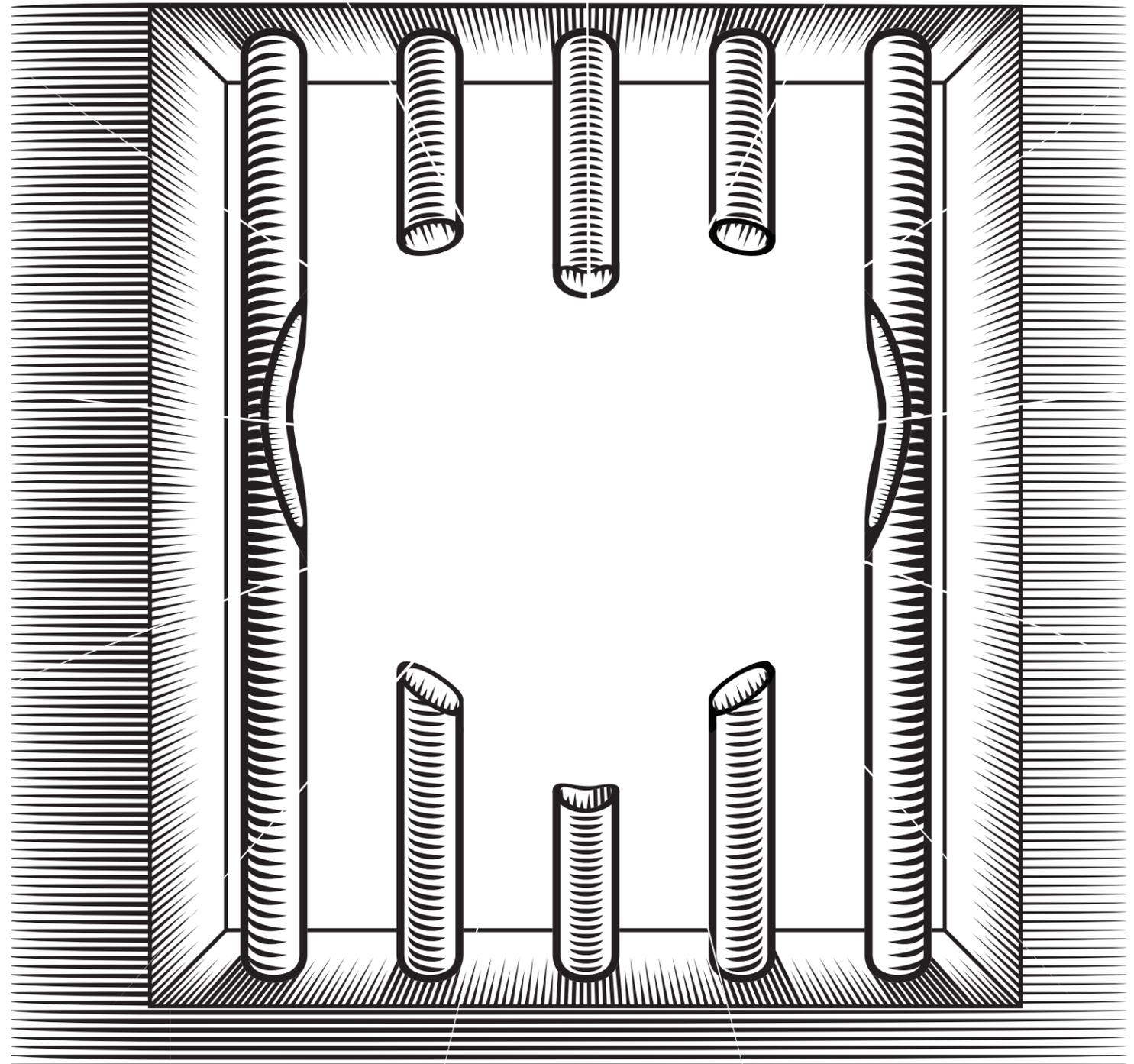


HOW TO START A PRISON BOOKS COLLECTIVE



cover image courtesy of pkro.org

...HELPING PRISONERS ESCAPE SINCE 1979

Foreword: PIC and Abolition

You don't have to be an abolitionist to run a book to prisoners group, but we are and we find the analysis useful for evaluating our work and deciding what good directions to take are. If you're not familiar with the terms, Prison Industrial Complex or Abolition, the following simple definitions, adapted from the organization Critical Resistance, may help you understand the context in which abolitionists operate.

The Prison Industrial Complex

The prison industrial complex (PIC) describes the overlapping interests of government and industry and the use of surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems.

Through its reach and impact, the PIC promotes and preserves the authority of people who get their power through racial, economic and other privileges. There are many ways this power is amassed and maintained through the PIC. Here are some examples. Mass media creates images that foster stereotypes of people of color, poor people, queer people, immigrants, youth, and other oppressed communities as criminal, delinquent, or deviant. "Tough on crime" politicians then play on this fabricated threat to earn political gains. Private companies earn huge profits supplying police forces and running private prisons. All of this stifles social and political dissent by oppressed communities that struggle for self-determination and reorganization of power in the US.

Introduction

This manual is designed to help the reader start and maintain a prison book program. The information is based on the years of experience of two collectives, Books Through Bars in Philadelphia and the Prison Books Collective in Carrboro. It is not meant to be taken as an absolute, but as friendly advice when devising your own policies and procedures. The second person "you" is adopted only for grammatical convenience. It is assumed that several persons will be taking part in an organization's decision making and administration.

Please get in touch with us if you have any questions about anything in this manual or need to trouble shoot. We are available to help other Books 2 Prisoner groups and have over a decade of experience that we are thrilled to share.

Until Every Cage Is Empty,

—The Prison Books Collective

Abolition

As PIC abolitionists we understand that the prison industrial complex is not a broken system to be fixed. The system, rather, works precisely as it is designed to—to contain, control, and kill those people representing the greatest threats to state power. Our goal is not to improve the system even further, but to bring an end to it.

Because the PIC is not an isolated system, abolition is a broad strategy. Abolition isn't just getting rid of buildings full of cages. It requires dismantling this society that feeds and relies on oppression and inequalities maintained through punishment, violence, and control of millions of people.

Abolition is a commitment to struggle for liberation.

Abolition is both a practical organizing tool and a long-term goal.

Appendix 5: Instructions for New Volunteers

Welcome to Prison Books!

Thanks for coming to our workday! Help from folks like you is the only reason our group can do what it does. The following is a basic set of guidelines for filling a prisoners' request in our space. Don't worry—even though it may seem a little overwhelming at first, once you've filled a couple of packages it all goes real fast and becomes like second nature.

1. **Take a prisoner's letter from the stack on the table.** Look up the prisoner in our card catalog (by last name) to see if we've sent them books before, and roughly what was sent. Their envelope will tell you what prison they are in. Fortunately, almost all the prisons we send to (in NC, MS, and AL) have more or less the same restrictions: paperback only, no more than three books at a time, including 'zines. **One prison, Leakesville, MS, does not allow written letters to go in the package.** If you want to write a prisoner in Leakesville a letter, it has to be sent separately from the books. (Prisoncrats are such jerks!)

2. Open the letter, and read it. The vast majority of the time, it will be a simple request for books or "zines" (small radical pamphlets we carry). **Usually, prisoners request by topic or theme rather than specific title or author, making it pretty easy to find something for them on our shelves.** You can ask another volunteer how the shelves are catalogued, though they are also labeled. Sometimes, a prisoner will write with a more complicated letter, asking for help with a legal case, or certain resource information, or with art or written submissions for our publication *Words of Fire*. Depending on the issue at hand, we have different folders to store these things in, and ways of helping prisoners with these different kinds of requests. You can ask another volunteer or collective member what to do in this case. Also, if the letter is in Spanish and you need help translating, ask one of the collective members for help.

Sometimes a prisoner will write to a specific collective member or volunteer. If that person is present, pass the letter along to them. If they're not there, and it contains a book request, you can go ahead and send the books. When you're done, write "filled" on the envelope, and put it in the plastic "hold" box under the bulletin board for them to pick up.

3. **Find some books they would like.** Don't freak out if you can't get them everything they want; something is better than nothing. Sending a package with two out of four things they want or like is better than not sending a package at all, just because we don't have the first edition of that one John Steinbeck novel they have to have. As you look for books, **try to make sure the package weighs less than 2lbs.** (This isn't always possible with some textbooks, but do your best.) If you absolutely cannot find anything the prisoner wanted, you can put the letter "on hold" by writing what the prisoner is looking for and putting it in the "hold" box.

4. If it seems like they haven't written to us before, or are asking for help from another kind of support organization, **add our 'zine catalog and resource guide (located on the red rack near the door) to the package.**

5. If you'd like to (though its not necessary), write a short response letter on our letterhead (also on aforementioned red rack) to the prisoner, **as long as it is not going to Leakesville, MS.** It's particularly a good idea to include a list of the titles of books and zines sent if you're sending politically radical subject matter that fascist prisoncrats might want to censor, so that the prisoner might at least find out if they didn't get something they were supposed to. Also, include the date.

6. Wrap the package! There are wrapping supplies (manila envelopes and brown grocery bags) on the red rack, as well as tape, scissors, and pens on the tables. When addressing the package, **don't forget to include the prisoner's DOC number** as well as the city and zip code for where the package is going to. Without a DOC number the package won't get to the prisoner. When you're done, stamp the package with our return of address and "media mail" stamps, and throw it in the outgoing package bin.

