth.

For more information, please visit www.musicopia.net.

tended Year, Out of School Time, sports, and other extracurricular activities complement their classroom education. When students engage in various activities and receive support in all areas of their lives, they are better prepared to excel academically.”

The City encourages all families to take advantage of these programs throughout the year. Together, we can ensure that every child in Philadelphia has the tools, support, and opportunities needed to thrive in school and beyond.

For more information about available programs, please visit Your One-Stop Back-to-School Resource Hub on phila.gov.

READ BANNED BOOKS



by Lorraine Lavender-Sams

Our Time is Now: Power, Purpose, and the Fight for a Fair America

Revitalization is necessary for the continued progression of societies, families, communities, governments, churches, schools, and all other societal and structural policy-making entities.

We witness the deliberate destruction of our systems of governance that have been the stronghold of our democracy for two hundred and forty-nine years (249). Think about that for a moment, 249 years of a democratic society.

I cannot remember a time post-Civil Rights Era when people were more divided in our nation. The chasm is so vast that many see options for closing the divide, though it is possible. The truth is that there’s strength in our differences and our vulnerabilities.

With the voter suppression being pushed forward in forms such as polling place consolidation and gerrymandering, Americans need to be assured that they have equitable access to the ballot box.

The selection for this week is “Our Time is Now: Power, Purpose, and the Fight for a Fair America” by former Georgia State Representative Stacey Abrams.

Abrams’ book isn’t a condemnation of America as much as it is a call for America to live up to its potential as a democracy. Drawing on her personal experiences, research from her organizations (Fair Fight Action and Fair Count), and historical data to advocate for a more inclusive and just democracy, the book lays bare the kinks in the American democracy, the inequities in the justice system, voter protections, identity politics and civic engagement in the fight for a more equitable America.

Books like “Our Time is Now: Power, Purpose, and The Fight for a Fair America” are critical to the survival of this democracy, particularly considering the passage along party lines (88-52) of House Bill 4, a bill intended to redraw the state’s congressional map to create five new GOP districts. I thought it fitting that I should end this column with the speech made by Representative Ann Johnson of Texas (D-134) to her colleagues on the floor of the Texas House of Representatives.

“In 1972, Barbara Jordan ran for Congress in Texas House District 18. When I looked around my house as a little girl, there was a painting of ‘The Story Tellers. It was her favorite painting that my dad had... Black men speaking to youth about their history and their future. As I look around the room of white men, I think about my dad, and I love the headshake, and I love the nod, because this is about racism. And if you can’t hear it from them, then hear it from me. As a White woman and the daughter of a man of privilege and power, he knew that his strength was to bring people who didn’t look like him to the table of government. Yes. And so, 50 years later, after Barbara Jordan, aided by White people to have a voice, the first Woman of Color elected to the South, a woman who sat in the impeachment of Nixon, a woman who said that finally, after amendment, debate, and vote,” I am part of We the People.”

To stand here as a fifty-year-old woman and know that we now go back in time. So, let’s talk about the cowardice and cheats, because if you knew you could win this next election, you wouldn’t make this effort to steal five seats from elected officials that members of color elected to represent them in Washington, DC. You wouldn’t be doing everything you can to take this coalition of diversity and stand up at the mike and say, “Why are we doing this?” Because we can. And you shield your racism with your party, with ignorance and arrogance. Yes. To come up here and say, “To be completely honest with you, I haven’t read the bill from the other side. To be honest with you, I haven’t talked to the lawyers about bringing this before you think that people will give grace on ignorance and arrogance around the party, because you can’t admit that the root of all of this is about racism and power. A power grab. A pure power grab.”

Afterschool

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young people ages 14-23 who are in or have formerly been in foster care, focusing on education, employment, housing, and personal development.

“We are excited to welcome students back for the 2025-26 school year on Monday, August 25,” said Tony B. Watlington, Sr., Ed.D., Superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia. “The experiences students have outside of the classroom through Extended Day/Ex-