

Sorry, Computer Says No: Using Policy to Better Achieve Public Library Access

Wanda Brown

Dougherty County Public Library

Jennie Feinberg

Augusta-Richmond County Public Library

John Mack Freeman

Gwinnett County Public Library

Deborah Jackson

Cobb County Public Library

Brenda Poku

Live Oak Public Libraries

Tamika Strong

Georgia Public Library Service

Team Access - PINNACLE 2016-2017

Abstract

Library policies should be written and implemented to provide fair and equitable access for all. However, current public library policies often limit access for individuals and can be crafted and enforced in ways that restrict user access. Since policies serve as a library's foundation for customer service, an ineffective policy adversely affects user access by limiting staff discretion and framing decision making in negative terms.

Library policies should reflect the implementation of a library's mission to balance the management of information resources while providing fair and equitable access to all community stakeholders. For this white paper, access is defined as the removal of any barriers that hinder equal availability to all library resources and services for all library users. To that end, we will analyze access and its role in the ongoing evolution of library policy development and implementation regarding library card eligibility, fines and fees, and computer use. We will then explore how to craft inclusive policies that assist staff in the decision making process and ways to expand access to all library users on an equitable basis.

Introduction

The profession of librarianship at its core is inextricably tied to customer service. If libraries want to attract and retain library patrons, libraries would benefit from creating a user-focused culture, starting with their policies and procedures. According to the American Library Association's Code of Ethics, libraries should strive to "provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable

service policies, equitable access, and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests” (ALA, 2008).

Despite these guidelines, some libraries may have policies that are ingrained institutional, social, and/or economic barriers to library use that continue to be inherently exclusionary. Front-line staff often lack a clear understanding of established policies and are afraid of disciplinary action if they make the wrong decision. Staff may enforce policies that they may not necessarily understand, or they ignore the policy altogether. Either way, users are not receiving fair and equitable service.

Policies and procedures need to be customized to meet the needs of a library’s community stakeholder demographics. Policies often block access for those community stakeholders who are identified as underserved or disenfranchised such as but not limited to, race or ethnicity, E.S.L., nonreaders, age, low-income, homeless and transient populations. Some libraries have not revised their policies in response to their user communities’ evolving demographic, social, cultural, or economic needs. For instance, members of the homeless population may be unable to produce acceptable forms of identification to establish residency to obtain a library card because they do not have a permanent address. Paying fines for low-income library users may be an economic hardship resulting in their inability to check out items. In addition, computer use policies restrict access to those who may need it by limiting or blocking use based on residency, fines and/or library card status. As a result, members of these populations may decide to not return to the library.

In 2016, the Pew Research Center surveyed 1,601 American adults to identify usage patterns and attitudes towards their libraries. More than 50% of the survey respondents stated that if their libraries were to close it would impact their communities. Women, Latinos, and library users earning less than \$30,000 were especially concerned that if their libraries closed it would have a major impact on their families (Horrigan, 2016). Furthermore, in 2017, Library Journal randomly surveyed public librarians to learn how their libraries handled fines and fees. They received 454 responses, and 97% of the libraries reported that they have a policy in place that suspends user borrowing privileges if the amount owed exceeds \$10. One librarian noted that “it’s not worth the severed relationships when responsible customers have a one-time occurrence, when families incur huge fines because of a vacation, or when the word of mouth messaging spreads because of any of these situations. Libraries have enough to combat, this is a matter of hospitality and being supportive of our customer needs” (Dixon, 2017).

In a Pew Research Report (Horrigan, 2016), 29% of library users 16 and older had used library computers, internet, and Wi-Fi. In this report, library computer users are more likely to be young, black, female and lower income. When compared to the 29% of users, the study found:

- 45% of library users between the ages of 16 and 29 used computers, the internet or the library’s Wi-Fi
- 42% of black library users used libraries’ computers and internet
- 35% of those whose annual household incomes are \$30,000 or less used libraries’ computers and internet
- 33% of women used libraries’ computers and internet

User access should be the primary guiding factor when creating library policies. Policies should be clear, user-focused and flexible. They should be written in such a way that staff feels empowered to make decisions that removes barriers to library resources and at the same time supports the library core mission of access for all. However, the problem of policies conflicting with access ideals is not new. An understanding of the historical policy writing and adoption perspective is needed if libraries are to change the way they craft and implement policies.

History

Is access a new primary concern for library policy writers, or is this a longstanding issue? In an effort to determine this, numerous library policy recommendation manuals were reviewed to better develop a common understanding of what library policies truly are, where they come from, what sorts of recommendations form the background ecosystem of the public library world, and what role non-library organizations (particularly professional groups such as the American Library Association) have on the past and present policy makeup.

Effective policies for public libraries are generally defined as reflective of the mission, consistent, flexible, supported by procedure, clearly written, fully disclosed to staff, and appealable (Larson and Totten, 2008). Effective policies are absolutely necessary for ensuring ongoing equitable library service, and thus promoting high levels of access among all constituent communities.

Sources of policy

Policies primarily come from four sources:

1. Original policies that an organization develops and implements
2. Appealed or common law policy that is developed and implemented on a situational basis
3. Implied policies that staff assume because of repetition or observation, and
4. Externally implemented policies that come from laws and funding agents (Larson and Totten, 2008)

Most policy guidelines seek to ensure that an organization focuses on developing original policies that respond to the ongoing needs of the organization. However, more modern texts also point out that externally implemented policies, whether they come as laws or rules from local funding agencies, must be taken into account when developing the policy framework that will govern a public library.

Overall, policy recommendations repeatedly cite the need for policies to be regularly reviewed with an eye towards an evolving library landscape (Nelson and Garcia, 2003). Libraries should reevaluate policies to ensure that they reflect with the ongoing and evolving mission of the organization. Thus, as priorities in the library world shift away from traditional stances of protecting library resources toward protecting the rights of individuals to access to the world of information, libraries have a responsibility to reevaluate policies that reflect older mindsets, goals, and priorities.

When allowing access to any service, policy writers should remember that library services exist to be used (Larson and Totten, 2008). Oftentimes, libraries have enacted restrictive library policies because they have sought to protect the library from financial harm or from

accusations of fiscal mismanagement. However, these policies may not be reasonable or fair given the risks of operating public services (White and Ferguson, 1970).

Recommendations for specific policy types

The principles related to a streamlined user registration process have a long history within LIS literature. Larson and Totten stated that registration should be kept straightforward, simple, and inclusive as possible. Others have argued that the public library's main role should be to provide services only to those who are represented in the funding base of the library and should not be available to anyone who walks inside (White and Ferguson, 1970). Age limits are another often cited barrier for receiving a library card. Advice on this topic ranges from doing away with age requirements as unnecessary (Larson and Totten, 2008) to a more nuanced look at the legal issues involved. While recommendations typically call for collecting no more information than is practical (and they consistently remind policy writers of privacy requirements instituted under state law), there is no codified basis for what sort of information is sufficient. This leaves the process of introducing someone to the library susceptible to a traditionalist mindset where things are done because that is always the way that things have been done to get a library card in a public library setting.

For example, many libraries have codified a very minimal amount of information as being absolutely necessary to receive a library card. Typically this includes a full legal name, birthdate, response to a voter registration question, and a physical address. However, without consistent reminders and adequate staff training, these types of policies have historically been undermined by libraries who have used repetition and observation in the development of

non-written policies that may require further information (such as phone numbers, email addresses, ID numbers, and more). This conflict is especially prone to occur when libraries have two sets of preferred registration data: a minimal set that is all that is really needed and a more complete set that is preferred by the library.

Fines and fees have traditionally fulfilled a variety of roles in public libraries. They have provided a small but important funding source; they act as incentives for library users to respect circulation rules, and they have enabled public libraries to offer services that would be fiscally impossible to offer on a free basis (i.e. copy services). The mission of most public libraries emphasizes the overall goal of allowing people to access resources whenever possible.

Although most policy recommendation manuals address the issue of fines and fees, much of the advice around these policies emphasizes the customer service and public relations aspects of these issues rather than the full access issues related to these concerns. In other cases, reviews of sample policies can make it seem that libraries are nickel-and-diming for services (Larson and Totten, 2008). Services that are considered typically part of the library's working practices in most institutions (e.g. notification of holds, ILL requests) are billed to users' accounts in other library systems (Michigan Library Association, 1996). Other libraries have completely done away with all fines and fees, especially for late items or fines related to children. The wide-ranging approach to fines and fees shows a library field deeply divided not only by economic reality but also by philosophical reasoning.

