

1) Michelle Mears <mmears@enid.org>

Feb 27

1) **When did you eliminate fines?** January 2009 removed overdue fines. Lost and damaged fines remain the same.

2) **What was your fine rate before you eliminated fines?** 10 cents per day/25 cents for videos/max 5.00 per item

3) **How much money did you raise in fines each year?** Approximately \$4000 a year from a town of 50,000

4) **If known, how much money (in staff time & postage) did it take to manage fines in your library?** Overdue notices went out and still go out on the same schedule, so no postage was saved. Staff time was hard to measure, but it was clear that nearly every transaction involved the cash register.

5) **What were the positive outcomes from eliminating fines?** More books seem to be coming back, time overdue does not seem to be any different. We recently shortened our notice schedule from 7/14/21/60 days to 3/7/14/28 days and this has made a bigger impact on returns than lack of overdue fines. The biggest impact was removing the negativity from nearly every transaction, and the impression that families would not be penalized for lateness when all items had been returned in good condition.

6) **What were the drawbacks to eliminating them?** So many people still do not know we eliminated overdue fines; it has been hard to get the word out. Some very traditional users think it is unfair, that somehow people are taking advantage of it. We always try to put a positive spin on it.

7) **Did you use any strategies to replace the lost income?** After about 6 months, we got tired of the ones who wanted to pay us anyway. Patrons who feel guilty are encouraged to deposit money in our clear plastic donation boxes we put on the service desk. We get about \$50.00 a month this way.

8) **Where these successful?** Didn't really care about lost income because it did not affect our budget. All fines were deposited into the city's general fund and not available for the library to spend anyway.

9) **Other thoughts, comments, etc. that might help us in making our decision?** Stick to your guns and promote it as a way to make sure families at all income levels have equal access to reading and learning. Changing your circulation period to 21 or more days helps even more because it decreases overdue items. We just migrated to a new ILS that has a 3-day courtesy notice before the due date and have seen another reduction in overdues. The people who check out and never return will do that anyway, whether or not there are fines. There is some research that shows overdue fines are not statistically effective in increasing returns on time or at all, you might want to be able to cite these studies. They're pretty old, but convincing.

Oh, at the time, I also used the argument about the economy in 2009 and how removing overdue fines is like lowering taxes for people. At the beginning of the recession it worked but I don't know about 2013.

Hope this helps!

Michelle

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Michelle R. Mears, MLS, PhD

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2) Stephen Nichols <senichols@sacoriver.net>  
Feb 27

to me  
Jay,

Our library director has recently left us, but I can tell you that eliminating fines for overdue books is one of the best moves we have made in recent years. Demanding fines is definitely not good public relations. When we dropped the requirement for fines about five years ago, our income from the "guilt jar" that replaced the fines shot up. We now receive about \$1,000 each year from the "guilt jar" and surprisingly to me, patrons feel good about dropping a buck or two in the jar. There are not many win/win moves in this world, but eliminating the overdue fine is one of them.

Steve Nichols

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3) Davis, Kevin  
Feb 27

to me, Rachel  
Hey there -

One potential complication is that if TML eliminates fines, that may prove problematic for any "open access" agreement between TML and SPPL.

With over \$20,000 in revenue from fines alone, annually, the city will surely not support my doing away with fines here at SPPL. If we were to enter into a mutual access agreement - and TML had no fines - I fear we would see an imbalance in policies and a loss in revenue (and traffic) here, as well as an uptick in 'scofflaw' users at your end.

Just a thought,  
Kevin

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4) From: Molly Larson <mlarson@rockport.lib.me.us>  
Date: Wed, Feb 27, 2013 at 10:15 AM

We have been casually working toward this for years. We have been waiving fines for anything under a dollar. We maxed our fines to celebrate our 99th birthday to 99 cents and as a result we have found that people tend to put more in the donation jar as a result. I realize this sounds anecdotal. I will get more solid numbers for you but I find it creates a much nicer atmosphere and promotes goodwill. We haven't done away with them completely but we are definitely moving away from that punitive concept.

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5) From: Pamela - work <pdunning@wiscasset.lib.me.us>  
Date: Wed, Feb 27, 2013 at 2:02 PM

Good afternoon. I have been at Wiscasset Public Library for 21 years. The Library has charged no overdue fees at any point during that time. Patrons are very happy to not be charged a "fine." The library does have a Donation and Guilt Jar on the front desk and in the Children's Room. Many patrons generously donate to the jar. WPL has over 5,500 patrons registered. The jars net approximately \$1,000 to \$1,200 a year. There are added benefits in that more items are returned because there is no fee attached and patrons feel more friendly toward the library. The system works for us.

Pamela Dunning, Director

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6) From: Pamela Turner <pturner@baxter-memorial.lib.me.us>  
Date: Wed, Feb 27, 2013 at 2:31 PM

Quite frankly - one of the best things we ever did in terms of customer service was to eliminate fines when we joined Minerva about 10 years ago.

I don't remember the fine rate at the time nor the amount we raised through fines. I do remember they took a good deal of staff time to administer and it was not a friendly approach to customer service.

I do know that we bring in a decent amount of money through our conscience jar. Some patrons feel more guilty than others.

For example - just last week, a patron had 3 books that were each 3 days overdue. With fines, it may have cost him a dollar or so. He put \$5 in the conscience jar. Something like this happens more often than you might expect.

We take the stand that fines aren't friendly (being friendly encourages support for the library) and don't deter people from keeping books longer than allowed.