7. Grab a notecard from the card catalog box on the table where we record sent packages, and fill it out like the others (Name and DOC #, prison location, date sent, whether or not you sent a dictionary or Words of Fire.) Unless the letter needs to be kept for some reason, **tear it up and throw it away so it doesn't get filled twice.** Then you're done. Congratulations, you filled your first package! Pick up another letter and repeat!

If you like doing this kind of work, and you hate the prison industrial complex, feel free to get more involved in our collective. We have meetings once a month, where we work on things like the regular *Words of Fire* (a publication of prisoners' writing, news, and art), fundraisers, teach-ins, political prisoner letter writing nights, and other events, and generally talk about issues that pertain to the collective's projects. Just ask a member of the group how to participate!

www.prisonbooks.info | prisonbooks@gmail.com

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BOOKS & MAGAZINES FOR PRISONERS CONTINUED

- **Women's Prison Book Project** - Sends free books to women and trans inmates only, including to those inmates in NC, MS, and AL. Women's Prison Book Project c/o Boneshaker Books, 2002 23rd Ave. S, Minneapolis, MN 55404 ꝫ 612-871-7110
- **4 Struggle Mag** - Magazine from the hearts and minds of North American Political Prisoners and Friends. Free Prisoner Subscriptions (remember it costs \$1.10 to

send a letter to Canada) P.O. Box 977048, RPO Roncesvalles Ave., Toronto, Ontario, M6R 3B3 Canada

- **Ms. Magazine** - Ms. is a feminist magazine covering current events, politics, and culture. Women in prison can get a free member-ship by writing to the following address: Attn: Ms. in Prison Program, 1600 Wilson Blvd., Suite 801, Arlington, VA 22209

HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH, & SUBSTANCE USE

- **Grace House** - Provides needs- assessments and discharge planning for HIV+ male prisoners at Mississippi State Penitentiary and HIV+ female prisoners at Central Mississippi Correctional Facility, including interviews for possible residency at Grace House. P.O. Box 68924, Jackson, MS 39286 ꝫ 601-353-1038.
- **North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition** - Provides education and direct services to those made vulnerable due to drug use and sex work in North Carolina using harm reduction methods. P.O. Box 13761, Durham, NC, 27709 ꝫ 336-543-8050 ꝫ <http://www.nchrc.org>
- **Harm Reduction Coalition** - A national organization advocacy and capacity- building organization that promotes the health and dignity of individuals and communities impacted by drug use. 22 West 27th Street, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10001 ꝫ 212-213-6376 ꝫ <http://harmreduction.org/>
- **AIDS Services Coalition** - A non-profit organization that provides information, services, and resources to people living with HIV/AIDS. They provided some services to incarcerated individuals. P.O. Box 169, Hattiesburg, MS 39403 ꝫ 601-450-4286
- **Montgomery AIDS Outreach** - Brings HIV/AIDS patients in from prisons for medical appointments, provides HIV/AIDS education programs to prisons, counseling services, housing, public health, employment resources. They also have an office in Dothan, 820 W. South Boulevard Montgomery, AL 36105 ꝫ 1-800-510-4704.
- **RAINN - Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network** - A national anti-sexual assault organization that works in collaboration with rape crisis centers across the country. All services are free and confidential and provided to survivors regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and immigration status. To get help, call 1-800-656-HOPE (4673).

PRISON ORGANIZING

- **CURE** - A national prison reform group with chapters in MS, AL, and NC. PO Box 97775 Pearl, MS 38835 ꝫ PO Box 190504 Birmingham, AL 35219 ꝫ PO Box 49572 Charlotte, NC 28277
- **Alabama Women's Resource Network** - AWRN's role is to keep the plight of women in prison at the forefront of public discussion, prison policy decision making, and to support the growing voice of women on the inside. 1211 28th Street South Suite 100C Birmingham, Alabama 35205 ꝫ 334-202-5092 ꝫ awrn.org@gmail.com
- **Anarchist Black Cross - Jacksonville** - ABC is a national network and federation of of groups which provide material aid and political support to political prisoners, as well as radical literature to general populations. Their closest chapter is in Jacksonville, FL ABCF P.O. Box 350392 Jacksonville, FL 32235-0392 ꝫ jacksonblc.net
- **Critical Resistance New Orleans** - The New Orleans chapter of this national, prison abolitionist organization is mainly active on issues like judicial racism and amnesty for local prisoners, but is also

PRISON ORGANIZING CONTINUED

- a helpful resource for general prison organizing in the South. 930 N. Broad St. New Orleans, LA 70119 ꝫ crno@criticalresistance.org
- **Women and Prison: A Site for Resistance** - A website that makes visible women's experiences in the criminal justice system. The stories are supported by a collection of resources, such as organizations, reports, essays, and links to a wide range of information on women and prison. 4001

LEGAL & PAROLE RESOURCES

- **ACLU of Alabama** - Takes on limited number of individual cases and provides referrals. Attn: Legal Request Legal Committee ACLU of Alabama 207 Montgomery Street, Suite 910 Montgomery, AL 36104 ꝫ 334-262-0304
- **ACLU of Mississippi** - Takes on limited number of individual cases and provides referrals. Attn: Legal Intake Coordinator P.O. Box 2242 Jackson, MS 39225 ꝫ 601-354-3408.
- **Equal Justice Initiative of Alabama** - litigates on behalf of prisoners of condemned prisoners, juvenile offenders, people wrongly convicted or charged with violent crimes, poor people denied effective representation, and others whose trials are marked by racial bias or prosecutorial misconduct. 122 Commerce St. Montgomery, AL 36104 ꝫ 334-269-1803 ꝫ <http://www.eji.org/>
- **HALT** - Offers a list of free publications and legal guide. 1612 K St NW, Ste 510, Washington, DC 20006
- **NC Center on Actual Innocence** - Investigates claims of innocence for NC felones with at least three years left in the sentence. PO Box 52446, Shannon Plaza Station Durham, North Carolina 27717-2446 ꝫ 919-489-3268
- **Prison Self-Help Legal Clinic** - Supports prisoners' efforts at self-litigation with educational resources. Provides services in Spanish and English. PO Box 798 Newark NJ 07101
- **National Lawyers Guild** - A national organization of progressive and radical lawyers active around a wide range of issues which affect prisoners. Their closest chapter is in Birmingham. They publish an excellent Jailhouse Lawyer handbook, which can be requested for free from their national office
- at 132 Nassau St., Ste. 922 New York, NY 10038 ꝫ 212-679-5100 ꝫ <http://www.nlg.org/>
- **Salvation Army of Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi** - politically conservative, Christian organization that can nevertheless provide parole assistance, prerelease, job-training programs, employment opportunities in cooperation with parole personnel, and material aid. PO Box 4839 Montgomery, AL 36103 ꝫ 1-800-SAL-ARMY ꝫ <http://salvationarmyalm.org/>
- **Salvation Army - Carolinas Division** - See description above. P.O. Box 247808 Charlotte, NC 28224-1808 ꝫ 1-800-SAL-ARMY ꝫ <http://www.salvationarmycarolinas.org/>
- **Southern Center for Human Rights** - provides people facing the death penalty legal representation, challenges human rights violations in prisons and jails, seeks to improve legal representation for poor people accused of crimes, and advocates for criminal justice system reforms on behalf of those affected by the system in the Southern United States. 83 Poplar St. Atlanta, GA 30303 / 404-688-1202
- **Prison Legal News** - Monthly magazine that provides cutting edge review and analysis of prisoner rights, court rulings and news concerning prison-related issues. Provides information that enables prisoners and other concerned individuals and organizations to seek the protection and enforcement of prisoners' rights at the grassroots level. \$3.50 sample issue/ \$30 Year subscription. Has catalog of legal books. Accepts books of new stamps as payment. P.O. Box 1151 Lake Worth, FL 33460 ꝫ 561-360-2523

I. The Raw Materials

A. Space

A prison book program requires indoor space for both storage and packing. At a bare minimum, you will need a place the size of a garage to start. You will also need lots of shelves of whatever type you can find. Books stacked vertically soon become amorphous piles of chaos. Cinder blocks and boards are the old standby for dirt cheap shelving. Folding tables can be used for working surfaces and then stored if the space is multipurpose.

Some of the places to investigate for usable space are churches, bookstores, community centers, libraries, schools, and warehouses. When you call potential spaces, explain what you are setting out to do and the type of space you need. Ideally they will be interested not only in providing the space, but also inviting people to get involved in the project. Also check with any property owners you know who may have vacant areas in their buildings.

Your first location does not have to be permanent. Since a book mailing operation requires no major structural remodeling, or special electrical or plumbing modifications, it is relatively inexpensive to move out of one spot and into another one. Security is a minimal concern as nearly nothing you need has any direct cash value.

Bear in mind that the space needs to be accessible by many people sometimes at odd hours. An area in a private residence is not well suited to this set up unless it has its own entrance. Beware of damp, stuffy basements as books can mildew, particularly in the summertime. Ventilation is a consideration in any damp space or climate. Also avoid any space that floods as this ruins

B. Letters from Prisoners

How do prisoners find out you exist? You're providing a free service that's much in demand, so advertising tends to take care of itself.

Once the word is out on the prison grapevine you'll be flooded with requests. Probably the easiest way to start is by contacting an existing prison book program that serves prisons in your geographic area and ask them to pass on some of their requests. If you do this, be sure to tell the prisoners how you received their request so they

any books stored directly on the floor. When considering attics the number of steps and type of stairs is a concern. Remember you will be bringing thousands of books into your space and carrying hundreds of packages out of it. This is not an insurmountable problem, but worth evaluating. Finding a site that is accessible to all bodies is of course ideal.

Running water and a refrigerator are not required in the room or rooms you set up in. Access to a bathroom is handy. It can be down a hallway or at the other end of a warehouse. Trying to get by using a bedroom or living room is not recommended. Incoming books take on a life of their own.