Recommendations that flow from an intellectual freedom background suggest that libraries should be able to explain why certain services cost money while others are absorbed

into the cost of doing the business of the library (Jones, 1999). On the whole, however, fines and fees place an uneven and inequitable burden on the public library user base, leading to a decline in the availability of library services and a decrease in the access opportunities for lower-income individuals. However, due to the inability of most public libraries to absorb both the additional cost of providing services at no charge and the loss of the revenue stream, policy manuals continue to advise on the uneasy tension between fines and fees and the broader goals of access.

Many policy recommendation manuals were written before the modern era of computers in libraries began in earnest. Although many mention cautioning users about content on the internet, few provide concrete recommendations on user access beside boilerplate statements that computers are available for everyone to use provided that they have the appropriate library card (Michigan Library Association, 1996). Indeed, most do not consider whether or not computer privileges should be suspended based on a library user's fees or their ability to access other library services. Additionally, policies that require a library card in-hand for computer use or creating user privilege levels for only computer services were not addressed in the reviewed policy recommendations.

Other Sources of Policy

Numerous policy recommendation manuals referred policy writers to the American Library Association's (ALA) Library Bill of Rights and the Interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights. ALA adopted these policies as the group's official stance on a number of intellectual freedom related issues. Although the Library Bill of Rights is updated only rarely, interpretations for numerous topics are developed and refined on an ongoing basis to meet new concerns of the

library world. The interpretations related to the Economic Barriers to Information Access are particularly relevant.

The Economic Barriers to Information Access interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights states in part:

The American Library Association opposes the charging of user fees for the provision of information by all libraries and information services that receive their major support from public funds. All information resources that are provided directly or indirectly by the library, regardless of technology, format, or methods of delivery, should be readily, equally and equitably accessible to all library users. [...]

Library services that involve the provision of information, regardless of format, technology, or method of delivery, should be made available to all library users on an equal and equitable basis. Charging fees for the use of library collections, services, programs, or facilities that were purchased with public funds raises barriers to access. Such fees effectively abridge or deny access for some members of the community because they reinforce distinctions among users based on their ability and willingness to pay (American Library Association).

This offers particular guidance to libraries as they seek to analyze their fines and fee structure as well as any costs associated with computer use or obtaining a library card. However, it should be noted that while the ALA is made up primarily of library professionals, the organization is not directly responsible for running libraries. As such, libraries often have to contend between the

ethical ideals espoused by the professional association and the political and economic realities of providing public library services in communities across the country.

In addition to ALA, library policy can also be influenced by community norms, politics, and the makeup of the individuals who serve on the library's governing body. Due to the varied nature of people involved in public library work, a question in public library service emerges: is there an absolute right and wrong when it comes to public library access levels regardless of community, or are these questions more community-centric in how they need to be answered due to the varied nature of communities in America? Public library policy recommendations as a whole tend to flow from an essentialist model that promotes a unified theory of what public library's should look like while community leaders and other non-library professionals may advocate for a more localist view.

The reviewed historical policy guidelines may seem at first glance to support more contemporary policy goals of diversity, equity of service, inclusion of all peoples, and promotion of ideals of intellectual freedom. However, these recommendations are often couched in negative language. For instance, a 1970 policy guideline from the American Library Association states that "there should be no censorship; no limitation in its service because of race, color, religion, or national origin; and no special privilege for class, group, or level." Because of the proscription of things to avoid, this may have lead many libraries to think that advocating for their ideals was built around not doing certain things (i.e. not banning books, not turning people away) rather than actively supporting including everyone in the community through more inclusive policies and practices.

A disconnect begins to become obvious. At the highest levels of the policy analysis, there is a repeated emphasis on ensuring that the library is open for all people at all times. In many cases, though, these recommendations become filtered through a more “practical” lens that does not see policy writers question policies related to library card access, computer access, or generally equitable library services. In fact, it seems that though the public library has been paying lip service to library policies written to promote accessibility for over 80 years, the policies that have come out of the field more easily reflect a concern with the protection of resources and keeping out those who do not belong in a library’s defined service area.

During an era when libraries continually have to fight for their relevancy, an examination of this policy dichotomy is necessary. How, in the contemporary public library, have policies been written given this historical background?

