

1. Responsibility exists as an inherent part of the borrowing process with or without the existence of late fines.
2. Responsibility is a hard thing to measure and may not be aided with fines.
3. Pursuing the value of responsibility through the use of late fines negatively impacts other fundamental library values.
4. Late fines block access, and not always equitably.

**Eliminating late fines does *not* eliminate responsibility inherent with borrowing from the library.**

- Library items are still provided as a loan, not a gift. They are borrowed on the condition that they will be returned in good condition and on time.
- Although fines may disappear, fees will not.
  - Automatic billing for lost items would still continue on a regular interval. Items returned with damage will also be billed.
  - Accounts with replacement costs of \$25 or more will be submitted to collection after 45 days. LPL submits about 700 accounts to collection per year. Approximately 300 accounts in collection are paid off per year.
  - Until payment is received or lost items returned, patrons with lost and damaged materials will be blocked from further borrowing.
  - Of the roughly \$1,098,489.24 fees in the system, \$803,938.73 are for lost, damaged, and collection fees. These fees will remain in place with the elimination of late fees.
- If we eliminate fines, we propose temporarily blocking access on accounts with items two weeks late. This block will be lifted with the return of the item. This measure is actually more severe than waiting until a patron has reached \$10 in fines, as no single item will ever reach that high a fine.
- By eliminating fines but keeping fees, we will maintain the motivation for returning items, i.e. continued borrowing privileges. At the same time, we will be eliminating what amounts to a punishment after the fact that keeps some patrons from ever returning.

## **Responsibility is difficult or impossible to **measure** as an outcome.**

We can't tell if fines actually have an impact on responsibility.

- LPL Strategic Plan: “The Library will establish a process for outcomes evaluation.”<sup>20</sup> How do we count how much responsibility we are creating with fines?
- Of the roughly 53,000 patrons that have been active in the system since 2017, about 32,000 have had some sort of fee charged to their account, and about 25,000 have had an overdue fee. Do we count that as a success or a failure?
- If late fines encourage responsibility, why do overdue rates tend to be the same with or without them?
  - The only objective measure we can place on responsibility in this context says fines make no difference.

## **Responsibility is **not** encouraged with late fines, at least not the kind of responsibility we are interested in fostering.**

- The consequence faced for not returning your items on time should not be a financial penalty but the knowledge that you deprived another person of a community resource.
- Charging patrons late fees lets them pay their way out of responsibility. Patrons at LPL routinely rationalize their fine payments as “their donation to the library.” The message we send is: sure, they kept the item past the due date, but they paid for the privilege, so it is okay. Late fees become extended use fees.
- From LONG OVERDUE: Eliminating Fines on Overdue Materials to Improve Access to San Francisco Public Library, “Missing deadlines, misplacing items, having to change plans, and reprioritize —these are universal human realities. Overdue fines do not turn irresponsible patrons into responsible ones, they only distinguish between patrons who can afford to pay for the common mistake of late returns and those who cannot.”<sup>21</sup>