

Section 2: The Service Projects

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Introduction to the Service Projects

As AmeriCorps VISTA Leaders with a strong interest and background in Service Day projects, our goal is to share our combined knowledge and experiences with other VISTA Leaders. Commissioned by Andy King to create service projects fitting the VISTA anti-poverty focus, we have outlined projects that will benefit other VISTA Leaders well into the future.

For the five projects outlined here, our team selected projects that represent the needs of VISTAs throughout the country. We have intentionally included projects that address the CNCS focus areas of Veterans and Military Families, Environmental Stewardship, and Education. Over the course of three months, we met virtually for intensive collaborations, as well as in small teams of members who focused on specific aspects of the projects. Each service event included is something that a member of our team has either directly participated in or helped to coordinate. Our hope is that this insight will guide you through the process of creating your own Service Day event.

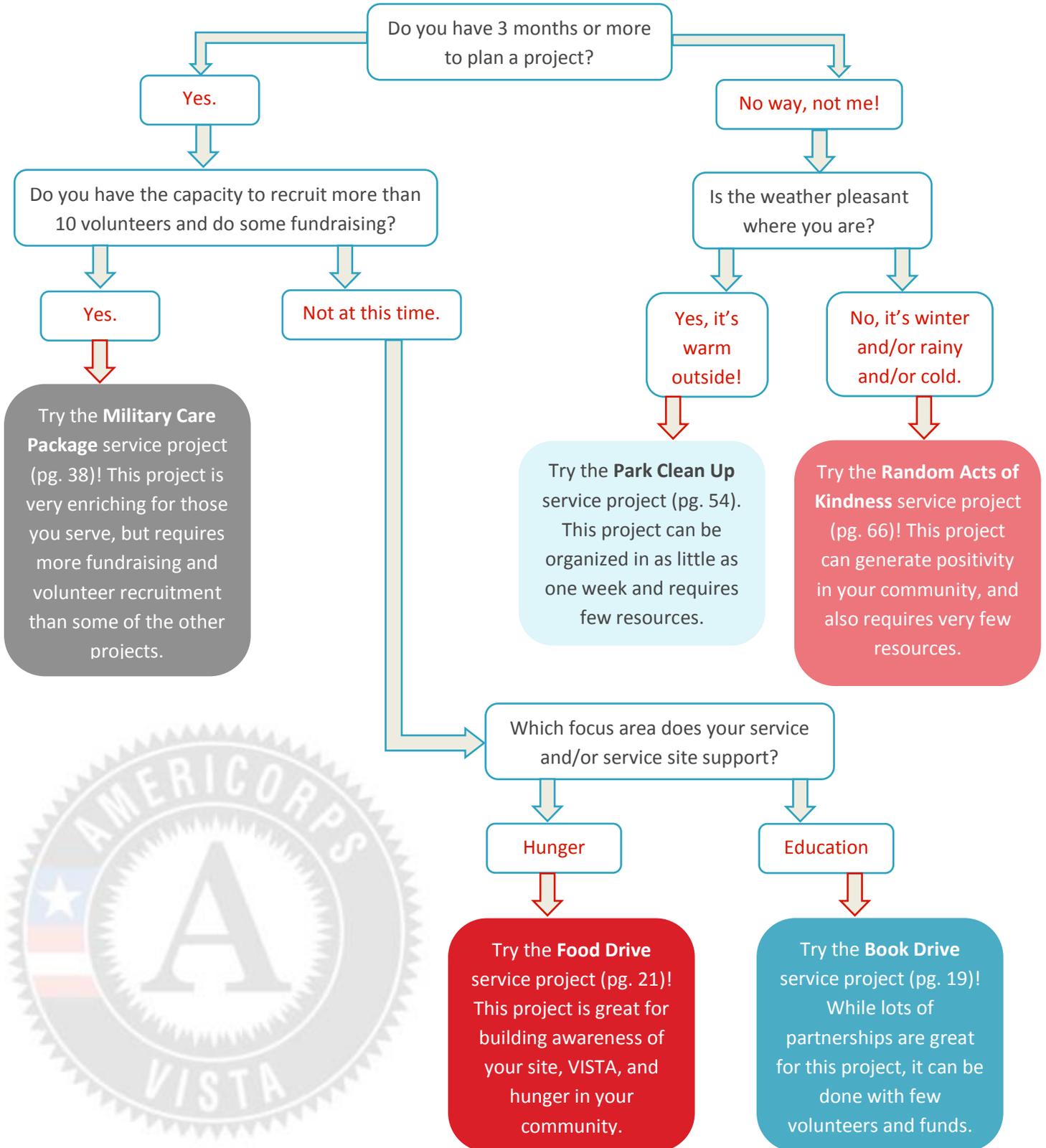
As VISTA Leaders from across the county, our experiences and ideas reflect the variety of communities we serve. It is our goal that these projects can be readily adapted to fit the needs of the populations they are aimed at, both rural and urban, small and large. You are the expert in the needs of your community.

