

## There are **costs** to collect fees.

Many libraries cite costs associated with collecting fines as cancelling out much or all of the revenue generated by them.<sup>18</sup> While we may not be able to say quite as much with library fines collected by LPL, there is definitely a cost to collecting fines.

### ➤ **Technology and service subscriptions at LPL**

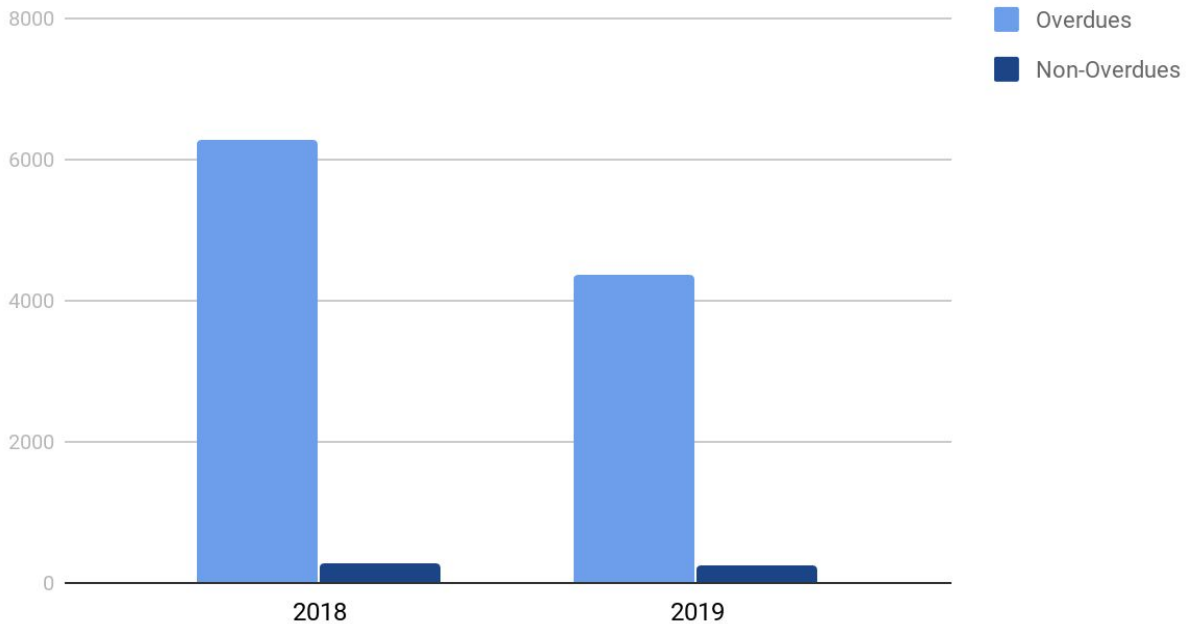
- From 2014-2018 combined equipment purchase fees, equipment maintenance fees, and credit card service fees for patron payments made to the library total \$51,313.74.
- Total credit card service fees (classified under the expenses line) paid by the library in 2018 just for overdues was \$5,359.24.
- Annual subscription fees for running credit card transactions at the self checks has been \$3,000 per year, and will increase to \$3,200 a year starting in 2019.
- If we go fine free we can reasonably eliminate fee payments through the self check machines. Counting self check subscription fees plus credit card processing fees for overdues, that will result in a savings of approximately \$8,500 per year.
- These fees subtracted from the \$120,000 of expected fine revenue brings the total down to \$111,500, or 2.4% of expected revenue.

### ➤ **Staff and patron time** better spent teaching about and utilizing library resources is wasted haggling over and paying late fees. It is difficult to quantify the exact amount of time spent, but we can measure some factors.

- **The Accounts desk:**
  - According to our ILS Symphony, in 2018 6,555 individual patrons paid \$77,941.50 fees at the Accounts desk. Of those, \$54,888.79 were for late fees, involving 6,268 patrons.
  - 1,437 patrons had overdue fees of \$10,762.01 waived at the Accounts desk. Each of these transactions would have included an extended interaction between the staff and the patron regarding the reason for the waiver.

- Staff talley sheets from 2016 through 2018 record 21,960 interactions with patrons that specifically involved paying fees at the Accounts desk. This does not include simple inquires involving fees in person, over the phone, or via email regarding fees.

