

# The Complete Guide to Stocking your Library with New, High-Quality Books

**How can you consistently keep *good* books in your Library (as in new, high-quality, interesting books that your users actually want to read) without spending a ton of money?**

This is probably the biggest challenge that we face as Little Free Library stewards.

We've all been there. You start out with a box or two of your own books, or those given to you by friends. You're excited to share your favorites with your neighbors and see what people give back...but that's not exactly how it goes. Suddenly, you've given away all of your original books and very few have come back.

What do you do now? Will people start sharing their own books or will that never happen? Are you doomed to constantly buy more books to keep your Library stocked?

No, it doesn't need to be that way!

Successful Little Free Library stewards have found ways to not only find affordable books, but to engage their communities so that keeping their Library full is a group effort.

**What if you had a steady stream of new, quality books coming to you for free? What if you had a team of people supporting you, ready to give you books if you simply asked?**

The most successful stewards have set up just such a system and here, we are going to share their exact strategies so that you can do the same.

## Rely on Your Friends and Neighbors for Help

**Start by asking your personal network if they have any extra books.** Your friends, family and neighbors already know you and want to help you.

*Tip: Before you even install your Library, tell the people closest to you what you are working on. Invite them to be part of the process of starting your Little Library; that will encourage a sense of shared ownership, which is key to long-term success.*

Take a tip from your fellow steward Karina Glaser in Harlem, NY, who wrote [this great blog post](#) on how to keep your Library stocked. Every time you visit relatives, hang out with friends or talk to other parents when you pick your kids up from school, ask if they have some books they can share.

**People you already know aren't the end of your network, either.** Have you noticed anyone consistently using your Little Library? Has anyone complimented you on it? Those people already know about your Library and love it, so ask them to help you take care of it.

**In many cases, kids and teenagers are the most frequent visitors of Little Libraries.** Ask them to be stewards and perform specific duties. They could keep the books stocked and organized, and keep the Library clean. They could help you run a book drive or reach out to the librarian at their school to get donations.

The added bonus of recruiting kids to help is that your Library is less likely to be damaged by, ahem...overzealous teenagers if you have encouraged them to take ownership of it.

All right, if you've already talked to your close personal network, who else should you turn to for support?

## Announce Your Library with a Grand Opening Celebration

**How can you create a network of people who will you give you books and help ensure the success of your Library?**

The first step is to make sure as many people as possible know about your Library. Then, invite people to help; get your friends and neighbors involved from the very beginning. Finally, remind everyone that your Library exists, and ask for support when you need it.

If you follow these steps, you will create a network of supporters who help you keep your Library stocked and successful for years to come.

### Have a Grand Opening Celebration

Did you get that? This one is so important that we'll say it again. Have a Grand Opening Celebration, seriously.

Post an invite on local Facebook or other social media pages. Pass out fliers in your neighborhood or mail postcards to invite people to stop by. Better yet, knock on doors and personally invite your neighbors to come check it out!

**What is a Grand Opening Celebration, exactly?** Here are some examples of what you can do:

- Provide snacks, drinks or have a potluck.
- Invite people to bring a book or two to help stock your Library.
- Have a book swap. Put out a card table full of books that people can peruse and swap with some of their own.
- Have a ribbon-cutting and let everyone cheer the "official" opening of your Library.
- Read a special dedication (as formal or informal as you want) before the ribbon-cutting. [We happen to like this one.](#)
- Host a story time for the neighborhood kids and read a few books aloud.
- Put out coloring books or sidewalk chalk; have a table where people can make their own bookmarks.
- Give dog walkers a reason to stop by and have some dog treats available.

The sky is the limit. One steward even smashed a bottle of champagne over her Library! (That turned out to be a bad idea.)

**A kickoff event is crucial because it invites your neighborhood to get involved from the beginning; it creates a sense of shared ownership.**

*"Having a kickoff party/open house was one of the best things I could have done! It helped introduce everyone to the Library and explain how it worked. It really pulled the neighborhood together." – Steward Mike Krafick*

Even for those who don't come, they still get an introduction to the Library and they might stop by the next time they're out for a stroll. Plus, it's an opportunity to ask people to bring a book or two.

The more people who care for the Library, the more people who will share books and watch out for it in the long run.

**Your Grand Opening Celebration is an opportunity to connect with people in your neighborhood who will help care for your Library for years. Create a support team and share the fun!**

## Share Your Story Locally and Online

### Send out a Press Release

Local media is your best friend when you launch your Little Library. Send out a press release ([like this one](#)) to your local radio and TV stations, newspapers and neighborhood newsletters, announcing your Little Library.

If there is something special about your Library, be sure to share that in the press release. If you're having a Grand Opening Ceremony, this is the perfect time to mention that, too.

