

# Manual for BFA Container Captains, Consignees, Recipients, & Volunteers



A step-by-step guide to receiving your BFA books  
& basic set-up of school libraries



\*Cover photo by Betty Press

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# Introduction

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**The mission of Books For Africa (BFA) is to end the book famine in Africa.** Books For Africa remains the largest shipper of donated text and library books to the African continent, shipping over 42 million books to all 55 countries on the African continent since 1988.

This manual is to help prepare and guide the work of BFA container captains, consignees, recipients, and community volunteers. It provides checklists and instructions to help you prepare for the processing through customs; unloading of the BFA sea container and transporting the books; and setting up systems for operating a library.

**Please share and write in this manual!** The checklist is meant to be filled out as you go along, and to be shared with everyone involved in your project. The manual should be read in full as soon as you receive it. Also, while we have written this manual with school libraries in mind, it may also be useful to other recipients of BFA books.

To develop this manual, we talked with BFA volunteers and recipients of BFA books. For the suggestions related to library set-up and operation, we worked from two excellent documents: *Setting Up and Running A Small Library* by Nicola Baird, with the Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO); and *Libraries For All: How to Start and Run a Basic Library* by Laura Wendell, with UNESCO. More information on these publications is provided in this manual. We especially want to thank Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs students Christopher Nevin, Wycliffe Waganda, and Mary-Margaret Zindren for their valuable assistance in completing this manual.

Thank you for your work to strengthen the literacy skills of African children and the economic future of African communities. **As you work with this manual, please share your ideas for how to make it better.** Email us at [bfa@BooksForAfrica.org](mailto:bfa@BooksForAfrica.org), call 651-602-9844, or send mail to Books For Africa, 253 East 4<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 200, St. Paul, MN 55101 USA.

Sincerely,



Patrick Plonski, Ph.D. Executive Director

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# Checklist for Container Captains & Other Key Volunteers

## 1. Prepare for the BFA books to arrive

- Talk with people about the books and the library. Begin recruiting volunteers.
- Set up a Library Committee.
- Decide where the library will be located.
- Set aside money for expenses.
- Seek out librarian training and connect with other libraries.
- Prepare the library space.
- Plan for storage options.
- Complete government forms.
- Gather what is needed to transport the books (i.e. truck, day laborers)

## 2. Unload the sea container & transport the boxes of books

- Bring the needed government forms to port to process the BFA container through customs.
- Assign roles and tasks to volunteers.
- Consider keeping the books inside their boxes.
- Transport the boxes to a warehouse or other large space to divide by recipient school, or transport the boxes directly to the recipient schools / communities.
- Keep the boxes safe, clean, dry, and organized.

## 3. Sort and organize the books & prepare them for use

- Keep the boxes grouped: 1) textbooks, 2) reference, 3) information, 4) fiction, and 5) books for young children.
- Group books for young children by reading level.
- Group information books by general subject.
- Put fiction books in order by author.
- Set up additional processes to organize and track books.
- Make posters and visual aids.

## 4. Set up systems for operating the library

- Identify volunteers who can help run the library.
- Protect the books from theft and damage.
- Make and follow lists of what must be done to maintain the library.
- Make sure there are resources to support the ongoing work of the library.

## 5. Encourage use of the library

- Make the library a fun, interesting, and welcoming place to be.
- Work with teachers and volunteers to make sure the library is well used.
- Teach students about the library.
- Show student projects and create displays.
- Share book recommendations.
- Read stories out loud.
- Support student efforts related to the library.
- Share your good work.



## Country-Specific Notes

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- Nigeria: If you are shipping to Nigeria, please request the Nigeria Manual
  - South Africa: If you are shipping to Nigeria, please request the South Africa Manual
  - Ethiopia: Obtain a waiver from the Ministry of Education
  - Kenya: Prepare to pay taxes, as a full waiver is difficult to obtain
  - Sierra Leone: Prepare to pay taxes, as a full waiver is difficult to obtain. Prepare to pay around \$5,000 at customs
  - Tanzania: Prepare to pay taxes, as a full waiver is difficult to obtain
  - Central African Republic: It is required that the consignee be tax-exempt
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## Key roles for volunteers

There are several critical roles related to receiving, transporting, and organizing the BFA books. Sometimes the same person will need to take on more than one role. Make sure there is one person who agrees to fill each major role, and that a back-up person for each role is also identified. Key roles for volunteers are:

**Container Captain:** The container captain raises the money needed to pay for shipping of the BFA books from the United States to Africa, and sometimes for other expenses as well (such as for transportation of the books to their destination and for library set-up). This person works directly with BFA to get the project started and often plays the role of overall project manager. Most often, the container captain either lives in Africa or in the United States. Many of the container captains who live in the United States partner with community leaders and/or NGOs in Africa. The role of container captain includes responsibility for tasks like:

- Raising money and making sure payments take place on time
- Working with other volunteers and organizations to make sure all other roles in the project are assigned and tasks are completed; and
- Sending comments back to BFA on how the project is going and how the books are being used.

**Consignee:** The consignee is the person from an organization registered with the government (and ideally with tax-exempt status) that is named on the shipping documents as having authority to sign for the BFA shipment at the port and to remove the boxes from the sea container. The consignee helps the container captain make sure the books get from the port of entry to the recipient school. Often the consignee will hire a port agent to facilitate the clearance process. The role of consignee includes responsibility for tasks like:

- Talking with schools and community leaders about the preparations necessary for storage of books and library set-up;
- Making sure government documents are completed properly;
- Finding a central storage area where recipients can come to collect their books;

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- Helping to arrange for transportation from the port to the central storage area and/or to the recipient schools;
  - Working with other volunteers and organizations to make sure all other roles in the project are assigned and tasks are completed; and
  - Sending comments back to BFA on how the project is going and how the books are being used.