We do stop a person's card if they have items overdue more than time allowed by our Minerva settings. We find this is often a good deterrent -- especially when the patron cannot reserve or download books because his/her card has been stopped.

We also have an ordinance in which we can ask the police to intervene if items are long overdue. We use this when/if the patron has interlibrary loan items long overdue or if the items were acquired via ILL. I try to call the patron before going to the police. That usually works.

Pam Turner  
Baxter Memorial Library

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7) From: Tina Branco <tbranco24@gmail.com>  
Date: Wed, Feb 27, 2013 at 3:22 PM

Here in all-volunteer South Thomaston we also eliminated fines about 3 years ago. Before that we charged .05/day (but only for days that we were open -3 days/week) The amount of time spent calculating and collecting nickels and dimes was deemed very counter-productive and the all volunteer staff often just said – oh, forget it leaving me to clean up the mess in the automated circ system.

We put out a “guilt jar” (one of our patrons wanted to know when the Quilt was going to be finished and were we going to display it?) and now use that to collect not only overdue money but also "contributions" to pay for printing and copying. The town does not want to have to go through the accounting nightmare so they graciously let us keep the money for incidentals. Last year the monies collected paid for our ILL postage (we're not on the van service.)

It's been a positive experience for both staff and patrons, and I can point out we have the same experience of most people paying way more than we'd ever charge in fines/printing.

Tina Branco,  
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8) From: <jbenedict@moore.lib.me.us>  
Date: Wed, Feb 27, 2013 at 5:42 PM

Hi,

We're a small library so no huge dollar amounts have ever been involved but I stopped charging fines several years ago and just keep a donation jar on the desk. I tell patrons if they ask that we don't charge fines but they can make a donation if they want to - most give more than the fine would have been. Having the jar out also leads to lots of

donations from people who don't have overdue books! I keep a jar of candy right beside the donation jar and many patrons will put money in before they take a piece of candy. I don't keep exact track but I'm sure it must bring it \$500 a year or more.

Jeanne

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Jeanne Benedict  
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9) From: Audrey Snowden <asnowden@orrington.lib.me.us>  
Date: Thu, Feb 28, 2013 at 2:26 PM

*Responses interspersed!*

Audrey Snowden, Librarian  
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**Our Board of Trustees is considering a change of policy to eliminate the use of overdue fines here at TML. We are a municipal department of the Town of Cape Elizabeth (pop. 9,025,). We are interested in the experience of any other public libraries that have eliminated the use of overdue fines to help us in our decision making process.**

**1) When did you eliminate fines?**

*Last summer.*

**2) What was your fine rate before you eliminated fines?**

*5 cents a day, per item.*

**3) How much money did you raise in fines each year?**

*Who knows? We collected it in the drawer at the front desk and used it to pay postage on outgoing packages. We never raised enough to deposit, or anything.*

**4) If known, how much money (in staff time & postage) did it take to manage fines in your library?**

*We have not done overdue notices in years, so no postage. When checking out books, we would tell patrons, "Do you know you have book x out, and it's overdue? Would you like to renew that so it doesn't accrue any further fines?" And when checking books back in, we informed patrons what they owed right then. Orrington is like a modern-day Mayberry and is thus a special case, but really, our people are for the most part very conscientious.*

**5) What were the positive outcomes from eliminating fines?**

*SO much more goodwill. Plus, people seem more open to trying things they might not have otherwise tried; we have not noticed any great increase in titles not being returned. Also, the library used to have two fine-free months per year, and people used to hold on to their overdue books until the fine-free months, which was a pain.*

**6) What were the drawbacks to eliminating them?**

*We have not found a one. Not having fines is much more in line with our philosophy, and we receive all of our funding from the town anyway, so charging taxpayers for using their own resources seemed wrong. Even if the books are late, they're being used by the people who paid for them!*

**7) Did you use any strategies to replace the lost income?**

*We have a guilt jar. Our completely unscientific hunch is that we are making as much as if not more than what we made through fines.*

**8) Where these successful?**

*Yes. Even if we aren't making the same amount in fines, we are getting more people in and circulating more items as people realize the library police have been retired. The risk of not getting items back ever is pretty small considering the boost this library has seen in use.*

**9) Other thoughts, comments, etc. that might help us in making our decision?**

*Fines are plain old bad PR. We don't need bad PR in this day and age. We need to be the most user-friendly place possible. If we were relying on overdue fines for library operations we would be in a sad state. Granted, Orrington is a small community with a small library, so it is eminently reasonable to keep tabs on overdues without too much effort. For us, getting rid of fines was a great move.*

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10) Lisa Richland <lisarichland@gmail.com>

Feb 28

to me

Dear Jay-

We are a small library on eastern Long Island. We eliminated fines about four years ago and it has been terrific. The biggest benefit has been the lack of conflicts about money between staff and borrowers. We do not loan anything to folks who have overdue unrenowable items such as DVDs and video games, or items which have holds pending. This makes sense to people and isn't perceived as punitive. When we eliminated fines, we put a donations box on the circ desk which says: no fines, donations. We have found that the donations are often more than the fine would have been and we make certain that folks know it is absolutely voluntary. of course we do require payment for lost or damaged items. We send email notices in advance of due dates and overdue notices and then bills. The bills are for replacement cost and it is made clear that returning the item voids the bill.

Please feel free to ask any questions you may have about this. It is one of the best things we've done here.

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