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The Flowerings Project: A Library in Transformation

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The Flowerings Project: A Library in Transformation (1909-07155)

Final Report prepared by Dr. Jody Condit Fagan, with review by Dr. Joanne Gabbin, Dr. Bethany Nowviskie, Lauren K. Alleyne, and Dr. Aaron Noland

Progress Report

Furious Flower and the JMU Libraries are pleased to submit this detailed final report of activities undertaken as part of our 2020-2021 Mellon Foundation planning grant.

The major outcome of the grant was to leverage a growing partnership between the JMU Libraries and Furious Flower Poetry Center at James Madison University to explore and develop a “Furious Flower model” for integrated library support of a living, academic center for the arts with archival, scholarly, digital, educational, and performance components. The model, as imagined in our planning grant proposal, aimed to explore and treat [nine key areas](#), weaving within and across the partners’ activities (See Appendix: Activities Timeline). Three of the areas were regarded by the planning grant Core Team (a small group of leaders from both organizations) as transcendent across all the others:

1. Develop needed cultural competencies in libraries, archives, and digital centers seeking to partner with campus projects or organizations promoting the visibility, inclusion, and/or critical consideration of marginalized groups;
2. Explore the ways a shared and inspiring exemplar project can be used to manage organizational and cultural change;
3. Foster faculty and other campus partners’ understanding of library processes, systems, expertise, and goals.

The remaining six focused on domains and applications, including inclusive archival workflows, frameworks for multimedia preservation and performance capture, teaching-and-learning collaborations, and policies and platforms for sustainable digital publications. Rather than treat these six goals as separate planning grant outcomes, the Core Team instead recognized their interconnections and engaged with all of them throughout the grant activities.

Prior to the planning grant, interactions between Furious Flower and Libraries had been positive and fruitful, but could be characterized as ad hoc, finite, and isolated from one another—more predicated on individual staff and faculty members’ personal relationships and goodwill, or ability to respond to one-off requests, rather than on organizational commitments and shared institutional goal-setting. This planning grant allowed the two organizations’ leadership to spend regular time with one another in a variety of contexts—even amidst the distractions and pressures of the pandemic response. It also afforded opportunities for broader community

“a syllable
is a brick.
a single inked word on
a page is a monument
in the face of
a white horizon
meant to erase
us.”

– Fred Joiner, “To the Builders,”
*Furious Flower: Seeding the Future
of African American Poetry*

building and the development of shared understandings among a much larger group of Libraries and Furious Flower stakeholders.

The Flowerings Core Team (Joanne Gabbin, Lauren Alleyne, Bethany Nowviskie, Jody Fagan, Aaron Noland, and several people who served as Flowerings Project Coordinator (Talibah Atiya, Quinn Jiles, and Spencer Law) held no fewer than 30 planning and discussion meetings throughout the two-year period for such activities as:

- Choosing, convening, and facilitating the advisory board kickoff, group conversations, asynchronous engagement, and end-of-year meeting
- Planning and facilitating five “drop-in” sessions for all Libraries and Furious Flower personnel, plus sometimes faculty partners and advisory board members
- Getting to know the expert consultants we were able to retain through Mellon funding (Bergis Jules, Lynette Johnson, and Jon Voss from SHIFT Collective), working with them to develop interview protocols and a large vision-setting retreat, and discussing SHIFT’s final report
- Collaborating with Lae’l Hughes-Watkins to develop a customized version of the Reparative Archives workshop and discussing the event and Lae’l’s report
- Developing a commitment to share space and center Furious Flower’s offerings not only programmatically but physically through the forthcoming renovation of our main research library on the JMU campus, Carrier Library, which is now slated to include Furious Flower office and meeting spaces as well as a new Gwendolyn Brooks Reading Room
- Developing strategic communications for our blended and distinct constituencies about our partnership and the grant activities, including by sharing press releases, newsletters and stories, and [the project’s public web site](#)
- Exploring technologies to provide streaming access to Furious Flower’s AV collections
- Navigating and advancing our knowledge of JMU policies and procedures for grant administration, human resources, and budget management
- Ideating, evolving, and writing emerging goals and ideas, expressed most recently in JMU’s successful 2021 Mellon implementation grant proposal (“Flowerings II: Seeding and Tending Furious Flowers Digital Archives and Infrastructure”).

In addition, the planning grant’s direct support of Furious Flower through needed additional personnel afforded the Executive Director and Assistant Director time to engage with grant activities and strengthened the Center’s abilities to deliver programming throughout the grant period. This included:

- [The Furious Flower Reading Series \(2020 and 2021\)](#)
- Deep participation in the 2021 African, African American, and Diaspora Studies Conference at JMU, February 17-20
- [Legacy Seminar for Educators: “Groundwork: The Legacy of Poet and Editor Haki Madhubuti,”](#) June 21-25 2021 (virtual)
- [Furious Flower Children’s Creativity Camp \(2020\)](#)

- [2021 Furious Flower Poetry Prize and Quarantine Kwansaba Contest](#)
- Announcing and identifying the Center’s first [Carmen R. Gillespie Fellow \(2021\)](#).



From Left to right: Jon Voss (SHIFT Collective), with members of the Core Team, Jody Fagan (Libraries), Joanne Gabbin, and Lauren Alleyne (Furious Flower) visit after an outdoor breakfast meeting to discuss SHIFT’s report, July 26, 2021. Photo credit: Jon Voss

In addition to the extraordinary benefits from these events to attendees both at JMU and worldwide, Furious Flower’s ongoing intellectual and artistic programming directly supported the planning grant goals by:

- Illustrating the need and potential for archival curation of creative works emanating from such generative events. For example, the Furious Flower Reading Series generates precious Facebook video recordings and chat interactions that are currently not curated.
- Further illuminating the beauty, power, and uniqueness of Black poetry communities and culture.
- Revealing to more people the connections between Furious Flower events and instruction and curriculum. For example, JMU College of Education Professor Mary Beth Cancienne has developed K-12 lesson plans based on Furious Flower archival content.
- Driving increased traffic and attention to Furious Flower’s groundbreaking digital literary journal, [The Fight and the Fiddle](#).
- Increasing awareness of the physical and virtual spaces inhabited by the Furious Flower Poetry Center and Libraries, their limitations and opportunities. For example, as the pandemic eased, the Core Team enjoyed a celebratory toast in the Center’s cozy and welcoming home in Cardinal House, but the same space felt cramped and distant from the center of campus when a large group of architects came to visit for Carrier Library renovation planning.
- Making the towering reputation of Furious Flower Poetry Center—never in question to the Black poetry community—more obvious to a wider array of campus stakeholders at JMU. As the SHIFT Collective’s final report to us stated, “no single entity or program at

JMU has been more nationally or internationally prominent and renowned than *Furious Flower*” (p. 11).

During the grant period, it was also notable that the Furious Flower Poetry Center and its faculty and staff were celebrated and recognized in several ways:

- A well-attended book launch celebration for the publication of the anthology *Furious Flower: Seeding the Future of African American Poetry*, by Joanne V. Gabbin and Lauren K. Alleyne, hosted by JMU Libraries and the College of Arts and Letters, February 19, 2020
- Joanne Gabbin featured as the keynote speaker at the JMU Spring 2021 Commencement
- Building Rededication Ceremony including the naming of Gabbin Hall, Friday, September 24, 2021
- Furious Flower assistant director Lauren K. Alleyne recognized with the prestigious, state-level 2022 [SCHEV Outstanding Faculty Award](#).

“Beginnings have many doors—
each an opening into time. A possibility.
A name is a beginning. A name, too, is a door,
and through it, so much can enter—
the shame of a wrongheaded history,
the unvanquished haints of injustice—
the wrong note of it clanging an offkey anthem.

And so, we must close some doors.
And we must decide how to continue,
which is to say, we choose how to begin again.

—Lauren K. Alleyne, “(Re)Dedication,”
JMU building rededication ceremony, September 24, 2021

JMU Libraries’ faculty and staff were also honored to receive JMU’s highest honor in the form of [two awards in 2020](#) as part of the state Governor’s Honor Awards Program:

- President’s Purple Star Award for Teamwork, recognizing contributions in converting the campus to online learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic
- President’s Purple Star Award for Community Service and Volunteerism, recognizing a community-based effort to manufacture PPE for local healthcare organizations.

Significant progress was also made during the grant period on the subaward to the JMU Libraries from Dr. Tanya Clement’s Mellon Foundation grant for the “Annotate Audiovisual Extensible

Workflow” project, part of her AudiAnnotate tool, to support innovative possibilities with scholarly annotations on audiovisual content in the Furious Flowering collections.