**Recipient:** Recipients are the people who represent the schools and sites where the books are to be used by students. Each BFA sea container often contains books for more than one recipient.

## Set aside money for expenses

*This information is especially helpful for consignees and container recipients.*

While container captains are often focused on raising the money needed to cover the cost of sending the BFA books across the ocean, there are other important costs to think about as well. Fundraising goals should consider the decisions made by the library committee about where the library will be located (for example, the cost of building a new building, if necessary), the cost of drivers travelling to and from the port, and the cost of materials needed to get the library ready for use (such as bookshelves and supplies). When fundraising for BFA books includes several recipient schools, it may be necessary for each school to make its own arrangements for transportation and to cover the related costs.

Also, it is important for each recipient school to have a good plan for how the ongoing, day-to-day expenses of the library will be covered.

## Plan for storage options

*This information is especially helpful for consignees.*

If the preparation of your library space takes a long time, or if a bigger space is needed to hold teams of volunteers sorting and labeling the books (see Step 3), you will need to plan for a space to be available for use – a warehouse or other large, secure area.

Also, if the sea container from BFA contains books for more than one recipient, a warehouse or other large, secure, centrally-located building may be needed for storing the boxes for a short time and dividing them by recipient library. Often, the consignee arranges this space.

## Complete government forms & prepare to clear the container

*This information is especially helpful for consignees.*

Once the funds have been raised and BFA staff have provided an expected date when the sea container will likely leave the U.S., fill out all government forms needed to receive your BFA books and inquire with the port authority about the processes required to clear a container. Make sure the forms will be valid for the date when your shipment is expected to arrive. Add some extra time in case the shipment is delayed. (For example, in Nigeria, the critical form to complete is the Form M, shown at the end of this section. The Form M is only valid for six months, so care must be taken to



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clear the container in that time frame. Note that BFA must receive a Form M in order to put the container on the BFA shipping schedule.

Getting approval of government forms can be complicated. Common challenges include:

- Delays at the port related to slow government processes or port officials who are hard to work with;
- Port officials spending extra time looking at government documents or the contents of the sea container;
- Economic problems that lead to port officials going on strike or taking other actions to show their unhappiness with the government; or
- Bad weather that slows down all tasks.
- Port officials requesting a list of the individual ISBN numbers of the books in the container (Note: in Ethiopia and Nigeria, BFA has special forms that can facilitate exemption to this request)

\*Special note on the ETA of the container: the estimated arrival time provided by the freight forwarder is indeed an estimate. Containers are often delayed by several days—even weeks—past the ETA date. Make sure container recipients and volunteers are aware of this, and flexible about the arrival date of the container.

## Preparing Documents for Clearance

In getting ready to travel to port, there are important items to bring and things to think about:

- The government forms needed to receive the shipment of BFA books (brought by the consignee who is authorized to sign off on the shipment at port);
  - These include but are not limited to: Bill of Lading, Invoice, Packing List, Organizational Government Registration, and Tax Waiver
- Funds to cover port & clearance fees (and other incurred costs, like storage fees. The port authority or your clearing agent can give a cost estimate);
- Transportation vehicles, such as trucks with a covered bed, cars for smaller shipments, or open vehicles that have tarps and tie-downs to protect the boxes of books;
- The list of volunteers and contact information (including information on the temporary warehouse, if one will be used); and
- Money for fuel, food, and possibly lodging (if the port or warehouse is a long distance away, or if problems arise).

## Share your good work

You have worked hard raising money to bring books to the community. You have invested time and resources to set up a library. You have developed ways to make the library a fun and vibrant place for students to learn a love of reading. Why not tell everyone?

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The more people know about the good work you are doing, the more community support you will have to continue your efforts. Make sure to keep community partners, regional governments, and NGOs informed of your progress at least once a year.

Also, please continue to see BFA as your partner. Tell BFA staff how your library is doing and share stories and photos of how the library is being used. Let us know if you are in the U.S.—we have special events in several cities each year!

## **Thank you!**

Thank you for all you are doing to support literacy among the children of Africa. If you have suggestions for how this manual can be expanded or improved, please email us at [bfa@BooksForAfrica.org](mailto:bfa@BooksForAfrica.org), call 651-602-9844, or send mail to Books For Africa, 370 Selby Ave., Ste. 305, Saint Paul, MN 55102



# BFA PROJECT WORKSHEET FOR CONTAINER CAPTAINS & VOLUNTEERS

Fill in the most important information for each phase of your project (*for example, names, phone numbers, email, and physical addresses*)

**Raise money for BFA books & expenses** (library building, shelves, maintenance).  
Common amount of time:  
*1 year or more*

**Send book request form to BFA.** BFA gathers books, prepares them for sea container shipment.  
Common amount of time:  
*1-2 months*

**Sea container travels from USA to African port.**  
Common amount of time:  
*2-3 months*

**Sea container arrives in port.** Unload sea container, transport boxes to destination library, or to warehouse to be sorted by destination library.  
Common amount of time:  
*3 days – 3 months*

**Set up the library.** Divide books by type, shelve them, set up library operations. Communicate library rules and how the library works. Plan regular activities.  
Common timeframe:  
*3 months - ongoing*

Container Captain (*fundraiser / project manager*):

BFA contact:

Library Committee contact:

Other volunteers:

Date sea container is expected to arrive in port:

Consignee (*signs off on paperwork at port*):

Port contact:

Other volunteers (*drivers, box movers*):

Warehouse location & contact person (if necessary):

Library Committee contact:

Community and student volunteers: