

Fine Free FAQ

January, 2023



Why did the Deep River library go fine free forever?

- Facts: Studies have shown that fines do not actually deter people from returning items late.
- Reducing barriers: Eliminating fines is one way to improve access to our library's great resources, programs, and services. Fines disproportionately affect those who may need our (free) services most. Going fines free helps reduce social inequity where those who can afford to pay fines access the library, and those who cannot do not. In 2020, 46% of our overdue items were children's materials and 5% young adult materials. Ottawa Public Library found that the majority of blocked accounts (due to fees owing) were located in low-income neighbourhoods. Especially during this time of continued economic challenges and uncertainty, access to education support, job seeking resources, and lifelong learning, should not be determined by a resident's economic status.
- Increasing usage:
 - Often patrons stop borrowing, or borrow fewer items because of fines.
 - We believe that we have something for everyone who comes through our door. We want everyone to come through our door, and that means welcoming back members that we haven't seen in years as well as new members.
- Improving customer service: Staff would rather help you connect to our collections than call you about overdue fines.
- Decreasing revenue: fines usually account for 1% of library budgets and this revenue source is declining due to increased use of digital materials. Fines cost time and resources to administer.

Why now?

We've been Fines Free since COVID-19 hit in March, 2020. In January, 2022 the Deep River Public Library Board decided to eliminate fines for a year-long trial. The trial enabled staff to evaluate the impact of going fines free. We found:

- Increased circulation and active cardholder rates may be attributed to going fines free, increased open hours/services as COVID restrictions lifted, or the implementation of a new integrated library system with automatic email renewal notices.
- Patrons borrowed more in 2022 (an average of 28 items each compared to 18 items each in 2019).
- New patron registrations (325) increased by 25% over 2019's 259.
- No abnormally long wait periods were reported.
- Very overdue items were returned in early 2022, perhaps also due to lifting COVID restrictions.
- As of December 1, 2022, 120 library accounts had overdue items for a decrease of 80% over the fall of 2021 (626 accounts). Some of the 2022 overdue accounts may belong to staff. Shhhhhh, don't tell anyone.

What does Fine Free mean for me?

1. Overdue fines will no longer be applied to your account, and we have cleared any old fines.
2. You're still responsible for returning materials! Please do your best to return them on time. Someone else may be waiting on them.
3. If items are 4 weeks late, we'll assume that you're keeping them, and you'll be billed for the replacement fee. If you reach \$40 on your account, you won't be able to borrow anything else or use our online resources like Libby.
4. Bring the items back and the replacement fees will disappear. You'll be able to use your account normally again.
5. Sign up for e-notifications to stay in the loop! You'll receive reminders when your items are almost due or past due.
6. Fines will still apply to special collections like the Town's Equipment Hub or to technology borrowed.

What about past fines?

All fines (including replacement costs for lost or damaged items) were cleared January 1, 2022. If you lost or damaged an item in 2022, we'll still ask you to pay the replacement costs.

What about other fees?

Fees for lost or damaged items will still apply. Those fees are calculated as the cost to replace the item + an administrative fee of \$5.

So no matter how late I return the items, I'll never be charged a fee?

No. Once your item is 4 weeks late, it will be marked "lost" and the replacement costs will be applied to your account. If you return the items, the charges will be removed.

So how long can I keep items out for?

Our loan periods have not changed: two weeks for most material, one week for DVDs, new books (except during COVID), Hub items and Museum/Park passes.

If you need the item for longer, simply renew the items yourself (by logging into your account online) or by contacting us by email (info@deepriverlibrary.ca) or phone (613-584-4244). Library staff love to renew (we're a special sort). You can renew most items twice unless someone else is waiting for them. This triples your original lending period!

Is everything fine free?

Almost! Special collections like the Town of Deep River's Equipment Hubs or other equipment will still have fines. For the Hub, the fine is \$5/day.

What if I lose or damage an item?

A replacement fee will be added to your account for the lost or damaged item. Borrowing privileges will be suspended after accruing \$40 in fees.

What if I find the item after?

Return the item and we'll clear the replacement fee from your account.

Will people return items if they don't have to pay late fees?

Yes. All materials will still have due dates and patrons will receive reminders when items are due. By removing fines, patrons are more likely to bring items back and less likely to avoid returning to the library.

Hundreds of libraries across North America have stopped charging late fines in recent years. They report that items were returned at similar rates, or even earlier, compared to when they had fines.

I thought of fines as a donation to the library. Can I still donate?

Of course! Donations are always appreciated. Donations can be made in-person, by mailing a cheque, or online at [Canada Helps](#). Donations over \$20 are eligible for tax receipts.

Are other libraries fine free?

Yes! Renfrew Public Library was the first in our County in July, 2021. Increasingly libraries around the world are going fines free, and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries is encouraging all Ontario libraries to go fines free. The trend is growing, and we're excited to apply the service model in Deep River. Ask staff for more resources on the fine free movement if you're curious.

I haven't been to the library in years. Will my library card still work?

Come talk to us. We'd love to have you back! We will either get your account reactivated or set you up with a new one.

Library accounts must be renewed every year, and we delete accounts from our system after five years of inactivity. It is easy to set you up with a new one. You'll just need a proof of address.

How can I get a library card?

Stop in with a piece of identification or mail that shows a local address, or contact us at 613-584-4244 or info@deepriverlibrary.ca for details.

Will this change affect library revenue?

Yes, but overdue fines represent a small percentage of the library's operating budget (about 1.5%). Fine revenue was already on the decline. With increasing use of online resources, like eBooks and eAudiobooks, libraries are generating fewer fines.

This decision aligns with our library's mission and values and is fiscally responsible. It will result in increased use of our current resources. It will also improve customer service, and shift staff time from collecting fines to answering your questions, helping you find materials, or assisting you in using our online resources.