

The Open Sidewalk Project

A living archive of stories in motion

Discover • Reflect • Set Free • Mark the Moment



Sidewalk Librarian Toolkit



Open Sidewalk Project

For Volunteer Coordinators & Community Curators

Sidewalk Librarians are the connective tissue of the movement—helping others find courage to set books free, coordinating local partnerships, and keeping stories in motion in their communities.



WHAT THIS GUIDE IS FOR

This guide is your basecamp for becoming a Sidewalk Librarian—a volunteer curator who helps stories stay in motion within your community. You'll learn how to coordinate local releases, build partnerships with Sidewalk Stations, and support Believers & Givers in your area.

Who This Guide Is For:

- Volunteer coordinators who want to facilitate book releases
- Community organizers passionate about reading and connection
- Book lovers ready to help stories travel farther
- Anyone wanting to build literary community in their neighborhood

Key Principle: Sidewalk Librarians don't gatekeep—they open gates. Your role is to make it easier for others to participate, not to control the movement.



ROLE DEFINITION & EXPECTATIONS

What Sidewalk Librarians Do

As a Sidewalk Librarian, you're a **connector, facilitator, and storyteller**. You help the movement grow organically in your community by:

- **Coordinating local releases:** Organizing book releases at cafés, parks, and community spaces
- **Building partnerships:** Connecting with Sidewalk Stations (cafés, bookstores, gathering spots)

- **Supporting participants:** Helping Believers & Givers understand the four-step ritual
- **Tracking journeys:** Keeping loose tabs on which books are traveling through your area
- **Sharing stories:** Posting updates and celebrating books-in-motion on social media
- **Connecting librarians:** Collaborating with other Sidewalk Librarians regionally

What Sidewalk Librarians Don't Do

You are NOT:

- A traditional librarian requiring cataloging or inventory systems
- Responsible for retrieving or tracking every single book
- A police officer enforcing rules about how people participate
- Required to personally release books (though you can!)
- Expected to fundraise or manage budgets

Remember: Books are meant to travel freely. Some will return to your area. Many won't. Both outcomes are success.

Time Commitment Guidelines

The beauty of this role is its flexibility. Most Sidewalk Librarians spend:

- **2-4 hours per month:** Maintaining partnerships, coordinating releases, posting updates

- **Optional extra time:** Attending community events, organizing group releases, or creating local momentum

This isn't a job—it's a passion project. Scale your involvement to fit your life.



YOUR FIRST 30 DAYS

Week 1: Foundation & Setup

Tasks:

1. **Register as a Sidewalk Librarian** at opensidewalkproject.org/contact
2. **Set up your local presence:**
 - Create a simple social media presence (optional but helpful)
 - Use hashtags: #OpenSidewalkProject + your city/neighborhood
 - Join the Sidewalk Librarian network Slack/Discord (link provided after registration)
3. **Do your own first release:** Experience the four-step ritual yourself before coordinating others
4. **Map your territory:** Identify 5-10 potential Sidewalk Stations in your area (cafés, bookstores, libraries, community centers)

Week 2: Community Connections

Tasks:

1. **Reach out to 3 Sidewalk Stations:** Use the partnership templates provided in this guide
2. **Connect with local Little Free Libraries:** Introduce yourself and the project to stewards
3. **Post your first social update:** Share your journey becoming a Sidewalk Librarian
4. **Attend a virtual Sidewalk Librarian orientation:** Meet other coordinators (when scheduled)

Week 3: First Coordinated Release

Tasks:

1. **Plan a small group release:** Coordinate with 3-5 Believers & Givers for a simultaneous release
2. **Prep your materials:**
 - Book Code IDs (BCIDs) for each book
 - Simple instruction cards
 - Signage for Sidewalk Stations (if they've agreed to host)
3. **Document the event:** Take photos, gather participant reflections
4. **Share the story:** Post about the release with #OpenSidewalkProject

Week 4: Rhythm & Reflection

Tasks:

1. **Check in with your Sidewalk Stations:** See if any books have been discovered
2. **Celebrate early wins:** Share stories of books that have already traveled
3. **Identify what's working:** Which locations, book types, or approaches generated engagement?
4. **Plan your next month:** Set a realistic cadence (one release event per month is plenty!)

30-Day Success Metric:

By the end of 30 days, you should have:

- 2-3 active Sidewalk Station partnerships
- Coordinated at least one group release (3+ books)
- Connected with other Sidewalk Librarians in the network
- Posted 3-5 social media updates about local activity

Remember: This is a marathon, not a sprint. Small, consistent efforts create lasting momentum.