Each Project Guide has detailed instructions on how to complete the project as well as Supplemental Materials, which include sample documents to give you an idea of what they could or should look like. These are not meant to be used exactly as they appear; be sure to tailor them to your specific project, community, and partnerships.

National Days of Service are particularly exciting opportunities for VISTAs, who don't typically get to partake in direct service. These events can be great opportunities to learn more about community members and to engage meaningful service projects. Remember to have fun and to soak in the experiences, conversations, and awareness National Service Days spur!

Which Service Project Should You Choose?

When your Day of Service is quickly approaching, it can be difficult to choose exactly which project will best suit your team. We've created a tool to help you narrow your choices! Use the map below to identify a project that will fit your timeline, budget, and volunteer capacity. Keep in mind that you can tailor each project to fit your needs and that this is a broad outline of the workload you can expect.



Project 1: Book Drive

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Project Summary

Project Description: A book drive is a great project for any population size, but if you plan to make this a large-scale project you will need to make sure you have the resources to transport, store, and sort the amount of books you collect.

Number of VISTAs/Volunteers: 1-50+

Cost Estimate: \$0 - \$700

Time Estimate: 3 months

Target Population and Setting: Local schools or libraries that are in need of books

Keywords: book drive, literacy, education

Objectives/Outcomes:

- Collect enough books to truly impact one or more sites
- Motivate the community to come together for a common cause
- Promote AmeriCorps VISTA, national service, and National Service Day(s)
- Create connections in the community that can be utilized in current and future VISTA projects

Additional Notes: This project can be as large or as small as you choose; but when planning how large you want the event, make sure you consider that all of the books will need to be transported to a central location where they are sorted, then transported again to the organizations that are the beneficiaries. If you do not have access to a large enough space or enough vehicles, then it is best to plan for a smaller book drive.

Project Guide

Timeline

3-4 Months Before	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Contact local schools and libraries to determine recipients of the drive.•Begin recruiting volunteers, if necessary.
3 Months Before	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Contact potential book collection sites.•Begin marketing.
2 Months Before	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Source collection boxes.•Secure transportation.•Secure a facility to sort books on Service Day.•Continue marketing..
1 Month Before	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Distribute collection boxes to book collection sites.
2 Weeks Before	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Confirm volunteer availability and assignments for the Service Day.•Call sites to check how many books they have collected. If necessary, collect books from sites that have a surplus (make sure you have contacted the storage facility to see if you can drop off books early).
1 Week Before	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Confirm transportation.•Confirm logistics with drop-off sites (schools, libraries, etc.).•Confirm all participants have and understand the schedule for the day of the event.
Day Before	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Set up the sorting facility so that everything is in place for when volunteers arrive.
Day of Event	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Bring books to the sorting site and break them into designated categories.•Prepare the books for transport to their final destinations.•Be sure to take plenty of pictures and to keep track of how many books you've collected.
Day After Event	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Confirm that all of the book recipients received their deliveries.•Write and distribute press release to highlight the successes of the Service Day.
Within One Week After	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Send "Thank You" notes to all donors, partners, and outstanding volunteers.

Before You Start

Hosting a book drive might seem like a simple task, but there are three main stages to a book drive: collection, sorting, and distribution. For your main Service Day project, you can focus on sorting and getting the books ready for distribution—but you also need to plan how you will move the books to the sorting location, and out to their designated organizations. If you are not confident in your ability to successfully navigate all three phases, you can coordinate the drive on a smaller scale. Also, this project can work well with a single AmeriCorps program, but can incorporate community volunteers, too.

Supply List

- 1 collection bin per site (often these are large cardboard barrels or boxes)
- Paper and printer (for flyers)
- Tables for sorting
- Extra boxes for distributing books
- Markers and pens
- Tape (to repair any torn boxes)
- Signs for sorting

Community Partnerships

For this Service Day project, there are three main groups of partners that you will need: collection sites, transportation/event space providers, and book recipients.

First, you will need to assess your community need—what organization(s) could really use these books? Finding places that need and will use the books should be one of your first steps. This ensures there will be drop-off sites for the books and gives additional information to use in your marketing.

For the transportation and event space, you may need to get creative with your community partners. Do any local businesses have their own vans/trucks for deliveries? Are there any organizations with warehouse space that would be willing to support a good cause? You may be surprised by how many local organizations are willing to band together for a good cause. These partners will be the key to a successful Service Day, so make sure to connect with them early and confirm their participation. Without event space, sorting the books will be a challenge, and without transportation, it may come down to volunteers filling their cars with books.

Finally, the collection sites should be another easy connection to make. Asking a shop to host a collection bin and display a flyer is not generally an inconvenience, and many local shops love getting behind a good cause that will directly assist their community. Some places to approach are coffee shops, business offices, grocery stores, and book stores. As with the other partners, feel free to get creative! This is a chance to unite your community for a cause, so get as many organizations involved as possible.

**** For details on how to form a partnership, go to the Food Drive Template (pg. 24) ****

Fundraising

In this project, try to encourage enough community participation that your program does not need to fundraise. If you make the connections early enough for transportation and event space, then organizations will be more likely to support your cause.

The main items that you should try to get as in-kind donations include:

- Transportation of the books from their collection sites to the sorting facility.
- Transportation of the books from the sorting facility to their donation sites.
- Space to sort the books.
- Cardboard boxes for collection sites to use (also some extras for sorting day).
- Food/beverages for volunteers on sorting day.

**** For more information about fundraising and requesting donations, see the *Food Drive Template* (pg. 26) ****

Recruiting and Managing Volunteers

This project can be accomplished with a single VISTA program, but it can easily be opened up to other AmeriCorps groups and community volunteers. Since there are so many stages of this project, it will be important to match the right amount of volunteers for the amount of books you have collected—otherwise you will either have too or not enough work.

