

Annual Report 2024



Freedom Reads 2024 Highlights



Inside Literary Prize

Visited 12 prisons in 6 states to host Inside Literary Prize judging.

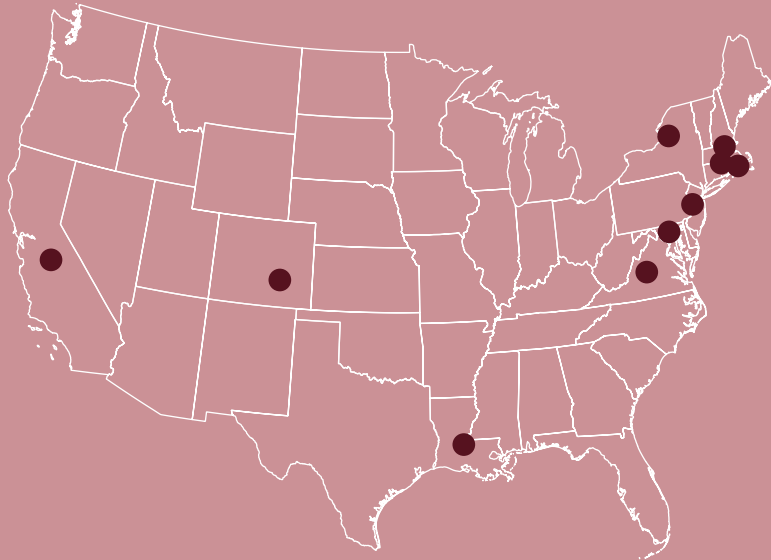
Expanded
our staff and our board.

Published
our Impact Report.

Launched
our new website.

Opened

New Libraries in 17 Prisons in 10 States



Encouraged people in prison to see themselves anew with the Portraiture Project.

40K

Brought Joy to
close to 40,000
people in prison.

A Letter from the CEO

I can't help but begin Freedom Read's first Annual Report by thanking our many supporters. Our shared belief that books can transform the lives of men, women, and children in prison combined with your generosity has turned this belief into a powerful reality. When I started Freedom Reads, I would often say that books provide wings, all of you provide the updraft for us to soar. I hope you know your continued support is necessary as we fly even higher.

We opened the first Freedom Library in the Fall of 2021 at MCI-Norfolk, where Malcolm X once studied debate in a prison library. We had a more modest plan then, to bring a Freedom Library to 1000 prisons. But a man wrote us from MCI-Norfolk. He didn't live in the cellblock with a Freedom Library and criticized us. "Isn't the goal of Freedom Reads to let every prisoner be inspired by the words of these great works of literature?" he asked. He was right. We changed our plan: In every prison we partnered with, we would open a Freedom Library in every cellblock.

We went from one library per prison to 10, 20, or more libraries per prison. When we went back to MCI-Norfolk in 2023 to open libraries in every cellblock, the cat who originally wrote to complain now wrote to praise, "I want to say thank you, thank you, thank you for keeping your promise. Forgive me for being jaded but I truly didn't think you guys would or could place a library in each unit." He then asked how he can help us.

We often don't think about the way that acts of generosity and grace spark more generosity, but this is something we have seen again and again. Bringing beauty, hope, and possibility to people who are sometimes in very dark places, doesn't just shine a bit of light, but also changes perspectives in profound ways.

This work takes tremendous effort and 2024 was a year of great accomplishments for Freedom Reads, as you will see in the pages that follow. None of this work would be possible without your belief and support. And I want to shout out those in prison. A few times each year someone serving time donates money to Freedom Reads. That people earning pennies on the dollar send us what I personally know keeps them from starving is one of the greatest testaments to our work. We look forward to sharing the joy we bring to those Inside with you in the months ahead.

Thank you!

Dwayne



Freedom Reads CEO and founder Reginald Dwayne Betts
Photo: Keenan Hochschild

Freedom Library Openings

“Freedom Reads empowers people through access to inspirational literature and the transformative effect of reading a good book. First launched at MCI-Norfolk in 2021, we are proud to see this thriving initiative expand and grateful to Freedom Reads for their strong partnership.”