Model Development

Work toward a new model for our Libraries-Furious Flower collaboration began with the development of deeper trust and openness on the part of the Core Team. In one of the Core Team’s first meetings, Joanne Gabbin asked each person to share their stories. Jody Fagan’s story included how she thought she was going to become an architect, started graduate school in architecture, then changed directions and went to library school. Joanne said, “We may be sisters. Because I also wanted to become an architect when I was young. But that path wasn’t open to me.” This frank speech fostered a connection *and* clarified how institutional racism shaped Jody’s and Joanne’s life experiences so differently. That kind of reflection continued in our meetings, as the disproportionate effects of the pandemic took a toll on our communities, as police brutality murdered George Floyd, and as political wars against teaching about the impacts of structural racism ensued. We mourned losses. We also celebrated community and personal events, such as the increase in national attention on Black poetry (e.g., Amanda Gorman’s inaugural poetry reading, numerous six-figure prizes and awards received by poets¹), the naming of Gabbin Hall, the hire of a valued colleague as Associate Vice Provost for Scholarship, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and Lauren’s progress toward her PhD, her SCHEV Outstanding Faculty award, and her [NAACP Image Awards Nomination](#).

*“Recentering is a transformational thing – people may say it as a throwaway term – but we have to work together in a different way. ...People need to be transparent about what time it takes, be up front about how much work it is and what it would take for someone else to do it too.” – Aleia Brown, 9/29/21
Advisory Board Group Conversation*

We made time in meetings to learn about one another, our experiences, and how all of that affects the way we engage with our work. Interpersonally and as a team, we increased shared understanding of:

- How experiences with institutional histories and current institutional politics shape our daily life and work
- The extent to which personal life, community life, spiritual life, and work life intersect and affect one another
- The degree to which one feels able to bring a “whole self” to different contexts
- How our various phases of career, work styles, forms of scholarship, and creative activities contribute to our individual and community pursuit of our dreams and aspirations

¹ [Patricia Smith won an award for \\$100,000](#); [Toi Derricotte, \\$100,000](#); [Reginald Dwayne Betts, \\$625,000](#).

- How an event like the 2020-2022 coronavirus pandemic affects communities in radically different ways
- What a reparative approach to archives and institutional relationships looks like in action and how it manifests in a variety of settings
- The ethos of Black poetry and literary communities and the language of libraries and archives.

We also became more aware of how the experience of Furious Flower as a small, Black woman-led Center differed historically and currently from JMU Libraries as a large, complex, and predominantly-white organization. Here are some examples:

- JMU Libraries and Furious Flower Poetry Center both face challenges due to budget constraints, but how that plays out for the Libraries' large budget is different than for the Center's smaller one.
- As a center for academic technology, instructional design, library functions, and many other multidisciplinary activities, Libraries faces many competing demands on its budget and its staff's time.
- Libraries has full-time personnel dedicated to specific functions whereas Furious Flower personnel must more frequently "pitch in" across functions. Examples include HR functions, financial processing, technical support, and social media.
- Libraries embodies many departments with their own professional standards, work approaches, cultures, et cetera. While we generally don't want folks outside the Libraries to have to learn about these in deep ways in order to have their service needs met, part of our grant ambition to promote "understanding [of] library processes, systems, expertise, and goals" for faculty partners involves learning different things for working with different aspects of the Libraries.
- Yet, we also acknowledge the time and commitment of Libraries staff to develop new knowledge, enhance cultural competencies, and transform their professional practices (e.g., librarianship, archival work, instructional design), as demonstrated by their use of this planning grant's professional development funds.
- Libraries is a large system that interacts with other large campus systems, and policies and procedures are more likely to be written to address the needs of large systems. This also means Libraries and campus IT or other offices offering support sometimes operate more slowly than a small center like FFPC. The SHIFT report noted that "Blanket tech system policies can be too restrictive for the rich, unique needs of a group like Furious Flower" (p. 30). Libraries' expertise in navigating between campus IT and Furious Flower has been and will continue to be extremely valuable.

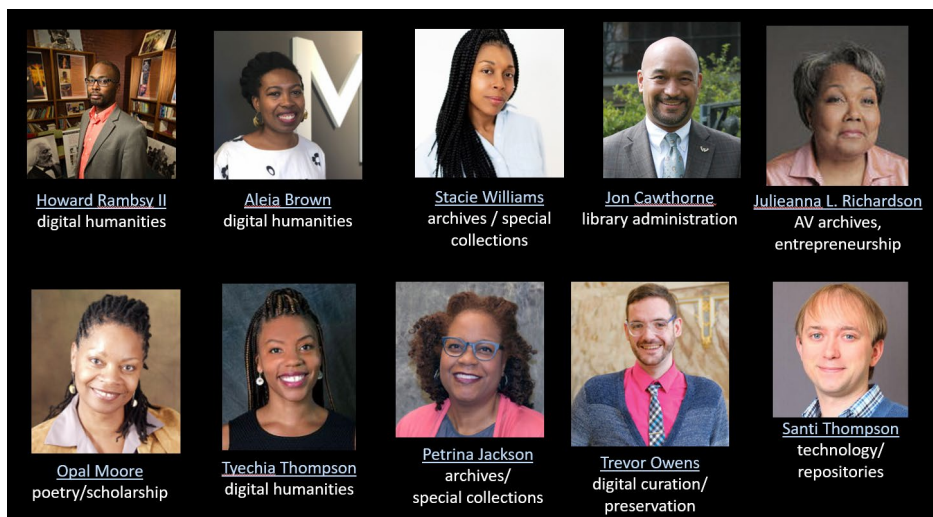
"[Academic] libraries can have rigidity in structure – how do you have a process to help people come to an idea?"

– Jon Cawthorne, 10/4/21 Advisory Board Group Conversation

Although analyzing our organizational differences was helpful, we were most energized by discovering commonalities in our hopes and ambitions, and forging our new partnership together. For example, the group’s initial planning meetings were dominated by beautiful storytelling and visionary ideation, which challenged the project manager’s ability to nail down timelines and action items. As time went on and team members recognized the needs of our various roles, they began to make more space for creative expression *and* logistical matters.

“Libraries are stretching themselves to think about the roles they've played, for example in curatorial roles. We say we're care-focused but we don't give ourselves the space to imagine things. Mellon gives us the opportunity. Glad we can dream a little bit.” – Santi Thompson, 3/2/21 Advisory Board Kickoff

Brainstorming ideas for the Flowerings Advisory Board provided the Flowerings Core Team members opportunity to talk about what expertise would be relevant to our endeavor. Joanne and Bethany collaborated on invitations to the luminaries the group settled on and were delighted that each person invited to join enthusiastically agreed. The kickoff meetings, topical and asynchronous conversations, asynchronous dialogues, and end-of-year meetings of this Advisory Board thoroughly enriched the Core Team’s reflections and the model’s development. The Board members were Aleia Brown, Howard Ramsby II, Jon Cawthorne, Julieanna Richardson, Opal Moore, Petrina Jackson, Santi Thompson, Stacie Williams, Trevor Owens, and Tyechia Thompson.



The Flowerings Advisory Board

Another cluster of examples of how this planning grant allowed us to develop our organizational partnership with trust and openness relates to the logistics of grant management. Sharing the grant budget allowed us to develop a “third way” of resource allocation and expenditure. Three Libraries’ fiscal technicians supported these aspects of the planning grant while respecting Furious Flower’s autonomy and desired approach. They didn’t assume we would handle things

the way Libraries always has. For example, default JMU policies and practices are often designed for paying full-time staff, large contractors, and other institutions, whereas our grant and partnership involved compensating numerous part-time staff and student employees who were fulfilling professional functions, our first Furious Flower student fellow, advisory board members, and one-person startups who don't necessarily have cushions from institutional support. We wanted to treat all our partners and consultants as colleagues, community members, and friends, not as business contracts. Finding flexibility within a state institution, with grant funds, and in partnership with one another was and still is a learning process. One of our advisory board members commented in the end of year meeting, "as university corporatizes, we take on the language of contract—contracts as interfaces between work. What is needed is genuine in-depth collaborations—vulnerability." Together, Furious Flower and the Libraries sought to develop and communicate more humane and personalized approaches, while still respecting the accountability procedures of a complex state institution. Navigating procedural waters together for two years to execute the mechanics of these grant activities in a way that was transparent and collaborative was very powerful in building trust over time.