COMMUNITY COORDINATION

Identifying Potential Sidewalk Stations

Sidewalk Stations are physical locations that welcome books-in-motion. Look for:

- **Cafés & coffee shops:** Places where people linger with books
- **Independent bookstores:** Already book-friendly spaces
- **Libraries:** Public and Little Free Libraries
- **Community centers:** YMCAs, recreation centers, senior centers
- **Coworking spaces:** Modern hubs with built-in community
- **Waiting rooms:** Doctor's offices, salons, auto repair shops
- **Laundromats:** Perfect captive audience!
- **Campus buildings:** University lounges, student centers

Green Flags (Good Potential Partners):

- Already has community bulletin boards or free materials
- Owner/manager is visible and accessible
- Space has regulars who know each other
- Mission aligns with literacy, community, or creativity

Red Flags (Skip These):

- Locations with strict "no solicitation" policies
- Chains with corporate rules requiring legal approvals
- Places where materials regularly disappear or get trashed
- Spaces with no clear ownership or permission structure

Approaching Sidewalk Stations

When reaching out to potential partners, keep it simple and low-pressure.

Here's a proven approach:

In-Person Pitch Template (2 minutes or less)

"Hi! I'm [Name], and I'm coordinating a local project called The Open Sidewalk Project. We set books free into the community—people discover them, read them, leave a short reflection online, and then release them somewhere new. It's like geocaching for books."

"Would you be open to being a 'Sidewalk Station'? That just means we'd occasionally leave books here for your customers to discover. There's no cost, no commitment, and we'd provide a small sign explaining the project. What do you think?"

Why This Works: It's concrete, visual, low-commitment, and immediately understandable.

Email Pitch Template

Subject: Quick Partnership Idea: Books-in-Motion at [Business Name]

Body:

Hi [Owner/Manager Name],

I'm [Your Name], a local volunteer with The Open Sidewalk Project—a literary movement that sets books free into the community. Think of it like geocaching for books: readers discover them, reflect on them, and release them somewhere new.

I'd love for [Business Name] to become a "Sidewalk Station"—a community spot where books-in-motion can be discovered. There's no cost or commitment on your end. We'd just occasionally leave books in your space for customers to find, along with a small sign explaining the project.

Would you be open to this? I'd be happy to stop by and show you what it looks like in action.

Thanks for considering!

[Your Name]

[Your Contact Info]

opensidewalkproject.org

Partnership Agreement Template

Once a Sidewalk Station agrees to participate, send them this simple agreement (or adjust to fit your needs):

Sidewalk Station Partnership - Simple Agreement

Between: [Business/Location Name] and The Open Sidewalk Project
(coordinated by [Your Name])

What We'll Provide:

- Occasional book releases at your location (1-5 books per month, depending on activity)
- Signage explaining the project to customers
- Promotion of your location as a Sidewalk Station on social media
- Books are always free—no purchase necessary

What We Ask:

- Display our small Sidewalk Station sign near where books will be placed
- Allow books to remain visible for customers to discover (no need to manage or track them)
- Optional: Share social media posts about books discovered at your location

Flexibility:

- You can pause or end this partnership anytime
- No legal obligations, contracts, or fees involved
- This is a community goodwill project—keep it simple and fun

Sound good? Let's get started!

[Your Contact Info]

Working with Educators & Librarians

Teachers, school librarians, and public librarians are natural allies. Here's how to approach them:

For School Librarians & Teachers:

- **Frame it as a literacy initiative:** "Students become part of a living story network"
- **Offer classroom integration:** "Each student can release a book and track its journey"
- **Suggest weeding partnerships:** "Old library books ready for retirement can get a second life"
- **Pitch it as community service:** "Students spreading literacy beyond school walls"

For Public Librarians:

- **Emphasize community building:** "This complements your mission—getting books into hands"
- **Offer joint events:** "We can host a 'Release Day' at the library"
- **Respect their role:** "We're not competing—we're extending the library's reach into the wild"
- **Suggest book sale partnerships:** "Unsold books from library sales can become books-in-motion"

Connecting with Little Free Library Stewards

Little Free Libraries are perfect launch points for books-in-motion. To connect with stewards:

- **Visit in person:** Leave a friendly note in the LFL with your contact info
- **Use LFL maps:** Find registered libraries at littlefreelibrary.org/map
- **Offer cross-promotion:** "We'll mention your LFL in our social posts when books travel through"
- **Suggest they become a Sidewalk Station:** Official recognition + signage

Sample Note for Little Free Libraries:

"Hello! I'm [Your Name], coordinating The Open Sidewalk Project in [neighborhood/city]. We set books free with tracking codes so readers can see where they travel. I'd love to connect about occasionally releasing books through your Little Free Library. If you're interested, reach out: [contact info]. Thanks for spreading literacy! 

Collaborating with Other Sidewalk Librarians

The network of Sidewalk Librarians is your support system. Ways to stay connected: As we grow:

- **Join the Sidewalk Librarian Slack/Discord:** Share wins, troubleshoot challenges, coordinate regional releases
- **Attend monthly virtual meetups:** Learn from experienced coordinators
- **Create regional partnerships:** "Let's release 100 books across 5 cities simultaneously"
- **Share resources:** Templates, signage designs, partnership letters—don't reinvent the wheel

Regional Collaboration Ideas:

- **Cross-city releases:** Coordinate books traveling between your cities
- **Themed releases:** "Poetry in Motion" or "Summer Reading Journeys"
- **Map projects:** Create visualizations of books crisscrossing your region
- **Storytelling campaigns:** Share the most interesting book journey from your area each month



SIDEWALK LIBRARIAN TOOLKIT

Essential Materials You'll Need

Keep these on hand for smooth coordination:

- **Book Code IDs (BCIDs):** Order from opensidewalkproject.org or generate using the web app
- **Sidewalk Station signage:** Printable templates available in Brand & Messaging Guidelines
- **Instruction cards:** Small cards explaining the four-step ritual (template in Quick Start Guide)
- **Partnership letter templates:** Provided in this guide
- **Social media templates:** Pre-approved posts from Brand & Messaging Guidelines

Books to Release (and Not Release)

✓ Good Books for Release:

- Popular fiction that's widely appealing
- Classic literature in good condition
- Inspiring memoirs or accessible nonfiction
- Young adult novels (always popular!)
- Local interest or regional authors
- Poetry collections

X Books to Avoid Releasing:

- Damaged books (water damage, missing pages, mold)
- Textbooks or technical manuals (low discovery rate)
- Books with controversial or offensive content (use discretion)
- Rare or valuable editions (these belong in collections, not wild releases)

Tracking Without Controlling

As a Sidewalk Librarian, you'll naturally want to see where books go—but remember: **tracking is for storytelling, not inventory management.**

Healthy Tracking Practices:

- Check the OSP web stats weekly to see which books in your area have been discovered
- Celebrate when books resurface—but don't stress when they don't
- Share interesting journeys on social media to inspire others
- Use tracking data to identify which locations generate the most engagement

What Success Looks Like: 30-50% of released books getting at least one check-in is excellent. Some will travel silently. That's okay—they're still being read.

 **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS****What if a Sidewalk Station wants to stop participating?**

Thank them warmly, remove their signage, and move on. No guilt, no pressure. Partnerships should feel good for everyone.

Can I require participants to register before releasing books?

No. The movement is designed to be frictionless. Anyone can release a book—registration is optional for people who want to track journeys.

What if someone releases a book I consider inappropriate?

Use gentle guidance, not rules. If it's genuinely harmful content, you can quietly remove it. But remember: one person's "inappropriate" is another person's necessary read. Focus on adding good books rather than policing bad ones.

How do I handle book releases that don't follow the four-step ritual?

Celebrate them anyway. Some people will just leave books with a note inside saying "Free book!" That's beautiful too. The ritual is an invitation, not a requirement.

What if nobody in my area seems interested?

Start smaller. Release 3 books yourself over 3 weeks. Post about it. Sometimes the movement grows slowly, and that's fine. One engaged participant is worth ten passive ones.

Can I adapt the materials to fit my community?

Yes—within reason. Use the provided templates as a foundation, but feel free to adjust language for local culture. Just keep the core mission intact: books-in-motion, reflections, and connection.

Should I try to retrieve books that aren't moving?

Only if they're in a location where they might be damaged or discarded (like a park bench in rain). Otherwise, let them sit. Sometimes books find their reader weeks or months later.

MEASURING SUCCESS (Loosely)

The Open Sidewalk Project isn't about metrics—but a few loose indicators can help you see if your community coordination is working:

Signs You're Doing Great:

- 3+ active Sidewalk Stations in your area
- At least one book release event per month
- Books getting discovered and re-released (check-ins happening)
- Believers & Givers reaching out to you with questions or ideas
- Local social media buzz about discoveries
- Other Sidewalk Librarians in nearby areas connecting with you

Most importantly: Do you feel like you're part of something meaningful? Are books moving? Are people smiling when they discover them? That's success.

JOIN THE MOVEMENT

You're not just coordinating book releases—you're weaving a literary network in your community. Every Sidewalk Station you connect, every Believer & Giver you encourage, every book you help set free becomes a thread in a shared tapestry.

Thank you for being a Sidewalk Librarian.

The stories you help set in motion will travel farther than any shelf could hold.

Open Sidewalk Project

Making books travel farther

opensidewalkproject.org

Questions? Visit opensidewalkproject.org/librarian-support

Share your story: #OpenSidewalkProject

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