



San Francisco Public Library
100 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102 - 4733

MEMORANDUM

Date: January 13, 2020
To: San Francisco Library Commission
From: Michael Lambert, City Librarian
RE: Restoration of Print Notices

The San Francisco Public Library is bringing forth an update regarding the status of mailed print notices related to circulation functions.

Background

During the past year in the lead up to the Library eliminating overdue fines in September 2019, library staff were also making preparations to renew the San Francisco Public Library's contract with the vendor, Ace Mailing Inc. for the printing and distribution of circulation notices, as the contract was set to expire. The elimination of overdue fines negated the primary purpose for issuing print notices to the remaining segments of the SFPL's active patrons still receiving these reminders. The discontinuance of print notices related to overdue fines drastically reduced the volume of mailing performed by the vendor, which influenced contract renewal discussions.

The near sunset of this contract would have left the library without a viable alternative for sending print circulation notices to its patrons. In evaluating this service and the merit for continued engagement with this vendor, library staff performed an assessment of this method of notifications. Library staff benchmarked other libraries in the region and gleaned that many peer libraries were looking to eliminate this communication mode, as the majority of their patrons have either switched to email or phone notification. Of note, the Alameda and Contra Costa County had discontinued the practice, as well as the Marin County Free Libraries.

The assessment found that a considerable amount of time, effort, and money goes into continuing the practice of distributing printed notices via US Mail to an increasingly small percentage of the library's active user group. The San Francisco Public Library has in place automated systems for distributing such information via email and by phone. The overwhelming majority of patrons receive their notices via these two modes.

Notification Preferences

Notification Preference	3 Year Active	% of Total (3 yr)	1 year Active	% of Total (1 yr)
Email	389,103	82.2%	239,126	85.6%
Phone	66,761	14.1%	34,567	12.4%
Print	17,588	3.7%	5,774	2.1%
Total	473,452	100.0%	279,467	100.0%

The library has made several efforts – most recently in July 2018 – to encourage patrons to adopt email notification as their preferred method of communication and opt away from print notifications. A message was inserted into the Sierra account of every patron with Print Notifications communicated SFPL’s efforts to be more environmentally conscious by minimizing distribution of paper notices and to provide patrons with a better library experience by notifying them of aspects of their account more expeditiously (by phone or email).

This plan to reduce costs, paper use, and waste was also proposed by the internal Green Stacks Committee as part of the [FY12 budget process](#).

Current Action

Since the discontinuance of print notices last September 2019, Library leadership has been taking into consideration the cumulative patron input and feedback regarding the preference for mailed print notices. Effective January 2, 2020, the Library resumed mailing print notices to library patrons who have placed holds on items. The resumption of print notices will also include overdue notices.

The resumption of this service may be sustained for the duration of the most recent contract renewal with the vendor Ace Mailing Inc., which runs through February 23, 2022. This will allow the Library to develop a comprehensive plan to mitigate the impact of moving patrons away from reliance on mailed print notices for notifications of their hold requests.

As a department of City government, the San Francisco Public Library is responsive to the recommendations of the City and County of San Francisco - [FY 2020-24 Information and Communication Technology Plan](#), issued by the Committee on Information Technology. This ICT Plan has recommended: “To modernize government services and support disaster resiliency, COIT recommends that San Francisco initiates a citywide effort to remove all paper processes. COIT recommends the City & County of San Francisco develop a plan to go paperless. The eventual discontinuance of print notices before 2024 will insure SFPL adheres to the City’s goal for San Francisco to be a responsive, transparent digital city with easy to use and accessible services for every resident.