*"Furious Flower needs to remain agile, remain true to itself, even as it becomes more integrated into politics and bureaucracy at JMU."
– SHIFT Final Report, p. 15*

Our consultants, SHIFT, further supported the development of the Core Team by participating in retreat planning meetings with us, challenging us, and offering reflections from an external perspective. Their deep experiences with communities of color, community archives, and libraries as community partners supported additional model development.

Rippling out Beyond the Core Team

The flourishing of the model rippled out past the Core Team to include Furious Flower and Libraries employees, JMU faculty partners, our Advisory Board, and Black poetry communities, all of whom further developed and enhanced the mode's formation. Venues included:

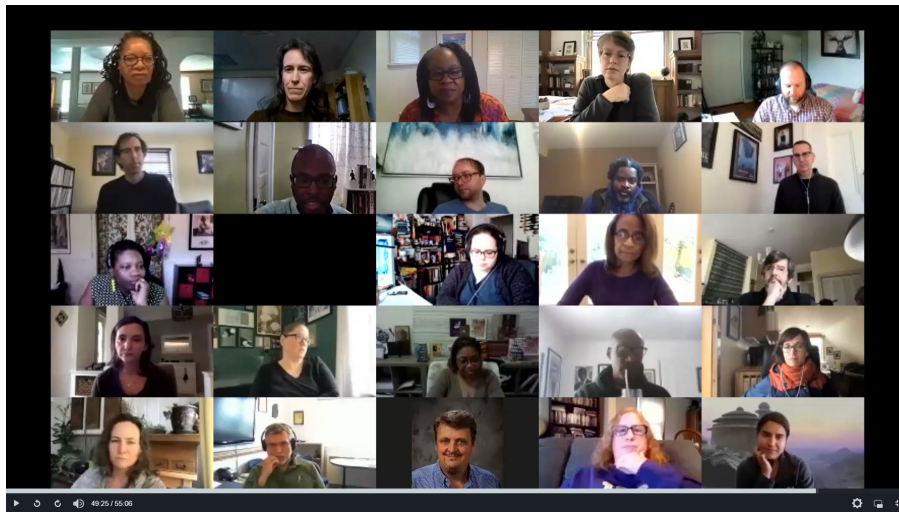
- Five large drop-in sessions (April-November, 2021)
- 37 professional development experiences (2020-2021)
- 6 interview sessions with campus and community groups by SHIFT Collective (Oct 2020-Mar, 2021)
- SHIFT Retreat (May 24 and 25, 2021)
- Reparative Archives Workshop with Lae'l Hughes-Watkins (July 22, 2021)
- A meet-up between the Flowerings Core Team and the Libraries' Digital Infrastructure Working Group to review digital archive technology components (September 7, 2021)
- Three group conversations with the Flowerings Advisory Board (Sep-Oct, 2021)
- An informational session led by JMU Libraries Special Collections for Furious Flower's entire staff, including students (Dec 6, 2021)
- Coordination between the AudiAnnotate project leader and Flowerings project manager

- Ongoing participation and engagement of Furious Flower leadership in the vision-setting and schematic design phase for Carrier Library renovation.

Drop-in sessions

Five drop-in sessions held between April and November, 2021, provided an opportunity for poetry, informational sharing, relationship-building, discussion, and feedback. They averaged 35 attendees per session and included a variety of our stakeholder groups) (see: Appendix: Drop-In Sessions).

Poetry readings set the stage for these drop-ins, and Joanne’s warm hospitality enlivened the Zoom rooms. She expressed gratitude directly to individuals she saw who have worked with Furious Flower over the decades, and often invited people to speak. She also described her faith in Libraries’ members of the Core Team—Bethany Nowviskie, Aaron Noland, and Jody Fagan, allowing attendees a view into the Core Team’s partnership. Joanne and Lauren commented several times that seeing 30-40 people show up to each of these events communicated organization-wide support to Furious Flower, noting “we feel like there’s an army behind us now!” For further details, please see: Appendix: Drop-In Sessions.



Drop-in session with SHIFT Collective, Libraries, Furious Flower, Advisory Board members, and JMU faculty partners, August 9, 2021

Libraries’ Leadership (a large, regular meeting group of all associate deans, department directors, and team supervisors, open to any other JMU Libraries employees who wish to join) was also engaged through updates and Q&A sessions at their meetings on February 27, 2020 and November 5, 2021. Libraries Dean’s Council received updates at each bi-weekly meeting with time for questions, and Bethany Nowviskie addressed Flowerings project progress at regular “Open Q&A” town halls and “Ask Me Anything” sessions. The entire Libraries’ organization was additionally kept up-to-date through regular entries in our weekly, internal listserv newsletter.

Professional Development Experiences

Due to the impact of the pandemic, we worked with Mellon to alter our planned, grant-funded travel budget to support virtual professional development opportunities for Libraries and Furious Flower stakeholders. The 37 professional development activities funded by the planning grant's Conferences & Meetings and Travel budget lines had a profound effect across the Libraries' organization (see Appendix: Professional Development Activities). A few quotes illustrate staff reflections on how their work related to the nine key areas of the grant:

- At the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, a Metadata Strategies staff member mentioned learning about “Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative” as a resource for tracing metadata related to African Americans in Virginia. “One particular session ... discussed the extreme necessity of complete and accurate metadata in assisting researchers in accessing materials; poorly described materials can essentially “hide” a resource. This solidifies the value in creating quality metadata when describing our Special Collections’ materials, which is a large part of my position.”
- A Scholarly Communications Strategies faculty member spoke about her experience at ACRL 2021, “Dr. Cottom’s keynote resonated particularly strongly for me with respect to my professional goals: surfacing structural disparities and acting as an agent for change with respect to surveillance capitalism and data rights... I also particularly appreciated the sessions that identified the feelings of isolation and loneliness that occurs among BIPOC in smaller college towns and in academic libraries. The strategies for support in these cases (also shared with colleagues) are helpful reminders of the work that is necessary for BIPOC to just exist in these homogenous environments.”
- An associate dean who attended ACRL 2021 highlighted the sessions “Translating Values into Action: Launching an Anti-Racism Talent Management Audit” and “Systemic Oppression Requires Systemic Change: Recasting the Roles of Academic Libraries in Contemporary Contexts” as ensuring that she “walked away with new ideas and strategies that will inform and influence my work in JMU Libraries into the future.”
- An instructional designer who attended Embodying Anti-Racism said, “I’m working to understand the tenets of white supremacy culture and where I can break those cycles. While I have learned about and discussed with colleagues/faculty at JMU, I appreciated the opportunities to learn and discuss with people outside of my regular community.”
- A Resources & Education Services faculty member who attended the ERA Virtual Research Learning Series commented, “This course helped me develop tools, attitudes, and methods toward being a co-conspirator for justice with BIPOC communities. This included prioritizing personal experience and knowledge to become authentic collaborator with traditionally marginalized communities during research processes.”
- A Metadata Strategies staff member in attendance at the Islandora 8 Camp noted their time at the Lyrasis-sponsored Fedora and Islandora training camp provided “direct and vicarious insight into the suitability of the platform for supporting JMU digital collections, including the FFPC.”

- A Special Collections staff member who attended “Arrangement and Description of Audiovisual Materials,” noted the emphasis on “pre-processing as a method for gaining preliminary intellectual control of audiovisual material... This suggestion is well-suited for the FFPC recordings that are largely already grouped according to conferences. However, while creator-supplied media labels can provide a lot of information, they may not provide the right description to facilitate access. While the bulk of the material transferred to Special Collections by Furious Flower, including AV, was labeled, this tenet emphasizes why it’s important to balance donor-supplied description with archivist-created description.”
- A faculty member in Strategy & Development who attended the Contemplative Practices in Higher Education Conference wrote, “my participation on the planning committee led to the conference inviting [poet] Steven Willis as a featured presenter and session leader. I was introduced to Steven through the Furious Flower Reading Series.”

SHIFT Interviews and Retreat

Six group interviews were facilitated by SHIFT to inform the creation of the retreat that would be the capstone of their engagement with the Flowerings project and their final report to the Flowerings Core Team. The six groups were: Furious Flower Leadership and Staff, JMU Library Staff, JMU Libraries Dean’s Council, JMU Students, JMU Faculty and Staff, and JMU and Furious Flower Alumni, Local Community Members, and Off Campus Supporters. Findings from these interviews are outlined in the SHIFT Final Report. Libraries attendees referred to their SHIFT interview session frequently as a major support for understanding the model and our developing partnership.

