

# How We Created a Passport Acceptance Facility as a Revenue Source for Our Library

## How Our Program Started - 2018



Our library was inspired to start a Passport Acceptance Facility after a local public library branch started a successful program. While the location was pretty close to us, the State Department determined there was enough community need for us to open a facility as well. After consulting with the public library's program staff, we began to develop our own facility.

## Our 2018 Start Up Costs

Item	Cost
Copier/Printer	\$500
Facility Stamp	\$25
Credit Card Terminal	\$250 (one time purchase)
Stamps.com account	\$17.99 / month
Camera	\$200
Photo Printer/Supplies	\$950
Photo Backdrop	\$80
Photo Cutter	\$70
Mail Scale	\$20
Stool for Photos	\$800
Photo Folders	\$50
Baby Bouncer for Infant Photos	\$60
Total	\$1923

## Our 2022 Reopening Costs

Item	Cost
DNP IOW 520 Passport Camera System	\$878
DNP SP 430 Shipping Label Printer	\$130
Shipping Labels - Roll	\$60
White Hanging backdrop	\$20
Heavy Duty Swivel Stool	\$200
Photo Amenities (mirror, height measure, etc.)	\$78
White Sheets (for infant photos)	\$30
Laundry Service	\$20 as needed
Verbook booking service	\$800 annually
Total	\$2318

Our old photo system required lots of manual adjustments to get a photo cropped right. The printer we initially purchased did not survive being off and unused for 2 years and we had to replace it before reopening. After just a couple months of use, the new one started to randomly shut down. We decided to spend a significant amount of money on a totally new, high-tech system. This reduced the amount of time we spend on photos - the machine does almost all the work for us. We have not had a photo rejected by the State Dept since we made the change.

I purchased more white sheets (so we didn't have to reuse them for multiple applicants), a new wall-mounted photo backdrop, a heavy-duty stool for taking photos, a printer for shipping labels and some amenities like a mirror, a height tape measure and we pay for a laundry service to wash the sheets as needed.

## How to Start a PAF at Your Library

There are a number of things to consider first:

- Are there other places to apply for a passport in your community? Start here: <https://iafb.travel.state.gov/> This website is maintained by the US Department of State and lists all locations in the country approved to accept passport applications. Ultimately it is up to the Dept. of State to determine if there is need in your area, but this will give you an idea of how things look in your community.

- Do you have a space you can dedicate to this program? Consider that families of 4 or more may need to apply, that you need space for a photo backdrop (if you want to take photos) and that some privacy is needed to conduct these appointments. People will have birth certificates, social security cards and other sensitive documents and may need to discuss sensitive issues (custody paperwork, unusual circumstances). Your space should accommodate these needs.

- Do you have staff you can dedicate to this program? Training is significant, detail-oriented and repetition is really needed to get comfortable in the process. Do you have detail-oriented staff that can focus on this program?

- How will the addition of passport acceptance affect the rest of your library daily operations? Do you have space for people to wait for their appointments? Will you need to change your desk coverage schedule? Will adding passports diminish the standard services you provide to your community?

- Do you have funds to invest to set up your office up front or do you need to start small and invest more later? We jumped in with both feet because we had the funding to purchase camera equipment. But it may make more sense for your facility to just start by accepting applications and having applicants bring photos with them.

## Poor Planning What We Did Wrong



Our director at the time was not willing to repurpose one of our public meeting rooms to serve as a passport office and decided to use a staff office instead. This office was located inside the locked staff area on the second floor, which meant staff had to go downstairs and escort each appointment into the office area. This quickly became frustrating for staff.

## Poor Planning What We Did Wrong



Booking appointments was also a huge issue. The public library used a booking system to send out appointment confirmations and used the general library phone line to take the appointment calls. We decided to use our existing Outlook system and have Circulation staff answer a dedicated phone line.

Staff spent significant amounts of time talking each person through their specific circumstances, trying to determine what documents they would need to bring to the appointment. This resulted in people arriving for their appointment with the expectation that we would "do it for them" or they weren't prepared because we didn't make them do the legwork themselves. So much staff time was wasted on the phone giving details to people who then showed up completely unprepared and had to be sent away - a waste of staff time on the phone and then in person on the day of the appointment.

## Poor Planning What We Did Wrong



Staffing was also problematic. Our director wanted as many people as possible trained as Acceptance Agents. We ended up with 8 trained agents - all 3 of our circulation staff, all 3 of our librarians as well as our office manager and training coordinator.

All staff had regular appointment shifts; however, the bulk of the appointments fell to circulation staff. This decision led to very inconsistent quality of service - the librarians and office staff had less experience and less confidence in what they were doing when they processed applications.

A lot of mistakes were made by the less experienced staff members, which led to even more stress for them about accepting applications. It was not a good use of staff time to go through extensive training which didn't get utilized enough to develop confidence in the process.

## Poor Planning What We Did Wrong



Staff quickly began to comment on how difficult it was to staff the public desks and then shift to passports and back to the desk. Being a passport agent is VERY different than being a reference librarian. As library staff, we are very used to finding answers for people and frequently there is some hand-holding for patrons that don't understand an issue. Many staff really struggled with this.

As a passport acceptance agent, it is your job to evaluate the person in front of you and whether what they are presenting to you is valid. You are not the State Department, and you don't have absolute answers to their questions (most of the time). Your job is to ensure the forms are filled out correctly, that the person on the ID matches the person in front of you, that the appropriate documentation is provided and to point out any issues the State Department may have with an application. We don't make guarantees or assurances that they will get a passport.

## Income Basics

You will make \$35 per application accepted. From this, you will have to pay shipping fees. Up to seven applications go in one envelope, and each envelope currently costs us \$7.80 to mail through stamps.com. 7 x \$35 = \$245 (total acceptance fees per envelope) \$245 - \$7.80 = \$237.40 (total acceptance fee - shipping cost) This is a super basic example just to give you an idea of costs.

We also take photos, and have since 2019. We charge \$15 per photo, which was the going rate in 2018. (Many places are now closer to \$20.) Our cost per photo is about \$0.48.

## Our Income 2018-2020

Month (2018)	# of Applications	# of Photos	Revenue (net including shipping costs)
January	84	0	\$2940
February	59	14	\$2760
March	90	26	\$3540
April	112	44	\$4580
May	107	52	\$4625
June	59	42	\$3710
July	74	23	\$2565
August	44	18	\$2055
September	39	23	\$1905
October	48	25	\$3080
November	27	18	\$2025
December	40	22	\$1720
Total	835	307	\$34,075

## Our Income 2018-2020

Month (2018)	# of Applications	Revenue (net including shipping costs)
April	75	\$2625
May	80	\$2800
June	68	\$2345
July	69	\$2415
August	52	\$1820
September	28	\$980
October	51	\$1785
November	29	\$1015
December	27	\$945
Total	420	\$14,700

We were not tracking shipping costs prior to 2022. I estimate for this 2018 timeframe we mailed about 68 envelopes, at the current rate of \$7.60 each, that would be \$516.80 in shipping. \$14,700-\$516.80=\$14,183.20

## Our Income 2018-2020

Month (2020)	# of Applications	# of Photos	Revenue (net including shipping costs)
January	162	69	\$6855
February	139	76	\$6035
March (Closed starting 3/17)	61	32	\$3315
Total	372	189	\$16,005

In January 2020, we added walk-in service. This SIGNIFICANTLY increased our numbers. After we re-opened post-Covid we did not restart walk-in service. We may in the future, but currently we are so busy it just isn't feasible.

## Revamp & Reopen 2022

By the time we closed due to Covid-19 on March 17, 2020, staff was extremely burnt out on passports. As word of Covid started to spread in early 2020, some staff members decided they didn't want to conduct appointments anymore. Circulation staff took on those appointments, as well as the walk-in that we had started taking in January. Looking at our statistics, in the short time we were open in 2020, we made 47% of the previous years' total revenue. And all that work was mainly done by circulation staff who were also still working their regular public desk hours. We were exhausted, and it absolutely was not sustainable. Our passport program remained closed for 2 years.

In mid-2021, I wanted to start our passport program again, but I wanted to completely change how we did things. I had very specific ideas of how to make the program work better for both staff and the public. Our library got a new director in late 2019 and he was very open to a complete reimaging of the program - and he didn't balk at the money I wanted to spend to improve things.