### 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.

Here are some ways you can use social media to get more books for your Library:

**Start a social media page specifically for your Little 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.*

Use the account to advertise special events, post the latest books in your Library and most importantly, ask for books when you are running low.

**Spend \$5 occasionally to promote a Facebook post on your Library's Facebook page.**

Your promoted post will reach a much wider audience than your regular posts and it could bring in some new visitors.

**Does your Neighborhood Association, HOA or local service group have a Facebook page?** Announce your Library with a post on their pages and ask for their help keeping your Library stocked with books.

Use [Freecycle](#) and [Nextdoor](#) to put a call out for books, or to advertise unwanted books if you wind up with too many.

*“I was running out of books for my Library here in Portland, Oregon, so I posted requests on a couple of websites: Freecycle.org and Nextdoor.com. I got instant results and added 50 books to my back stock!” – Steward Scott Kamins*

**If you haven’t heard of BookCrossing yet, [check it out.](#)** BookCrossing allows you to label your books with a unique code, then track where they travel around the world.

Plus, BookCrossing has meet-up groups around the world where you can network with your fellow bibliophiles and encourage them to share books in your Library. You can even set up your Library as [an official BookCrossing zone.](#)

*“Here in my area, I use the BookCrossing meet-up groups and invite Little Free Library stewards to join us. This is an advantage to stewards because, as a part of these groups, they have a totally FREE source of all kinds of books!” – Steward Madeline Guzman*

## Contact Local Service Groups, Schools and Businesses

Unless you live on a deserted island, you have some organizations and businesses right in your town who would happily give you books (or even money). You just need to ask.

### Contact branches of your public library and Friends of the Library groups

Most public libraries have periodic book sales to help them clean out their shelves and raise a little money. Every branch library may have its own sale, so be sure to contact each one.

**Email, call or stop by in person to introduce yourself to the Librarians and let them know that your Little Library exists.** Ask if they would be willing to share some of their extra books with you.

Offer to promote public library events at your Little Library. Some stewards have even worked with their local Librarians to coordinate regular events like field trips or story times.

**Wait – aren’t Little Free Libraries competition for public libraries? Short answer: no, that’s silly.**

Long answer: Of course not. A Little Library could never replace all of the resources that a public library offers. On the contrary, many librarians have realized that Little Libraries are useful outreach tools. Little Libraries are a great way to reach neighborhoods that are far away from public libraries to provide access to books and spread the word about public library events. We see Little Libraries and public libraries as complementary, not competition.

*“Monterey County Free Libraries (MCFL) provides service to an area of over 3,700 square miles. We launched “Branch Out MCFL” and have started 29 Little Free Libraries so far...we call them branchlets...they are an extension of our existing services. Our goals were to reach more patrons, have a presence in rural areas, and increase literacy rates. Branchlets address these issues by reaching patrons where they are...by offering free books...and by encouraging people to make reading a part of their daily lives.” – Jenna Severson, Librarian of Programming and Outreach*

The public library isn’t your only resource, though. **Contact service groups to make sure they know your Library exists, too, and ask for their support.** They may have grants you can apply for or perhaps they could help you fund raise or run a book drive.

**Local businesses and schools are another resource.** Schools have their own libraries and may have excess books for you.

Small businesses may have an interest in giving back to their community; you could offer them some free promotion by sharing fliers or a post on your Little Library advertising their support.

Here are some groups you could reach out to:

- Rotary Clubs
- Lions Clubs
- 4-H Clubs
- Boy or Girl Scout troops
- The American Legion
- Kiwanis Clubs

*“Yesterday the doorbell rang and my husband answered the door. To his surprise, someone handed him an envelope and said, “Merry Christmas.” It was a check for \$200 from our local American Legion, thanking us for the Library! It might be well worth the time to solicit local organizations for contributions if you need assistance in keeping books in stock. I also contacted one of our local banks that I know contributes to community projects.” – Steward Joyce Lehman*

## Get Books Directly from Publishers

More and more publishers are becoming familiar with Little Free Libraries and sharing books with stewards.

### Host a Little Free Library Takeover

Have you ever tried a Little Free Library Takeover? If you don't know what that is, check out [this blog post](#), which explains how Takeovers work.

The basic idea is that you reach out to publishers directly, usually through email, and ask them to send you free books. In exchange, you will stock your Library exclusively with their books for a few days and promote the event on social media and in your community.

*Tip: Do not just look up a bunch of publisher websites and send a request to every email address that you find. Review the exact strategies that we outline [in this blog post](#) for how to reach out to publishers.*

**We have a series of blog posts about Takeovers;** [this post](#) includes an exact email template you can use when you contact publishers and a list of publishers friendly to Little Free Libraries.