The SHIFT retreat (May 24-25, 2021) included 18 participants from Libraries, 9 from the Flowerings Advisory Board, 5 JMU faculty and staff, 3 from Furious Flower, and 3 from the broader Black poetry community. The days began with poetry, including a breathtaking live zoom performance by Avery R. Young, and a Furious Flower promotional video showcasing the Center’s success and influence. Small group activities throughout the two-day virtual event allowed for in-depth engagement with a power analysis, reflections on “Furious Flower at 50,” analysis of the alignment between Furious Flower and JMU Libraries, and rapid prototyping. The full group also engaged in discussion of understanding and mapping opportunities.

The final report (“Furious Flowerings: Investigating Sustainability and Capacity Building at a Living Black Poetry Center through an Equitable Library Support Model”) identified the following key findings and recommendations:

Findings

1. Furious Flower has broad support from the communities they have nurtured and helped to grow over the past 25 years.
2. JMU has not adequately supported Furious Flower financially or otherwise, which has caused harm and a lack of trust.
3. Stakeholders credit Furious Flower with bringing more value to the university than it receives in terms of resources and support.

4. Structural barriers to on-campus funding should be examined, including the tilt of institutional investment toward credit-hour/revenue producers, which often leaves research- and scholarship-based initiatives inadequately resourced.
5. JMU lacks inclusive processes for campus entities (such as Centers) that are outside of its traditional funding path to be included in new initiatives, leading to additional marginalization.
6. Furious Flower should better leverage its assets to generate funding and other kinds of support.
7. Furious Flower needs a succession plan, a sustainability plan, and a formalized partnership with the Libraries that will guide the organization beyond the span of current leadership.
8. Stakeholders want Furious Flower to be located in a multi-functional, configurable new space with well-integrated collections materials.
9. In its 25 years, Furious Flower has garnered national and international acclaim, but it is vital for the organization to increase its visibility and audience on JMU's campus.
10. Furious Flower has amassed an extraordinarily valuable archival collection of Black poetry and art.

Recommendations

1. Keep Furious Flower at the center of the Flowering Team's project plans moving forward to mitigate historical marginalization.
2. Protect Furious Flower's autonomy in order to hold onto what has made the organization great.
3. Actively pursue grant funding for Furious Flower with support from, and in partnership with, the university and the JMU Development Office.
4. Leverage and activate the Furious Flower community of supporters inside and outside of JMU to help bring more resources to the Center.
5. Set clear expectations for all partnerships in the beginning of a collaboration, being explicit about wanting to only engage in equitable partnerships.

For more details, please see the SHIFT Final Report, uploaded as a supplementary document.

Reparative Archives Assessments and Workshop

A Reparative Archives Workshop hosted by the originator of the "reparative archives" concept, Lae'l Hughes-Watkins, occurred on July 22 and included 10 participants from Libraries, 7 JMU faculty partners, and 2 from Furious Flower. The R. A. W. Final Report provides full details about Hughes-Watkins' careful preparation for the workshop, including interviews with Furious Flower, pre-assessments of attendees, and post assessments.

Hughes-Watkins noted several outcomes for attendees and findings from her pre- and post-assessments:

- Clearer understanding of the history between Furious Flower Poetry Center and James Madison University Library
- Enhanced understanding of the historical context between both partners

- Shared value of the importance of Furious Flower Poetry Center
- Concern for broader buy-in by JMU administration yet significant confidence in the leadership of Bethany Nowviskie, Dean of Libraries
- Clearer understanding of the reparative archives framework.

Attendees also identified interest in future opportunities to see the direct implementation of the framework within the library and a desire for opportunities for enhanced networking/community building between communities. As another goal, they articulated ensuring financial stability and autonomy of the Center with personnel and financial resources, while maintaining a symbiotic relationship between Furious Flower Poetry Center and Libraries.

Group Conversations with Flowerings Advisory Board

Based on the grant’s nine key areas and Advisory Board members’ expertise, the Flowerings Core Team generated three topical areas to guide conversations the Flowerings Project Manager set up with a broad set of Libraries faculty and staff and other campus stakeholders. Libraries employees participated in question prompt generation for the group meetings via a Microsoft Teams space with channels for each meeting and a broadcast invitation was sent to the Libraries’ employee listserv.

Small Group Meetings with Advisory Board

- 9/29: Centering Communities
 - equitable and inclusive labor, especially with respect to poetry and archives: Stacie Williams, Howard Ramsby, II, Petrina Jackson, Aleia Brown
- 10/4: Academic Libraries + Digital Humanities Spaces
 - Physical Spaces, Partnerships, and Organizational Culture: Jon Cawthorne, Opal Moore, Aleia Brown, Tyechia Thompson
- 10/11: Creating a Digital Infrastructure to Support Access (big picture)
 - Juleanna Richardson, Tyechia Thompson, Trevor Owens, Santi Thompson

***Let Jody Fagan (faganjc@jmu.edu) know if you are interested**

Invitation to Libraries’ employees to participate in small group meetings with the Flowerings Advisory Board

Notes from each meeting were also posted in Microsoft Teams and sent to all attendees (since users external to JMU could not access Teams). The groups were well-attended: Centering Communities (19 attendees), Academic Libraries + Digital Humanities Spaces (21 attendees), and Creating a Digital Infrastructure to Support Access (15 attendees). At each meeting, we reviewed the grant’s nine key areas and introduced the advisory board members. Please see the Appendix: Group Conversations with Advisory Board, for more details about these events.

Overall Reflections from Libraries’ Employees

The most common question during the planning grant from Libraries’ employees was, “How can I support the planning grant activities?” This question came from all areas of the Libraries, and included both the desire to leverage Libraries’ functional expertise and a willingness to do

whatever tasks might be necessary, whether those tasks directly engaged with their current Libraries' position or not. We reassured them that — during this formative and exploratory phase of the planning grant — “just showing up” to the drop-in sessions and to Furious Flower events was a strong means of showing Libraries' commitment as an organization.

In a drop-in session and follow-up survey November 2021, Libraries employees were invited to answer open-ended reflection questions about their experiences across the planning grant's activities. Several spoke about appreciating the sharing of poetry and normalizing the presence of the arts as part of daily work. One person said,

Avery Young's performance ... was the most meaningful thing I've ever seen via Zoom or any other sort of teleconferencing. It's a good example of how this project has helped at least from my perspective to see that many of the reasons we have a library or work in a library, which can be rather abstract, and that performance and a lot of parts of this project have made the reason for our work much more concrete, and I really appreciate that.



Avery Young's performance at the SHIFT Retreat, “My Smiling Negro”

Others spoke to the importance of intentionally making space to meet with an advisory board to help guide our reflections:

We don't often do that, at least in my experience with project management. And it's been incredibly meaningful, and as the project team starts to get into the weeds a little bit, it's helpful to reflect on those big picture questions with the advisory board and know there are others out there who know that we're doing this good work, are supporting us.

For those who were able to attend, the conversations with Shift Collective and the reparative archives workshop were referred to as “impactful,” “community-building,” and “transformative.” One person wrote, “These spaces helped clarify the whole gestalt of the Flowerings project as one with many parts and many potential outcomes, rooted in equity, shared authority, and authentic partnership.”

Employees also talked about finding new connections between the grant goals and their daily work. One wrote to say “I am learning to bring more ease into my collaborations, more openness to others' perspectives, and more flexibility to my contributions.” Library employees expressed interest in ensuring sustainability (e.g., retaining grant-funded personnel), clarifying roles and responsibilities, and curiosity about how the long-term partnership with Furious Flower would play out.

Libraries employees continued to support Furious Flower in pre-existing ways (such as through long-established Special Collections relationships), but the heightened attention of the grant also inspired new connections. For example, an LIS student and Libraries public services staff member (now a full-time employee in Libraries' Special Collections), Faith Benavides,

completed an internship in Fall 2021 in partial support of Furious Flower under the guidance of Humanities Librarian Brian Flota. She created a list of Furious Flower presenters (2014-present) and their publications (over 400 titles) to support Libraries' acquisitions of these titles. Libraries already owned 200 of these books and have so far acquired about 25% of the remaining titles. Due to this and related analyses, we are also adding the publishers of Furious Flower-related books to our approval plans, and have ordered publications for Spring 2022 presenters.

“Libraries should be ... a collision of ideas. We're in institutions that are divided by subjects and that's not helpful for people. The problems people face are interdisciplinary. We're about going to the future, to take what has been outside and bring it central to create a new understanding, new knowledge.” – Jon Cawthorne, Advisory Board Kickoff

As the Core Team engaged in and reflected upon all the above activities with our partners and communities, our ideas evolved in written form (see below Figure).



