



Wisconsin | Campus Compact

Prison Book Drive

“Salvation is being on the right road, not having reached a destination.”- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., from “Unfulfilled Dreams”

March 3, 1968

Overview

As Dr. King wrote, the greatest tension in life is that between good and evil; through this tension, the many forks on the road to salvation arise. While it is impossible to always choose the right path, Dr. King would agree that it is our duty as a community to continually help those who have strayed.

More and more of our nation's prisons are providing inadequate educational opportunities for inmates. Providing free reading materials to prisons can not only give prisoners a temporary escape within the pages of a story, but also further education where opportunities for learning may be scarce. In organizing a Prison Book Drive, you can greatly aid in the self-improvement of prisoners and help reduce the likelihood of an inmate's return to prison.

Suggested Age Groups

High School, College Students and Adults

Suggested Skill Level

Moderate

Project Supplies

Collection Boxes, Plastic Bins, Crates, etc.

Day of Event Supplies (Tables, Chairs, Advertising Materials)

Project Instructions

1. Recruit Project Leaders

- i. Contact friends, family and colleagues for leadership roles in helping implement the project. This is a great opportunity for students to implement leadership skills in a community-based service project.

2. Contact Your Local Correctional Facility

- i. Inform your local correctional institution of your efforts to make sure that it addresses their needs. Find out if there is a library system in place; if so, there may be an inmate request system which will allow you to request specific donations.
- ii. Be aware of specific regulations regarding donated materials; for example, many facilities will not accept **hardcover books or any materials that contain any handwriting, margin notes, or highlighting.**

3. Define a Project Plan and Timeline

- i. If you plan to use Martin Luther King Jr. Day (January 16, 2012) as your event day, establish a timeline that allows for completion of tasks along the way. Provide enough time to plan and organize the project as well as clean up and recognize those involved.

4. Request Donations

- i. It is most important to make potential donors aware of the regulations of the prison/jail to which you will donate. **The best donations are usually new paperbacks, so a good way to get acceptable materials would be to contact local publishers to see if there are any extra copies they would be willing to donate.**
- ii. Make it explicit; provide a list of requested items, which may come from the prison librarian. Some of the most often requested materials are:
 - Reference books (dictionaries, thesauri, almanacs, anthologies, etc...)
 - Self-help and recovery books
 - Novels & Collected Poems
 - Books written in languages other than English
 - LARGE PRINT (Many prisoners lack much-needed glasses)

5. Establish Collection Locations

- i. Establish one or more highly visible drop-off locations where materials will be collected. Obtain collection containers (boxes, plastic bins, crates, etc.), label them and place in determined locations.

6. Promote!

- i. Print fliers, advertise in the newspaper, utilize social media or whatever medium you can to engage people in the project and obtain as many donations as possible.

7. Contact Support Organizations

- i. Many communities have organizations that are already engaged with local prisons/jails such as student-run organizations or even local bookstores. Contact these support groups for general information as well as support with project specifications (advertisement, materials collection, prison/jail regulations).
- ii. Some examples include:
 - Books To Prisoners (Seattle, WA): <http://www.bookstoprisoners.net/>
 - Books Through Bars (Philadelphia, PA): <http://www.booksthroughbars.org/>
 - Rainbow Bookstore Cooperative (Madison, WI): <http://www.rainbowbookstore.org/b2p>

8. Day of the Event! Sort, Scan, & Ship

- i. On the day of the event you will need to organize volunteers to help sort, scan and prepare the books for shipment to the correctional facility. Again make sure each volunteer understands the guidelines for delivery as procedures may differ based on location and security level of the prison or jail. Each book will have to be scanned for inappropriate material before delivery.

9. Reflect and Recognize

- i.** After its completion, it is important to reflect on the experience of the project and think about its impact on yours as well as the prison community. Use this opportunity to think about how you can continue your service and hopefully achieve greater impact in the future.
- ii.** Be sure to recognize both yours and your fellow volunteers' efforts. Allow for both you and the inmates to show how much you appreciate the work you all have accomplished.