



*San Francisco Public Library*

100 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102

**MEMORANDUM**

DATE: December 12, 2016

TO: San Francisco Library Commission

FROM: Luis Herrera, City Librarian

RE: Library's Consideration of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) Technology

The San Francisco Public Library is considering future investments to modernize the Library's equipment and systems for circulation functions, materials management and inventory control. Aging circulation equipment throughout the system necessitates SFPL start a refreshment plan. The Library's current circulation systems rely on barcodes and *Tattle-Tape* for security measures, a technology developed in 1970. The age of the system and the fact that many libraries have moved to RFID, makes it difficult and expensive to replace or repair equipment. Through regional benchmarking, SFPL has learned that 75% of Bay Area public libraries have already converted to RFID. An internal staff work group, the RFID Task Force, is exploring a project to modernize the Library's infrastructure with upgraded self-service check-out machines, security gates, and automated materials handling systems that would employ more efficient RFID technology.

**Benefits to the Public**

The RFID Task Force has reviewed the current landscape in library materials management systems and found that adoption of RFID technology features numerous benefits to library patrons. Investments in the equipment and RFID tags:

- Streamlines the checkout process, speeding up transactions for self-reliant service or public service at circulation desks, since multiple items can be checked out at once.
- Shortens length of time patrons wait in lines, which helps staff focus more on each patron interaction.
- Improves patron access to the collection: Increases accuracy of holdings on shelf through real-time information and more frequent collection inventories. Patrons will experience less disappointment due to the presence of "ghost items" in the catalog.
- Returns materials to circulation faster.
- Eliminates false alarms at security gates, improving patron interactions with staff.
- Reduces check-in errors that may mire patrons in red tape.
- Improves the appearance of the collection, eliminating unsightly placement of barcodes over cover art, since tags can be read through book covers and cases.

- Reduces footprint of materials-handling technology and self-check machines, gaining precious space for additional check-in units (sorely needed at the Main), as well as other space uses/needed equipment and furniture.

### **Benefits to Staff and Library**

The RFID Task Force has also found that investments in RFID technology have tangible benefits for library workers as well:

- Reductions in the rate of repetitive stress injuries by minimizing instances of staff handling materials.
- Improved collection management through streamlining inventory control.
- Enhanced security with gates that have a 360° range.
- Streamlines circulation functions, reducing the time spent on repetitive tasks and increasing overall circulation capacity.

### **Proposed Revision to Privacy Policy**

The Library is committed to protecting patrons' privacy and borrowers' confidentiality through the SFPL Privacy Policy. Through the RFID Task Force's evaluation, staff have confirmed that the use of a combination of library cards without RFID tags and library items bearing passive RFID tags (with a limited range of under one meter) offer increased circulation efficiency while ensuring patron privacy. The Library will be seeking to update the current SFPL Privacy Policy to allow for the adoption of RFID technology as the organization's standard technological application for materials management, inventory control and circulation functions.

### **Recommendations**

In accordance with our strategic goal to be a premier urban library, the Library recommends to modernize collections management and circulation systems with the implementation of RFID technology. Since the technology has been used in libraries for over 10 years, procedures for ensuring patron privacy are well-established and have proven effective. This technology will provide significant benefits to both staff and patrons, helping us meet our goal for service excellence. As part of this process library staff will be gathering additional information in the coming weeks to bring back to the Library Commission for further examination.