



The City of



San Diego Public Library

FACT SHEET

Proposal for Moving from an Overdue Fine Model to a Materials Recovery Model

Introduction

In reviewing the effectiveness of library fines as a deterrent, studies have shown that fines are not the best way to motivate patrons to return materials. Library fines are creating barriers for the very people our library is supposed to help. Individual fines may be small, but they are the biggest burden to the people who can least afford to lose access to library materials and services.

- According to Council Policy 100-05 Library overdue fines are Category III – Fees; Fines and Penalties. Policy states user fees in Category III shall be reviewed annually relative to the reasonableness of the fee and the fiscal effect as it relates to deterrence.
- Fines are a consistent and negative theme in interactions with patrons. Often staff have uncomfortable interactions with patrons that are angry or upset over fines. These patrons leave the Library with a negative image and many times we lose not only that patron but the entire family. There have been many times when staff have heard stories of parents not allowing their children to check out books because they can't afford the fines or of children being afraid of the library because of the threat of fines. This is in direct conflict with the image we want to present and with the initiative of providing a positive user experience.
- According to a Public Libraries Online article by Julia Pyatetsky, the Vernon Public Library in the State of Illinois recently eliminated adult overdue fines. They found that books and other library materials were returned, on average, eight (8) days earlier than before the policy shift.

Socioeconomic Impact

According to the US Census the median income for San Diego is \$66,116 with 15.4 percent of the population in poverty. In the San Diego region, 21.0 percent of adults lack basic literacy skills (nces.ed.gov) and 60.0 percent of children in economically disadvantaged areas do not meet standards in English Language Arts.

- An analysis of overdue fines by zip codes shows lower socioeconomic communities also owe the most in overdue fines. Many of our residents, the people we serve, are on limited incomes or living in poverty and the impact of library fines on their ability to use library services is real.
- Accumulation of any fines from overdue materials often leads to people no longer using the Library. Once a patron reaches a \$10.00 threshold on fines, they are blocked from library services. Analysis of fines shows that the majority of patrons with blocked accounts are in underserved communities such as Barrio Logan and Valencia Park. In fact, nearly 40.0 percent of patrons with fines in these two neighborhoods have reached a blocked status.



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Fiscal Impact

The average amount of overdue fines collected every year is approximately \$675K. This accounts for 0.05 percent of General Fund revenue and 1.25 percent of the Library's operating budget. Upon analysis, it actually costs the Library and City more in staff time and resources to collect overdue fines. Between 2014 and 2016, there was an average of 399,386 overdue fines paid in person.

- If each payment took one (1) minute, this would equate to 6,656 hours. Each library location must do a daily deposit that takes a staff member approximately 30 minutes with an additional 10 minutes for a second person to verify for a total of 8,034 hours. Additionally, there is one (1) Account Clerk in the Library's business office who spends all of their time preparing daily deposit uploads and another Account Clerk who spends half of their time reconciling and preparing bank and upload corrections.
- Adding the business office staff costs of \$61,417, this brings the total to approximately \$328,783 without fringe and indirect costs as well as supplies which would bring the total to \$1,054,576.
- From a strict cost recovery perspective, the cost of collecting fines far surpasses the amount collected.

Recommended Policy Changes

The ultimate goals for the San Diego Public Library are to eliminate barriers to usage for all patrons, increase access to materials, increase circulation of materials and recover materials. In order to achieve these goals I recommend several policy changes that would fall in line with a Materials Recovery Model.

- The day after items are due after last eligible renewal (Day 22), the patron's card is blocked and they must return items or replace them in order to access library services. If patron does not return within an additional 30 days overdue (Day 52) they will receive a bill for the total amount of items still checked out. Patrons have 30 days from this time to return or replace items before being referred to the Office of the City Treasurer. At 60 days overdue (Day 82), the account will be referred to the Office of the City Treasurer. Once account is referred (Day 82), the patrons no longer have an option to return the items. They must pay the replacement cost of the materials and all other associated Treasurer fees.
- The renewal limit is 5 (five) and eligible items are automatically renewed. This will allow ample time (165 days) to return or replace an item before the account is referred to the Office of the City Treasurer, thus staying with the goal of recovering items rather than penalizing patrons.
- Replacement costs must be paid online by credit or debit card. No cash or checks will be accepted. The acceptance of cash creates the greatest financial impact in regards to staff time and supplies. By only accepting credit or debit for replacement costs, the Library will still realize the cost savings associated with the elimination of overdue fines.