Recruiting Volunteers

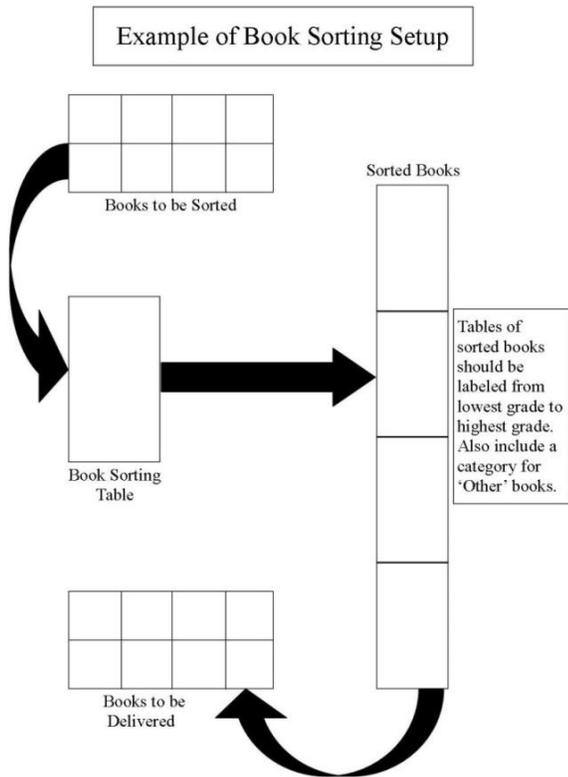
In order to plan for the scale of your book drive, you will need to contact other AmeriCorps programs and volunteers as soon as possible. Your CNCS State Office can give you contact information for the other AmeriCorps programs in your area. Once you have a contact person, you can easily coordinate how many members will be attending, which will impact how many book collection sites you set up.

If your project reaches the scale that you need outside volunteers to help with sorting, network with your contacts and partners to find the best course of action. One way to advertise for sorting day is to put the time, date, and location of the event on flyers that are on collection bins. Then, people who are donating books will also have the option of sorting them.

Managing Volunteers

On sorting day, most volunteer positions will be the same—sorting books into piles according to ages. Make sure that all volunteers are greeted and briefed with the information they need to properly sort the books (how sorting tables are arranged, where full boxes will go, etc.).

Keep communication clear to avoid any mistakes when sorting, which will benefit the organizations receiving books. Overall, it is best to communicate early and often so all volunteers know when and where they need to be at the sorting location, as well as the tasks they will be expected to accomplish.



Day of Event

The bulk of the Service Day will consist of sorting the collected books, but you also need to consider how the books are arriving to the sorting facility and how they are being transported to their final locations. If you are hosting a large drive, hopefully you can arrange transportation with a community partner. If not, there is always the option of using volunteers’ vehicles to transport the books—just make sure to coordinate accordingly so that you do not end up with more books than room in the available cars.

Once all books have arrived to the sorting location (preferably at least the night before), they can then be arranged on tables for sorting. There should be a central table where all unsorted books are placed, and then a line of tables labeled according to age groups. Signs should mark each table to limit confusion, and volunteers should check the book descriptions for what age range it belongs in (most books are labeled on the back). Your

advertising should have indicated the age ranges of the books you are collecting, but always expect some outliers. (See illustration for sample set up.)

Wrapping Up

Once all of the books have been sorted, you should take a few minutes for some reflection. Take the time to discuss the impact you are having on your community and those living in it. As AmeriCorps VISTA members, it can be easy to feel removed at our host sites, so taking the time to perform direct service gives us a presence and tangible impact on our community. Your reflection time can be as simple as asking members what their favorite part of the day was, or how they felt about the service. You could instead have a structured reflection with a video or speech and then break into small groups with preplanned discussion questions. No matter what you decide to do, taking a few minutes for reflection can make the day memorable for members.

No matter how the event goes, be sure to thank your volunteers, partners, and donors. The thanks can take different forms, depending on how much work was contributed. For volunteers who just helped out on the day of the book sorting day, giving them a brief “Thank You” speech may be sufficient. For any volunteers that went above and beyond, and all of your donors and partners, a handwritten “Thank You” card is the best way to express your gratitude.

Lastly, make sure to complete a press release detailing the results of your project, and send it to everyone on your Media Contacts Worksheet (pg. 77).

Budget

Line Item	Estimated Cost Range
Transportation	\$0 - \$250
Supplies	\$0 - \$100
Promotion/Marketing	\$0 - \$50
Food and Beverages	\$0 - \$200

Budget Explanation

Note that these numbers are all extremely rough estimates, as costs will vary significantly depending on what you choose to do, where you are located in the country, and how successful your donations are. These are just intended to give you a general idea of costs and help you decide if this is a viable project for your site.

