

DOWNTOWN LIBRARY
610 QUINCY ST. | RAPID CITY, SD 57701 | 605.394.4171

RAPIDCITYLIBRARY.ORG



Date: December 13, 2021
To: RCPL Board of Trustees
From: Emily Tupa, Policy Committee Chair
Re: Fines recommendation

Date: December 7, 2021
To: Emily Tupa, Policy Committee Chair
From: Terri Davis, Director
Re: Fines recommendation

Motions:

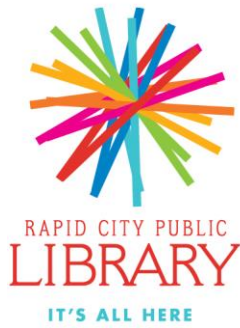
- 1) Move to eliminate charging of overdue fines, to be effective January 1, 2022.
- 2) Move to waive \$35.75 in out-of-county fees from 2016, 2018, 2019, and 2021.
- 3) Move to waive \$365.75 in reversed charges from 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019.
- 4) Move to waive all remaining overdue charges from 2015-current, amounting to approximately \$87,440

Background: Overdue fines have long been imposed by libraries, originally to motivate library users to behave responsibly. However, studies have shown that fines do not serve that purpose; in fact, they may impose barriers to library service, especially for children and those with fixed or low incomes.

Research and experience from libraries that have gone fine-free show that fines do not affect how quickly people return materials; return rates are the same before and after libraries go fine-free. Some libraries have a better return rate on materials after going fine-free because: 1) people may be ashamed to return late items; or 2) some people can't afford to pay the fine, so why bother to return the materials at all?

In addition, tracking and collecting on overdue fines can cost more than the fines bring in; the Saint Paul public library system found that they expended \$250,000 to collect \$215,000 in fines. Other library actions regarding fines include:

- The New York Public Library eliminated fines and cleared outstanding fines as of October 5, 2021
 - Some replacement fees still apply
- The High Plains Library District (CO) removed fines except for DVDs. They found that 95% of materials were returned within one week of the due date
- St. Paul Public Library, Gleason Public Library (IL), and San Rafael Public Library (CA) libraries reported hold times (a good measure of late returns) were virtually unchanged after eliminating fines
 - Milton Public Library (VT) saw its on-time return rates actually increase after fine elimination
- The Salt Lake City Library saw the late return rate decrease from 9% with overdue fines in place to 4% after eliminating fines
 - There were longer hold times after going fine-free, but it was due to more people checking out items; their unique borrowers increased by more than 10% during that same time



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For our library, the amount collected for fines amounts to a very small amount of the total library budget:

Year	Total Library Budgets	Total Fines Collected	Fines as % of Budget
2021	\$3,589,626	\$9,961*	0.2%
2020	\$3,223,966	\$8,452	0.2%
2019	\$3,435,726	\$19,660**	0.6%
2018	\$3,435,192	\$29,945	0.9%

*Through October 31, 2021

** Fines on children's materials eliminated May 2019

Lost materials charges differ from overdue fines. Lost materials reflect an actual revenue impact, as those materials need to be replaced in some fashion. The amounts of outstanding overdue fines and lost materials are shown below. Continued use of the collection agency is recommended to recover costs for lost items; since October 2018, that service has resulted in a cumulative recovery of \$65,000, with an ROI of 5.48 to 1.

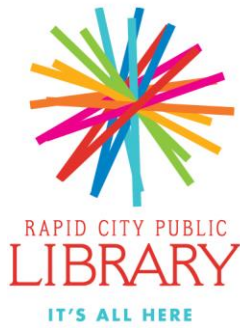
Year	Overdue Fines	Number of Items	Average Fine per Item	Lost and Damaged Materials	Number of Items Involved	Average Cost per Lost Item
2015 and earlier	\$584	162	\$3.60	\$290,231	15,410	\$18.83
2016	\$14,820	4,889	\$3.03	\$48,850	2,265	\$21.57
2017	\$16,206	5,392	\$3.01	\$39,819	1,821	\$21.87
2018	\$22,008	7,499	\$2.93	\$48,926	2,067	\$23.67
2019	\$16,052	6,007	\$2.67	\$52,169	2,324	\$22.45
2020	\$8,854	2,745	\$3.23	\$36,743	1,679	\$21.88
2021*	\$8,915	3,291	\$2.71	\$41,463	1,849	\$22.42
Total	\$87,439	29,985	\$2.92	\$558,201	27,415	\$20.36

* To October 31, 2021

12,106 individual library users are involved in the above listed fines and lost materials charges. Of these, 1,740 are youth accounts (ages 0-17), and 10,290 are adult accounts. Ages are not recorded for remaining 76 accounts.

The out of county fees requested for waiving are apparently a clerical error in the patron database; we do not bill for out of county fees, therefore these charges should not have appeared.

The reversed charges are also likely due to system errors over time; the reversal was likely due to lost materials that had been paid for and returned, but the reimbursement was incorrectly recorded in the system.



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Related articles:

- *Why some libraries are ending fines.* Deborah Fallows. The Atlantic, December 4, 2020.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/notes/2020/12/why-some-libraries-are-ending-fines/617253/>
- *Lightfoot's Decision to Eliminate Library Fines Triggers 240% Increase in Book Returns.* Chicago Sun Times, October 30, 2019.
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/news/2019/10/30/20940677/chicago-public-library-no-fines-book-returns-increase-lightfoot>
- *The Dayton Library Ended Late Fees: Here's What Happened.* Dayton Daily News, July 6, 2018.
<https://www.daytondailynews.com/news/local/the-dayton-library-ended-late-fees-here-what-happened/ZGaTCrUqhZQsbaH9QxTbiJ/>
- *Libraries are Increasing Usage by Going Fine Free.* Infoday.com, August 13, 2019.
<http://newsbreaks.infoday.com/NewsBreaks/Libraries-Are-Increasing-Usage-by-Going-FineFree-133407.asp>
- *Are Fines Effective?* Bowling Green State University research, 2017.
<https://libguides.bgsu.edu/fine-research>
- *Fine Free Policies.* Library Connection Inc, March 22, 2019.
https://www.libraryconnection.info/documents/fine_free_policies_report_SC-2019-03-22.pdf
- *Fine-free libraries map.* Urban Libraries Council, 2021.
<https://www.urbanlibraries.org/resources/fine-free-map>
- *How eliminating library fees advances racial equity.* Urban Libraries Council. April 24, 2020.
<https://www.urbanlibraries.org/blog/how-eliminating-library-fees-advances-racial-equity>
- *Why many libraries are eliminating late fees.* Forbes, December 30, 2019.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/rachelkramerbussel/2020/12/30/why-many-libraries-are-eliminating-late-fees/?sh=679221f76966>