Shawn Jenkins, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Correction, October 2024

+21 CA

Twenty-one more in California October 2024



+18 CO

Eighteen more in Colorado April 2024



+11 LA

Eleven more in Louisiana June 2024, six more in December



+5 NY

Five more in New York July 2024

+5 MA

Five more in Massachusetts September 2024

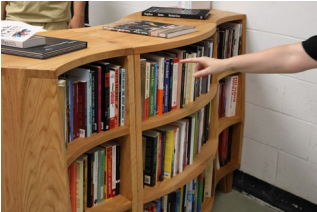


17 RI

Seventeen in Rhode Island May 2024
New state this year

9 NJ

Nine in New Jersey May 2024
New state this year



+42 CT

Forty-two more in Connecticut September 2024

+14 MD

Fourteen more in Maryland February 2024



+32 VA

Thirty-two more in Virginia March 2024

Our New Website

In April 2024, Freedom Reads launched a dynamic new website, rich in storytelling and filled with resources about our work. Developed by the Freedom Reads communications team in collaboration with the award-winning design studio Practise, the site provides an accessible and engaging way to explore our mission—from building and opening Freedom Libraries in prison cellblocks to amplifying the voices of those Inside. With streamlined navigation and compelling visual assets, the website allows visitors to experience the impact of literature in transforming lives.



In the Media

Literary Hub, NY, Aug 2, 2024
The first US Book Prize judged entirely by incarcerated people announces a winner



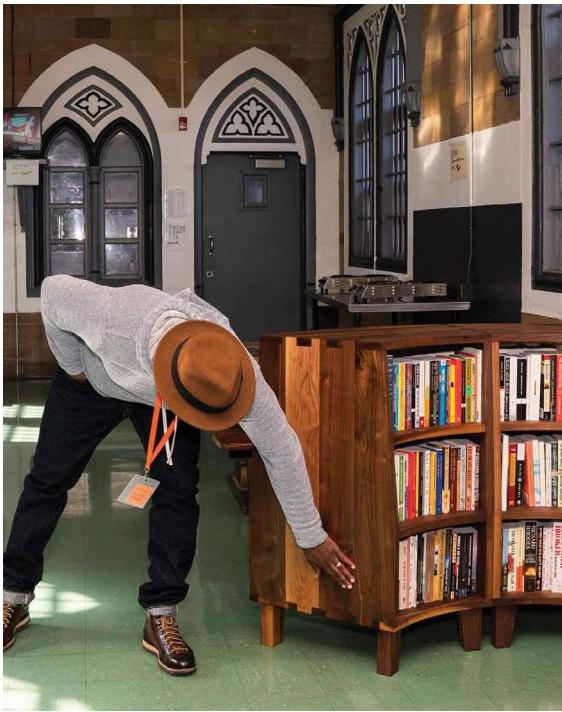
Richmond Free Press, VA, July 11, 2024
Freedom Reads founder Betts to receive top honor from Library of Virginia



WVTF Public Radio, VA, May 7, 2024
Freedom Reads donates thousands of books to Virginia prisons



Country Roads, LA, October 23, 2024
“I Am Free When I Read”



NBC 9 News, CO, June 22, 2024
Incarcerated Colorado women first to judge national book contest



The Harvard Crimson, MA, December 6, 2024
Reginald Dwayne Betts on Vulnerability, Collective Memory, and Freedom Reads



**Nothing grows without
weeping, not even joy.**

Prisoners at Buckingham Correctional
Center in Virginia on March 4, 2024 awaiting
Dwayne Betts' performance of his one
man show, *Felon: An American Washi Tale*



Our New Board Members

“We are extremely fortunate to have such amazing talent onboard to help guide us as we work to achieve our vision of a Freedom Library in every cellblock in every prison in the nation.” **Reginald Dwayne Betts**



Alex Duran is a Program Director at Galaxy Gives overseeing its Criminal Justice Reform portfolio. He previously served as a program specialist with the Open Society Foundations supporting grant-making efforts tackling mass incarceration in the United States.



Alva Greenberg is an Independent Art Curator, collector and philanthropist with a deep commitment to the arts and to the welfare and education of children.



