

The Open Sidewalk Project

A living archive of stories in motion

Discover • Reflect • Set Free • Mark the Moment



Sidewalk Station Toolkit Guide

For Cafés, Businesses & Gathering Spaces

Become an "in-between stop" where books rest briefly before continuing their journey. Zero cost, zero overhead—just a small space where stories can pause.



WHY BECOME A SIDEWALK STATION?

As a business owner or manager, you already create community. Becoming a Sidewalk Station adds a unique dimension that costs nothing but offers real value:

Benefits for Your Business:

- **Community differentiation** — Stand out from chains with a distinctive local touch
- **Customer dwell time** — Browsing books = longer visits = more purchases
- **Social media content** — "Found a traveling book at [Your Business]!" posts tag your location
- **Local press coverage** — We help you announce your partnership
- **Zero cost** — All signage and materials provided free by OSP
- **Minimal maintenance** — Books come and go naturally; you do nothing
- **Brand alignment** — Associates your business with literacy, community, and connection
- **Foot traffic** — Listed on our searchable Sidewalk Station map



SIDEWALK STATIONS REPORT: "Customers browse the books while waiting for coffee. It's become a conversation starter—people ask about it every day."

What's Required of You?

Setup: Dedicate small space (shelf, basket, windowsill)

Time: 20 minutes to set up signage

Maintenance: Occasionally tidy the display

Staff training: 5-minute briefing on how to explain it

Ongoing: Nothing. Books naturally come and go.



SETUP GUIDE

Where to Place Books

You don't need much space—just somewhere visible and accessible to customers. Here are proven options:

Option 1: Dedicated Shelf or Bookcase

Best for: Coffee shops, waiting rooms, lobbies

Space needed: 12-24 inches of shelf space

Setup: Empty shelf, add Sidewalk Station sign above/nearby

Capacity: 10-30 books

Maintenance: Straighten books weekly

Option 2: Basket or Bin

Best for: Counters, end tables, windowsills

Space needed: Size of a bread basket

Setup: Place basket, add small sign/sticker

Capacity: 5-15 books

Maintenance: Empty if overflowing, refill if empty

Option 3: Windowsill Display

Best for: Storefronts with wide windowsills

Space needed: 18-36 inches

Setup: Arrange books spine-out, add window cling

Capacity: 8-20 books

Maintenance: Check for sun damage, rotate occasionally

Option 4: Counter/Table Display

Best for: Checkout counters, waiting area tables

Space needed: 10 inches square

Setup: Stack 3-5 books with table tent sign

Capacity: 3-10 books

Maintenance: Restock when empty

How Much Space Do You Really Need?

Answer: Not much! Minimum viable Sidewalk Station = 1 square foot. A small basket on your counter works perfectly.

Display Best Practices:

- ✓ **Visibility:** Place where customers naturally look while waiting
- ✓ **Accessibility:** Easy to reach without asking permission
- ✓ **Lighting:** Well-lit so covers are visible
- ✓ **Signage:** Clear "Take one!" message so people know it's free
- ✓ **Organization:** Spine-out or face-out, not chaotic piles
- ✓ **Cleanliness:** Dust occasionally, remove damaged books

Safety & Maintenance Considerations:

Fire Safety: Don't block exits or fire extinguishers

Trip Hazards: Avoid floor-level displays in high-traffic areas

Weather: If near doors/windows, protect from rain

Theft Prevention: These books are FREE—theft is impossible!

Damage Control: Remove moldy, torn, or inappropriate books

Refreshing: If books sit for months, donate to charity and request fresh releases from OSP community

SIGNAGE & MATERIALS

What You'll Receive (All Free from OSP):

1. **Sidewalk Station Sign** — Main sign (8.5" x 11" or 11" x 17"), weatherproof
2. **Window Cling with QR Code** — For glass doors/windows
3. **Table Tent** — Folded sign for counters/tables (4" x 6")
4. **Instruction Card** — Laminated card explaining how it works (5" x 7")
5. **"Take, Read, Set Free" Stickers** — Small stickers for individual books
6. **Digital Assets** — Social media graphics, website badge

Sidewalk Station Sign (Main Display)



Placement: Above/near book display, or mounted on wall/window

Table Tent (Counter/Table Display)

 **TAKE ONE!**

Free traveling books

Part of The Open Sidewalk Project

Take • Read • Set Free

Track the journey:

opensidewalkproject.org

Window Cling



SIDEWALK STATION

Free books inside!

[QR CODE]

The Open Sidewalk Project

Instruction Card (Place Near Books)

HOW IT WORKS

- 1. Take a book** — It's free!
- 2. Read it** — At your own pace

3. **Check inside** — Some have tracking codes
4. **Log your reflection** — opensidewalkproject.org (optional)
5. **Set it free** — Leave it for the next reader

Every book is a journey.

You're part of the story.



VISITOR COMMUNICATION

How to Explain the Project to Customers

Keep it simple! Most customers will understand from the signage alone, but here's what to say if they ask:

Customer: "What are these books for?"

You: "They're free! It's part of The Open Sidewalk Project—books traveling from reader to reader. Take one if you'd like, read it, then set it free for someone else to find. Some of them have tracking codes inside so you can see where they go next."

Customer: "Can I really just take one?"

You: "Yes! That's the whole point. Take it, enjoy it, then pass it forward when you're done. You can leave it anywhere—a park bench, another café, a train—wherever someone might find it next."

Customer: "Do I have to bring it back here?"

You: "Nope! Set it free anywhere. That's what makes it fun—these books travel all over. Someone might take one from here and release it in another state. Then someone else finds it and keeps it going."

Customer: "Can I leave a book here?"

You: "Absolutely! If you have books you'd like to set free, you can leave them here for others to discover. The more books in motion, the better."

Simple Talking Points for Staff

Brief your team with these quick points (takes 5 minutes):

What: Free books customers can take, read, and pass forward

Why: We're a Sidewalk Station—a rest stop for traveling books

Rules: Take freely, read, then set it free somewhere else

Tracking: Some books have codes inside for optional tracking at opensidewalkproject.org

Return: They don't need to return books here—that's the point!

Donations: Customers can add books if they want

Your job: Just point people to the books if they ask. That's it.

Staff Script (One-Liner):

"Those are free traveling books—take one if you'd like! Read it, then set it free for the next reader. They're part of The Open Sidewalk Project."

FAQ FOR BUSINESS OWNERS

Q: How many books will I need to start?

A: Start with 5-10. They'll naturally replenish as customers leave books. We can help you get initial seed books from OSP participants in your area.

Q: What if someone takes all the books at once?

A: Rare, but if it happens, that's actually great—it means 10+ books are now traveling! We'll help you get more. Also, customers often donate their own books to refill your station.

Q: What if customers don't understand it's free?

A: That's why signage is crucial. Make sure "FREE" and "TAKE ONE" are clearly visible. If you still get questions, train staff to proactively say, "Those books are free to take!"

Q: Do I need to track which books are here?

A: No! That's the beauty—zero inventory management. Books come and go organically. You do nothing.

Q: What if someone leaves inappropriate books?

A: Remove them. You're in control of what stays in your space. Adult content, damaged books, outdated textbooks—toss or donate them.

Q: What's the liability if someone trips on books?

A: Same as any retail display. Keep books contained (shelf/basket), not on the floor. Standard business insurance covers this.

Q: Can I remove the signage if I change my mind?

A: Yes! There's no contract. Try it for 3 months. If it's not working, remove it. No hard feelings.

Q: Will this attract homeless people or loitering?

A: Books attract readers, not loiterers. Sidewalk Stations report no increase in unwanted lingering. If anything, book browsers tend to be paying customers.

Q: What if books sit for months without anyone taking them?

A: Refresh your display. Donate stale books to charity, post in local Facebook groups that you're accepting OSP book donations. Rotate inventory keeps it interesting.

Q: Do I need to register each book myself?

A: No! Customers and OSP participants register books before leaving them at your station. You're just the host location.

Q: What if my space is too small?

A: A basket the size of a breadbasket is enough. Seriously. 5-10 books in a small basket on your counter works perfectly.

Q: Will OSP help promote my business?

A: Yes! You'll be listed on our searchable station map, featured in our newsletter when you launch, and tagged in social media posts. We provide co-branded promotional materials too.

PROMOTION

Social Media Announcement Templates

Use these ready-to-post announcements to let customers know you're now a Sidewalk Station:

INSTAGRAM/FACEBOOK POST:

" Big news! We're now an official Sidewalk Station for The Open Sidewalk Project!

What does that mean? Free books for you to take, read, and pass forward. Think of us as a rest stop for traveling stories.

Stop by, grab a book, enjoy it with your [coffee/meal/haircut], then set it free for the next reader—anywhere you like! Some books have tracking codes so you can see where they travel next.

Welcome to the movement. Stories in motion start here. 

#OpenSidewalkProject #SidewalkStation #BooksInMotion #*[YourCityName]"

[Include photo of your book display]

TWITTER/X POST:

"We're now a Sidewalk Station!   Free traveling books available—take one, read it, set it free. Stories in motion at [Your Business Name]. #OpenSidewalkProject #BooksInMotion"

INSTAGRAM STORY:

[Photo of books]

Text overlay: "FREE BOOKS "

"We're a Sidewalk Station now!"

"Take • Read • Set Free"

Swipe up: opensidewalkproject.org

How We'll Promote Your Station

When you become a Sidewalk Station, here's what OSP does for you automatically: (In development)

- ✓ **Interactive Map Listing** — Your business appears on our searchable Sidewalk Station map with address, hours, and description, (In development)
- ✓ **Newsletter Feature** — New stations are highlighted in our monthly newsletter (goes to all subscribers)
- ✓ **Social Media Shoutout** — We post about your station on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter
- ✓ **Press Kit** — We provide a template press release you can send to local media
- ✓ **Digital Badge** — Website badge you can add: "Proud Sidewalk Station"
- ✓ **Ongoing Tags** — When people post about finding books at your location, we tag your business

Getting Featured on Our Interactive Map

Our map at opensidewalkproject.org/stations is searchable and mobile-friendly. When travelers or locals look for Sidewalk Stations near them, you'll appear with:

- Your business name and address
- Photo of your book display
- Hours of operation

- Short description (e.g., "Cozy coffee shop with 20+ traveling books near the fireplace")
- Link to your website/social media
- Number of books released from your station

Co-Branded Content Opportunities

We can create custom content featuring your business:

Spotlight Blog Post: "Meet [Your Business]: A New Sidewalk Station in [City]"

Video Interview: Short video featuring you talking about why you joined

Social Media Takeover: You take over our Instagram for a day

Case Study: "How [Your Business] Uses Books to Build Community"

Local Roundup: "5 Great Sidewalk Stations in [Your City]"

Local Press Announcement Template

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Your Business Name] Joins The Open Sidewalk Project as Official Sidewalk Station

[CITY, STATE] – [DATE] — [Your Business Name], a beloved [type of business] in [neighborhood/city], has partnered with The Open Sidewalk Project to become an official Sidewalk Station—a free-book exchange location where traveling books rest briefly before continuing their journeys.

Starting [date], customers at [Your Business Name] can take free books, read them, and then "set them free" for the next reader—anywhere they choose. Some books include tracking codes, allowing readers to log reflections and watch where books travel next.

"We're excited to be part of this movement," said [Your Name, Title]. "Our customers love books, and this gives them a chance to discover new stories while supporting a really cool community project."

The Open Sidewalk Project is a literary movement that sets books free to travel from reader to reader, creating living archives of reflections and connections. [Your Business Name] joins over [#] Sidewalk Stations across [#] states.

