

Presenters



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Yolo County Library (CA)



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Why?

2019 ALA Midwinter Meeting Resolution on Monetary Library Fines as a Form of Social Inequity

“[I]mposition of monetary library fines creates a barrier to the provision of library and information services; [ALA] urges libraries to scrutinize their practices of imposing fines on library patrons and actively move towards eliminating them; and urges governing bodies of libraries to strengthen funding support for libraries so they are not dependent on monetary fines as a necessary source of revenue.”



Fines and Fees

Fines are punishment for violating a municipal code or state law, usually for a minor infraction, such as an overdue library book or running a red light.

Fines are also referred to by government jurisdictions as overdue fines, extended use fees, and late fees.

<https://www.route-fifty.com/finance/2020/11/fines-and-fees-alternatives-report/170299/>



Start Gradually by Clearing the Path



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Let Patrons Know You Care



Welcome Mat, <https://www.photos-public-domain.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/welcome-mat.jpg>

Libraries = Community Living Rooms



["People lounging"](#) by [the queen of subtle](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC 2.0](#)

Identify Your Audience

- Staff
- Governing Board
- Patrons
- Taxpayers
- Friends and Foundations



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Tailor Your Message and Strategy

- Staff
- Governing Board
- Patrons
- Taxpayers
- Friends and Foundations



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Analyze Your Community

Household Income by Zip Code

Review patron accounts for inequities

The American Community Survey (ACS) is an ongoing annual survey run by the U.S. Census Bureau that provides information about demographic, economic, housing and social status of the U.S. civilian population.



<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data.html>

Analyze Your Community

Town of Yolo: Average household income of \$51,703
2nd lowest in Yolo County by zip code

Knights Landing: Average household income of \$59,965
4th lowest in Yolo County by zip code

West Sacramento (95605): Average household income of \$68,617
5th lowest in Yolo County by zip code

9.8% of all library **accounts with fines** are in Yolo, Knights Landing and West Sacramento

8.2% of all library accounts are in these communities

14.3% of all **blocked library accounts** are in Yolo, Knights Landing, and West Sacramento

8.2% of all library accounts are in these communities

13.9% of all **blocked adult accounts** are in Yolo, Knights Landing and West Sacramento

7.3% of all adult library accounts are in these communities



Getting Started

Strategy #1: Implement automatic renewals

To prevent fines from accruing, automatically renew materials for patrons at the end of the loan period.

Renew the item unless it has been reserved by another patron or the maximum number of renewals has been met.

If the book cannot be renewed, send an email/text/phone call with a request to return the item to prevent a late fee.



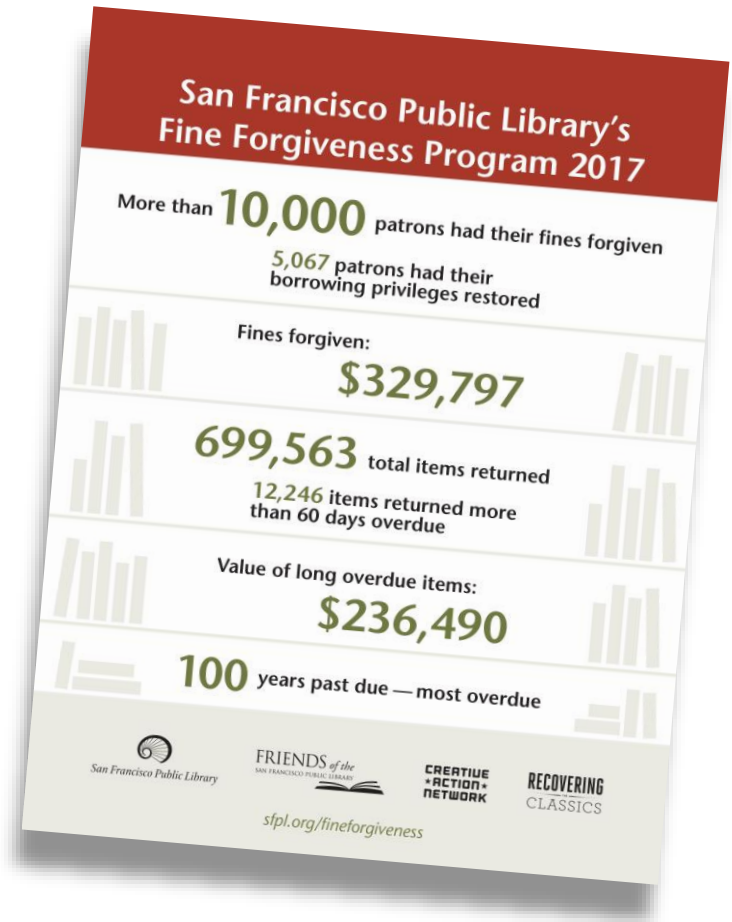
<https://www.pageafterpage.org/automatic-renewal-begins-jan-1>

Getting Started

Idea #2: Offer a fine amnesty event



<https://sfpl.org/locations/main-library>



Getting Started

Idea #3: Food for Fines Events

“In 2018, the public libraries in Fairfax County, Virginia, began a food-for-fines program, which collected 12,000 pounds of food to donate to a nonprofit food pantry. Each donated item accrued one dollar toward a maximum \$15 fine forgiveness.”

Deborah Fallows, <https://www.theatlantic.com/notes/2020/12/why-some-libraries-are-ending-fines/617253/>



"Food for Fines week by derrypubliclibrary is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Getting Started

Idea #4: Offer a Read Off Your Fines Event

“Los Angeles County Library cardholders age 21 and under can get rid of library fines by reading them away. For every hour spent reading, \$5 in fines will be removed from their account.”

<https://lacountylibrary.org/readaway/>



Eliminate Fines Gradually

Idea #5: Start by Eliminating Fines for Youth

“The decision to eliminate fines on youth material is about equity and access,” remarked Grand Rapids Public Library Director John McNaughton. “We know that 75% of Grand Rapids Public School 3rd graders are not proficient in reading. This is a community problem that we can help solve. By removing a large barrier to using the library, we can get books in homes and help to develop a daily reading habit.”

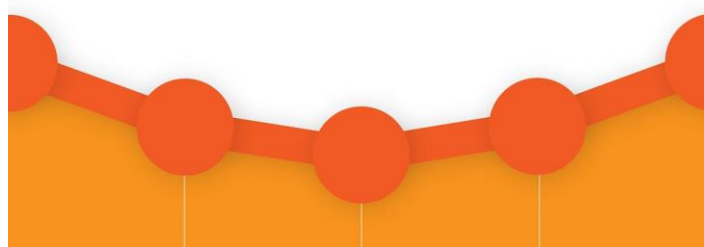


<https://www.grpl.org/kids-go-fine-free>

Monitor and Measure Results

Metrics to consider:

- Did borrowing increase? For whom?
- Did account registration/renewal increase? For whom?
- Was there an increase in the return rate of late items?
- Measure results at 3 months, 6 months, 1 year, etc.



"Graph_Analytics_Line_Yellow" by [Alan O'Rourke](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#)

Monitor and Measure Results

Yolo County Library eliminated late fines for youth in January 2019

One year later: 28% increase in borrowing on youth accounts

System-wide Circ by Materials (Location codes) Jan - June 2018							
J	34608	32999	36185	33753	32828	36046	206,419
YA	2846	3981	4395	4061	4220	5025	24,528
System-wide Circ by Materials (Location codes) Jan - June 2019							
J	39096	39226	43822	37452	38639	41046	239,281
YA	4967	4515	4861	4838	4772	5553	29,506
42% of Esparto Student Success cards have been used at least once since January 2019							



Yolo County Library



COUNTY OF YOLO

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 31, 2021

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Yolo County Library Eliminates Late Fees Starting April 1

(Woodland, CA) - In time for National Library Week which runs April 4-10, Yolo County Library is eliminating late fees for all patrons effective April 1.

Though items that are returned late will not accrue late fees, patrons are still expected to return library materials on time and will still be billed for lost or damaged items. The checkout period on items of three weeks will remain the same and reminders will still be sent via email. Patrons will still be responsible for late fees accrued before April 1, 2021, but will have the opportunity to 'Read-Off-Your-Fines' during the Yolo County Library's Summer Reading Program, which starts June 1.



Now You're Ready



"NJ - Hamilton: Grounds for Sculpture - Seward Johnson: The Retrospective - The Greeters" by wallyg is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Questions? Comments?

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"In question" by [Chop Suey Stuey](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)

Eliminating Library Fines

Improving Community Access, Equity and Usage

"It's like having to pay another credit card bill at the end of the month that I can't afford"

Peter Bromberg | Associate Director, EveryLibrary
WebJunction Webinar, June 15, 2021

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Prepare the Way

Talk to People



Workshop the Material



Photo by [Michel Grolet](https://unsplash.com/photos/NBRNK4XC1k8) on [Unsplash](https://unsplash.com/photos/NBRNK4XC1k8): <https://unsplash.com/photos/NBRNK4XC1k8>

Root in Values



Photo by [Belinda Fewings](https://unsplash.com/photos/6wAGwpsXHE0) on [Unsplash](https://unsplash.com/photos/6wAGwpsXHE0): <https://unsplash.com/photos/6wAGwpsXHE0>

Let's Talk Reality



*“It’s like having to pay another credit card bill
at the end of the month that I can’t afford.”*

Let's Talk Reality

Holt and Holt (2010) observed, “Reacting to fines and the cost of lost books, or just fearing such expenses, parents and caregivers in poor families may make a rational decision to not allow their children to get a library card or to check out books that might get lost.” The SPELL research (Zhang, 2013) confirms this assertion.