Current Trends

A large portion of Georgia public libraries are members of the Public Information Network for Electronic Services (PINES) state-wide consortium. PINES is “Georgia’s ‘borderless library’ system that allows PINES card holders free access to books and other materials in 284 library branches and affiliated service locations throughout the state.” Out of the 63 library systems in the state, 53 of them are PINES members; because of this, there is a lot of overlap regarding policies covering library card requirements and fines. Computer use policies, however, are largely left up to each individual system. There is also room within the statewide PINES policies for local systems to customize rules and regulations to their local needs. In

addition to several PINES library systems, four independent Georgia library systems policies were also examined.

As is true of most libraries across the nation, residency requirements to obtain a free library card are a matter of policy in Georgia library systems. This is largely because much of library funding is tied to property taxes that citizens in those communities pay. The PINES consortium loosens the residency requirement to any Georgia resident, regardless of county or local municipality. All of the independent systems examined have residency requirements confined to their county or the counties covered under the umbrella of a regional system. Both PINES libraries and the independent systems require a non-resident fee for users residing outside of their service area. The fees for a non-resident card range from \$25.00 to \$50.00 annually. Both PINES and independent systems include exceptions for people who own property, attend school, or work in their covered service areas.

One aspect of residency requirements that is often not fully articulated in written policies is that of transient or homeless users. While some systems have it in their official policies that those residing in temporary housing may still obtain a card as long as the residence is in the covered service area, others are silent on the subject. One reviewed policy prohibits issuing library cards to transient users. The reasoning given for this, not surprisingly, is financial. The policy states:

Due to high losses of material and the requirement of the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB), which dictates that governments have a responsibility to be accountable for the use of resources and to demonstrate a reasonable endeavor to recover property paid for with tax payer's money, the library cannot issue a library card to anyone residing at a property whose residents are transient, e.g., hotels, motels, hospitals, halfway houses and mission homes. Persons at these addresses may receive a card which can only be used for computer access and other services which do not include the circulation of materials. If they wish, they also have the option of a deposit card: a deposit is required to cover the cost of materials checked out and the deposit is refunded

with the return of the materials and the closing of the account. Also, if a fiscally responsible officer at a transient property gives written acknowledgement, accepting responsibility for loss or damage to material, a card may be issued to a resident of that property.

This requirement is a prime example of a barrier to access that is fueled by a good faith effort to protect tax funded public resources.

Age requirements for obtaining library cards are another barrier to access. Some libraries require a minimum age to get a card. Most require a parent or guardian signature for minors. The person signing for the library card assumes all financial responsibility for any materials checked out on the minor's card. Libraries vary with what their definition of a minor is. While many consider a minor to be someone under the age of 18, other libraries will allow a person as young as 13 years old to sign for his or her own card without a parent's signature. PINES libraries do not require a person to be of a certain age to have a card; however, a parent or legal guardian must sign for minors under 18. Requiring a parent or guardian signature leads to yet another potential barrier to access. Many parents who might sign for their child to have a card owe fines and fees to the library under their own names. Depending upon the library's policy, this may prohibit the child from having a card since the person who is signing for financial responsibility is already in debt to the library. The PINES Executive Committee decided in 2017 to uphold its policy not to restrict a child from getting a card based on fines owed by the parent.

Fines and fees are a major source of access barriers in Georgia public libraries. Of the libraries examined, nearly all employ some form of overdue fines and other fees. Only one library does not charge overdue fines, but instead opts for fees that accrue as overdue notices have to be mailed. The other libraries' fines range from \$0.05 to \$0.50 per day, varying by the type of material being borrowed. All of the libraries have a maximum amount of fines/fees owed

before library card use is blocked. The maximum fine amount users can carry without being blocked is \$10.00. Check-out limits often allow up to 50 items at one time, which in and of itself can be an excellent benefit; however, the potential to accrue fines large enough to block use of the card increases exponentially. This can be a financial burden for lower-income individuals, especially if fines are accrued on the cards of multiple family members. Many find themselves over the limit and unable to use library services. Fines owed on old library accounts also keep many from ever coming back to try to get another card, as they believe they are forever banned from using the library. In addition, most libraries use some form of collections management. Another fee is attached to the accounts which go to the collections agency, typically \$10.00. Prior to 2016, this debt was reflected on the user's credit report until new federal guidelines restricted the reporting of service fees, which included library debt. Many library administrators point to the success that collection agencies have with recouping materials and fees; however, in most cases, the negative public relations and damage to user relations are not taken into account when assessing the benefits of these policies.