Transportation: this includes mileage and truck/car rental, if necessary. Remember that mileage can add up quickly; it might be cheaper to rent a car or truck than it would be to pay mileage on a fleet of personal vehicles.

Supplies: try to get as many of these donated as possible. For necessary supplies that aren't donated, be creative! Ask your collection sites if they would be able to supply cardboard boxes for collecting books. Just be sure to cover any existing logos or images with flyers or promotional materials for your specific project—that way people will know exactly what the collection box is for.

Promotion/Marketing: this primarily consists of printing costs, which will mostly be used for flyers and other marketing materials. If you decide to buy advertising, this could increase beyond the maximum budgeted range.

Food and Beverages: it is a nice gesture to have food and drinks available for your volunteers; especially on the book sorting day, which could be a full day. Providing food for a large group can be expensive, so check and see if any local restaurants are willing to provide an in-kind lunch for your volunteers.

Supplemental Materials

Book Drive Check List

What supplies do you need before the event?

- Cardboard boxes/bins for collection sites
- Printer and paper for flyers and signs
- Tape
- Markers/pens

What supplies do you need for the day of the event?

- Extra cardboard boxes/bins
- Tape to repair any damaged boxes
- Tables to place sorted and unsorted books
- Signs labeling the age range for each table
- Markers/pens

Marketing Materials

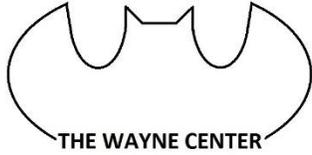
- Completed Media Contact Worksheet (see pg. 77)
- Press Releases (for example see pg. 17)
- Flyers to distribute around the community
- Social Media Guide (for example see pg. 79)
- Liability waivers (check with your host site to see if this is necessary)
- "Thank You" cards and postage for event supporters

What Partnerships Do You Need?

- Local organizations to receive the books
- Partners to advertise for the day and collect books
- Organizations to help with transporting the books
- A location to provide space for the event (and possible collection before event)

What Should You Get Donated?

- Cardboard boxes/bins for collecting books
- Printing (if not available at your site)
- Space for the sorting day
- Transportation of books
- Lunch for volunteers (if applicable)
- Tables for sorting books (if not available at the site)



Contact:

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For Immediate Release

January 2, 2014

THE WAYNE CENTER TO COLLECT CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN MLK DAY BOOK DRIVE

GOTHAM CITY, New York --- The Wayne Center is hosting a book drive **January 6 - 19, 2014** in support of Martin Luther King, Jr. National Day of Service. Gently used children's books can be donated at the following locations:

- Gotham City Library
- Gotham County Hospital
- Fire Station #34 of Gotham City
- Eastern Gotham Middle School

The Wayne Center will also purchase wholesale books from The Publishing House from any monetary donations received through this event.

Organized by **AmeriCorps VISTA** members serving at The Wayne Center, this drive will provide identified libraries and literacy organizations throughout the city with thousands of children's books.

Only 60% of children in Gotham City read at an appropriate grade level. This book drive will provide access to age-appropriate books, helping to raise literacy rates in the city.

About The Wayne Center

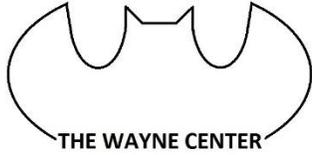
The Wayne Center is a nonprofit organization which provides job training and educational materials to help Gotham City residents rise out of poverty. The organization also advocates and builds awareness of unemployment and low literacy rates in the city.

About AmeriCorps VISTA

AmeriCorps VISTA, funded through the Corporation for National and Community Service, is a program in which individuals are placed in service sites across America to fight poverty by building the capacity of local organizations. AmeriCorps VISTA members serve on a full-time basis for one year.

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An editable version of this press release is available at <http://bit.ly/vistaservicedayprojectguides>.



Contact:

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lisa@thewaynecenter.org

For Immediate Release

January 20, 2014

MLK DAY BOOK DRIVE COLLECTS OVER 40,000 BOOKS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LITERACY

GOTHAM CITY, New York --- The Wayne Center has concluded their MLK National Day of Service book drive and collected a record **40,102 gently-used children's books** from donation boxes throughout Gotham City. The drive also collected **\$3,293**, which will provide an **additional 5,000** books through a partnership between The Wayne Center and The Publishing House of GC.

The book drive, organized by **AmeriCorps VISTA** members hosted at The Wayne Center, began January 6, 2014 and ended on January 19, 2014. Bruce Wayne, CEO of Wayne Enterprises said, "It's essential for the success of our city to invest in our children." Some Investment Firm allowed 26 employees to volunteer to distribute the books to libraries and literacy organizations throughout Gotham City, and seven donation boxes were generously donated by A Hardware Store.

This is a great step in the right direction for Gotham City to support children's literacy.

About The Wayne Center

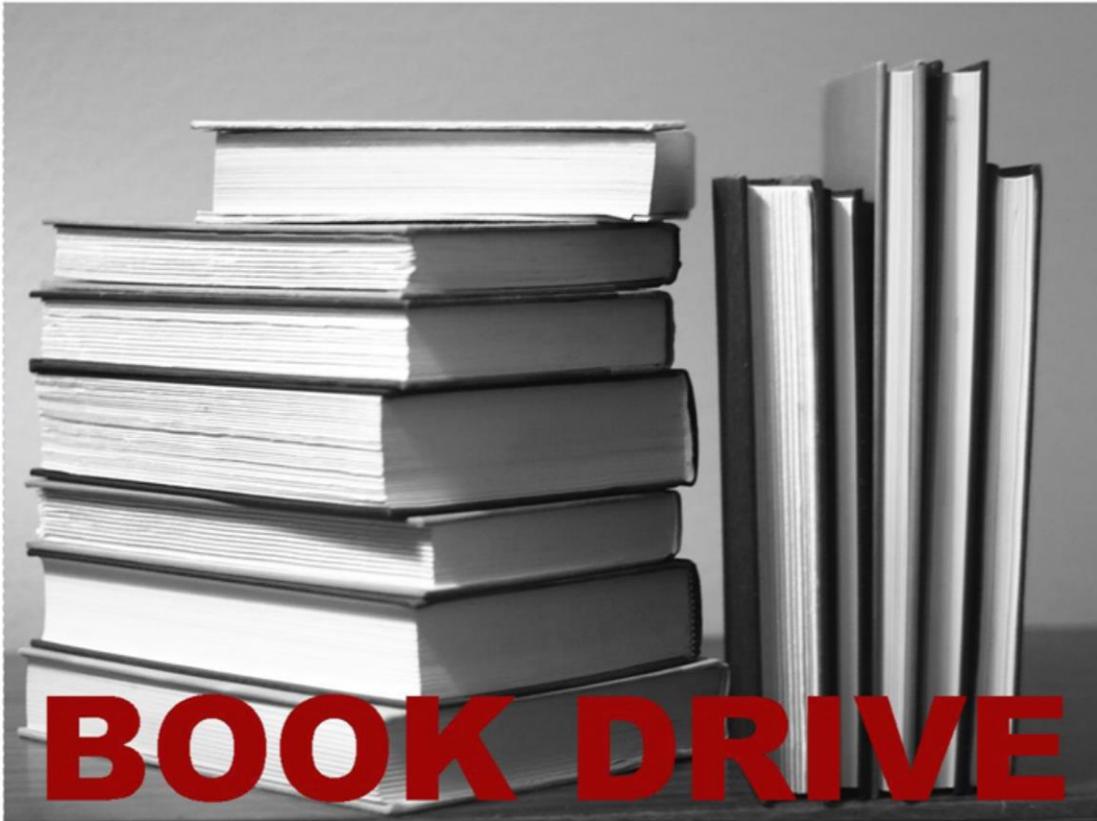
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*"My Organization" and AmeriCorps VISTA
are hosting a city-wide book drive to honor
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.!*

Please bring new and gently used children's
books to one of the donation box locations.

January 11-18, 2015

8:00 a.m.—3:00 p.m.

For other ways to get involved, please
contact mlkbookdrive@gmail.com.

Donation Box Locations

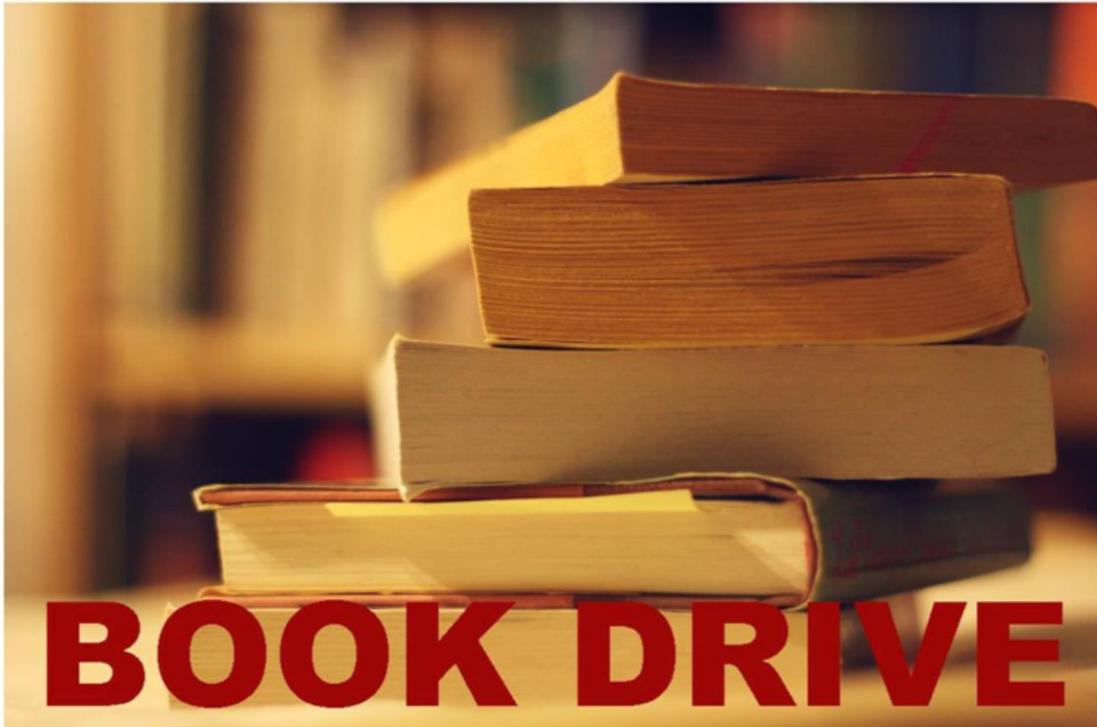
Lansing City Hall

Delta Twp. Fire Dept.

Lansing Street Library

*Sponsored by "My Org"
and AmeriCorps VISTA!*





5555 Mockingbird Lane
Lansing, MI 48912
January 11-19, 2015 11:00 a.m.—5:00 p.m.

Join us in honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with a book drive!
Please bring new and gently used books to the address above. All
books collected will be donated to the Hope Children and Women's
Shelter, who serve to improve literacy rates in the area.

**For other ways to get involved
and more information, contact:**
Chelsea Leser, AmeriCorps VISTA
My_name@gmail.com
800-222-0000



An editable version of this flyer is available at <http://bit.ly/vistaservicedayprojectguides>.