Let's talk **Money**



Photo by [Michael Longmire](https://unsplash.com/photos/lhltMGdohc8) on [Unsplash](https://unsplash.com/photos/lhltMGdohc8): <https://unsplash.com/photos/lhltMGdohc8>

Let's talk **Money**

“High Plains Library District (CO) eliminated late fines on library materials and found the financial repercussions to be ‘neutral’ because they were able to eliminate costly credit card tech. on their self-check[s]. Staff time [is] expensive, and when the amount generated by charging fines is compared to the costs associated with collecting them, it becomes clear charging fines for revenue may not make sense....”

- *Removing Barriers to Access: (AKA Spell White Paper) - Colorado State Library*

Let's talk **Money**

The Vernon Area (IL) Public Library District reports that “the cost of staff time to handle overdue fines and of processing the amounts to more than what they’re earning back from patrons.”

“The End of Overdue Fines?” | Public Libraries Online 11/5/15
<http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2015/11/the-end-of-overdue-fines>

Let's talk Money

Tena Wilson, Executive Director of the Stark County (OH) District Library reports that “it cost more money in staff time for the tracking, collecting and accounting of the overdue fines than the \$188,000 the district collects in penalties each year” and also found that the “fines tend to penalize the library's loyal customers the most.”

Let's talk **Money**

The Government Finance Officer's Association says, "A local government's revenue system needs to treat people fairly to maintain the public's trust. **GFOA's Code of Ethics requires that finance officers support equitable provision of services.** But some local governments use and rely on revenue from **imposed fees and fines that make socioeconomic and racial inequities worse.**"

Let's talk Money

“Are Your Financial Policies Ethical?”

“Fines and imposed fees should not be used as revenue raising or cost-recovery tools.

“Using them this way can worsen problems that governments services are meant to solve. For example, studies have found that local governments can end up spending more on collecting court fees than they raise in revenues.”

From: GFOA, “Imposed Fee and Fine Use by Local Governments” <https://www.gfoa.org/fees-fine-policies>

Let's talk **Customer Experience**



photo by flickr user OKNOVOKGHT <https://flic.kr/p/9hHJZJ> 2.0 Generic (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Let's talk **Staff Morale and Time**



"Angry Birds" by Denis Dervisevic <https://www.flickr.com/photos/23979265@N07/5327974794> CC BY 2.0

Concerns and Objections



Image: Shutterstock

I Object!

We have to teach Responsibility!!!

- Acknowledge that it's a value, but not our core value
- Govt agency shouldn't be teaching moral values. That's for parents/faith institutions
- Oh... And we will still hold people responsible if they don't return the materials

Items won't come back!

- Um... yeah, they will. We have the receipts.

Hold wait times will go up!

- They won't go up by much if at all
- If they do go up it's because usage is up, not because patrons aren't returning items responsibly...

The Results are In



"Thumbs up" by Flickr User Photosightfaces <https://www.flickr.com/photos/30595068@N06/22998943633> CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

The Results are In

SLC: MORE STUFF IS COMING BACK!

3% of returns are late (compared with 10% previously)

REVENUE and ROI IMPACT

Loss of less .3% of budget → Increase in circulation (+11%)

Number of Borrowers (+11%), and New card registrations (+4%)

HOLD WAIT TIMES

Negligible impact (9.6 v. 9.4 days)

Making it Happen

(or, all politics are local)



Making it Happen

Pro Tip: Speak the Three Languages of Politics

Progressive

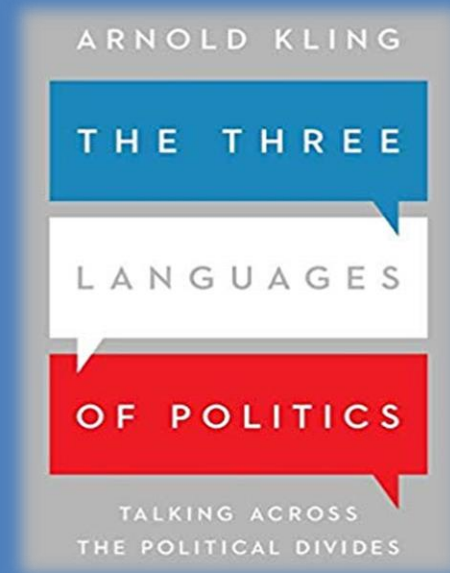
Speak to Equity and Access

Libertarian

Speak to Self-Direction and Gumption

Conservative

Speak to shared culture/heritage



Making it Happen

If Needed... Bridging the Budget Years



More information at

goo.gl/g3t7c7

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