Some libraries have employed different strategies to reduce barriers created by fines. Holding "food for fines" drives is a commonly used strategy. While finding \$10 may be difficult for some, bringing in canned or prepackaged food is more feasible. At least one library system occasionally offers a fines amnesty week where fines are greatly reduced if users pay the remaining balance at the time of forgiveness. Another library system offers the opportunity to go on a "payment plan" in order to clear up fines. When users are on the payment plan, their accounts are flagged to keep them from going to collections. The users make an agreement to pay off their debt slowly, but at regular monthly intervals. As long as users are making the

minimum payment each month, the library considers this a good faith effort and allows continued use of library services, including borrowing, while they pay off the balance. These efforts show that some libraries are offering alternatives for those with financial burdens to clear up their accounts.

Throughout the years, libraries have tried to maintain open access to materials while being financially responsible to their funding agencies. The reasoning behind charging late fees have not proven to work. The penalty of keeping an item past the due date does not stop it from happening. For instance, according to the 2017 PINES Annual Report of two of our studied library systems, users owe more than \$2.5 million. The amount owed to the same systems was \$2.3 million in 2016. In one of the systems, \$1.14 million is from over 30,000 users with expired accounts. Realistically, this debt is a number that will continually grow without much hope of being collected.

As stated before, most computer use policies are dictated by the local library system, even in the case of PINES libraries. Some of the barriers to access that come into play with library card requirements and the charging of fines also hold true for computer use. Most of the examined policies state that one must have a library card in good standing to use the public computers. One policy requires that users have a zero balance on their library cards in order to access the public computers.

There is generally some form of guest pass offered for out of town guests. In many cases guest passes are offered for free, but some libraries charge for passes. Charges range from \$1-2 for one time use, or there is the option of paying non-resident fees for a library card good for a partial or entire year.

Other barriers that arise when dealing with public access computers include printing costs and time limits. Most libraries charge fees for printing. The cost per page varies. The average is \$0.15 per black and white page. The costs can be prohibitive for those who are financially burdened, especially since saving information to a flash drive, emailing, or saving to the cloud does not help people who do not have access to the necessary technology outside of the library. Some libraries offer a set number of pages for free and then charge per page after that limit is reached.

Of the policies examined, all of them included time limits for computer use that varied per location. This makes sense, as some branches have fewer computers for public use than others, causing their time limits to be shorter out of fairness. Most larger systems have a generous time limit, with multiple sessions being allowed each day. Additionally, all reviewed libraries offered wireless internet access. The service is free; however, users must have their own device to use it. This helps with time limits, as wireless use is not limited. Unfortunately, this is a luxury for people who are affluent enough to have their own electronic devices which leaves behind those that cannot afford their own personal devices.

The current state of library affairs echoes the circumstances put forth in the industry's literature and policy recommendations: high ideals filtered through a heavy lens of "pragmatism." In many cases, the focus has swung heavily towards protecting library resources from misuse. In an age when libraries have to aggressively fight for every round of funding, this attitude is certainly understandable; however, it sets libraries as being in opposition to the users in their communities. As such, to emphasize access, a paradigm shift must occur in many library policies.

Recommendations

So what now? The most ideal of all library policies would be to allow everyone complete access to all library services and materials. The reality is policies were created to define a “happy medium” that most of the stakeholders of the institution could agree upon to provide their constituents access to “free” services. The question today is whether or not the current “happy medium” policies are relevant to our current communities. In their book *Public Library Services for the Poor: Doing All We Can* authors Leslie and Glen Holt include “eight action chapters intended to lay out ways librarians can organize resources to integrate effective programs into the lives of the poor” (Holt and Holt, 2010).

The first step for interested libraries to take is “start where you are.” In a paraphrasing of Booker T. Washington’s Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition address, (Holt and Holt, 2010) recommend that libraries “[p]ut down your library bucket where you are.” Libraries can start by reviewing policies with the current community in mind. The demographics of the community the system serves may have changed since the policies were last approved. Consider visiting the American FactFinder website developed by the United States Census Bureau to learn more about the makeup of the community the library serves. There library staff can learn the age, gender, race, household income, and other information about the community. Libraries can search by town, city, county, and state. In addition to demographic research, consider forming a committee made of various members from the library community, including staff, Friends members, community representatives, county officials, etc. to ensure that the revised policies will be fair to all of the library’s stakeholders. Typically, library policies are presented to the Library Board for approval. This step may take some time, as it would also include researching

the policies of comparably sized libraries, discussions with library staff, Friends groups, and community members, drafting of the new plan, and presenting it to the Board for approval. If this option is not one the system is able to take on at the moment, consider reviewing and revising library procedures.