Gara LaMarche is a Leader in Residence at the Colin Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership at City College in New York, where he also teaches and co-chairs Leadership for Democracy and Social Justice, of which he is a founder.



Steve Levitt is the William B. Ogden Distinguished Service Professor of Economics Emeritus at the University of Chicago. He directs the Becker Center on Chicago Price Theory and is the co-author of *Freakonomics*.



Scott Semple was the Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Correction, among other roles at the agency over his more than 30-year tenure, before retiring from public service.



Bryan Stevenson is the Founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), a human rights organization in Montgomery, Alabama. He led the creation of EJI’s highly acclaimed Legacy Sites.

Our Existing Board Members



Dr. Carla Hayden was the 14th Librarian of Congress. Dr. Hayden served as the first woman and the first African American to lead the national library. She is now a Senior Fellow at the Mellon Foundation.



Anthony W. Marx is President of The New York Public Library, the nation’s largest library system with 92 locations in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island.



Robert I. Usdan is a Co-Founder and Senior Advisor of Endicott Capital, a private equity firm in New York. Rob has extensive experience working with boards of directors and has served on numerous public, private, and non-profit boards.



Tracey L. Meares is the Walton Hale Hamilton Professor and a Founding Director of the Justice Collaboratory at Yale Law School. Before joining the faculty at Yale, she was a professor at the University of Chicago Law School.



Deborah Leff has served as President of the Public Welfare Foundation, Senior Advisor to the Equal Justice Initiative, Director of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, and CEO of Feeding America.



Robert Raben has 30 years of professional experience as an attorney, senior Hill staffer, and Assistant Attorney General. He served as counsel to Congressman Barney Frank and Democratic counsel for two Subcommittees of the House Judiciary Committee.

Portraiture Project

We brought acclaimed photographer Gioncarlo Valentine into nine prisons to take portraits of over 200 men and women. The experience was often moving and always joyful as having one's portrait taken is quite different from the photos most

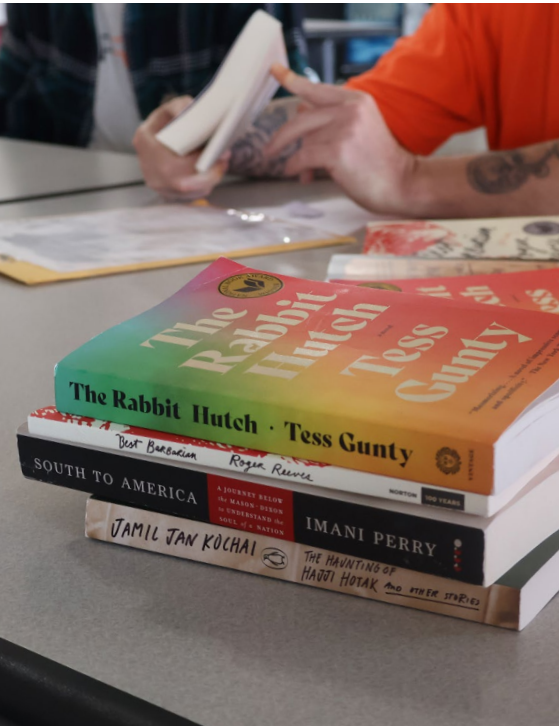
people inside are used to. Gioncarlo made the experience uplifting, helping people feel beautiful. Freedom Reads made sure everyone photographed got copies of their portraits to share with friends and family.



The Inside Literary Prize

Freedom Reads inaugurated the Inside Literary Prize in 2024 which was decided by a jury of hundreds of incarcerated readers from 12 prisons in six states — Arizona, Colorado, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, and North Dakota. The prize went to Imani Perry, author of *South to America: A Journey Below the Mason-Dixon to Understand the Soul of a Nation*.

The judges read four books selected by a selection committee that included incarcerated readers, writers, and Departments of Corrections librarians, who chose from finalists for the 2023 National Book Awards. The other finalists for the ILP were Tess Gunty’s *The Rabbit Hutch*, Jamil Jan Kochai’s *The Haunting of Hajji Hotak and Other Stories* and Roger Reeves’s *Best Barbarian*.