Like kudzu on an open hillside, piles and boxes of books will accumulate and cover every desk, shelf, cabinet, table, chair and anything else with a flat surface including the floor.

With an adequate budget it's possible to lease a space, but paying rent is generally too large a burden for a book program just getting started. While a location need not be permanent you can avoid the complications of address changes by conducting all your correspondence from a post office box.

won't feel like the other program forgot about them. If you don't think you can fill the requests as quickly as the other program would fill them, let them know.

If you are anxious to get the floodgates roaring notify other prison book programs of your existence and tell them to pass the word along. Make sure you have a large mailbox!

Appendix 4: Resource Guide

PARENTING & FAMILIES

- **Aid to Inmate Mothers** - Reunites incarcerated mothers with their children through family connection programs, mentoring programs for children with incarcerated parents, and re-entry resources. P.O. Box 986, Montgomery, AL 36101 or 1-800-679-0246
- **Alabama Women's Resource Network** - Offers Family Reunification and Parole Preparation Workshops for Loved Ones of Alabama State Prisoners. AWRN teaches families how to collaborate with their loved ones on developing a comprehensive reentry plan and how to present that plan to the Alabama Parole Board at a parole hearing. 401 Beacon Parkway West, Rm123 Birmingham, AL 35209
- **Storybook Prison Ministry** - Helps to build relationships between incarcerated non-custodial parents and their children through books. Packages and mail books, written messages, and CD recordings of parents (housed in Central MS Correctional Facility) reading to their children. P.O. Box 23815, Jackson, MS 39225-3815
- **Harriet's House** - A program of Safe Passage that provides transitional housing for up to 24 months with case management services to women leaving the prison system. Primary goal of the program is to re-unite mothers with their child/children while participants in the program are striving for self-sufficiency. Passage Home, Attn: Harriet's House, PO Box 10347, Raleigh, NC 27605 / 919-256-4262
- **Matthew 25 Center** - Provides free accommodations and support to families who travel great distances to visit their loved ones in prison in Southeastern North Carolina. 1196 Penderlea Highway Burgaw, NC 28425
- **Legal Services for Prisoners with Children** - LSPC advocates for the human rights and empowerment of incarcerated parents, children, family members and people at risk for incarceration. 1540 Market St., Suite 490 San Francisco, CA 94102 or 415-255-7036 or <http://www.prisonerswithchildren.org>
- **Mississippi Innocence Project** - Provides quality legal representation to Mississippi state prisoners serving significant periods of incarceration who have cognizable claims of wrongful conviction. The Project also seeks to identify and address systemic problems in the criminal justice system and to develop initiatives that raise public and political awareness of the prevalence of wrongful convictions. P.O. Box 1848, University, MS 38677-1848 or 662-915-5207
- **Save Kids of Incarcerated Parents (SKIP, Inc.)** - Provide support services to children of incarcerated parents and their families and to increase public awareness of the underlying problems of these children as victims through education, advocacy and research. P.O. Box 250347, Montgomery, AL 36125 or 334-269-4141 or <http://www.skipinc.org>
- **Support for Kids of Incarcerated Parents (SKIP)** - Provides in-school support groups for children of incarcerated parents. In these support groups, children learn that they are not alone in this situation, talk about different feelings and emotions associated with having a parent in jail or prison, and form or strengthen a relationship with that incarcerated parent through weekly letter-writing. 115-A South Walnut Circle, Greensboro, NC 27409
- **Girl Scouts Beyond Bars** - Aims to lessen the impact of parental separation due to incarceration, to foster the personal and social development of girls and their mothers, and to provide girls with the opportunity to participate with their parents in the Girl Scout Leadership Experience. After release, parents and daughters can continue to participate in troop meetings in their communities, making Girl Scouting a consistent presence in their lives. Girl Scouts of the USA, Attn: GSB, 420 Fifth Avenue New York, NY 10018-2798

PRISON BOOKS COLLECTIVE PUBLISHING & DISTRIBUTION//PO BOX 625//CARRBORO, NC 27510

PRISON BOOKS COLLECTIVE PUBLISHING & DISTRIBUTION RESOURCE GUIDE

GENERAL PRISONER SUPPORT

- **PrisonPencals.com** - A website that advertises prisoners' requests for pencils. Send SASE to PO Box 235 East Berlin, PA 17316
- **Surviving the System** - Accepts writing to help youth, such as testimonies, articles on anger management, addictions, prison life, etc. Good inmate support group too. Traci Lister, PO Box 1860, Ridgeland, MS 39158
- **Black and Pink** - An anti-prison group that provides online pepal programs, a monthly newsletter, & direct support for LGBTQ prisoners. 617-942-0217 / members@blackandpink.org
- **Lambda Legal - Southern Regional** - Provides services related to the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people and people with HIV through impact litigation, education, and public policy work. 730 Peachtree Street, NE Suite 1070 Atlanta, GA 30308-1210 / 404-897-1880 / <http://www.lambdalegal.org>
- **Islamic Center** - Free Koran and study guides. Request through chaplain. 2551 Massachusetts Ave NW Washington, DC 20008 / <http://theislamiccenter.com/>
- **Liberation Prison Project** - Offers spiritual advice and teachings, as well as books and materials, to people in prison interested in exploring, studying and practicing Buddhism. PO Box 33036 Raleigh, NC 27636 / 415-701-8500 / <http://www.liberationprisonproject.org>
- **Positively Aware** - Bi-monthly magazine covering HIV/AIDS treatment, research, policy, and lifestyle. Annual drug guide covers all HIV drugs. Write for a free subscription. 5537 N. Broadway, Chicago, IL 60640.
- **Alabama Prison Arts + Education Project** - Offers creative writing and arts classes for participating "correctional" facilities. Alabama Prison Arts + Education Project, Department of Psychology, 226 Thach, Auburn University, Auburn, AL 36849 or 334/844-8946 or <http://www.humsci.auburn.edu/apae/>
- **Radical Faeries Digest** - Provides the Journal Brothers Behind Bars, as well as a free pepal listing for prisoners. BBB is available for \$3 to cover costs. RFD also offers a discounted prisoner subscription rate of \$10 per year, though some prisons won't accept RFD due to content. P.O. Box 302 Hadley MA 01035-0302.
- **Transmission** - A transgender activist group that provides pencils and books to queer and trans prisoners across the country. PO Box 1874 Asheville, NC 28802
- **Jewish Prisoner Services Internat'l** - New and/or used religious materials in several languages (including hard and soft covered books) are shipped to individual prisoners, staff chaplains and Jewish contract or volunteer chaplains consistent with facility property policies. PO BOX 85840 Seattle, WA 98145-1840 / 206-985-0577 / <http://psi.org>
- **Prison Fellowship** - Free bibles available in English or Spanish. PO Box 632 Wichita, KS 67201 / <http://www.prisonfellowship.org>
- **Earth First! Journal** - The journal of ecological resistance. Discounted prisoner subscriptions/waiting list for free subscriptions PO Box 964, Lake Worth, FL 33460

C. Books

There are many ways to get books for free. It is not difficult to build up a network of supply lines and you may end up with more books than you have the resources to sort, store or send. At that point your concern will be narrowing your selection to what you need the most. The good news is that you can sell overstock to pay for more postage. There are at least two types of books you may end up purchasing: dictionaries and blank journals or composition books, so it's worth finding cheap sources or donors to fund them.

Used bookstores- Build a friendly relationship with the used book stores in your area. Besides letting you cart off their overstocks, they can refer other groups or individuals who have books to your organization. Keep an eye out for “bag days” or other sales.

Libraries- Public libraries often clear out their unpopular titles. Once they are familiar with your work, they may give you first pick at the books they are liquidating. Bear in mind that the majority of a library's stock is hardback, which cannot be sent to some prisons. Even if a prison will accept hardbacks you have to consider whether the increased postage costs are worth it. However, do not shun all hardbacks, you may be able to sell them or trade them for books that would be more useful.

Publishers- Contact small and/or alternative publishers, particularly ones in your area. Books from a publisher's retail inventory stock that show even slight damage cannot be sold as brand new. Because the laws of gravity apply to the print trade as equally as to the rest of us, publishers are constantly accumulating damaged books and will often donate them to you on an ongoing basis. Besides damaged inventory publishers have “remaindered” stock. When more copies of a title are printed than the retail market demands, eventually the excess is remaindered at a reduced cost. To ensure that they are not then resold by a third party at full price, the front cover is usually all or partially cut off. Some prisons do not accept remaindered books, but in most prisons they are not a problem.

People Involved in Journalism – Literary critics, college professors, and editors are bombarded by publishers with advance copies, also called “review copies” of new books, and may be glad to give a large proportion of them to you.

Donations from Individuals and Groups- By putting out the word that you accept donated books in order to send them to prisoners, you will be contacted by individuals and groups eager to give you books. It is easier to facilitate accepting these donations if you have access to some type of vehicle. However, this is not a requirement, and you can simply tell interested parties that they need to drop off their donations at a specified time and place.

Schools - Schools of all types can be a valuable source of books. Professors, teachers and students of community colleges, universities, middle schools and high schools will often coordinate book drives. College students may donate textbooks that they are not able to sell back to their campus bookstore. Sometimes middle schools and high schools will donate textbooks that they will no longer use in the classroom.

Drop Off Boxes - Contact local libraries, religious groups and activist organizations to see if you can set up a donation box in their meeting space. Try to find one or two centrally located and public spaces at which book donations can be dropped off at anytime.