For more information, visit [your website] or opensidewalkproject.org.

Contact:

[Your Name]

[Your Business Name]

[Phone]

[Email]

SETUP CHECKLIST

BEFORE YOU START

- Identify where you'll place books (shelf/basket/windowsill)
- Request free signage kit from opensidewalkproject.org/stations
- Brief your staff (5 minutes, use talking points from this guide)
- Find 5-10 books to seed your station (ask staff, use donations, or request from OSP)

SETUP DAY (20 minutes)

- Clean and prepare your display area
- Install main Sidewalk Station sign
- Place table tent or instruction card near books
- Apply window cling (if applicable)
- Arrange initial books (spine-out or face-out)
- Take a photo of your display

LAUNCH WEEK

- Post announcement on your social media
- Update your Google Business listing: "Sidewalk Station - Free Books"
- Submit your station info to opensidewalkproject.org/register-station
- Send press release to local media (optional but recommended)
- Add "Sidewalk Station" badge to your website

ONGOING (MINIMAL EFFORT)

- Straighten books weekly
- Remove damaged/inappropriate books as needed
- Check if your station needs more books (post on social media if inventory low)
- Share photos of interesting books or release moments
- Celebrate milestones (100 books released, 1 year anniversary, etc.)



MEASURING SUCCESS (In development)

You can track your Sidewalk Station's impact through our online dashboard:

Metrics You'll See:

- **Total books** released from your location
- **Cities/states/countries** reached
- **Number of readers** touched
- **Most-traveled book** that started at your station
- **Sample reflections** mentioning your business
- **Map visualization** showing where your books went

Celebrating Milestones:

When you hit these milestones, we'll help you celebrate:

50 Books Released: Social media shoutout + certificate

100 Books Released: Featured blog post

500 Books Released: Special "Super Station" status

1 Year Anniversary: Press kit + community celebration ideas

Book Reaches 10+ Readers: Share the journey story



TIPS FROM SUCCESSFUL STATIONS

"Seed genres customers love."

Coffee shop: Literary fiction, poetry, short story collections

Hair salon: Quick reads, magazines, mysteries

Auto repair shop: Thrillers, sci-fi, business books

"Make it visually appealing."

Face some covers out. Use a nice basket. Add a small plant nearby. Make people want to browse.

"Tell customers proactively."

Don't wait for them to ask. When they sit down: "By the way, those books over there are free to take—they're traveling books!" Gets 3x more engagement.

"Refresh monthly."

Rotate stale books out. Ask staff to bring books from home. Post on social: "Our Sidewalk Station needs restocking! Bring a book to donate and get [small discount/free coffee]."

"Share the stories."

When a customer tells you they took a book and loved it, post about it! "A customer just told us they found a book here that changed their week. This is why we do this."



YOU'RE READY!

You're about to become a vital connection point in a global network of traveling stories. You have everything you need:

- Setup instructions (where to place, how much space)
- All signage templates
- Staff communication scripts
- FAQ for handling questions
- Promotion templates (social media, press release)
- Success metrics and celebration milestones

Next Steps:

1. Request your free signage kit: opensidewalkproject.org/stations
2. Choose your display location
3. Gather 5-10 seed books
4. Install signage (20 minutes)
5. Announce your launch on social media
6. Watch the magic happen!

Welcome to the network of Sidewalk Stations. Your space is about to become a launchpad for countless book journeys.

QUESTIONS OR SUPPORT?

We're here to help Sidewalk Stations succeed!

Email: team@opensidewalkproject.org

Station Owner Community: Join our private Facebook group for tips, photos, and celebration

Whether you need replacement signage, have questions about maintenance, want promotional support, or just want to share a great story—reach out anytime.

Open Sidewalk Project
Making books travel farther
opensidewalkproject.org

Connect with other Sidewalk Stations:

#OpenSidewalkProject #SidewalkStation #BooksInMotion #StoriesWeCarry

This guide is part of Basecamp resources at opensidewalkproject.org/basecamp

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