Book finalists for the Inside Literary Prize 2024

“Serving as an incarcerated judge for the inaugural Inside Literary Prize was a highlight of 23 years behind the wall. It gave me an opportunity to view books as much more than a reader; it taught me to peel back the layers of each work and to appreciate the story, whether I liked it or not. It was a lesson in critical thinking that helped me analyze each facet of the tale. I wasn’t just reading about a foreign walk of life. I was living it.”

Phillip Vance Smith II, 2024 Inside Literary Prize judge and 2025 Inside Literary Prize Selection Committee member, Neuse Correctional Institution, North Carolina



ILP judges voting at La Vista Correctional Facility in Colorado



ILP book discussion at Nash Correctional Institution in North Carolina

Thank You To Our Donors

We are so grateful to all our donors.
Whether you were able to donate \$10
or \$10,000, we thank you for your
generosity helping us transform prison
cellblocks through literature.

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driven organization. Your
support is our lifeblood, allowing
us to bring joy into prisons
nationwide through the power
of books and reading. Thank you
for making our work possible”

LeRoy General, Jr., Chief Development Officer,
Freedom Reads

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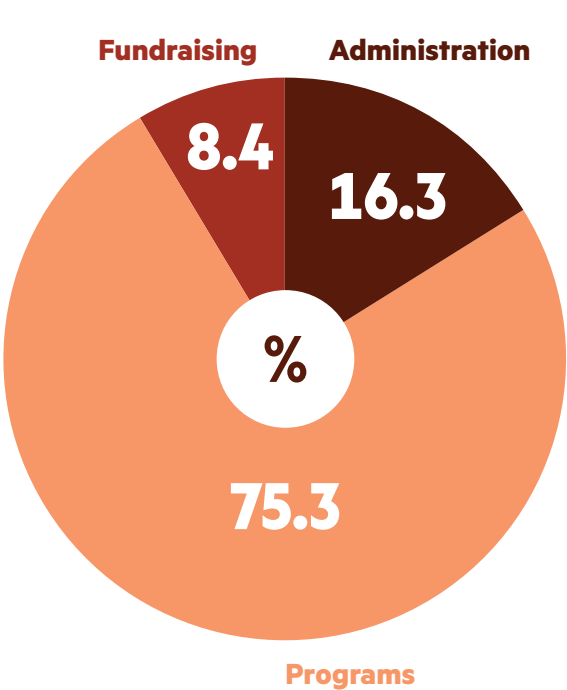
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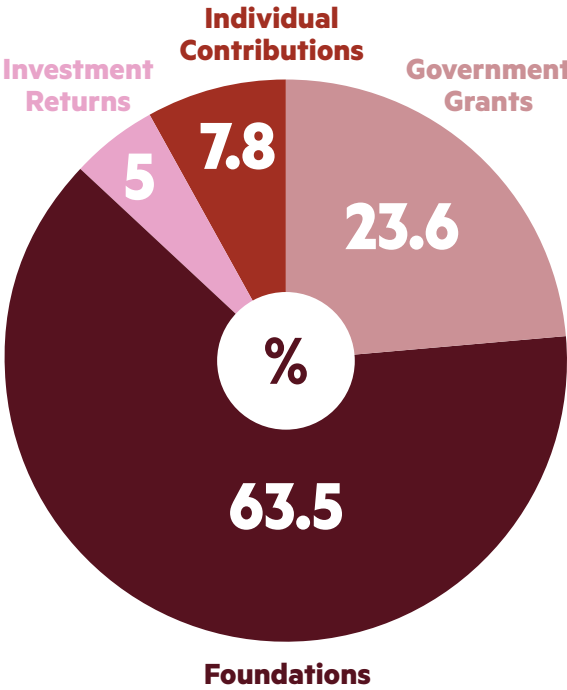
Freedom Reads is financially strong because of you, our donors. In 2024, the breadth of our funding community allowed us to sustainably grow while keeping our focus where it belongs—bringing Freedom Libraries and literary events to people in

prison. More than 75% of our funding went directly to this mission. With assets totaling \$13,192,974, we are ready to grow even further, building on this strong foundation to reach more people and transform more lives.

Expenses \$6,058,297



Revenue \$3,608,637



Total Assets \$13,192,974

freedomreads.org

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Freedom Reads