### **Steward Sheri Cox Fincher in Odessa, Texas, successfully received a large box of books from Simon and Schuster publishers. How did she do it?**

She searched around on their website and found the email address that was listed as the point of contact for advance reader copies. She sent this email and was delighted to receive a positive response:

*“I have three registered Little Free Libraries in Odessa, Texas. This website will give you further information: [littlefreelibrary.org](http://littlefreelibrary.org). The Libraries provide not only access to books and increased literacy skills, but also provide the community with a gathering place. All three of these Libraries*

*are located in underserved neighborhoods that are 11 – 15 miles from the one public library in our community. We have amazing community support from both those who take books out as well as donate books, but when donations slow down, we need to find other resources, and Advanced Reader Copies have been a resource for other Little Free Libraries (LFLs) in the United States. We would appreciate any relationship that you would support so that our LFL could thrive and continue to promote reading and literacy.”*

## **Apply for Advance Reader Copies**

Linda Formachelli is a freelance writer, blogger and author who knows the publishing industry well.

She has compiled [an amazing, alphabetical list of publisher contact information](#), including the exact email addresses to use if you want advance reader copies.

*Tip: Be respectful of publishers! Do not just send a generic template email to every publishing house on this list. Reach out to publishers who carry the kind of books that are popular in your Library. Make a case for why your Library is a good fit for whatever genre the publishers focuses on, be it YA books, poetry, biographies, etc. Publishers are more likely to respond to a thoughtful, specific request; make a case for how their book donation would benefit the both of you.*

[LibraryThing](#) is a community of over 2 million book lovers and their website has a wealth of information for bibliophiles, including monthly opportunities for their members and the public to [apply for advance reader copies](#).

## **Blogging for Books**

Penguin Randomhouse has a special program called [Blogging for Books](#) that provides unlimited, free copies of brand new books to anyone with a blog, no matter how small the following.

Seriously, you can start a blog just to take advantage of this program, even if you have zero followers. The trick is that you can only receive one book at a time, and you must post a review of the book on your blog before you can request a new book.

## **Sign up for Giveaways**

Websites like Goodreads, Reading Group Choices and ShelfAwareness<http://www.shelf-awareness.com/> regularly give away books to their members and followers.

It's usually easy and free to sign up. Here are links to get you started:

- [Goodreads Giveaways](#)
- [Shelf Awareness](#)
- [Reading Group Choices](#)

## **Book Resources Exclusively for Registered Stewards**

Here at Little Free Library, we have a few tricks up our sleeve that we reserve just for registered stewards.

### **First Book**

We've set up a program with the amazing nonprofit First Book, which allows Little Free Library stewards to apply for access to their online database of millions of brand new, deeply discounted books.

We're talking 90% off type of discounts, and they focus on children's books and YA books, too, which are always hot items at Little Libraries.

First Book focuses on putting books in low-income neighborhoods, so you will need to fill out an application demonstrating that you service children and families in low-income areas. [Learn more and apply here.](#)

### **Sign up for the Little Free Library Newsletter**

We send weekly e-newsletters with the latest happenings in the Little Free Library world, tips for stewards and cool Library designs.

Of course, our weekly newsletters frequently include book giveaways from publishers and special opportunities to get free or discounted books! [Sign up here.](#)

### **Join the Private Stewards Facebook Group**

Even if you're not currently on Facebook, then this is your reason to sign up. This [Facebook group](#) is only available to registered stewards who know their official charter number.

Thousands of stewards from around the world share advice, support and ideas every day – that includes sharing books with each other!

**We have already seen dozens of stories of stewards who met each other through the Facebook group and connected in person to swap books, or they mailed books across the country to support a steward who was struggling to keep books in stock.**

*“Ever since I joined this group of stewards I feel like there are so many more positive things happening in my life on the daily. I read a post last week from steward Cozette in Imperial Beach where she was telling the group that she had a large surplus of books. I messaged her and she generously offered to share her back stock with me. Within a few minutes of meeting her, I felt like I had known her forever. I could tell exactly what kind of person she was: thoughtful, caring, and so full of energy. She helped me load my car full of books for my Little Library in Coronado, California and I drove off so happy to have met a new friend, a new mentor and another participant in this great adventure of Library stewardship.” – Steward Cara Ryan Irigoyen*

This is an incredible, supportive community and we hope that you will join so that we can support you, too! [Join the group here.](#)

We hope you enjoyed these resources to help you keep your Library stocked full of books. Remember that taking care of your Library should be a community effort, not just your responsibility. The more people that you recruit to take care of your Library, the easier it will be.

Cheers,

Your Friends at Little Free Library