Book Banks - Your town might operate something like Philadelphia's Book Bank. The Book Bank is open several days a week, to teachers and representatives of community organizations. It is a valuable source of high school level textbooks.

ANARCHISM & RADICAL POLITICS

- Anarchism: What it Really Stands for - Emma Goldman
- Anarchy - Ericco Malatesta
- Anarchy Works: on Crime - Peter Gelderloos
- At Daggers Drawn - Alfredo Bonanno
- The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism - Fredy Perlman
- The Dragon & the Hydra: on the Organizational Forms of Early Slave Rebellions
- Enemies We Know: Against Police, Bosses, Rapists
- Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology - David Graeber
- Koukoulofori: Stories, Lessons, & Inspiration From the Greek Anarchist Movement
- Non-Western Anarchisms
- On Collective Process: Overcoming Power

EN ESPAÑOL

- Al Ferri Corri
- Anarquismo: Lo Que Significa Realmente, por Emma Goldman
- Autodefensa para las Mujeres
- La Democracia: su origen, que es, a quienes le sirve
- Diseñado para matar: Un Analisis de la Frontera
- Escritos Escogidos de Ricardo Flores Magón
- Horizontalidad: sobre la rebelion en Argentina en 2001
- Matrimonio y amor / La tragedia de la emancipacion de la mujer
- Ni Guerra entre comunidades ni paz entre clase
- ¡Nunca Se Detendrán!, por el prisionero anarquista Harold Thompson
- El Poder del Pueblo es la Fuerza de la Vida, por la Brigada de George Jackson
- La Sexta Declaracion, por las Zapatistas
- Trabajo Comunidad Politica Guerra

BLACK & BROWN LIBERATION

- 25 Years on the Move (a History of the MOVE Organization)
- A Plea for Captain John Brown - Henry David Thoreau
- Anarchism & the Black Revolution - Lorenzo Kombo Ervin
- Anti-Immigrant Hypocrisy
- Black Anarchism - Ashanti Alston
- The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance & the Civil Rights Movement
- Feminism: It's a Black Thing - bell hooks
- The Great Wall: On the Border
- Lectures on Liberation - Angela Davis
- Liberation or Gangsterism - Russell Maroon Shoatz
- On the Black Liberation Struggle in Philadelphia & Black Fighting Formations - Russell Maroon Shoatz
- Race & Border: The Two-Headed Ogre of White Supremacy
- The Real Resistance to Slavery in North America - Russell Maroon Shoatz
- Roots: Black Ghetto Ecology
- The Young Lords: a Brief Introduction

GENDER, FEMINISM & SEXUALITY

- A Beginner's Guide to Responsible Sexuality for Men
- Complaints & Disorders - Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English
- Gender Strike: a chronicle of revolt against the gendered order
- Jane: Memoirs from the Clandestine Abortion Service
- Notes on Women and Violence: Essays on Autonomy, Gender, and Self-Defense
- Out of the Closets and into the Libraries: Queer History
- Panther Sisters on Women's Liberation
- Quiet Rumors: an anarcha-feminist reader
- Selected Writings of Gender Anarchy
- Supporting a Survivor of Sexual Assault
- Tenacious (writing and art by woman prisoners)
- Transgender Liberation
- Understanding Patriarchy, by bell hooks
- Witches, Midwives, and Nurses
- Women's Self-Defense

EARTH & ANIMAL LIBERATION

- Desert: Anarchist Reactions To Climate Change
- Down with Empire, Up with Spring
- Earth Liberation Front (Frequently Asked Questions)
- Hoodwinked in the Hothouse: Exposing Climate Change's False Solutions
- Industrial Domestication
- Industrial Society and Its Future
- Memories of Freedom
- Revolutionary Ecology

INDIGENOUS REBELLION

- 500 Years of Indigenous Resistance
- The Case of Leonard Peltier
- Colonization & Decolonization
- The Lowry Wars - On Native Revolt Against Plantation Society in Robeson County
- Six Nations Rebellion
- Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle - EZLN

Types of Books

Most letters from prisoners request specific genres or titles of books, so it is advisable to use some system to sort and categorize the books you have. However, unlike a library, your stock is always changing, so the benefit of devising a complex cataloging system has diminishing returns. We separate the books into broad categories or genres. Even alphabetizing books within a section isn't generally worth the bother. It takes far too much time and with the high turnover of books coming and going, you'll have enough to do just keeping your inventory separated into subject categories. The Prison Books Collective currently uses these categories:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African American Fiction • African American Non-Fiction • Anthropology/Archaeology • Art • Auto/biography • Business/Economics • Comic Books • Computers • Ecology • Feminism/Women's Studies • Foreign Language • General Fiction/Novels • Grammar/Composition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health/Women's Health • History, US and World • Latin American Fiction • Latin American Studies • LGBTQ Studies • Literature/Classics • Math and Science • Music • Indigenous • Philosophy • Poetry • Popular Fiction (Pulp Fiction/Thrillers/Sci-Fi/Fantasy, Etc.) • Politics/Anarchism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychology • Puzzles/Games • Reference • Religion, Spirituality, UFOs, Occult (and all things improvable) • Romance/Erotica • Self-help • Spanish (books in Spanish) • True Crime (no glorified sexual violence stuff) • Westerns |
|--|---|--|

A few notes based on our experiences:

Dictionaries! Take in every dictionary you can get your hands on-from big fat unabridged volumes to slim little grade school paperbacks. Our all time most requested book is the dictionary, and unless you can find a good regular source locally, you may have a chronic shortage of them, so stock up whenever the opportunity presents itself.

We send "journal" or blank composition books on request. This is another category of book you may need to purchase or find a designated donor if you decide to provide them.

The popular fiction/pulp fiction category is for current name authors such as John Grisham, Dean Koontz, Stephen King, etc. This stuff makes the rounds inside prisons and is as widely enjoyed there as on the outside. You will get specific requests by title for many of these books. The reason for making popular fiction a separate category from general fiction/novels/literature is because there's a higher turnover and it makes it easier to find

out if that one last Dean Koontz is still around without poking through all the Faulkner, Allende, Vonnegut, and Doctorow on the shelves. We avoid sending in books from the "serial killer" genre such as the Silence of the Lambs books or true crime books that focus on murdering women or other glorified sexual violence. We usually have an entire shelf designated for Fantasy and Science Fiction with high turnover.

Westerns are the cowboy themed novels by Louis L'Amor and others. These are separated from Fiction/Novels because prisoners often specifically request Westerns. Just like we vet for glorified violence against women, we vet for glorified slaughter of indigenous peoples, too.

There is no category for pornography, because depictions of nudity are pretty strictly forbidden by prisons. That said, we generally leave most of the censorship to the prisons' own censors and try to keep self-censorship to a minimum. We've been truly surprised by what's been

Appendix 3: Zine Catalog

POPULAR HISTORY & SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

- 10 Days That Shook Iraq
- Art of War - Sun Tzu
- Bash the Fash: Anti-Fascist Recollections from Britain
- The Flatbush Rebellion: Community Response to Police Slaying of Kimani "Kiki" Gray
- How Fast it All Blows Up: Lessons From the Cincinnati Riots
- Mutinies: Vietnam
- No We Can't All Get Along: on Hip-Hop and the '92 La Rebellion
- Notes on the Arab Spring
- Preguntando Caminamos: on Current Social Movements in Mexico
- The Red Neck War
- The Stockade Stood Burning: Coal Miners and the Convict Lease in Tennessee 1891-1895
- Unfinished Acts II: a Chronicle of Anti-Police Struggle in Oakland 2009-2011
- Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

PRISONS & POLITICAL PRISONERS

- 3 Positions Against Prison
- An Updated History of the New Afrikan Prison Struggle
- The Anti-Exploits Of Men Against Sexism: On Prison Struggles Against Rape And Homophobia & Treason to Whiteness Inside Prison Walls
- Communicate From An Ex-Cop - Christopher Dorner
- The Demand For Order And The Birth Of Modern Policing
- Every Crook Can Govern
- Eye of the Hurricane (Sam Melville And The Attica Rebellion)
- Grand Jury Investigation & FBI Harassment
- Handbook on Surviving Solitary Confinement for the Targeted Prisoner
- Interview with Djore Lutalo, New Afrikan P.O.W.
- The Invisibility of Women Prisoners: Resistance
- Locked Up - Alfredo Bonanno
- The Prison Industrial Complex and the Global Economy
- The Prison Within A Prison: Resistance To The Isolation Units In Spain
- Trial Statement of New Afrikan Revolutionary Kuwasi Balagoon
- When an Agent Knocks (by the Center for Constitutional Rights)
- World Behind Bars: On the Growth of the American Prison Cell

WORK, CLASS, & ANTICAPITALISM

- Abolish Restaurants: Understanding Capitalism through the Food Service Industry
- Capitalism, Class, & Class Struggle
- The Mythology of Work
- Sabotage in the Workplace
- Work, Community, Politics, War

PRISON BOOKS COLLECTIVE PUBLISHING & DISTRIBUTION//PO BOX 625//CARRBORO, NC 27510

PRISON BOOKS COLLECTIVE PUBLISHING & DISTRIBUTION

ZINE CATALOG

WHAT IS A ZINE? A zine is a pamphlet between 20 and 50 pages long. Our collective started this catalog to give prisoners a broad, timely selection of reading material. Some prisoners use this resource to form study groups and organize on the inside. Please let us know how many zines we can send to you at a time, and any other restrictions regarding photocopied materials. We carry zines on the following topics:

- **ANARCHISM & RADICAL POLITICS** - "To revolt is a natural tendency of life. Even a worm turns against the foot that crushes it. In general, the vitality and relative dignity of an animal can be measured by the intensity of its instinct to revolt."
- **BLACK & BROWN LIBERATION** - The construction of Race is among the trickiest tools in the master's toolbox. Like gender, and perhaps even more so, it is a bogus category created to channel potentially boundless individuals into social strata that provide a blueprint for maintaining complex systems of domination. Whiteness, as a category, has been integral to the entire recent history of conquest and the prevailing social conditions of racial violence, policing, and poverty.
- **EARTH & ANIMAL LIBERATION** - The earth is not dying, it is being killed. The people killing it have names & addresses.
- **EN ESPAÑOL** - Una colección de nuestras revistas de muchos temas políticos, algunas que solamente tenemos en Español.
- **GENDER, FEMINISM & SEXUALITY** - "I believe that the society in which I live is a patriarchy with power concentrated in the hands of men, and that this patriarchy actively prevents women from becoming free and complete human beings. Women are oppressed by being denied access to economic resources, political power, and control over their reproduction. This oppression is managed by several institutions, chiefly the family, religion, and the state."
- **INDIGENOUS REBELLION** - We are all living on stolen land.
- **PRISONS & POLITICAL PRISONERS** - Over two and a half million people are in jail or prison in the United States, more people than constitute the entire US military.
- **POPULAR HISTORY & SOCIAL MOVEMENTS** - History isn't what happened, but a story of what happened. Every history contains different lessons. The selection of which histories a society chooses to teach shapes what we understand is possible. For that reason, many of these texts present stories ignored or omitted from mainstream history.
- **WORK, CLASS, & ANTICAPITALISM** - At work our time and activity is stolen from us and sold as profit. The conflict between those who have to work and our employers and governments is class struggle. To say our lives are more important than our boss's profits attacks the very nature of capitalism, and points to the possibility of a world without classes and privately-owned means of production. We are the working class resisting our own existence, struggling against work and class.

time. Such donations would include many copies of a single title donated by a publisher, or multiple boxes of a textbook donated by a school. One or two individuals can assume responsibility for regularly re-stocking the shelves with these books.

Once you are established, you will receive more book donations than you can use. You might want to coordinate book shipments to county jail facilities and half-way houses. You might also trade books for store credit at used bookstores or host yard sale style book sales and make hundred of dollars for postage.

We don't send in Bibles or Korans, instead we list the addresses of organizations that provide them in our Resource Guide (see Appendix II). This helps us conserve resources and concentrate on social justice work.

approved over the years, whether it's hundreds of copies of Black Power Revolt, histories of gang truce organizing, or thousands of specifically anarchist books, newspapers, and zines. It doesn't hurt to have a friendly lawyer or your local ACLU chapter write the occasional letter on your behalf when things get banned that shouldn't be. We believe if we're not sending in books that help prisoners understand and challenge their conditions then we're wasting our time and resources.

Organize your shelving based on the level of popularity of the topic area. If your space consists of two or more floors, you will want to shelve commonly requested items such as dictionaries and African American Studies on the main floor.

You may need to reserve a portion of your space for large donations of single titles that cannot be shelved at one

D. Zines

In addition to books, we also make available thousands of "zines," small booklets on contemporary political subjects like race, gender, direct action, anarchism, popular history, and anti-prison struggles.

It's hard to get lots of radical books donated, so we use zines as a way to bridge the gap between supply and demand. As we are able to provide multiple copies of these, prisoners are able to form study groups and themselves engage other prisoners in these topics. Study groups like these have popped up in a number of prisons throughout the South. Ideally, these groups can be a catalyst for prisoner organizing on the inside, as well as function as a form of dialogue between radicals on both sides of the prison walls. We include a zine catalog in

each package sent. It's been cool to see someone who firsts writes us for pulp fiction like Koontz or Grisham and then over the years ends up asking for Black Power environmentalist, and anarchist zines. You can see our Zine Catalog in Apendix II.

These days to keep up with our growing demand for zines and legal primers we print everything in house using a risograph. Get in touch with us if you would like tips on how to get your group set up with one.

E. Volunteers

To keep your program operating smoothly you need a core group of dedicated individuals who can put a fair amount of time into the project and a good flow of casual help whose involvement is on a more short term or occasional basis.

The Prison Books Collective consists of a core collective of 4-10 people in addition to a constantly changing volunteer pool. Some volunteers will want to help out only once while others will want to pack books several times each month. The collective participates in book distribution, decision-making and also assumes responsibility for all

administrative tasks including fundraising. One or two people, no matter how dedicated they may be, can become overwhelmed with the workload, so it's important to find people to assist with the variety of tasks.

Good sources for volunteers are progressive and radical political activist groups, progressive churches, service

PBC: Publishing and Distribution sin fines de lucro que usa sus para enviar libros gratuitos y materias informativas a presos, cuando los soliciten, por el Sureste de los Estados Unidos. Somos un distribuidor comercial compuesto completamente de voluntarios y somos también un editorial oficial de varias materias como la Lista Nacional de Recursos para presos. Nosotros enviamos libros a los estados siguientes:

ALABAMA NORTH CAROLINA

Dependemos de libros donados para nuestro suministro. Se archivan las cartas que recibimos y se llenan los pedidos como corresponde. También publicamos y distribuimos la Lista Nacional de Recursos para Presos (NPRL), un catalogo de zines (publicaciones pequeñas), y una publicación Palabras en del arte, la poesía, y el escrito de presos. Todas estas cosas son gratis.

Por favor tenga en cuenta lo siguiente:

Nosotros enviamos libros a los estados listados arriba solamente. Si no esta encarcelado en estos estados puede ordinar solo de nuestro catalogo de zines No de nuestra amplia selección de libros.

Por favor inférmanos de las RESTRICCIONES que impone su carcel con respeto a encomiendas como libro en rústica y/o cobertura dura, que hay que escribir en la encomienda, nuevo y/o de segunda mano, cuantos se permiten, factura y/o aprobación anterior, materias restringidas. Siempre escribir claramente con LETRAS DE MOLDE en lo exterior y lo interior de su cara:

NOMBRE

D.O.C.#/NUMERO

UNIDAD/COMPLEJO

DIRECCION/CALLE

CIUDAD/ESTADO/CODIGO POSTAL

Por favor, compartas sus libros con otros o que los done a la biblioteca si es posible. Tenemos una selección de libros en español.

Siempre disfrutamos de leer su poesía y de ver su arte. Si quiere usted, es posible que publiquemos su obra en nuestra publicación.

PBC: Publishing and Distribution is a not-for-profit that uses its profits from publishing and distribution to send free books and informational material, by request, to prisoners in North Carolina and Alabama. We are an all volunteer commercial distributor and publisher of hundreds of booklets like the National Prison Resource List (NPRL). We send books to the following states:

ALABAMA NORTH CAROLINA

We rely mostly on donated books for our selections. The letters we receive are filed by date received and are filed accordingly. We also publish and distribute the National Prison Resource List, a catalog of zines (small booklets) that address many issues that prisoners face, and a newsletter of prisoners' art, poetry, and prose. All of these things are free to prisoners

Please keep in mind the following:

We send books only to the states listed above. If you are incarcerated in a different state we only provide materials from our catalog and not our expanded book inventory.

Please let us know the RESTRICCIONS your prison places on receiving books, such as: Paperback and/ or hardcover What must be written on a page New and/or used books Invoice and/ or prior approval How many books are allowed Restricted materials Always PRINT the following clearly on the outside and the inside of your letter:

NAME

D.O.C.#

UNIT/FACILITY

ADDRESS/STREET

CITY/STATE/ZIP

Please share your books with others or donate them to the prison library whenever possible. This helps more people get access to these resources. We publish a newsletter of prisoners' art and writing. If you have book reviews, poetry, essays on the prison system, short stories, or anything else you'd like to see published, please send it our way!

organizations, book clubs and schools. We've also had really good luck putting up flyers around town asking for volunteers; as well as putting ads for volunteers in the event and classifieds sections of newspapers and online sites. We've found that volunteer retention is highest when the group designates a collective member to welcome and orient new volunteers as they arrive. That member can collect volunteer contact information or you can have a sign in book. You may want to have an announcement

listserv that occasionally lets people know about special packing opportunities, book sales or events.

You may be contacted by a former prisoner who received books from you or a similar organization while they were incarcerated. This is an excellent opportunity to get feedback on your efforts, allow someone to show their gratitude, and add another volunteer with an especially valuable perspective to your efforts.

F. Publisher/Bookstore Affiliation

Affiliation with a publisher or bookstore is a crucial component of a prison book program. The majority of prisons place restrictions on books being sent to prisoners by individuals.

However prisoners are generally allowed to receive books that are sent directly from a book store or publisher. You meet this condition by sending your books on behalf of the entity with which you have an association. Most prisons aren't too picky about this requirement. You don't have to be legally incorporated with the publisher/book store

nor do you need to be a paid employee. You do need to have labels or an address stamp made that include this publisher or bookstore as part of the address; otherwise the books will not be received by the prisons. (For example: Books to Prisoners Project Kalamazoo, ABC Publishing, 111 Lighthouse Lane, Kalamazoo MI 99999.)

G. Packing Materials

To send books through the mail, you need some sort of package, bag or envelopes.

There are many types of bubble sheet lined envelopes and padded book mailers that are well suited for mailing books. However, a number of prisons will not accept packages sent in envelopes of this type. For years we used grocery bags and packing tape and wrapped our packages like presents. We found though that some new volunteers were discouraged because they had a difficult time wrapping the books. Since then we've switched to manila envelopes that can be bought in bulk and it's only an extra four to six cents per package.