Building off the nine key areas, we developed emerging goals, found confirmation and added dimensions from our consultants, partners, and advisors, and updated our model's expression in our proposal for the 2022-2026 Mellon grant supporting implementation of the Flowerings Model. The next section will outline the model's components as we understand them today.

“To be touched by living poetry can only make us better people.”
— *“Poetry,” by Haki Madhubuti* ²

The Flowerings model is “how we work together” and it is also “how we developed our partnership.” It is both a way of working and the process to get there. It is an ongoing, evolving realization as well as the daily practice that results in that realization. The Flowerings model is full of “ing” words because it is a living process and relationship. In fact, understanding our partnership *as* a process and relationship is part of the model.

The model nests in the field of Black poetry and literature as well as within the domain of libraries and archives. The Furious Flower Poetry Center and Libraries will continue to learn about our respective contexts, and thanks to our 2022-2025 Mellon Foundation implementation grant, we already have in-depth conversations scheduled for knowledge sharing concerning archival workflows, description, and user experience—and these are just the beginning.

Components of the model include:

- Ensuring institutional change outlasts the passion of individuals in leadership at the time of the change
- Situating our work within the history, context, and ethos of Black poetry and literary communities, as well as that of libraries and archives. This includes promulgation of aspects we wish to nurture and grow, and grappling honestly with the effects of aspects that have been harmful
- Recognizing and upholding the autonomy of the Furious Flower Poetry Center as an organization
- Recognizing the value of Furious Flower Poetry Center’s archival materials and the importance of the Center’s continued curatorial oversight and partnership with JMU Libraries archivists and Special Collections staff
- Stewarding the Furious Flower collection for both preservation and access, with Furious Flower and the JMU Libraries as full and equitable partners
- Recognizing and developing Libraries’ skills and expertise with digital preservation, technology, and archival work
- Welcoming participation from all employee types and areas of the organization, and keeping our constituent groups well-informed to empower their engagement
- Upholding the importance of well-being and sustainable practices, particularly for work undertaken in the context of a global pandemic
- Expressing gratitude and generosity as a fundamental and everyday practice
- Continuing to foster and evolve a reparative and post-custodial approach to collections

² From *Taught by Women: Poems as Resistance Language*, p. 13.

- Continuing to foster relationships with campus partners and evolve our reparative approach
- Developing joint approaches for campus-level strategy.

The following developments illustrate how the model has already begun to result in organizational and institutional change:

- Furious Flower’s executive director feels able to retire knowing her legacy is well-provided for
- Furious Flower’s wish that the assistant director become the next director became a reality
- Libraries made direct budget transfers to Furious Flower in a new, values-based budgeting model, to support ongoing programming during a time when Furious Flower was underfunded
- The Libraries’ cross-departmental team formed to address digital infrastructure has become formalized and renewed as part of the Flowerings Project Coordination Team
- Libraries was able to secure permanent institutional funding for a tenure-track position to curate collections related to Black arts and culture and provide instructional services using Special Collections to our communities.

We are looking forward to continuing to evolve the model and our partnership under the auspices of our 2022-2025 Mellon Foundation implementation grant.

Setbacks or challenges

A major interruption to grant activities came with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and necessary organizational and personal responses. JMU Libraries is the primary center for academic technology and online learning/educational technology expertise on our campus and was an integral part of transitioning JMU to online and hybrid learning. Furious Flower performed herculean efforts to transition its own

programs online and support its communities. Both organizations experienced staffing shortages, a hiring freeze, and other changes during the two years of the grant. Investigations into the key areas of archival workflows, physical exhibit design, instructional design, digital journal platforms, and digital humanities components would likely otherwise have involved more Libraries’ staff and JMU faculty partners more deeply and potentially resulted in spinoff projects and publications.

We would also like to recognize that systemic racism meant that many Black communities were and are disproportionately affected by the pandemic. We mourned the loss of friends and family and shared concerns over health and well-being of loved ones. Amidst collective grief and struggle, we experienced extraordinary grace and support from our advisory board members, consultants, partners and colleagues.

“I have all of these lily plants but not you, nor peace.” – “[Disbelief](#),”

Kamilah Aisha Moon - 1973-2021

We regret the pandemic prevented more in-person events, especially recognizing that SHIFT's usual approach to designing events involves in-person community visits and activities. However, SHIFT did an excellent job adapting their approach to the virtual environment and reported feeling that the in-depth virtual focus groups and online retreat they held were ultimately more valuable than our planned in-person event. And, once safety protocols were approved, the Flowerings Core Team was able to meet several times in-person.

Changes to organizational leadership / grant management staff

The two Principal Investigators and Project Manager continued through the entire grant period as specified by the original proposal. The part-time Program Coordinator position in Furious Flower experienced some turnover and was filled by three different people over the course of the grant, with additional support provided by the Furious Flower graduate assistant, fellow, and administrative assistant. In addition, with the development of the implementation grant prospectus, proposal, and its subsequent funding, the role of Project Manager for the grant expanded into a Project Coordinator role (continuing to be filled by Dr. Jody Fagan) that began to coordinate a multi-departmental team of project managers within Libraries in concert with the Flowerings Core Team.

Lessons Learned

The Flowerings Model provides one articulation of our learning; the list below expresses some additional detail and reflection.

- JMU Libraries has begun to learn how to organizationally “show up” to support our partnership and collaborations with Furious Flower Poetry Center. This was seen prominently through the hearty attendance at organization-wide drop-in sessions.
- The Flowerings “Core Team” created a supportive and productive discussion space for our daily work.
- Learning how to express hospitality and warmth via virtual meeting technologies. Opening meetings with poetry and other human connection became a regular practice.
- We learned and are continuing to learn how to manage a project that respects the work styles and work loads of very diverse communities, teams, and individuals.
- JMU Libraries, Furious Flower, and JMU's Office of Sponsored Programs learned together about budgeting and reporting requirements for grants from private foundations (not previously an area of great experience for JMU) and improved our methods of communication.
- We learned how to navigate JMU's financial policies and procedures as they relate to grant expenditures in a way that supports the Furious Flower model.
- Developing joint approaches for campus-level strategy.

Goals Following the Grant Period

We are thrilled to be embarking on a \$2 million, 4.5-year implementation grant with the Mellon foundation, “Flowerings Project Phase II.”



Family, friends, and colleagues celebrating the Mellon implementation grant in the home of Dr. Joanne Gabbin

Already, we have completed or are actively working on next steps:

- Formation of the Flowerings Project Coordination Team, currently overseeing implementation of digital archive technology components of benefit to the Furious Flower collection and projects across the JMU Libraries
- Conversations with Furious Flower and Libraries concerning the archival workflow, the AudiAnnotate project to support scholarship built on top of well-stewarded library collections, and other relevant topics
- Support for additional Furious Flower programming such as the 2022 [Furious Flower Poetry Prize](#), [Collegiate Summit for Creative Writers: Poetry that Transports](#) (virtual),
- Continuing to partner on physical space design for the Carrier Library renovation, including new designs for Special Collections and plans for a reading room honoring Gwendolyn Brooks
- Publicity and networking related to the implementation grant, including reaching out to those working on similar projects, such as [C-CAP TEACH](#)
- Recruiting the implementation grant's Communication and Marketing Specialist and posting the JMU-funded position of Assistant Director for the FFPC
- Drafting job descriptions in Libraries to support a new directorate for distinctive collections and digital scholarship and a new tenure-track position in Special Collections to support our Black arts and culture collections as well as instructional services (both funded by JMU), and two implementation grant-funded archivist positions.

We will also continue to stay in regular touch with our Phase 1 advisors and communities, who express their ongoing enthusiasm for and commitment to our work.

Evaluations

Two major reports provided evaluative content from an external perspective:

- SHIFT’s final report (“Furious Flowerings: Investigating Sustainability and Capacity Building at a Living Black Poetry Center through an Equitable Library Support Model”) was based on 6 focus groups, interviews with the Core Team, and the two-day intensive retreat (see supplementary document, SHIFT Final Report).
- Lae’l Hughes-Watkins’s final report, based on planning conversations with partners, pre- and post-assessments, and the Reparative Archives Workshop experience itself (see supplementary document, Reparative Archives Workshop Final Report).

Additional evaluations included:

- Course evaluations from the eight-week “Circle Processes” Course—a learning opportunity for members of Libraries’ Council on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to develop facilitation competencies, especially for potentially challenging topics surrounding DEI.
- An internal survey of Libraries’ employees gathered their experiences through a dedicated discussion and survey. (see: Appendix: Discussion and Follow-Up Survey of Library Employees)
- In the 2022 end-of-year meeting, the Flowerings Advisory Board provided reflections on progress made by this grant, and offered takeaways (see: Appendix: Advisory Board End-Of-Grant Reflections).

Publications

Publications related to the planning grant:

- [Original press release](#)
- [Planning grant web site](#)
- [SHIFT Collective’s case study of the Flowerings Project](#)
- “Flowerings: A Framework for Mutual Growth” – submitted in draft form to Mellon as a supplementary document; will be publicly disseminated after formatting.

Publications related to the implementation grant:

- [Implementation grant press release](#)
- [Library Journal interview with Joanne Gabbin and Bethany Nowviskie](#)
- [The Citizen interview with Joanne Gabbin](#)
- [Implementation grant web site](#)

Appendix: Activities Timeline

2020 Q1

- Hiring Flowerings Project Coordinator
- Flowerings Core Team Formation
- Brainstorming Advisory Board Members

- Book Launch Celebration for *Furious Flower: Seeding the Future of African American Poetry* by Dr. Joanne V. Gabbin and Lauren K. Alleyne (February 19, funded by JMU Libraries)
- Introduction to the Flowerings Project at JMU Libraries' Leadership meeting (February 27)
- Storytelling with SHIFT, and beginning to plan an in-person visit
- Meetings among JMU Libraries, Furious Flower, JMU fiscal experts and JMU Research & Scholarship to support grant administration
- Four travel / professional development activities

2020 Q2

- Pandemic response and adaptation

2020 Q3

- Planning meetings resume with SHIFT
- No-cost extension filed with Mellon Foundation
- Four travel / professional development activities

2020 Q4

- SHIFT interviews – invitations and scheduling
- SHIFT interviews with Libraries' employees, Furious Flower staff, and Libraries' Dean's Council
- Four travel / professional development activities

2021 Q1

- Flowerings Advisory Board Kickoff Meetings. These led to discussions and reflections by Bethany and Joanne (see [Appendix: Reflections from Initial Meetings with the Flowerings Advisory Board](#))
- SHIFT interviews with faculty, students, Furious Flower alums and community members
- Flowerings public web site launch
- 2021 African, African American, and Diaspora Studies Conference at JMU, February 17-20
- Eight travel / professional development activities

2021 Q2

- Drop-in sessions (Apr 1 and Apr 22) with Libraries, Furious Flower, JMU Faculty
- Cross-departmental Digital Infrastructure Working Group formation
- SHIFT Retreat (May 24-25) with all constituencies
- Drop-in session (Jun 15) with Libraries and Furious Flower
- Carrier Library renovation architects and designers visit Cardinal House (June 21); this event kicked off subsequent meetings with architects.
- 2021 Furious Flower Legacy Seminar: Groundwork: The Legacy of Poet and Editor Haki Madhubuti (June 21- 25, 2021)
- Ten travel / professional development activities

2021 Q3

- Asynchronous discussions in Microsoft Teams with all Libraries employees to prepare for Advisory Board conversations
- Reparative Archives Workshop with Lae'l Hughes-Watkins, Libraries, Furious Flower, JMU Faculty (Jul 22)
- Drop-in session with Libraries, Furious Flower, JMU Faculty (Aug 9)
- Flowerings Core Team + Digital Infrastructure Group Meet-Up (Sep 7)
- Advisory Board Conversation with Libraries and Furious Flower: Centering Communities (Sep 29)
- Two travel / professional development activities

2021 Q4

- Advisory Board Conversation with Libraries and Furious Flower: Academic Libraries and Digital Humanities Spaces (Oct 4)
- Advisory Board Conversation with Libraries and Furious Flower: Digital Infrastructure (Oct 11)
- End-of-Year Update to Libraries Leadership about the Flowerings Model and next steps (Nov 5)
- Drop-in session (Nov 30) with Libraries and Furious Flower
- JMU Special Collections presentation for all Furious Flower staff and students
- Advisory Board End-of-Year Meeting (Dec 6) (see: [Appendix: Advisory Board End-of-Grant Reflections](#))

Appendix: Drop-In Sessions

The overall goals of the five drop-in sessions were:

- Provide opportunities for direct engagement regarding the grant's nine key areas
- Support open communication between stakeholders, the organizations, and the Flowerings Core Team
- Provide engagement with some advisory committee members (thinking of the 'technical' experts)?
- Open up connections so people have an idea of what their colleagues are learning/doing even if unable to attend certain events.

April 1– Drop-in session 1: Update and Q&A. Hear about why we're so excited about the Flowerings Advisory Board! (Libraries and Furious Flower only). 38 participants.

April 22 – Drop-in session 2: SHIFT presentation on results from the interviews (Furious Flower and Libraries employees, interview invitees, and advisory board members). 47 participants.

June 15, 2021: Drop-in session 3: Sharing out from and discussion of the SHIFT May Convening (Furious Flower and Libraries). 31 participants.

August 9, 2021: Drop-in session 4: Sharing out from the late July Reparative Archives workshop (facilitated by Lae'l Hughes-Watkins) (Furious Flower and Libraries employees and JMU faculty partners). 32 participants.

November 30, 2021 Drop-in session 5: Presentation about the planning grant, the implementation grant proposal, and the Flowerings Project Coordination Team (+Q&A); Feedback and discussion about Libraries' faculty and staff experiences during the grant period (we also sent a survey to gather experiences as an additional way to contribute). (Libraries and Furious Flower only). 28 participants.

Appendix: Professional Development Experiences

We proposed the use of funds for travel, conferences, and meetings to support research, training, networking, and inspiration among JMU Libraries and Furious Flower faculty and staff. In our no-cost extension request, we revised these lines to focus on virtual versus on-site activities in light of pandemic restrictions. As a result of the decreased cost of events, more Libraries staff were able to engage in a much wider array of activities than envisioned. These budget lines were used to pay for two major online events and 37 additional activities. The two major events were:

- Reparative Archives Workshop with Lae'l Hughes-Watkins – day-long intensive workshop with pre- and post-event assessments. 20 participants, including 7 JMU Furious Flower faculty partners, 11 library employees, and 2 Furious Flower faculty and staff (\$6,500)
- Circle Processes Online Course – 8 sessions from the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding, Eastern Mennonite University (April 23-June 11, 2021). 13 JMU Libraries employees participated, with breadth across library units and employment classifications. (\$3,000). JMU Libraries had previously contracted with CJP for a shorter introduction to Circle Processes for the library's Council on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to determine if this facilitation method showed promise for supporting challenging conversations. Attendees have been experimenting with infusing Circle-inspired facilitations methods into departmental and committee meetings, as well as the Flowerings Project Coordination Team supporting the implementation grant.

These numerous additional activities engaged 19 people, including both Furious Flower faculty and 17 Libraries employees across all four of the library's administrative divisions.

The activities included: Digital Storytelling, Association of Writers & Writing Programs Conference, Islandora and Fedora Camp, African American Policy Forum, Society of American Archivists, Arrangement and Description of Audiovisual Materials, Association of American Colleges and Universities, African, African American, and Diaspora Conference, Association of Colleges and Research Libraries, Diversity in Collections Training, ERA Virtual Research Learning Series-Co-Decolonizing Research Methods: Toward Research Sustaining Indigenous and other Community Engages Ways of Knowledge, Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, Embodying Antiracism: A Conversation and Course for White Folks, Awake to Woke to Work workshop with Equity in the Center, the Furious Flower Summer Legacy

Seminar (6 attendees from Libraries), and the JMU Diversity and “Sisters in Session” conferences.

Across all activities, Libraries units represented included Access & Delivery, Administration, Digital Collections, Digital Projects, Facilities & Operations, Metadata Strategies, Online Learning, Research & Education Services, Special Collections, Scholarly Communication Strategies, and Strategy & Development.

Highlights:

Several Special Collections and Digital Collections staff attended Arrangement and Description of Audiovisual Materials by the Society of American Archivists, and reported learning more about:

- Inclusive workflows for archival description, and frameworks for multimedia preservation, and encouraging a diverse archival record and privileging equitable access and accessibility.
- The key principles, concepts, and elements of DACS, the U.S. standard for describing archival materials, and their creators, including how to implement and incorporate DACS into workflows for accessioning, arrangement, and description.
- The arrangement and description of analog sound, video, and film materials found in mixed-media archival collections; strategies for planning and implementing audiovisual media processing.
- Specifically with respect to the Furious Flower Poetry Center Conference Recordings, the workshop’s emphasis on pre-processing work will support our balance between donor-supplied description with archivist-created description.

