



The Insider's Guide to Starting a Little Free Library

The number-one question we get is: "I want to get involved! Where do I start?"

In this guide, we'll map out the possibilities and share tips for getting started. First things first, you'll need to consider the following questions:

1. Who will maintain this library?

Determining the steward(s) of your book-sharing box is critical. The steward can be an individual who maintains the library or a group that manages it together. Stewards are responsible for keeping the library in good repair and stocked with books.



2. Where will the library be located?

Your Little Free Library can be placed at your home, at a local business, in a public park, at a school, and in a number of other locations! When choosing your site, you'll need to have permission from the property owner (if you want to install it somewhere other than your own home).

[This video](#) walks you through the details of choosing a location.

3. What is my budget?

If you're an avid do-it-yourself-er on a shoestring budget, you can [create an awesome book-sharing box](#) for just the cost of materials! That could be anywhere from \$10 - \$100, but one of the most affordable ways to start a library is to turn an article of furniture like a cabinet, bookshelf, mini-refrigerator, or even a washing machine into a

little library. There are hundreds of building plans and designs available online and [links to some of our favorites](#) on our website and [Instagram](#).

Some stewards commission a local builder to create the library of their dreams, such as [a replica of their home](#), or a unique design inspired by a favorite story.

For those not inclined to tackling a carpentry project, we offer a variety of assembled libraries and library kits in [our online store](#) at different price points. Sign up for our [e-newsletter](#) and keep an eye on our [special offers](#) for deals on select models.

In communities where funding is limited and book access is low, our [Impact Library Program](#) is dedicated to granting no-cost book-sharing boxes where they can make a lasting difference.

Considering a Build?

You can build one library or many! There are several library kits available in [our online store](#) that come with step-by-step instructions and can be assembled in as little as two hours. This is an especially popular project for Eagle Scouts or Girl Scouts working on their Gold Award. [Get five Girl Scout success stories here](#).

Just One: The Madison, Wisconsin, Children's Museum started with an unpainted library as a craft activity in the Wisconsin Book Festival. Parents and kids covered it with beautifully colored wet tissue paper over several days, then auctioned it off to raise funds.

Ten Libraries and Counting: Nancy Wulkan put up two little libraries in her Chicago, Illinois, neighborhood. She meant to stop there, but when she saw the big impact they had she decided to keep going and [has placed at least 10 libraries in public parks](#) around the city.

Corporate Philanthropy and Citywide Projects: A library build is a great team-building event for companies big and small! [Foresters Financial staff built 77 little libraries](#) that they donated across the U.S. and Canada. Employers aren't the only ones who take on large-scale library builds. In Lake Worth, Florida, [residents have built more than 100 little libraries](#) even though the town is only home to 30,000 people. That's one library per 300 residents!

Builders

If you are looking to build Little Free Library book exchanges but don't want to build them all yourself, who could you ask?

Local carpenters and artists. Libraries are great promotional tools. A library they build or decorate could be a constant advertisement for their work in the community. A modest sign on the library itself can acknowledge the builder, artist, or sponsor.

Local businesses. Try hardware, home and garden stores, building supply stores, or paint companies; any business that could build a library and is interested in promoting themselves through community service. Coffee shops and restaurants can offer ideal indoor or outdoor locations for libraries, especially if the libraries are decorated with their brand. Realtors like to point out that Little Free Library book boxes enhance a neighborhood's friendly appeal.



Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, 4-H Clubs, Rotary Clubs, Lions, Kiwanis, Jaycees, Altrusa, Masons, and other service-oriented organizations. Little libraries are great community service projects for one day, once a month, or as long as each group might like.

High schools, colleges and universities. If your high school has a woodshop class, propose that they build libraries to be donated to the community. Art students could decorate them. You could even create a library design contest. You'll be surprised to learn that elementary school classes are often

excellent sources of ideas, books—and parents with skills.

So, you have a library, or a plan to build or buy one—now what?

The Most Important Step: Registration

A registered library is a library with a charter sign on it. There are many benefits to registration, but one key benefit is that you get to legally use the name Little Free Library in accordance with our registered trademark and join a global network of thousands of dedicated stewards.

If you purchase a library through our online store, your library is automatically registered and comes with a complimentary charter sign that you'll attach to it. You do not need to purchase a charter sign separately.

If you've built your own library or purchased one somewhere outside of www.littlefreelibrary.org, you will need to register by purchasing an official charter sign. There is a one-time payment of about \$40 per library to register.

Here's what you get when you register:

- **A Steward's Guide** of proven tips to make your library successful
- **An official charter sign** engraved with a unique charter number
- **The option to add your library to world map of Little Free Libraries**, which receives millions of views each year, and the **Little Free Library Mobile App**
- **Access to a private Facebook group for registered stewards only** where you can get advice and support from thousands of your fellow stewards
- **A subscription to our e-newsletter** with book giveaways, special product offers, tips for stewards, cool library designs and more
- **Special discounts and book offers** in the Book Resources section of our website

When should you register?

As soon as possible! If you plan to build your own library, then go ahead and register right away, even if you are still early in the process of building your library.

It could take a week or so for your charter sign and registration materials to arrive. When they do, take note of your charter number. Write it down somewhere just in case your charter sign is lost or stolen.

Then, we highly recommend that you join the private Facebook group, which is a great place to get inspiration and support while you are building your library. Remember, though, that you'll need to know your charter number before you may join the group.

Build Interest and Find Partners

Promoting literacy and a love of books is an appealing cause to nearly everybody. That's good news for you if you are looking to bring others in on your Little Free Library project. So, where should you start?

Logistical and Promotional Help

Who is going to help you plan this project? Even if you want to plan it on your own, it's good have a larger network of enthusiasts spreading the word to the community. But who should you reach out to first?