You will also need tape, address labels or an address stamp. The best tape to use is 2- inch clear plastic packaging tape. Get it donated by the case if possible. The address labels or stamp need to have your organization's full return address, which includes the name of your affiliate publisher or bookstore. Generally speaking the postal clerk will stamp the words media mail on each of your packages, but some groups like to make their own media mail stamp to save time at the post office.

H. Postage

An established prison book program will spend most of its money on postage. Most packages cost over three dollars to send, which adds up quickly.

You may get a few donations of stamps from prisoners, yet it won't make much of a dent in the total. Minimum wage laws don't apply to prison labor, and jobs for prisoners are about half a notch above slave labor.

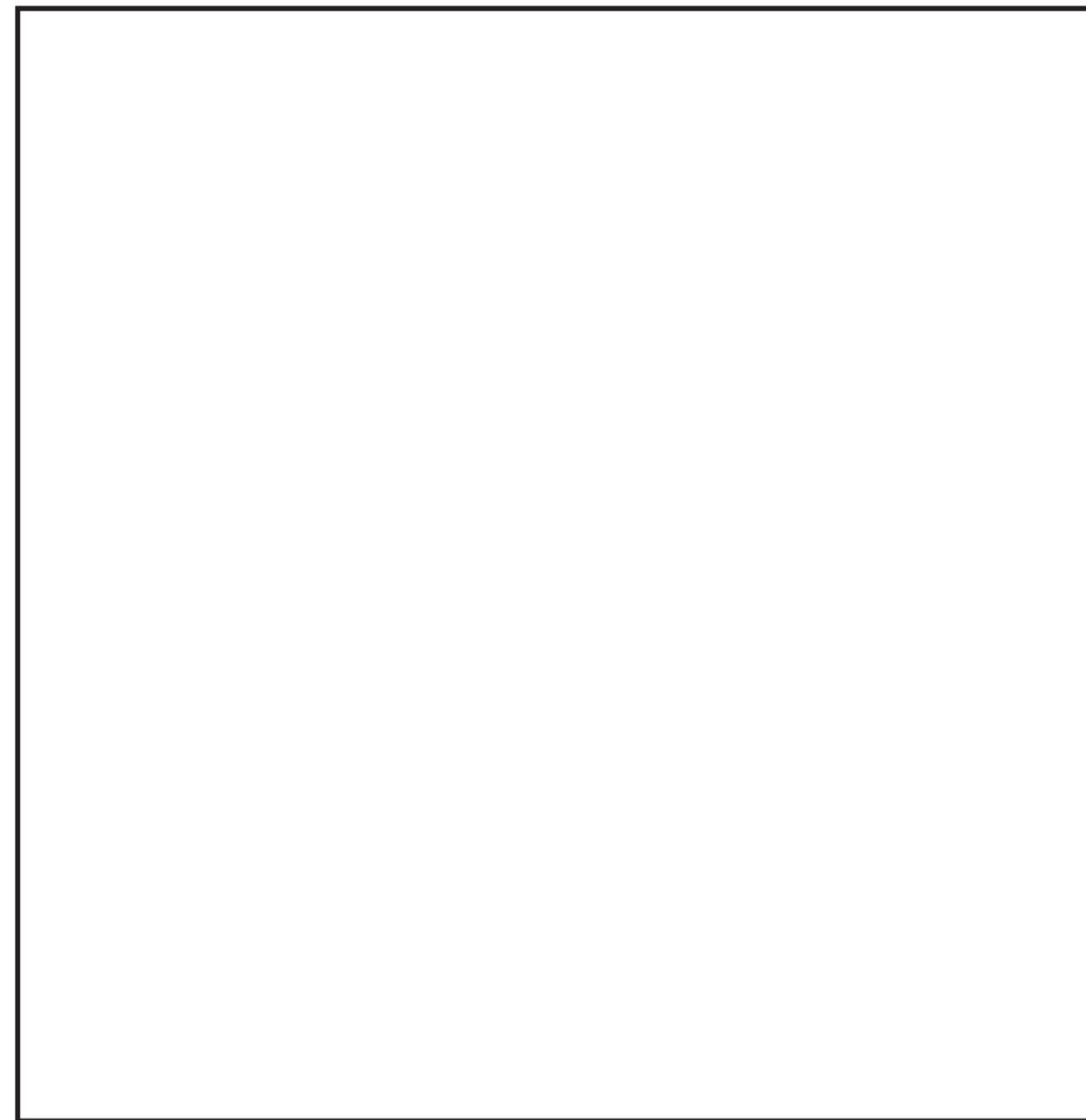
A first class stamp is the equivalent of the hourly wage for a typical prisoner, so any contribution is a testament to how much they appreciate your efforts.

Contact your local post office or consult the USPS web site to receive media mail rates.

Appendix 2: Stationary



Prison Books Collective
Publishing and Distribution
PO Box 625
Carrboro, North Carolina 27510



Appendix 1: Prison Books Collective Mission Statement

Our mission statement: Feel free to plagiarize, adapt or ignore it when writing your own.

The Prison Books Collective is a Carrboro, NC-based anti-prison group that sends hundreds of books to prisoners in the South each month, maintains an extensive radical 'zine catalog, widely distributes a monthly poster promoting political prisoner support, and publishes prisoners' art and writing. We also work to raise awareness about the prison-industrial complex in our own community and connect with others seeking to abolish this brutally racist and repressive system. We are an official commercial distributor and publisher.

Our collective formed in early spring of 2006 with the purpose of getting reading materials into the "gulag archipelago" that is the US prison system. In geographic coordination with similar groups, we ended up reaching out primarily to prisoners in Mississippi, Alabama, and central and eastern North Carolina. Through this process, our group has become something of a lifeline for thousands upon thousands of people who otherwise are completely disconnected from any support base whatsoever. With the goals of providing vital political and self-educational resources to prisoners, as well as spreading a radical critique of the prison system on both sides of the wall, our group has expanded to include several different projects. These now include the free books program, our 'zine catalog, our Words of Fire publication of prisoners' work, political prisoner birthday posters and our regular prison abolitionist reading group.

Contact us:

<http://prisonbooks.info>
prisonbooks@gmail.com



II. The Finances

Postage will be your largest expense. Keep in mind that the more you send, the higher the postage costs, and the more requests you fill, the more requests you will receive. Be realistic about how many packages you can afford to send each month and prioritize accordingly.

Aside from sending books, Books Through Bars recommends adhering to a policy of not spending organizational funds on individual prisoners. Some of your members may be involved with support campaigns, legal defense funds, publications. etc. but as a group you must be careful not to spread your finances too thin.

If you can manage to secure a rent free location, your monthly overhead will be minimal.

For handling grants and donations by check or online payments, you will need to set up a bank account in the name of your group. To do this you will need to get an Employer Identification Number from the IRS. The proper form can be downloaded at irs.gov or you can file online. Simply search "Forms and Publications" for EIN. The application includes instructions for obtaining an EIN. Once you have secured this number contact a local credit union (or bank) and ask to speak to a representative about opening an organizational checking account.

A. Grants and Foundations

There are books and manuals devoted to writing grant applications and finding foundations to fund your cause. Check your local library and consult the Foundation Center website at www.fdncenter.org.

The turnaround time for most grants is somewhere between 6 months to a year. By the time you research grants and receive and decipher the application forms, the seasonal application deadline may have recently passed and the next cycle may not start for another 6 months. Some grants require that you have a 501c3 tax-exempt status, which is a bit of an ordeal to get and not a short term endeavor. However, it is relatively easy to be sponsored by an already established 501c3 organization. Ask around to find one, usually a friendly church or larger political nonprofit group in your area can serve this purpose. Your sponsoring organization is entitled to a cut of any grants you receive, usually 5-10 percent.

One angle to take in applying grants is that you are supplying a social service by sending educational

materials into prisons. Other grants are specifically oriented towards groups working for social change. Simply sending books to prisons may not be the type of change these grant funds fund. If you can document your group's involvement with death penalty abolition, control unit monitoring or similar issues, you may make a more convincing case.

Grants are not the ideal way to finance your operation initially. Make it a point to learn about grants so you can apply in the future, but don't expect to raise money this way in your first year. Save any newspaper articles that feature your group or cover any events you hold, and keep a scrapbook of any photos, flyers or pamphlets related to your group. These will come in handy when you need documentation for your grant applications.

B. Donation from Individuals and Groups

Besides donations of books, you also can seek financial contributions to support your work. Often people want to give money because they believe in what you are doing and not because it's a tax write off.

Sometimes donors will want the contribution to be tax deductible. In this case you must be a nonprofit organization or have a nonprofit organization as your sponsor. The legal designation is 501c3 and it is from the IRS. All donors wanting a tax deduction must write the check out to your sponsoring 501c3 organization. Work out with your sponsor how often they will process checks and what percentage they will keep, typically 5-15 percent. Donors will need a receipt and thank you note. You can write them but they must mention the name of the sponsor who received the donation on your behalf.

Some book donors may also want receipts to make their book donations tax deductible. Ask them to estimate the value of their book donation and promptly send them a

receipt in that amount. In all cases, you should send a note of thanks. Create a database in which to record their contact information and the type of their donation.

As previously mentioned, prisoners will occasionally make small donations. These are usually in the form of a few stamps enclosed with their letter. Stamps are the least cumbersome currency for prisoners who want to make donations. Normally \$5-10 is the most to be expected directly from a prisoner. Their relatives on the outside may send more. If you are many months behind in answering requests it is a good idea to send prisoners a note to let them know you've received their stamps or check. Otherwise, be sure to thank them when you send their books.