Two Special Collections staff reported back from the “CCAHA’s Diversity in Collections Care: Many Voices Colloquium” that they learned more about:

- The critical need for staffing and networking among collections care workers to address lack of diversity in the field.
- Inherent bias in how “documentary” photographs are lit and staged for various purposes.
- Projects supporting principles of collections care.
- Reparative description in metadata, and workflows and treatment plans to track implicit bias in preservation.
- How cultural care is enacted through image guidelines, care/access guidelines, and usage guidelines.
- Ways in which collections' description must appropriately represent subjects and must also be discoverable by patrons.
- The benefits of iterative description and how filling in the gaps in earlier description helps collections become more equitable, ethical, and representative.

Attendees at the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC) Spring 2021 conference learned about:

- How archives can respectfully reach out to and partner with communities.
- How libraries and archives need to approach the work in a “relational instead of extractive” way, moving slowly and to start by asking what the community wants and needs with respect to their preservation efforts, rather than what the library or archive can gain from the partnership.
- The extreme necessity of complete and accurate metadata in assisting researchers in accessing materials; poorly described materials can essentially “hide” a resource.
- Digital repository work, generally.

Appendix: Group Conversations with Advisory Board

“One major take-away for me was the possibility of bringing together a range of people at a university and beyond, many librarians, but also poets and scholars of black literature to discuss an African American project. How rare. How outstanding. How...did it happen? Ok...something else were the directed questions that gave outside contributors like me a specific way to contribute.”
 — Howard Rambsy, II, 12/6/2021 End-Of-Year Meeting

September 29th, 2021: Centering communities: Equitable and inclusive labor, especially with respect to poetry and archives.

19 Attendees: 1 JMU faculty member, 2 Furious Flower faculty, and 16 Libraries employees.

Advisory Board Members

- Aleia Brown, Assistant Director of the African American Digital Humanities Initiative (AADHum), University of Maryland
- Petrina Jackson, Director of Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries; Chair, ACRL Rare Books and Manuscripts Section
- Howard Rambsy, II, Professor of literature at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Poet Howard Rambsy II also sent follow-up comments after the meeting with further elaboration, which was included in the notes.

Welcome/Introduction

- Lauren read her poem, *Rededication*, also read at the JMU building re-naming ceremony on Friday, September 24; Jody shared an overview of the Flowerings Advisory Board and the upcoming conversations and introduced the three AB members here today and four of the grant key areas that related to the day’s topic.
- Joanne described the planning grant’s progress and praised the Advisory Board’s engagement and participation. We are making progress on a partnership between Furious Flower and Libraries on building renovation plans that include Furious Flower.

Prompts

- Predominant and institutional perspectives and epistemologies can often "take center stage" in archival description work (as well as in libraries in general). What strategies have you seen to be successful in decentering predominant perspectives and re-centering marginalized perspectives especially in the context of PWI? What have been some barriers you've observed?
- Can you talk about the challenges of large organizations working with smaller groups in terms of honoring the limited time of the smaller group? For example, shared authority in archival description is an important principle, but needs to be balanced with respect for the time and labor of the smaller group.
- Can you talk about ethical issues in collecting poetry and other creative works off social media, to preserve it while respecting the rights and autonomy of content creators?
- Do you have any thoughts about how we might integrate or support the integration of FFPC archival materials into the curriculum?
- (If time) As we hope to embark on a 4.5-year Mellon grant-funded project together (currently in proposal stage), what other advice do you have for us?
- What are we not asking about that we should be?

October 4th, 2021: Academic Libraries + Digital Humanities Spaces: Physical Spaces, Partnerships, and Organizational Culture

21 attendees: 16 Libraries employees, 2 Furious Flower faculty, 3 JMU faculty

Advisory Board Members

- Jon Cawthorne, Dean, Wayne State University Libraries
- Opal Moore, Poet, author, and critic; retired, department of English (chair), Spelman College
- Tyechia Thompson, Librarian and assistant professor of English at Virginia Tech

Welcome/Introduction

- Joanne, Lauren, and Bethany talk a little about the context: JMU Libraries, which also includes academic technologies, is a very large, predominantly white organization, committed to partnering with Furious Flower, a small, Black-woman led Center currently located in the College of Arts and Letters, the Carrier Library renovation planning work, and JMU centers like [AAAD](#).

Question Prompts

- How do you see the location of the academic library, digital scholarship / digital humanities centers, and other centers (like FFPC and AAAD) affect their flourishing? By location we are thinking both physical and administrative (e.g. how the organizational chart is set up).
- What is your perspective on how scholarly communication has been evolving? How we can leverage that to participate in pragmatic hope for the future of JMU Libraries and our partnership with Furious Flower?

- What organizational changes have you seen to be successful to support the flourishing of Centers like FFPC and AAAD? How do these play out at the various levels of a university, academic library, and library departments / projects? (If time)
- As we hope to embark on a 4.5 year Mellon grant-funded project together (currently in proposal stage), what advice do you have for us?
- What are we not asking about that we should be?

October 11th, 2021: Digital Infrastructure for a Poetry Archive: Access to the World
15 attendees: 12 from Libraries, and 3 from Furious Flower.

Advisory Board Members

- Trevor Owens, Head of Digital Content Management, Library of Congress
- Julieanna L. Richardson, Executive Director, theHistorymakers.org
- Santi Thompson, Head of Digital Research Services, University of Houston Libraries
- Tyechia Thompson, Librarian and assistant professor of English at Virginia Tech

Introduction

- Welcome from Joanne, Lauren, and Bethany
- Jody talked a little about the Digital Infrastructure work so far

Prompts

- Digital archives require excellent stewardship. Can you talk about what excellent stewardship of a digital archive means?
 - Can you talk about the resources required?
 - Thus far, we (JMU) have focused on the procurement of software for both preservation and access. What strategies (beyond tools), which consider the people doing 'the preserving' (present continuous preserving), would you recommend for ensuring the Furious Flower collection and repository as a whole remain stable, resourced, and sustained? I.e., what policies, planning, structures, etc., might be helpful in this endeavor?
- We have many partners (JMU Faculty, instructional designers, technology experts) excited to start using the Furious Flower digital archive collections right away (or yesterday!) Can you talk about the work required to engage in such partnerships above and beyond merely making materials available online?
- As these collections become available to the world, we may identify numerous opportunities for new partners – perhaps additional content, or new technologies. Can you talk about ways you've handled such opportunities while honoring a project's scope?
- Do you have recommendations for how JMU administration and/or the visionary PIs can support the implementation phase of a digital archive?
- As we hope to embark on a 4.5-year Mellon grant-funded project together that will (among other things) implement a digital archive, what advice do you have for us?
- What are we not asking about that we should be?

Appendix: Discussion and Follow-Up Survey of Library Employees

Twenty-seven Libraries employees attended a one-hour drop-in session on November 30th that had the explicit purpose of gathering their feedback. The Dean of Libraries excused herself to support freer conversation. A follow-up survey was distributed via the library-wide listserv to gather thoughts from those who could not attend or who wished to respond in writing or anonymously. The meeting began with a YouTube performance of “Fig Tree on 9th and Christian” by Ross Gay (recommended by an attendee). The prompts for the meeting and survey were:

- Q1. As relates to the Flowerings grant, the Libraries-Furious Flower partnership, or your related work, what memories stand out to you from the past two years?
- Q3. As relates to the Flowerings grant, the Libraries-Furious Flower partnership, or your related work, what are you learning?
- Q4. As relates to the Flowerings grant, the Libraries-Furious Flower partnership, or your related work, what hopes, dreams, questions, or concerns have arisen?
- Q5. As relates to the Flowerings grant, the Libraries-Furious Flower partnership, or your related work, what’s still fuzzy or muddy?
- Q6. Is it okay for us to quote from your comments in the final, public report?
- Q7. Your Name (OPTIONAL) and any other comments

Selections from responses are included (with permission) in [section 1a of this report](#).

Appendix: Advisory Board End-of-Grant Reflections

Eight of the ten advisory board members were able to join a Zoom call December 6, 2021, to reflect on the entire grant period and offer advice to the Flowerings Core Team. Board members also had the opportunity to reflect on the meeting prompts in a Google Doc before and after the meeting. The prompts are enumerated below, along with summarized responses and illustrative quotes.

From your engagements with us, what stands out to YOU as the major take-aways we should convey in the report?