### Number of Individual Patrons Paying Fees at the Accounts Desk



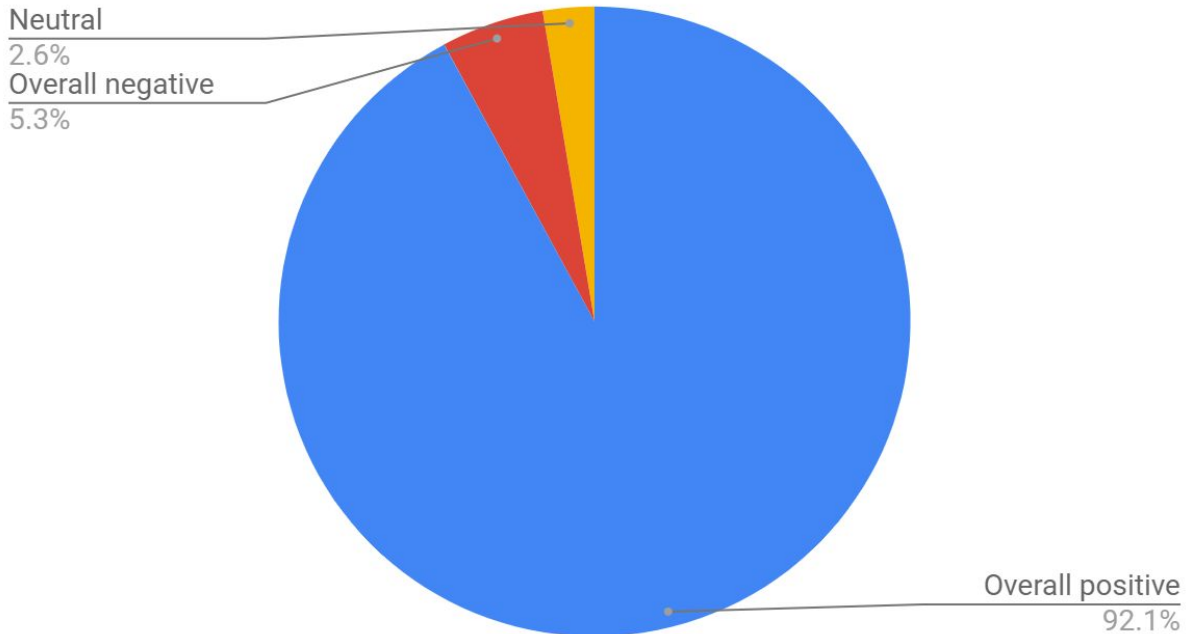
- **Bookkeeping:**

- Denise Berkely is LPL's Accounting Specialist. On a daily basis she balances the actual monies received by the library against what is reported by the ILS, the self check machines, the website, the Square reader, and the cash register. She estimates spending about 3 hours per week on these tasks, or about 156 hours per year, or 936 hours since 2014. That is about 12% of her work time at LPL. This does not include time spent by Denise and the Accounts Coordinator researching discrepancies, which accounts for an extra hour or two a month. This time would not disappear with the elimination of fines, but it would be reduced.

- **IT Support:**
  - Kim Fletcher is LPL's Technology librarian, system administrator for our ILS, and main support for our sorting machine and fleet of self check machines. Kim counts approximately 40 official help tickets that she has submitted to Bibliotheca or SirsiDynix over the last five years directly related to payment issues. Each involved lengthy back and forth communication with the vendor. Resolution time for these issues varied from hours to weeks. She estimates dealing with another 50 cases over the last five years involving in house troubleshooting of payment issues on the self check machines. Since 2012, approximately 40 official inhouse tickets have been submitted to our technology department regarding payment issues from the Accounts Coordinator alone.
- **Bottom line on staff hours and late fines:**
  - Although eliminating late fines will reduce the workload on staff, we are not recommending any reduction in staff hours.
  - In the long term it may be possible to reduce Accounts desk staff hours through attrition, however we will not know if such a thing would be possible until after living in a fine free world.
  - In the short term there are many other regular tasks to which staff can devote their attention. We can also look at expanding service in areas such as outreach.
- **Customer Experience:**
  - The Accounts Department has the wonderful privilege of issuing library cards, the literal key to accessing all of LPL's fantastic resources, to every new patron that walks through the doors. Unfortunately, we are also routinely placed in a punitive role, squabbling over missed due dates and small fees that add up to blocked access. Beyond a doubt, the number one source of conflict between Accounts staff and patrons are late fees.

- Libraries that eliminate late fees consistently report improved perception of the library by the public, as well as better relations between staff and their patrons.<sup>19</sup>
- In our own survey, the response was overwhelmingly positive when asked about overall experience when going fine free.

How would you rate your library's experience with eliminating fines?



### 3. To promote the value of responsibility in the community

Value based argument: The library should promote responsibility in the community. There is a tangible penalty for not returning your items on time. Responsibility is encouraged by holding patrons to this standard.

Responsibility certainly is an important value. However, when examining it in relation to library fines there are several key points to consider.