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## [PINES-Directors] Fwd: Fines Free circ modifier proposal

1 message

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**Sandy Hester** <shester@cprl.org>

Tue, Sep 15, 2020 at 4:57 PM

To: PINES Directors <PINES-Directors@georgialibraries.org>

Hi All,

In advance of the PINES Executive Committee meeting tomorrow, I wanted to share with the group some great questions asked by Geri Mullis (with her permission, of course). Warning: the answers are a bit long so thanks in advance for your patience in reading through to the end.

Hi Geri,

Thanks so very much for reaching out with your questions and sharing your thoughts...

I'll address the specific questions you posed but I'm happy to provide more information. Our draft proposal was almost 4 pages long so we definitely have more to share.

1. What are you going to do after 2 years if PINES votes not to go fines free? While we haven't fully fleshed that plan out yet, our initial thoughts are to request permission from our local boards to do "clean slate" initiatives on a regular basis (quarterly, maybe?). Because we don't want to add burden to our frontline staff, we will likely do this using reports and devoted time from the administrative side, or maybe approach the PINES team about doing something similar to the batch forgive project done at Okefenokee a little while ago. So, in short, if we find that our communities have benefitted during the 2 years (as measured with increased usage and anecdotes), we will likely seek an alternative solution to minimize the impact of fines on our patrons. Yes, we can do it that way now, but having the process automated (with little staff intervention) would be much easier.
2. With you being the only PINES library doing this will it be enough data? Do you want more libraries to pilot with you? We plan to track data on the local level, with 7 locations in 6 counties. Our county populations range from around 9,000 to around 40,000 and the local per capita funding is quite varied as well. While that doesn't mirror all systems, we are hoping it will at least give more data points than we have now. We would welcome other PINES libraries to join us! We would be happy to share our plans for making the case to our local government agencies and shifting our budget away from counting fines as a true revenue source (we want to treat that line item similarly to the way we treat donations). Certainly having more hard data will help everyone in making these decisions for their own communities.
3. Have you or will you ask other PINES libraries to join in with you for the pilot? We have not yet asked anyone else to join but, again, would gladly welcome a partner. Our system is the middle of a system-wide renovation of sorts and this proposal is an outgrowth of that process. We fully realize that others might not be ready for this drastic shift in thinking for any number of valid reasons. However, we strongly feel that the time is right for us.
4. Have you asked the PINES libraries that are against going fines free what would it take to change? We have made notes of the concerns expressed in various meetings where this topic was discussed but we haven't specifically asked that question of others. Interestingly, that is nearly the exact question posed to the CPRLS administrative team that began this whole process for us. Once we started looking at the actual numbers, we realized that shifting to fines free wasn't as out-of-reach as we initially thought. Since the Annual Report is asking for a more detailed breakdown of other local revenue this year, we are hoping that Whitney will be able to provide us with more hard data on the financial impact across the state. As far as the philosophical debate, that mountain will be much harder to scale. However, I feel that we have an intensely strong group of library leaders in Georgia who truly have a passion for serving their communities. Recent times have seen more calm, open, rational discussions than in the last 15 years, at least by my observations. I look forward to continuing this discourse with my colleagues and believe that we can pull on our vast collective knowledge and wisdom to create a solution that works for all.

As a final food-for-thought, through our system-wide renovation, we are striving to repair what is broken, foster what is working, and spark innovative ideas for the future. The process hasn't been easy because change can be scary. However, we are already seeing positive results for our patrons and all levels of staff. With our infrastructure renovation fully underway to ensure our libraries are ready to provide quality service, we are ready to begin the next phase, customer acquisition. Going fines free is a critical next step to recover lost users, invite new ones, and rejuvenate sagging usage numbers (AKA: evidence that our resources are getting to our communities). We know the process won't be easy but we need to take that first leap and shift from discussion to action. Samuel Johnson said it best, "Nothing will ever be attempted if all possible objections must first be overcome."

I look forward to sharing more with you and the group. Please feel free to ask any questions and share any comments or concerns. Thank you for your time in reading and considering my responses (probably too long as I have a tendency to ramble).

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After that long-winded first response, I realized that I didn't address your concern about degrading the PINES user service model. The concerns over the shared user experience are certainly valid. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, a disparity already exists. Not all digital resources are available to all PINES patrons. DVDs circulation lengths and fine rates vary from system to system. Student cards are not universally offered by all systems. Library hours often vary dramatically even within systems. The power of PINES lies in the ability of any cardholder to access any collection, whether in person or via interlibrary loan. The fines free proposal won't change that foundational principle. Yes, some libraries may hear the familiar, "That library doesn't charge fines, why do you?" That's a frustrating position but is prevalent in other areas of service as well. Without equitable local funding for all libraries across Georgia, there will always be situations where neighboring libraries don't/can't offer matching services. So, in short, we definitely want to maintain the integrity of the PINES consortium and user service model, however, we don't see this project as being much different than other disparities that we already face as a group.

Thanks again,  
Sandy

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