Your friends, family and neighbors. Find people who love to read and want to strengthen their community. Draw on their diverse skills and interests. Maybe your

neighbor is a do-it-yourself woodworker willing to build a few libraries, or a colleague is a good organizer and speaker. Start spinning your web of supporters!



Public and school librarians.

Don't forget about retired librarians! Your local Friends of the Library group may be another good resource.

Local schools. Talk to students and school clubs, as well as principals, teachers and counselors. Maintenance staff and crossing guards can have a stake in little libraries, too. Many Little Free Library stewards are current or retired teachers who are passionate about reading.

Neighborhood associations. Most groups thrive when they have active projects that benefit their members, and Little Free Library book exchanges are among the most neighborly projects we know of. Try approaching a local PR firm and asking if they would volunteer their skills to promote your project. It's a great way for them to give back to their community!

Announce Your Library through Local and Social Media

If you're not a PR expert and don't know anyone who is, that's just fine. You can still promote your library project like a pro, or maybe even better because you have a personal commitment to the project. Here are some tips:

Send out a Press Release

Local media is your best friend when you launch your little library. Send out a press release to your local radio and TV stations, newspapers and neighborhood newsletters, announcing your Little Free Library.

Tip: Make it easy for reporters to find you and your little library. Offer unique story angles and new, unusual, funny or timely information in your press release. You can send out more than one press release as there are new events or developments at your library.

Use Social Media

Social media is a fantastic free tool you can use to spread the word and ask for book donations if you need them.

Start a social media page specifically for your Little Free Library. We recommend Facebook or Instagram.

Tip: only start a Facebook page or Instagram account for your library if you are going to update it regularly! People will quickly stop looking at your page if you rarely post anything. Don't know what to post on your page? Here is an example of [an Instagram account](#) and [a Facebook page](#) run by successful stewards.

If you don't have the time to maintain a social media page for your library, see if your neighborhood uses Nextdoor.com and share updates about your library there. Or post on the Facebook page of local groups like your neighborhood association or HOA.

If there are schools nearby, ask administrators if you can put a notice in their newsletter to let local parents know you've put up a Little Free Library book exchange.

Tell People Face-to-Face

This is probably the most powerful method you have to spread the word. Knock on doors, post flyers in the neighborhood or mail out postcards announcing your Little Free Library.



Invite neighbors to stop by for a Grand Opening Celebration ([like this one](#)) where you provide snacks, have a ribbon-cutting and invite people to celebrate your Library.

You could provide sidewalk chalk or a make-your-own-bookmark station for kids. Maybe it could be a potluck, where your neighbors all bring a

dish to pass and a book to share in the Library.

The goal is to get lots of people involved from the beginning and encourage a sense of shared ownership, which is key to making your library successful in the long run.

Raise Funds

Regardless of the size of your project, you are likely to need to raise funds for supplies and materials.

Host an awareness event and ask for contributions.

Example: Host a Sunday Afternoon at the Movies! Screen one of the many free news pieces or documentaries on Little Free Library available on [YouTube](#).

We like [this great video from PBS Atlanta](#). Provide snacks and ask people to bring “a buck and a book” to the screening to support your Little Free Library. This is a great way not only to educate people about Little Free Library book boxes, but to network with people who may want to help you as you move forward.

Find Books

Worried about having enough books to stock your little library? Here are some proven strategies from stewards:

Reach out to local bookstores and thrift shops. Approach local bookstores to see if they would be willing to donate. Explain what your Little Free Library is and ask if they would be willing to give you a discount or let you sort through their excess inventory.



Organize a Book Swap. You don't have to organize a massive citywide campaign. In fact, sometimes smaller events work better because they only require a relatively small group of organizers who invite friends, neighbors, and colleagues. Some communities hold book swaps every few months and have centralized places where Little Free Library stewards can donate and take books any time. If you have any kids in the neighborhood, ask them if they could help you run a book swap at their school.

Contact the public library and Friends of the Library groups. Most public libraries and Friends of the Library groups have

book sales throughout the year to get rid of excess books and raise a little money. Ask if you could sort through their books or take a bag of books for free to support

your little library. Offer to partner with the public library and promote their events at your little library; some stewards have even organized events like field trips or story times with the support of their local public library staff.

Keep People Interested

Now that you have your Library up and running, how do you keep people interested? Here are some ideas that have worked well for our stewards:

Little Free Library Mobile App. Registered Little Free Library stewards can set up a steward account on the Little Free Library mobile app! With an account you can update your library's information in real time, announce upcoming events, enable a virtual guest book, and more.

Little Free Library bike or walking tour. This could even be a treasure hunt for kids. These can be one-time events or you can design routes for tourists. Seattle, WA area families have already held several bike tours.

Summer Little Free Library camps for kids. For two years, 10-13 year olds in one city have combined arts, crafts, community observation, reading and organizing into five days of fun. The first year they built one library on the theme of kindness, and found lots of ways to experiment with acts of kindness. The second year they built four Little Free Library boxes, prepared books for distribution, and visited dozens of locations.

Bi-weekly or monthly story times. In good weather, have everyone gather by a Little Free Library, pick their favorite books and read aloud to each other. Or schedule monthly readings at coffee shops or community centers.

Arts and crafts events. Create bookmarks and tiny books that can be placed in libraries in your area.

Geocaching. If you haven't heard of this international treasure hunt yet, check it out here. Little Free Library book exchanges make perfect hiding spots for geocaches and many stewards have reported immediately receiving new visitors within hours of adding a geocache to their library.

So what are you waiting for? Let's spread the joy of reading to every corner around the world!