



Library Cards and Outreach: Barriers and Solutions

Establishing criteria for getting a library card and setting fees for nonresident cards is a local policy decision. Within this context, outreach to underserved populations may present a dilemma within existing policies.

One of the outcomes of the My First Books project is that families have library cards and use their local public library. Many times, underserved families who participate in outreach programs like My First Books do not have a library card and may face barriers in getting a card. Make sure your Board is informed about the project, why it is important, and what impact it will have on participating families. Here are some things to consider:

Nonresident cards

- Family lives outside the library's jurisdiction and doesn't qualify for a library card
- Family is not able to afford the fee for nonresident card

Possible solutions:

- Library board waives library card fee for duration of program
- Library board provides partial year library cards or reduced rate library card
- Community groups provide scholarships to pay for nonresident cards
- Programs (like Head Start) may have funds to pay for nonresident library cards
- Grant funds are used for nonresident cards to demonstrate benefits to families

Fines

- Family has had a card but it is currently suspended due to fines or lost book fees
- Family has a card but is afraid to use it due to unpaid fines or lost book fees

Possible solutions:

- Library board waives fines for My First Books families
- Library board institutes an amnesty period for all fines
- A creative way to work off fees is instituted (for example, for every book read, \$5 is taken off fee / offer book fine coupons for those who donate bestsellers / waive fines with a donation of canned food)

Never used a library and/or is intimidated by the library

Possible solutions:

- Train staff in customer service to make everyone feel welcome.
- Provide a special guided tour/field trip for My First Books families.
- Demonstrate how to check out books and use the OPAC or card catalog.

- If you have a significant population who speaks a language other than English, use signs and library card applications in both languages.

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- Make sure parents know their children are welcomed and it's okay if they make noise.
- Include photo and personal note from librarian on flyers/parent newsletters/library card applications.
- Include a map and directions to the library on flyers/parent newsletters/library card applications.
- Utilize help of local Women Infant Children (WIC) offices to put library info and applications in client files.
- Ask Head Start or other partners who conduct home visits to personally take library info to parents, and help them to fill out and submit the library card application.
- Bring "library" to parents (Jumpstart, Early Literacy Event, school events such as Back-to-School Night or Family Fun Night).
- Visit community partner during pick-up times to reach parents face-to-face. Introduce yourself, make personal connections, fill out library card applications on site if possible. Consider bringing a "petting zoo" of what is available at the library (laptop, music and movies, eReader, etc.).