C. Book Sales

Book sales are a good way to reduce your overstock of seldom requested subjects and big hardbacks too costly to send. Don't expect to sell everything you put up for sale. The key to a successful book sale is getting the word out that you are having it. Try to hold it outside on a sunny day at a place and time with a lot of foot traffic.

D. Fundraisers

These events serve to raise money while also giving you an opportunity to tell people about your program. A speaking appearance by an author or speaker on the prison industrial complex, racism, and other intersectional issues makes a good program. A debate, film screening, bingo game, cabaret, music show are other possibilities.

Ensuring that the event runs smoothly, has a good turnout, and raises money is no small undertaking. Last minute problems can arise, such as discovering that the venue requires you to have insurance or that the PA system is inadequate. If you haven't done this type of thing before, find someone who has, or start with a small event before getting more ambitious.

Pack-a-thons are a great fundraiser as you can both make money for your organization and get caught up in answering requests. Pick a weekend during which your organization will pack books for twelve hours each day. Next, prepare

instruction kits for the packers. Each participant should secure pledge money with donors pledging a flat fee per hour and contributed to the organization prior to the actual pack-a-thon so that you can use the money to send the packages. Packers can have pledges from many different people. You can also get local businesses to donate food and prizes. As a result of an annual pack-a-thon you can build relationships with new donors and volunteers, raise money for your prison book program, and send out more than one month's worth of book requests.

Crisis #3: Departure of key person

An all volunteer group has no contracts or requirements for advance notice of resignation. Anyone at any time may have to cease his or her involvement for any number of reasons. To prevent one departure from creating a crisis, try to have each facet of the operation known and understood by more than just one person. Someone may take on all the grant writing and donation solicitation, but if there are others who keep abreast of the process and relevant details, the life of your operation won't be in danger should the fundraising expert suddenly depart.



Crisis #4:

Funding dries up

The nature of grants is that they aren't automatically granted and there may be a delay of several months between notification and the check arriving.

Without an ongoing effort to seek new grants and fill out applications, your funding may run dry. What will not run dry is the steady stream of requests from prisoners. Some measure of financial security can be gained by maintaining a balance of different types of funding sources. Don't abandon the concept of book sales, speaking events, or punk shows because you just got a nice check that tripled your budget. In six months your

financial picture won't look so rosy if you haven't been planning ahead.

You can temporarily shut down outgoing mail operations until there is enough money to pay for postage. Do not pack a large batch of books if you don't expect to have the postage covered in the foreseeable future. As per Crisis 2, you may be forced to discard a backlog of requests in order to get back on track.

V. Averting Disasters

From time to time you will encounter obstacles and snafus, some of which may lead to a full fledged crisis. Below are some examples of what can happen and what to do when it occurs.

Crisis #1:

Donated books overflow available storage space.

This is bound to happen sooner or later. The following suggestions can be used simultaneously.

Reorganize your space more efficiently. Add more shelves and make them deeper and taller.

Clean out the “dead” stock. With experience you will come to learn the types of books that don’t move very fast. These can be traded at used book stores or sold at

your book sales. You can list what doesn’t sell at your book sale for free on Craig’s List and use it to build good will with your community.

Be more selective in the donations you accept. Turn down collections that contain predominately subjects that are overstocked

Crisis #2:

Incoming requests are backlogged to the point where you are over 6 months behind in answering them.

Prisoners are often moved, transferred, paroled or released. The mail forwarding capabilities and address correction practices of most prisons are poor at best.

If you are answering requests that are over 5 or 6 months old, many will be returned and you will have wasted that much effort and postage. It’s a good idea to check every inmate’s location in the prison system’s online data base to see if they have been transferred or released. Check the Department of Corrections website of the state(s) you serve to look up inmate locations.

Hold a pack-a-thon. This is a marathon packing session of 12 hours or longer during which your volunteers have solicited sponsors who are pledging some amount of money for every hour the volunteer is packing. It takes some planning, but a good pack-a-thon can become quite a festive event, with donated food or even donated

messages for the tired arms and shoulders of the packers. If you can collect some of the pledge money in advance, it helps to cover the increased postage costs of sending so many packages at one time.

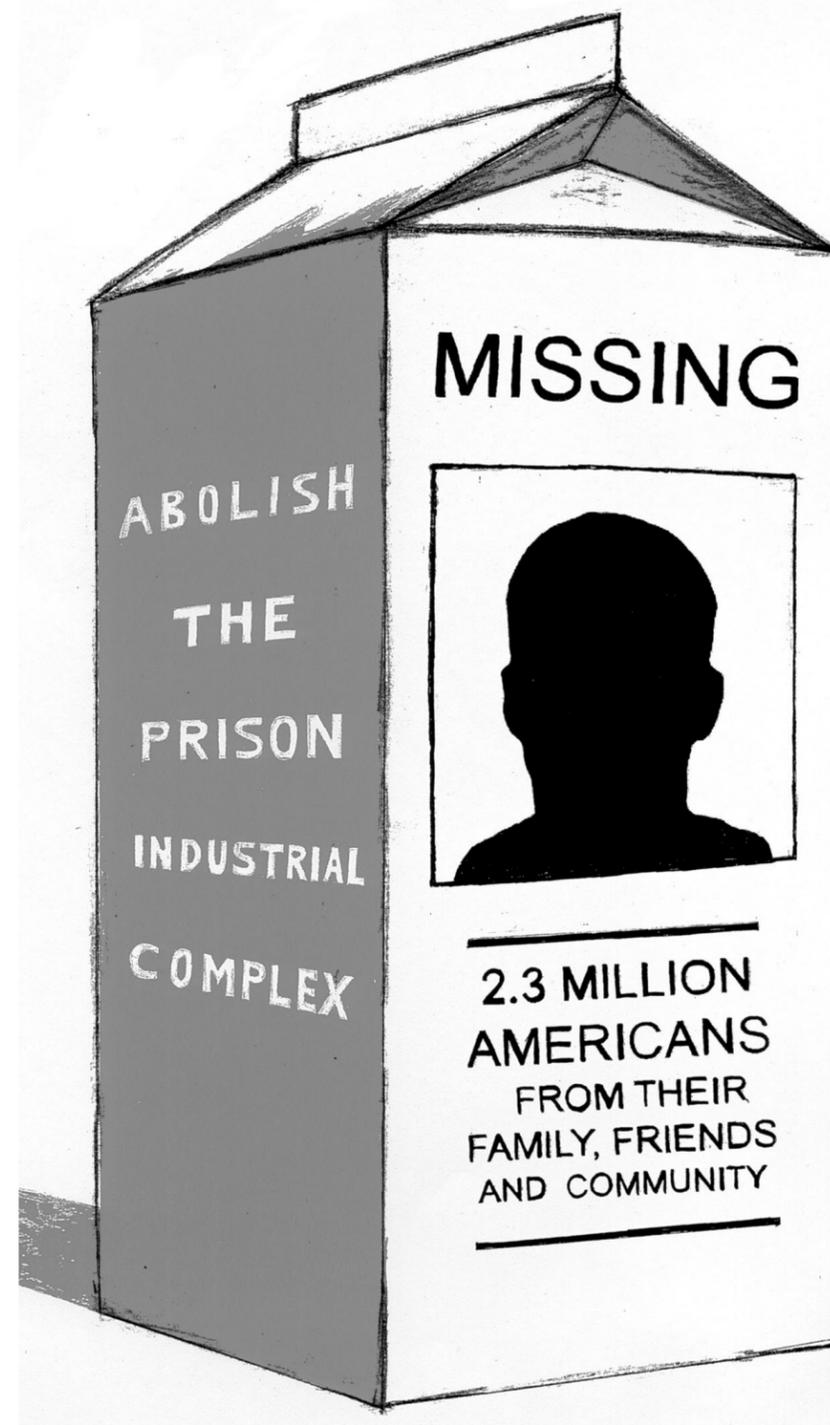
A last resort is to simply discard the backlog of requests and start on the recent ones. Don’t throw away everything though. Open and read all the letters you receive so that anyone you are regularly corresponding with isn’t lost. You may also want to answer the educational/self help requests or the letters from those who show a political awareness. If you decide to discard requests without filling them, it’s a good idea to let the prisoner know what you are doing and why.

E. In Kind Donations

Support for your operation doesn’t need to be a direct monetary contribution. There are many other ways people can lend a hand to help your cause.

Besides books, be on the lookout for donations of shelves, packing tape, pens and markers, filing cabinets, desks, access to a copy machine or a used copy machine. People can also help with tasks including transporting packages to the post office, picking up donations of books, writing grant proposals, planning and handling of fundraising and publicity events, photocopying, and keeping your book inventory properly sorted and categorized.

Sometimes you run out of money or volunteers, but you never seem to run out of books. Your books can be used as a barter commodity. One of the attractions for volunteers is being able to pick through a large selection of titles and borrow some of interest. We do not discourage anyone helping to pack books from borrowing them; it’s the least we can do considering the project couldn’t operate without their labor. It is possible to work out some creative deals to save time and money, such as someone with a car provides transportation in exchange for library privileges on the book inventory, or the person providing building space gets to pick out several nice hardbacks every month in lieu of rent.



III. The Process

The step by step procedure that follows is Books Through Bars operations plan. Your operations may vary and will probably change with time as you grow. The first two steps, reading and sorting of letters, occurs before the actual packing. All the other steps are carried out during a packing session with the exception of transportation to the post office which may not take place until a few days later. We have found that a pleasant way to accomplish packing is to set up packing sessions as cafe style events held on a regular basis. Having refreshments and listening to music makes for an enjoyable and productive working environment.

A. Sorting Letters

Books Through Bars advises new programs to open letters within a day to a week of receiving them. You should do this even when your program is three or more months behind in filling requests (a situation common to most prison book programs). We recommend this for several reasons.

