

😊 FINE FREE 😞

Contrasting Opinions

-Michael Richter Director Bath County Memorial Library

FINES – WHAT FINES

What is a fine and what is a fee?

- Bath County Memorial Library was one of the first “fine free” Libraries in Kentucky.
- The Library ended most major fine recoupment prior to 2014.
- This transition in policy was a board approved measure in 2012 (est.) but didn’t fully take effect until later due to existing fines.
- Existing fines and fees are still on the Library records with more than \$55,000 owed to the Library.
- Since 2014 no fines have been levied.
- In 2018 the Library levied a fee for mail notification of overdue items.

PRO VS CON FINE FREE OR FINE WITH ME

PRO

- Fines are a deterrent to Library use.
- Fines are economically targeted to disadvantaged people.
- Fines don't force people to read any faster.
- Fines limit the capability of children to access literacy resources

CON

- No fines means... no consequences?
- Fines are a tool to encourage responsibility
- Fines help to motivate timely return of materials
- Fines don't cause people to fail to read

PERSONAL OBSERVATION

CIRCULATION SUPERVISOR AT ERLANGER – KENTON COUNTY

- Fines didn't deter theft
- Staff were constantly feeling aggrieved at fine collection issues
- Dealing with fine avoidance strategies took a long time.
- Lots of cost to get limited return
- Checkout losses not deterred
- Locked out due to fine issues

LIBRARY DIRECTOR – BATH COUNTY

- Theft happens – or Don't stuff that down your pants!
- Staff don't spend time collecting money they spend time with patrons
- Dealing with lost item costs is easier than overdue materials
- Checkout losses are not significantly higher
- Lost items can be returned

BUT EVERYONE ELSE IS DOING IT!

BEFORE 2005

- Fines were common, and expected for using library services.
- Overdue fines and collections could end up on credit reports and even be used for prosecution from local municipalities.
- Failure to return materials was used for mediation, patrons who didn't show up could have a warrant issued on them causing them to be arrested.

SINCE 2015

- Fine Free Libraries have been gaining ground across the country
- Major Libraries are going fine free setting the tone. Chicago 2019, Seattle 2020, Los Angeles Public 2020, San Francisco 2019, and Denver 2019.
- The Urban Library Council advocated for it early and it was a Ted talk

BENEFITS

Does it really work?

- Yes it does, most libraries see substantial increases in lost item recovery after publicizing fine free changes.
- Most libraries see large increases in regular use.
- Staff are happier about dealing with patrons and not overdue charges.
- Cost of collections recovery is lowered.
- Improves the public perception of the library
- Reduces inequality

PROBLEMS

Fine Free

- There is no statistical link to show that fine free libraries significantly increase patron use after a brief surge.
- Statistically there is no data to support the idea that communities will see a significant literacy change from this library policy decision.
- Libraries do not see long term extraordinary gains.
- This policy may alienate “good” users who see it as a reward for people who don’t turn in their items on time.
- Overdue items will occasionally increase – causing some shortages in popular items, though this is not significantly different than prior to the policy change.

PERSONAL OBSERVATION

Anecdotally going fine free is a good decision.

Statistically it is a wash whether it makes a long term difference or not.

Tying the decision to literacy issues isn't really proven.

Communities with strong Library histories will have the best luck.

- After nearly twenty years in Library land the instinct to go fine free seems great. However after having worked in urban, rural, and suburban libraries my expectation belief is that it makes sense for the library to go fine free but it isn't going to be much more than an evolution in the history of Library services. The real issue in going fine free is the concern about personal responsibility, and good stewardship of public funds. These two topics determine whether fine free practices are right for your community.
- If you have a community with a high personal responsibility quotient, and a high proportion of your users are home owners and not transient then going fine free makes a great deal of sense. If you have a highly transient community, you will need to take that into effect to decide whether it is right for you.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR COMMUNITY?

DECIDE IF FINE FREE IS RIGHT FOR YOU

- Do you have a highly transient community?
- What is the cost for having fines – in dollars, and in staff time.
- What is your rate of return when comparing fines with the cost.
- Do you have strong groups in the community dedicated to inequality awareness?
- Are staff disgruntled about fines?
- Does management waive fines for repeat offenders?
- What number of people would going fine free actually help?
- What is your schools policy on lost items at the library?
- Who would this policy most help?
- What is the opinion of local government officials?

WHERE DID YOU GET THAT

From Forbes, American Libraries Magazine,
The Hill, NPR, Library Journal, WLIX, Huffpost..
Yeah I am a Librarian and I can reference that.

- <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rachelkramerbussel/2020/12/30/why-many-libraries-are-eliminating-late-fees/#20b0998a7696>
- <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/imagining-fine-free-future/>
- <https://thehill.com/changing-america/enrichment/arts-culture/476997-more-libraries-are-going-fine-free-heres-why>
- <https://www.npr.org/2019/11/30/781374759/we-wanted-our-patrons-back-public-libraries-scrap-late-fines-to-alleviate-inequi>
- <https://www.libraryjournal.com/?detailStory=doing-fines-fines-fees>

WARRANTS?

- <https://www.wilx.com/content/news/Charlotte-woman-gets-warrant-for-late-library-books-564246981.html>
- https://www.huffpost.com/entry/johnathan-masters-arrested_n_6859452?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xILmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAFriS_PmGbbIWHMhBvGh16zUZd7jN8VAp2L49KXLjN7WYIUf0DM1pqE_HXVDya9gz7CB6GTqnxOh_XCwpAZI6PaZCcefPEq6GZa-XIN5kDTaG2x6l4BZQpFR7p2xGVr9sXBd_sUjpc5NyBnGgPFSDOWIjdOxMZ3I-d5Xao7EFkaB

CYNTHIANA-HARRISON COUNTY PUBLIC
LIBRARY

HOW TO MAKE
YOUR LIBRARY
FINE FREE

Kinzie Gaunce, Director



Questions to ask before you begin:

How much of your annual income comes from fines?

Do you need that income to operate?

How many of your patrons have blocked cards
because of overdue fines?

What is the breakdown of those cards? Adult vs
Minor

Decide how you want to approach becoming a fine free library.



ALL AT ONCE

Go totally fine free, every collection, at one time

SMALL COLLECTIONS

Begin to eliminate fines based on collection type. For example, Easy Picture Books, or Audio Books

CARD TYPES

Remove fines from Youth/ Children's cards or Adult cards

How to Approach Your Board



NATIONAL TREND

<https://www.urbanlibraries.org/member-resources/fine-free-map>

LOCAL LIBRARY POLICIES

Look at the fine policies of the libraries around yours. Are they fine free? If they are, it helps to pave the way for you!

INEQUITIES THE FINES CREATE

<https://www.npr.org/2019/11/30/781374759/we-wanted-our-patrons-back-public-libraries-scrap-late-fines-to-alleviate-inequi>

<https://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/472476-select-public-libraries-drop-late-fee-policies-citing-social>

Benefits



SHOW THEM THE IMPACT OF PARTIAL OR TOTAL FINE FREEDOM WILL HAVE ON YOUR BUDGET

SHOW THEM HOW MANY CARDHOLDERS WILL GAIN ACCESS TO LIBRARY SERVICES

GREAT PUBLICITY FOR YOUR LIBRARY