The work that library staff completes on a day to day basis is heavily influenced by the procedures that have been put in place which have been created using the library policies as guidelines. A review of the library's procedures with regard to providing library cards, fines and fees and computer usage can be done by convening a committee to examine these issues to see how they are currently handled. Once the review is completed, empower library staff to use discretion in working with users to find a favorable resolution in each encounter, and train staff to treat each user with respect, regardless of the particular issue.

One set of procedures that is essential to library services are the guidelines for obtaining library cards. As Jeffrey T. Davis' recent article declares, "[i]t starts with a library card" (Davis, 2012). The library card is the key that unlocks access to many services. However, as mentioned previously, for some segments of the population, this key is difficult to obtain. There are several ways libraries have addressed this issue, including establishing special user groups/cards that grant access to a limited number of materials and allowing transient and homeless populations to use alternative forms of identification to get a library card. An example of the last recommendation comes from the Worcester Public Library in Massachusetts, which allows homeless users to use shelter addresses to obtain library cards (Bundy, 2012).

For more general concerns for related policy and procedural changes in library card registration, recommendations include:

- Increase flexibility in providing library cards to new populations and homeless users
- Increase types of identification allowed to receive a library card
- Minimize the amount of information required to receive a library card
- Minimize or eliminate fees required to replace or renew a library card
- Reduce the number of services that are only accessible with a library card

In addition, ALA offers a toolkit to help libraries extend services to the homeless. Library cards are the first step to building a user connection, so it is especially important for administrators and other decision-makers to examine library policies to make sure they are inclusive and flexible when the situation warrants it. (Extending Our Reach Reducing Homelessness Through Library Engagement, n.d.)

Fines and fees also play a large role in preventing users from being able to take advantage of library services, especially the ability to check out materials and use public computers. In working to remove access barriers, libraries can consider the idea of completely eliminating the process of charging library fines. This has been done in numerous libraries worldwide. In January 2012, Windsor Public Library, Ontario, Canada eliminated late fees and by doing so, the library's CEO stated that "the new system will better regulate delinquent accounts, save money and show a greater level of respect for patrons" (Windsor PL Ends Late Fees, 2012). Kathy Dulac of Milton Public Library found that the elimination of fines led to more items being returned on time and made users feel more welcomed (Dixon, 2017).

Obviously, not all libraries are able to make the leap into completely eliminating fines. There are other initiatives administrators can consider like "creating fine-free cards for certain

categories of patrons, such as California’s Peninsula Library System for kids and teens, or Toledo Lucas County Public Library’s for active duty military personnel and veterans” (Dixon, 2017). Another option is offering a “Read Down Fines” program for kids and teens. Consider allowing adults to “Work for Fines” where users work off their fines by volunteering (Annoyed Librarian, 2012). Amnesty days or weeks which allow users an opportunity to clear up library balances during a particular time are popular, as are Food for Fines programs where libraries partner with a community food bank and users receive credits toward their fines based on the food they donate. Libraries should explore other fun ways they can encourage users to clean up their accounts while restoring access to library services.

Though we are in a technological age, in some communities the library is the only source of internet access for the public. “Libraries are essential to bridging the digital divide” (Real and Rose, 2017). In order to meet the needs of patrons, libraries may want to consider allowing users with blocked cards access to computer services. Libraries can set aside some terminals to serve as guest or express terminals. If a library has a time management system, staff can create guest cards or passes and give users more time or additional guest passes as needed.

Libraries are as diverse as the users in the communities they serve. However, as an institution with a commitment to providing access to services, we are charged with the task of finding the “happy medium” that allows us to be true to our mission and vision while at the same time truly serving our communities. These recommendations are just a few things libraries can do to improve the experiences of the users in their community.

Conclusion

Every library has its own local needs, and those local needs will drive policies that reflect that community and its values. However, libraries are not judged one community at a time; rather, people are prone to judging libraries together, and that reputation is not always positive. A negative access experience in one public library can sour an individual or a group on public libraries everywhere. Thus, a sea change in public library policy is needed. Everyone is welcome in all libraries, and access is a right, not a privilege only acquired through jumping through a series of hoops based on policies and procedures.

