



Recommendations and Considerations for Going Fine Free Guide

Last updated: September 22, 2025

Libraries who are planning to go Fine Free should email the RSA Help Desk at help@rsanfp.org. This guide is intended to provide an overview of the process and questions that libraries should consider.

How circulation rules work for fine free libraries

Circulation rules are applied based on the checkout library. Fine free library rules apply to all items checked out by that library no matter who's materials are being checked out. Much like a DVD that might only circulate for 3 days at its home library, if your library's Circulation Rule is for 14 days, the DVD checks out for 14 days at your library. Likewise, an item that is fine free at its home library will still accrue fines if checked out in a library that charges fines.

All patrons who check out at a fine free library receive fine free checkouts. Patrons from fine free libraries who check items out IN OTHER library will be charged fines if that library charges fines. The checkout library's rules are always in effect.

Overdue charges WILL BE APPLIED to patrons who return overdue items checked out in fine charging libraries. This helps to stop patrons from gaming the system. Likewise, overdue items returned at a fine charging library will not accrue a fine if they were originally checked out from a fine free library. Fines are always checked based on checkout library.

Assumed lost reports run on overdue items at 14 or 21 days for items checked out by fine free libraries verses 30 or more days in most fine charging libraries. Marking items as lost faster is the method used to block patrons rather than fine amounts. Once again, any library's item checked out by any library's patrons will be marked as lost sooner in fine free libraries. The checkout library's rules always apply.

Important note: Circulation rule changes are not retroactive! Items currently checked out at the time of the change will still be governed by the circulation rules that were in place when they were checked out. If these items are returned late, they will still accrue fines.

Evaluate your current circulation rules

The decision to move to a Fine Free library allows for circ policy adjustments.

Where possible, we recommend simplifying your library's circulation rules. The shift to Fine Free is a good opportunity to evaluate your rules and see where things can be simplified. If you are no longer charging fines, for example, do you still need to have shorter loan periods for new items or for media?

Do you wish to reduce the number of renewals permitted? For Fine Free libraries, RSA's recommendation is to permit a maximum of 2 renewals.

Since fines are not being charged, there is no longer a need for a grace period.

Do you wish to adjust your library's Fine Block Limit? These rules do not typically need to change. However, if your library is using a higher Fine Block limit (\$10, \$15, etc.) we recommend reducing your Fine Block limit to \$5. This way, patrons are blocked once a single item goes into Lost status, even if it is a small and inexpensive item.

- ☐ Review current circulation rules
- ☐ Review or reduce number of renewals
- ☐ Remove grace period
- ☐ Review fine block limit
- ☐ [Contact RSA](#) with information about desired changes to your Circulation Map or questions about your library's Circulation Rules

Removing existing fines

We recommend that libraries who are moving to a Fine Free model remove any existing overdue fines on items that were checked out from that library. They may also wish to remove other small miscellaneous bills such as Dropbox fees or fees for holds that have not been picked up. The shift to a fine free model is also a good time to evaluate your list of Bill Reasons. RSA can help you to customize this list if there are some bill reasons that you no longer wish to use. RSA can also help you to evaluate your existing fines and bills by providing reports. Fees for Lost and/or Damaged items should not be removed.

RSA will only remove fines charged by your library. If your patrons have overdue fines from other libraries, those fines will remain on their account.

Important note: Remember, fine free rules are not retroactive and only apply to checkouts made after these rules go into effect. When libraries make the change to Fine Free, we recommend that these libraries temporarily use the Fine Free Discharge Wizard to return materials to limit this. We **Do Not** recommend that Fine Free libraries continue this practice in perpetuity.

- ☐ Request a report of current overdue fines at your library
- ☐ Remove current overdue fines. [Contact RSA](#) for assistance in removing these fines

- ☐ Consider removing other small bills (DO NOT remove bills for LOST or damaged materials)
- ☐ Review list of bill reasons

Collection Services

If your library uses Unique or another collection service, make sure to contact **both Unique and RSA** about the change to Fine Free. RSA will need to adjust the collection reports that are sent to Unique. Unique may also have specific recommendations for Fine Free Libraries.

- ☐ Contact Unique Management Services about your change in policy
- ☐ [Contact RSA](#) to alert us of any changes to your services with UMS

Lost Items

Fine Free libraries need to adjust the time period for items moving into Lost status. We recommend shortening this period so that items go into Lost status at either 14 or 21 days past the due date. Most Fine Free libraries have implemented the 14-day rule.

- ☐ [Contact RSA](#) to shorten the time for items going into Lost status

Notices

Libraries who are eliminating overdue fines will need to evaluate their notices. Courtesy Notices, Overdue Notices, and Bill Notices may all need to have adjustments made to their wording to reflect the libraries' new policies. We recommend sending a courtesy notice to alert patrons to an upcoming due date. For a 2- or 3-week checkout, we recommend sending a courtesy notice at three days before the due date. For shorter loan period (1 week or less), we recommend sending a courtesy notice 1 day before the due date. For libraries using a 14-day time period for items going into lost status, RSA recommends that libraries send Overdue notices at 3, 5, and 10 days overdue. The Final Overdue notice (sent at 10 days overdue) should include a clear explanation of the policy regarding items going into Lost Status.

- ☐ Review of current notices
- ☐ [Contact RSA](#) to adjust wording in notices to reflect current policy
- ☐ [Contact RSA](#) to adjust notice timing