First, a small but significant portion of the letters you receive will be requests for information about how your project operates. These requests can be filled quickly by the person opening the mail using a form letter. Similarly, prisoners may be requesting resource lists or zine catalogs that you can send to them without delay. Or they may be requesting a service that you cannot provide but you can refer them to another group. In addition, their letter might include information of a time sensitive nature, such as an approval form that must be sent with a package of books within thirty days or information on current struggles inside the prison that you can publicize.

Also, opening requests months before filling them provides your program with an opportunity to solicit or otherwise look for books on the more obscure topics that are requested or make decisions about what to cull or sell.

In your first few months you may get a reasonable number of requests that can be answered promptly with little difficulty. In time, the volume of mail will increase until the only manageable way to deal with it all is to divide it into several categories.

B. Reading and Responding to Letters

When letters are first opened and read, those that are from prisoners exchanging regular correspondence with any of our staff are set aside for the addressee. Just make sure book requests are still filled if the addressee is no longer packing books.



D. Specialization

Depending on what your interests are and where you are located, you may want to focus on certain areas of specialization instead of accepting any type of request from any prisoner anywhere in the country. We encourage limiting your service area to one or two states. This helps you keep on top of your back log and respond to conditions and situations in prisons and jails locally. Also if you aren't sure of your time, money and personnel resources narrowing down the work is advisable. You can always expand later.

E. Record keeping

You want at least one person in your group to function as the book keeper and keep track of income and expenditures.

Most grant foundations expect some sort of report back on what you did with the money they gave you. It's a good idea to keep track of the number of requests you receive from prisoners each month. In addition, you should keep a record of the number of packages you are able to send to prisoners. You can use these figures in fundraisers. You will also want to keep track of the number of packages returned to you every month. It's important to make a record of packages that were returned for reasons other than transfer or release. This information will be critical if you attempt to challenge prison rules or mailroom actions. The other records (numbers of letters and packages) can be as detailed or as simple as time permits. We also keep a record of each prisoner that writes us in a card catalog system. The cards are in alphabetical in order by last name, and include their prisoner number, the last time we sent a package and what we sent them. This helps us not send duplicates of books or zines we have piles of or track if someone is writing to us too often.

IV. Peripheral Details

A. Resource Information

When you get requests for services or expertise which falls outside your mission, it's good to have a resource list of names addresses and groups on hand. (See Appendix II for an example of ours.) Like a list of mail restrictions this list can be periodically updated as you discover new information. The Prison Books Collective includes a resource guide in every package.

B. Contacts with Other Groups

The strength of any organized effort towards transforming society lies in its success at branching out and networking with other individuals and groups until enough power is built to confront society.

Your contacts and connections are a vital part of your operation. Whether they provide active support, or merely serve as a referral point, they can all be apprised of your upcoming speaking events, book sales or pack-a-thons. Likewise your group can keep itself informed and aware of the work of allied organizations. Seek out other groups working to abolish the prison system and/or reform it. Be honest with whom you forms coalitions, and make sure not to let well intentioned reformists steer you from your actual purpose.

C. Correspondence with Selected Prisoners

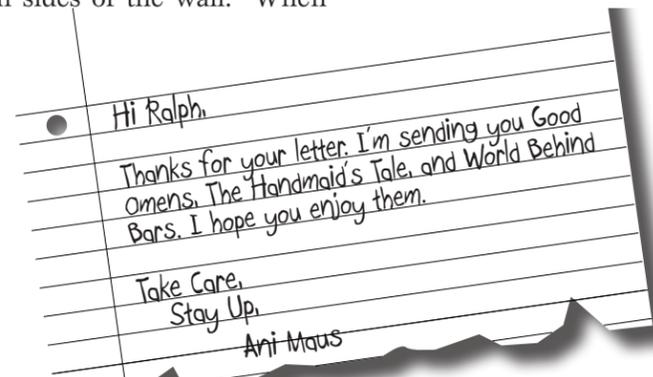
Sending books into prisons is the main part of your operation but it is not the only part. You can not only educate and enlighten but also learn from people who are incarcerated. Maintaining ongoing correspondence with some prisoners is part of the work of abolishing prisons which is a prison book program's mission. Prison book programs should maintain contact with leaders of prisoner study groups. They can ensure that the books you send are well shared, and provide feedback on what books best meet their needs.



Letters range from epic life stories to short notes along the lines of "I heard about your program. I have no money please send me some books, I'll take any type you have." Most letters tend to be fairly short and to the point. Some may be funny, insightful or thought provoking in unusual ways. You'll find an amazing range of handwriting styles. Some letters may contain artwork or poetry. Save them. You can compile a newsletter of prisoners' art and writing and then distribute it to both sides of the wall. When

you have a good collection you can also display them at fundraising events or use them in other creative ways for bringing awareness to prison issues.

We generally write at least a three sentence letter to include with what we are sending as part of the required "invoice". For us making a human connection is an important part of the work we do. Here's an example of a letter you can write no matter how short the letter is:



If someone writes more we may write more, but we write at least this much.

C. Selecting Books

Sometimes prisoners will request specific titles or writers. Individual volunteer's knowledge of authors in specific subject areas will come in handy. If you don't have exactly what they want, select something close or similar. If you've never heard of what they want and haven't a clue what genre it is the internet will probably hold the answer.

D. Checking Restrictions

Prisons often have different regulations. With regard to mail restrictions and regulations each prison sets its own policy. From the point of view of a prison book program, there is little rhyme or reason to the varying restrictions, and no discernible patterns geographically. To further complicate matters, there are units within a prison that have policies different from the rest of the facility.

The broadest policy is to allow any books or magazines. Beyond this there is every combination of soft backs only, hardbacks only, used OK, new books only, no magazines, no books without covers, books must be mailed with an invoice from the bookstore and so on. One of the tougher policies is requiring a prisoner to get a form signed by a prison administrator which is then sent to you and must be attached to the outside of the package. The forms often have a specified time period during which the books can be received by the prisoner. If your backlog of requests prevents you from answering this request within the allowed time period, the prisoner will have to get a new form and start over again.

In some instances there is a librarian or teacher at the prison who can get around difficult restrictions if you send books directly to them. It's also more cost effective to send in a large box this way.

The best way to navigate the maze of regulations is keeping an alphabetized state by state list of the restrictions of all the prisons you have served. When preparing packages to send out, this list is referenced so as not to send books that will be immediately rejected by the prison mail room. Whenever corresponding with people in prisons that you haven't sent books to before, ask them what their policy is so you can add it to your list.

E. Packing Books

Normally it's a good idea to limit the books to two or three per package. If it's a large hardback, perhaps a specific title someone asked for, sending just one book will suffice. Remember, some prisons place restrictions on the number of books or magazines in packages.

F. Stationary Form Letter

With each request you fill, you need to convey some general information about your program and how it operates. You can include a description of what your organization does and does not do on the back of your stationary. If you only want to send books every six months, tell them so. The description is your opportunity to ask for prison restrictions, advise them of your chronic backlog, or tell them what kinds of books you can't or won't send. Additional comments, inventory list, and personal notes can be written on the other side.

G. Addressing and Labeling

Sometimes it can be difficult to decipher the handwriting in the request letter. Usually there will be a name and address both in the letter and on the envelope. Between the two, the correct address is discernible. You can also cut out the address from the address received and tape it to the front of the package.

H. Sealing the Package

Packages are best sealed with 2 inch clear packaging tape. Duct tape and masking tape are against postal regulations and were designed for other purposes and won't work well for parcels. Clear 2-inch tape is also easier to deal with than staples. Going around all four edges of the package can help to smooth down the corners, but be careful to leave enough untaped area for postage. One pass over the label will ensure it won't get smudged or torn. Tape is cheaper than postage, so don't worry about using too much.

I. Verifying Prisoners Current Location

It's a good idea to check every inmate's location in the prison system's data base to see if they have been transferred or released. Check the Department of Corrections website of the state(s) you serve to look up inmate locations. For federal prisons look them up in the federal system. The Prison Books Collective saves at least \$200 a month checking the addresses.

J. Weighing

Media mail rates are by the pound. If you decide to weigh and stamp your packages yourself, you will need a reasonably accurate scale. It doesn't have to be digitally calibrated to fractions of an ounce, just something that will tell you what's over one pound or under 2 pounds. Always round up to the next pound, for example, 1 pound 2 ounces needs 2 pounds worth of postage. There will also be occasions when you will need to send packages over 2 pounds. If your scale is misadjusted on the high side, you will soon find out because the post office will return some of your packages with postage due.



K. Stamps and Postage

Take all your wrapped and addressed packages to the post office. A postal worker will then weigh each one, determine the necessary postage, place a post office sticker on each package in lieu of a stamp, and keep a running tab of the accumulated total, which you then pay by check, cash or debit card.

If you use this method you don't need your own scale and you don't have to bother with stamps; the Prison Books Collective is quite happy with it. Ask your local post office for more details.

Many groups have successfully set up a table outside a busy post office and asked passersby to take a package to mail. With each package not costing more than a few dollars, this is an easy way for sympathetic folks to contribute with little effort and strain on their pocketbooks.

L. Transporting Packages to the Post Office

There is a great variety in sizes, layout and staffing in post offices. Each has its own little quirks. In any urban area there is a large main post office with many smaller satellite branches in the vicinity. The branches may have shorter hours of operation and not be fully equipped to provide all services. All mail sent out of the city usually departs from the main office and you may want to deal exclusively with them. There are plastic tubs available from the post office at no charge. They can be used to transport your packages.