



Eliminating Late Fines: Improving access to your library

Anywhere Public Library seeks to eliminate late fines as a way to make the library more accessible to everyone in Our Town. When we stopped collecting late fines on children’s materials one year ago, there was no delay in returns or drop in our overall revenue, and the number of borrowers increased 10%. We talked with staff at libraries that had eliminated fines recently on all materials and they’ve seen only positive effects, like increases in materials returned, library card holders, and materials borrowed.

Fines don’t bring in revenue.

Overdue fines are cost neutral:

+1%

Only 1% (\$1,234) of the library’s operating budget comes from fines. Plus, money collected from fines and replacement fees has decreased steadily for the last 10 years.

-1%

Collecting fines is expensive. The costs for staff time, credit card fees, mailing notices, and collection agencies equals the \$1,234 brought in from fines each year.

Fines don’t bring back materials faster.

Libraries that have eliminated overdue fines get materials back at the same rate (or even faster). Your Library will continue to send overdue notices and charge borrowers for items not returned.

5%

Salt Lake Public Library’s late-return rate dropped from 9% to 4% following fine elimination.

42%

Vernon (Ill) Public Library’s average number of days an item is overdue fell 42% after ditching fines.

Fines DO have a negative impact.

19%

19% of cardholders (51,132) at Anywhere Public Library cannot check out materials because they have too many fines/fees.

“My family loves to go to the library but I hesitate to check out books for my kids because we can’t afford overdue fines and can’t get to the library very often.” –Joe Community

34%

34% of cards are blocked in North Neighborhood. Percentages are higher in economically challenged neighborhoods.

“The library should stop charging late fines; they drive the people who need libraries the most away due to shame or inability to pay.” – Jane Neighbor

Dropping fines will increase use.

8%

8% ↑ in juvenile borrowers at High Plains Library District (CO)

10%

10% ↑ in check-outs and borrowers in Salt Lake City

40%

40% more youth borrowers in San Rafael (CA)