- “I think this is a great model for how and where libraries should focus attention on some of the most unique areas of work on their campuses and seek to then support weaving those unique things further into other parts of the institution.”
- This grant showed how important it is for educational institutions to be mission-driven. “The FF team modelled a collaboration how-to: 1) how to foreground and articulate the mission and capabilities of the Library / archive as a rich resource AND creative “making” space vital to the shared learning/ teaching / research mission of the larger University. (I think of this as the organic stewardship of the institutional mission); 2) how to plan and organize a collaboration with the diverse (and differently focused and skilled) entities that make up a campus; 3) how to maintain communications and connections across internal and external participants, and capture / incorporate vital inputs gathered in very efficiently designed meetings. The FF collaborative model did not make the error that I’ve seen elsewhere where

meetings represent “inclusion” but fail to translate into participant engagement and partnership-building.”

- It’s important to structure how people connect to the institution, the tasks, and the work they are doing, but in a way that is based in genuine, in-depth collaborations with vulnerability, as opposed to corporate language and contractual interfaces.
- “One major take-away for me was the possibility of bringing together a range of people at a university and beyond, many librarians, but also poets and scholars of black literature to discuss an African American project. How rare. How outstanding. ... just the notion of working to expand and situate an African American poetry center firmly in a library was key...”
- “Librarians have a different way of working than a professor or a poet--different points of entry into the conversation.”
- “I am amazed by the Furious Flower constellation. I think all of the different types of people involved in doing this work (poets, librarians, scholars, digital humanists, IT administrators and more) is a major asset. I can imagine that Furious Flower is a case study for how people with different relationships and points of entry to Black poetry can work together.”
- Groups like the Poetry Foundation, Cave Canem, and American Writers Museum (Chicago) may have different goals but groups should let each other know they are there and what they are doing.
- “This gathering is extraordinary – don’t take for granted the values that have been expressed ... positioning this work and the broad need for spaces where people come not just to borrow a book but where they feel a culture of active engagement around the panoply around creative questions and performances.... People say two things about libraries: 1) they are essential, 2) they’re not that important. You hear versions of these two opposing postures all the time. Part of the challenge of constructing this report is to frame it in the space of contradiction and then to proceed in demonstrating how it’s being used in teaching, learning, service, research, and collections.”

Our proposal outlined PWI academic libraries, museums, galleries, and archives as key audiences for the planning grant’s final report, focusing on how other PWIs can apply what we have learned - does that sound appropriate? Are we missing any audiences?

- Be careful not to exclude HBCUs as an audience for this report, and be careful about when you mean a “PWI” versus financially well-endowed (or financially less-endowed) institutions. For example, there is a difference between JMU and Harvard.
- “One “audience” that we discussed in our meetings is the institutional management level of staff (President, Provost, et al., and the Board), which was not represented at the FF / Library planning meetings. Appropriately, the proposal is focused at the campus level (faculty, academic staff and students). However, the Shift document is highly revealing in its analysis of institutional funding structures and the ways that priorities are set and served. It reveals a disconnect between inherited or preferred institutional funding strategies and the much-touted but ill-served demands of interdisciplinarity-- a consistent feature of teaching/ learning models and standards, creative spaces, and post-undergraduate scholarly, creative and work environments. This “audience” needed to be engaged in the proposal development if only to gain insight into the ways that

institutional structures and assumptions frustrate the institution's higher aims by inhibiting the development of potentially exciting and productive relationships.”

- “Reach out to select groups or individuals in African American literary studies... We should reach out to some teachers, some professors, some scholars in hopes of inspiring another generation of [Joanne Gabbins]”
- Heritage foundations and other cultural centers such as the Christiansburg Institute (which has worked with Virginia Tech) and Chesapeake Heartland.
- “Many communities are seeking to do this kind of work but need to know how to work with PWIs or other partners in a way that is equitable. Organizations seeking partnership need to set clear expectations and know what their expectations are at the outset.”
- Curious that participation among African American students at JMU does not seem more robust. [FFPC reflected that the Reading Series attendance is dominated by white women. Trying to be more involved during recruitment and orientation, and with retention. The new Gillespie Fellow may support word of mouth and connections with the Black Student Association. Dean Nowvskie added that the Carrier building project is considering students' needs.]

Question 3 of 5: Looking at the SHIFT report and Lae'l Hughes-Watkins' report on her reparative archives workshop with us (attached to the email dated 11/19), what narratives would you recommend emphasizing in the final, public report versus in communications to internal-to-JMU audiences (e.g. our President and Provost)?

- “The work that Hughes-Watkins' workshop intends is, in my view, in-built in the collaboration design and build. In other words, that workshop is, I think, “internal” work but not descriptive of either partner. The FFPC/Library collaboration and the structural work that has been proposed and captured in the SHIFT document (e.g., the integration of FFPC/Library information and access to key institutional moments and sharing, such as faculty/student Orientations and graduate programs and executive planning settings) will institutionalize a “living” i.e., transformative and fluent archive. In my opinion, the statement of the grant goals are a perfect summary of the relevant narrative.”
- “Both reports really surface the important work of relationship building and strategic, intentional planning – activities that can sometimes be viewed as “non-essential” or “only worth doing if we have the time. I would encourage you all to give some real estate in the final report to how important it was to reimagine the existing relationships (and to take the time to learn from each other, talk about goals and future possibilities, learn the language that various groups use, and build a framework for buy in moving forward). Administrators and leaders in various fields need to see examples of how this kind of work can be instrumental in creating change, building trust, and fueling momentum – as well as why it isn't ever a luxury as part of a process, but really a necessity that is often overlooked/diminished.”
- Board members also highlighted some specific aspects of the SHIFT report that spoke to them, such as the rapid prototyping session and the visualization of action items.

Given the kinds of narratives we'll be sharing, how can we make our final report most useful for PWIs to implement lessons learned?

- Aim for a short report; consider webinars with ACRL or ALA CORE that cover the results of the project and how other institutions could implement them.
- Harvard Seminar for New Presidents Leadership Training if campus leadership outside academic affairs is deemed important
- Share methodological approaches from the SHIFT process and Reparative Archives Workshop, along with any relevant handouts or rubrics or other tools to support multi-phase institutional strategic planning. “I think many would also be interested in seeing how you all are addressing and syncing discussions around physical and virtual spaces/environments”
- Speaking from the partnership perspective (between an African American center and the library) is crucial. “I think folks pay attention or are interested in instances of a problem that was solved. In some ways, this project represents a kind of resolution of a problem, in this case, the usual distance between black and white spaces all on the campus of a PWI.”
- “Are there any significant partnerships between PWIs and HBCUs? The answer is probably ‘no’. Relationships between these institutional categories exist via personal friendships, which are tenuous and are not validated by the institutions that the individuals represent, and are usually undocumented. The culture of competition (or acquisition) dampens such efforts to reach across difference.” Other members added that personal efforts create possibilities, but that such encounters may have nowhere to “cohere or be named in institutional culture.”
- Include a timeline, FAQ, and action items so audiences understand how long this took, maybe even beyond the literal grant funding timeline. FAQ might help identify what the audiences might be asked. “What action items are useful from your narratives?”

Follow up: How can we make the template/ framework implementable, not just conceptual?

- Facilitating conversations about topics and lessons learned
- Make more connections between African American scholars and proactively ensuring preservation of their work. Promote the collections that you have – even just a one-page, bulleted list with items like the Gabbin papers.
- Strong collection management plan for Special Collections.
- Ensure Black students, faculty, and staff know their lives are important to be documented in the archives—beyond student protests. In 2020, Houghton Library acquired and digitized exclusively Black collections for one year, “only focusing on acquiring from Black scholars, only digitizing collections that reflects Black life – not only as it is in conflict but also in regular life.”

We may be asking you to help disseminate our final report – what are your ideas for suitable venues?

- An open access article in something like In the Library with the Lead Pipe
- Conferences focused on relevant topics

- Presentations/posters/birds of a feather experiences at events concerning the “future of the library” and EDI-centered services.
- Articles in peer reviewed journals and informal articles (Library Journal, ACRL News).
- DH spaces (AADHum, ASALH), DLF, ACH, Museum Computer Network. “Spaces where there is a natural relationship or connection between the technological work that makes collections available and the stakeholder groups who may find multi or interdisciplinary modes of research or partnership through a physical site of activation. Also consider spaces like we here, which publishes justice-based frameworks for library and archives work that could impact how such partnerships are designed in a PWI space, or how to scale or create new models for engagement in HBCU spaces.”