Those who love libraries know that they are special and offer much needed services to their communities. The ALA's motto of "the best read, for the largest number, at the least cost" should be remembered when creating policies that hinder access. The punitive nature of some policies affects the efficiency of library goals to serve their residents. Policies should be reviewed often to change or eliminate fines. Access to computers should not be tied to account balances. Restricting access to services should no longer be the norm. Starting now, libraries should be concerned with changing times; the time is now to be innovative and engage with the community to remain relevant.

References

- American Library Association. (n.d.). Extending our reach - Reducing homeless through library engagement. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/aboutala/offices/extending-our-reach-reducing-homelessness-through-library-engagement-3>
- American Library Association. (1980). Library bill of rights. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill>
- American Library Association. (1993). Economic barriers to information access. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/economicbarriers>
- American Library Association. (2008). Code of ethics of the American Library Association. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/proethics/codeofethics/codeethics>
- American Library Association. (2016). The state of america's libraries 2017: A report from the American Library Association. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/news/state-americas-libraries-report-2017>
- Annoyed Librarian. (2010, January 6). Being creative with fine alternatives. [Web blog]. Retrieved from <http://lj.libraryjournal.com/blogs/annoyedlibrarian/2010/01/06/being-creative-with-fine-alternatives/>
- Bundy, A. (2012). In Australia's first national year of reading, another reason why library fines are not so fine. *Aplis*, 25(2), 55.
- Connecticut State Library. (1995). *Policy Development Materials for Public Libraries*. Hartford, CT: Connecticut State Library.
- Davis, Jeffery T. (2017). It starts with a library card: Sharing our cities, towns and natural places. *American Libraries*, 48(7/8), 24.
- Dixon, J. (2017). Doing fines(s)? fines & fees. *Library Journal*. Retrieved from <http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2017/04/budgets-funding/doing-fines-fines-fees/>
- Wood, E. & Almeida, J. (2017). If we charge them, will they come? Fostering positive relationships with students by remaining fine-free. *Reference & User Quarterly*, 56(3), 158.
- Griffith, J. W. (1977). There is an alternative to fines. *School Library Journal*, 23(8), 50.
- Heeger, P. (2007). Better late than never: Late fines stop teens from coming to the library. *School Library Journal*, 53(2), 30.

- Holt, L. E. & Holt, G. E. (2010). *Public library services for the poor: Doing all we can*. Chicago, IL: ALA Editions of the American Library Association. eBook. Available from: eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).
- Horrigan, J. B. (2016). *Libraries 2016*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/09/09/2016/Libraries-2016/>
- Jones, B. M. (1999). *Libraries, access, and intellectual freedom: Developing policies for public and academic libraries*. Chicago, IL: American Library Association.
- Larson, J. C., & Totten, H. L. (2008). *The public library policy writer: A guidebook with model policies on CD-ROM*. New York, NY: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc.
- McDermott, M. (2017). Rochester Public Library forgoes fines for kids. *Packer News*. Retrieved from <http://www.packersnews.com/story/news/2017/04/07/rochester-public-library-foregoes-fines-kids/100125604/>
- Michigan Library Association. (1996). *Public library policy resource manual* (Revised ed.). Michigan Library Association.
- Nelson, S. & Garcia, J. (2003). *Creating policies for results: From chaos to clarity*. Chicago, IL: American Library Association.
- Pike Peak Library District. (2016). *No more overdue fines on kid, teen materials*. Retrieved from <https://ppld.org/whats-new/no-more-overdue-fines-kid-teen-materials>
- Read down your fines!. (2014). *Unabashed Librarian*, (173), 31.
- Real, B. & Norman, R.R. (2017). *Rural libraries in the United States: Recent strides, future possibilities, and meeting community needs*. Retrieved from <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/sites/ala.org/advocacy/files/content/pdfs/Rural%20paper%2007-31-2017.pdf>
- Simon, A. E. (Ed.). (1990). *Kids welcome here! Writing public library policies that promote use by young people*. New York Library Association.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). American FactFinder. Retrieved from <https://factfinder.census.gov/>
- White, R. M. & Ferguson, E. A. (Eds.). (1970). *Public library policies-general and specific*. Chicago, IL: American Library Association.
- Kelley, M, Rapp, D, & Lee, M. (2012). Windsor PL Ends Late Fees. (2012). *Library Journal*, 137(1), 16.