

**Implementation Update: Fine for Holds Not Picked Up**

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| <b>Date:</b> | October 16, 2012 |
| <b>To:</b>   | Budget Committee |
| <b>From:</b> | City Librarian   |

**SUMMARY**

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On July 16, 2012 the Library implemented a fine for holds that were not picked up. This report provides preliminary information about the revenue and other impacts of this fine for the period from July 16 to September 30, 2012 as requested by the Budget Committee at its September 12, 2012 meeting.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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Revenue generated by the Not Picked Up fine for the 11 weeks from the implementation date of July 16, 2012 to Sept. 30, 2012 is \$20,283 and is projected to be \$45,000 by year end.

Once the Not Picked Up fine is annualized, the Library expects to meet an annual budget of \$100,000 from this fine and this amount is in the 2013 operating budget submission.

The Director, Finance & Treasurer has reviewed the financial impact statement and is in agreement it.

**DECISION HISTORY**

At the meeting on November 21, 2011, the Board reviewed a report from the Budget Committee, *2012 Operating Budget – Budget Suggestions*, which included an assessment of a fine for holds not picked up.

The Not Picked Up fine for holds was approved by the Toronto Public Library Board on December 12, 2011 and introduced on July 16, 2012.

At the September 12, 2012 meeting, the Budget Committee approved the motion:

*That staff report back to the October meeting on the following:*

- c) *an update on the implementation, including revenues and any reduction in holds, of the new fine for holds not picked up.*

## **COMMENTS**

Before implementing the new fine, the Library first had to replace the email notification system for alerting customers that holds were available for pickup, and to complete a software customization to automatically charge the new fine. These were completed in the spring. The fine for holds not picked up was an initiative within a larger project which looked at efficiencies and customer service improvements in the holds service and resulted in staff reductions in the 2012 budget.

A comprehensive communication plan was developed for the public, managed through a variety of communication channels. Beginning June 1<sup>st</sup>, customers were alerted to the upcoming charge through a pop-up message that appeared when they placed their holds online. The alert linked to a Q&A on the Library website that provided more information about the fine and ways to avoid it by using holds management tools such as suspending holds and making holds inactive. Staff placed signs in the branch holds pickup areas and placed bookmarks in all holds available for pickup. A message was also included in email notifications for holds. All of this was supported by a social media campaign using Twitter and Facebook.

## **Customer response**

The Library has received considerable feedback from customers. Front-line staff reported a mixed response, with some customers supporting the fine as an important and necessary efficiency and others expressing disfavour. Social media comments again included a mix of viewpoints, particularly on Facebook where an active discussion on the topic took place.

Forty-five written comments about the fine were referred to the Chair of the Circulation and Collection Use Policy Committee. Most of these expressed strong displeasure with this initiative. The concerns included a growing “fear of fines”, the unpredictable nature of when a hold was going to arrive, and the new fine’s impact on low income users. Many individuals felt the fine was punitive, and that it was too high. Quite a number spoke about having missed notifications in the past and had concerns about reliability of the notification system. A number of the writers talked about the cumulative effect of the changes to fines that have been introduced this year.

## **Impact on activity levels**

The fine has had a significant impact on holds activities, particularly in reducing the number of holds that are not picked up. The following table compares 2011 and 2012 activity levels for the period beginning in May just before the fine was first announced, on June 1st:

| <b>Change in monthly activity: 2012 compared to 2011</b> |              |                     |                           |
|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
|                                                          | Holds Placed | Holds Not Picked Up | Total Monthly Circulation |
| May *                                                    | -1.8%        | -2.3%               | 0.2%                      |
| June                                                     | -15.5%       | -29.6%              | -3.8%                     |
| July                                                     | -11.5%       | -58.9%              | -0.9%                     |
| August                                                   | -16.5%       | -69.3%              | -4.5%                     |
| September                                                | -15.2%       | -71.8%              | -2.9%                     |

\*Before announcements about the new Not Picked Up fine

The Library is experiencing significant reduction in the number of holds that are not picked up. At the end of September the percentage of holds that were not picked up had dropped to 5%, from 15% of total holds in September 2011. To illustrate the significance of this, it translates into over 50,000 fewer holds not picked up for the month of September. People are placing fewer holds and proactively managing their holds, including cancelling and suspending holds. The result is that holds are filled more quickly for customers as material is not sitting on the holds shelf, and the Library is achieving the planned efficiencies in staff time tied to this activity.

However, the fine is also resulting in a reduced number of holds placed and appears to be contributing to a downward trend in circulation overall.

We will continue to closely monitor the impact on circulation.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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City Librarian