Radio Frequency Identification (RFID)

San Francisco Public Library is embarking on a project to equip 3 million library items with radio frequency identification (RFID) tags. RFID will make it easier and faster for patrons to check out materials; increase staff efficiency; enable the Library to modernize circulation equipment, checkout machines and security gates; and bring the San Francisco Public Library up to speed with standard library practices and technology.

BENEFITS TO LIBRARY USERS
Customer service

- With RFID, library materials will be able to move through the library system, from shelf to checkout, much more quickly.
- Many library users check out dozens of books at a time. Currently each item must be scanned individually at checkout, but with RFID, an entire stack of books can be scanned at one time.
- With quicker transaction times, the library's collections will be on the shelves faster and holds will arrive at patrons' branch libraries sooner.

BENEFITS TO LIBRARY STAFF
Efficiency

- Because RFID combines circulation and security deactivation into one process, staff can process materials (checkout and check-in) far more efficiently.
- Study results indicate an average savings of 8 seconds per check out, 5 seconds per check-in. Magnified over 6.5 million circulating items per year, the time-savings ranges from 12,000 - 15,000 hours or the work of 6-7.5 full time employees annually. This saved time will allow staff to provide more customer service.

Safety

- RFID can tell patrons and staff if all components of audiovisual materials are present in the case without having to open them, saving wear-and-tear on cases and preventing injury to staff's hands and wrists.
- Simpler processing minimizes unnecessary repetitive motion by staff, decreasing the risk of workplace injuries.

Accuracy

- RFID allows for faster, more accurate inventory, helping staff to identify missing items so they can be replaced more quickly.
- RFID helps staff identify items that might not have been checked out, allowing them to assist patrons promptly when security gates are triggered.
- RFID enables staff to systematically audit the physical inventory of collections in the stacks in real time without having to go back to their workstation to check items at a computer. They are able to spend more time in the stacks instead of behind a desk.

INDUSTRY STANDARD

- More than 75% of Bay Area public libraries already use this technology.
- RFID has been part of the national library landscape for well over a decade – it is a proven, reliable, efficient technology.
- More and more library technology vendors are entering the RFID marketplace. There is no move to pivot to an emerging technology in the industry. More vendors = more competition = declining costs. Since RFID has entered the library world, the cost of tags has dropped from $1/each to ~$0.20/each.

EQUIPMENT REPLACEMENT

- The usefulness of the library's existing checkout and security gates are depreciating. Irrespective of RFID, the Library will need to update or replace this equipment soon – why not invest in state-of-the-art technology?

PRIVACY

- RFID technology represents no threat to patron privacy.
- There are only two pieces of information stored on the passive RFID tag placed on each item in the library's circulating collection:
    - The 14-digit barcode number that uniquely identifies the item (already present on the barcode sticker affixed to cover of each item). No bibliographic information (title, author, etc.) will be on a RFID tag.
    - The security component, which tells an RFID reader if the item is checked out or not.
- Only pieces of the library collection (books, DVDs, CDs, LPs, etc.) will be RFID tagged; patron library cards will NOT be RFID tagged so there will be no RFID tracking of a patron's reading habits or borrowing history. Library cards will continue to function as machine-readable barcodes.
- RFID tags on books and materials can only be deciphered within 40 inches of a library RFID reader.
- The Library is following the 2012 RFID privacy guidelines recommended by the American Library Association and the National Information Standards Organization, a nonprofit organization founded in 1939, which develops, maintains and issues technical standards related to publishing, bibliographic and library applications.

BUDGET/RETURN ON INVESTMENT

- SFPL's investment in RFID technology upgrades represent a one-time strategic expenditure of $3,377,756. This investment is offset by the projected return on investment of $5.5 million over a ten year horizon for the lifespan of the equipment when factoring in the value of staff capacity that will be freed up for more impactful public services.