There were three things I thought were the most important to change:

- The office needed to be outside of the staff area.
- We needed to have one main passport agent conducting the majority of appointments.
- We needed to use a booking website and remove the option for the public to call and talk to us about their issues.

## Implementing Change

Moving the office was the easy part. About 2 weeks before our Covid closure, we moved the office to one of our meeting rooms, since staff were worried about germs the public was bringing into the staff area. While we were still on the second floor, it did not require people to be escorted to the interior office. The plan was to start in this space until we could switch our Civil Self Help Center upstairs and move passports down to the big office on the first floor. We operated out of this space from February - October 2022. It was not perfect, but it was MUCH better.

I looked at dozens of booking websites used by other Passport Acceptance Facilities. We ended up going with a company called Verbook. We basically had them copy the booking page they created for another facility, with a few customizations. They do most of the work, but there are many aspects that I can customize myself. The annual cost is \$800. Considering the amount of staff time wasted booking appointments in the past, this was agreed to be a reasonable cost.

The expected pushback on my staffing request never happened. I wanted to have one person be the main acceptance agent, whose only job was to process applications. I thought this would ensure consistent quality of service. I liked processing applications, and I wanted to be the main agent, as I was rather burned out on the circulation desk. I was thrilled that my circulation coworkers did not want to be the main agent, but they did want to continue accepting passports. Our supervisor maintains her training to cover in an emergency, but she does not conduct regular appointments. My 2 coworkers conduct appointments during my lunch hour, up to 6 appointments a week each.

## Revamped Program Staff Impact

I recently surveyed library staff to see how the revamped program is impacting library operations. Overall, everyone is happy with the new office location and having a waiting area for people.

The booking website has significantly decreased phone calls, though we do still get them. We do not advertise a phone number anywhere, so people have to do a little work to contact the library. They are either referred to the State Dept website or passed along to the passport office voicemail, if appropriate. Desk staff has been trained to only forward messages from someone who has already been seen by us. Staff does not answer questions about forms or documents at the public desks.

We try to treat the passport office as a separate entity from the library as much as possible. This significantly decreases the amount of staff time spent dealing with passport issues outside of the passport office.

The one issue a couple of staff commented on was that the program seems short staffed. If I am sick we either have to cancel the days' appointments or have someone cover for me. We have 2 staff members that regularly accept applications and can easily cover for me, and we have plenty of staff to cover the circulation desk if that needs to happen. While inconvenient, the few times I have had to be out sick, the program has run smoothly and the desk was covered without issue.

## Our Income 2022

Month (2022)	# of Applications	# of Photos	Revenue (net including shipping costs)
January	0	0	0
February	52	74	\$4085
March	312	154	\$13,220
April	394	216	\$16,680
May	343	190	\$14,855
June	424	254	\$16,800
July	332	221	\$14,835
August	393	197	\$16,710
September	345	201	\$15,980
October	323	189	\$14,740
November	238	139	\$10,345
December	290	211	\$13,375
Total	3467	2116	\$153,085

## Are You Sure Those 2022 Numbers are Right???

Those numbers look insane, right? Well, we have Covid to thank for such robust business. Do I think it will hold? Of course not. At some point the numbers will get smaller. Why are our numbers so high?

Covid-19 really did a number on the passport application process. For 2 years, all aspects of the process were limited and extremely slow. For most of 2020 only emergency applications were being processed, meaning renewals and standard new applications backed up. In addition to the federal-level processing backup, there were also many Acceptance Facilities that never reopened post-Covid. The local public library that inspired our program never restarted after Covid, so there is a high local need and fewer places to apply. Also, in lots of smaller towns around the state, it seems that post-offices that used to accept applications have stopped.

Covid closures also seem to have inspired the public to travel more - people who have never had a passport now want to apply. I believe our current income levels are a post-Covid anomaly and will eventually decrease, though I have no idea how long that might take. We currently have people come from all over California and Nevada because they couldn't find an appointment anywhere else. I estimate our monthly income will average \$10,000 - \$12,000 once things slow down.

