

FINE!

Outline of Libchat presentation for Ohio Library Council Convention, 9/28/16
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- What are fines for?
 - Revenue
 - Return materials/accountability
- Do fines work as a revenue source?
 - At most libraries fines account for less than 2% of revenue.
 - May be less than that if looking only at overdue fines, not charges for lost or damaged materials etc.
 - Patron comments “I don’t mind paying fines, helps keep library going” or “I’ve probably paid for a wing of the library with my fines” – Patrons have mistaken idea that library can be funded 10 cents at a time.
 - Resources spent collecting fines: infrastructure to collect fines, staff time handling transactions, management/admin time processing deposits and reconciling bank statements, time spent arguing with patrons about whether or not fine should have been assessed, etc.
 - Staff making \$15 per hour cost \$0.25 per minute. Is the time they spend collecting fines even made up for in the amount collected?
 - Patron ill-will over disputed fines: a patron upset about what they see as an unfair fine will spread word to multiple friends about negative experience. Enough negative experiences and an argument over a few dollars in fines loses the levy campaign.
 - Fines are regressive: those in most need of library services are most likely to have circumstances resulting in late materials, but are least likely to be able to pay fines
- Do fines work to get materials returned on time?
 - Why do patrons return materials late?
 - “I forgot”
 - Something happened
 - Still using items

- Why would someone forget materials are due?
 - Busy schedules, family needs, many items checked out, etc.
 - These are often our best patrons: why are we nickel-and-diming them?
 - Presence of fines did not work to help them remember due date.
- What might happen to prevent someone from returning materials on time?
 - Illness or injury, car broke down, kicked out of apartment, can't afford gas or bus fare, etc.
 - These are all outside of the person's control. Fines would not make them return or renew the materials. But more importantly, why are we punishing them for something outside of their control?
- What would encourage a person still using an item to return it on time?
 - Patron might be willing to pay "extended use fee," and so be disinclined to return item even if fined for overdue.
 - Again, these are our best patrons: why are we nickel-and-diming them?
 - Consider automatic renewals: if no one is waiting, automatically renew item for patron.
 - Rather than charging by the day, restrict checkouts if overdue materials are not returned or renewed.
- With no fines, how do we hold patrons accountable for returning materials?
 - Continue to send notices: advance due, 1-2 days overdue, 1-2 weeks overdue, etc.
 - If materials not returned or renewed, a few days after the due day prevent checkouts until materials are renewed or returned. Losing access to additional materials is greater incentive than paying 10 cents a day.
 - If after multiple attempts to get materials back they are still out, send patron a bill. If materials returned, no charge (or possibly processing fee if using collection service like Unique Management). If materials are lost, they have to be paid for.