

Emergency Connectivity Fund Solution: Long-Term Hotspot Lending

While many libraries are loaning hotspots for short periods of time (e.g., 1-3 weeks), this may not be long enough for all users. Libraries may want to leverage new funding available through the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) program to purchase and lend hotspots for a longer period, such as three months, a semester, or even one year.

This guide is meant to help libraries design, plan, and implement a long-term hotspot lending program—although much of the information and resources also are relevant for shorter-term lending programs. The guide also includes an overview of what libraries need to consider when requesting funding through the FCC's ECF program. More ECF-eligible programming scenarios are available at www.ala.org/advocacy/ECF.

Goals

To support the activities of community members who do not have access to affordable high-speed internet access in their home, the hotspot will:

- Increase internet access in homes for families that can't afford the service.
- Enable students with devices to participate in distance learning from their home and complete research and homework when it is convenient for them and their household.
- Increase community members' participation in activities related to our society, democracy, and the economy.
- Provide internet access to community members when it is convenient for them.
- Build digital skills.

Pros

- Fairly easy to set up and support the end user.
- Staff spend less time managing hotspots when they are loaned long term.
- Multiple Wi-Fi enabled devices can use the hotspot connection at the same time as long as all devices are within about 30 feet of the hotspot.
- Hotspot is mobile so the user can take it with them wherever they go.
- Because the solution is mobile, it is a good solution for individuals who are home insecure but need access to the internet regularly.

Cons

Hotspot can only be used in a location that is covered by the hotspot service provider. If cellular coverage is weak, this solution will not work.

Some service providers throttle internet speeds once a certain amount of data has been used in a billing cycle. When this happens,

Students enrolled in a local community college.

Someone who is currently unhoused.

Individuals eligible for the Supplemental Security Income program (SSI).

Program Terms

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLK55ljc_T5icoVxNNe7i5tliTMRd4wHsT

Include information with the hotspot about digital skills training or coaching services offered by the library or partner organizations.

Staff training

Staff who support the end user should be offered the opportunity to use the device.

If possible, keep one hotspot on site to assist staff in troubleshooting issues. Each hotspot model is unique, and menu and display choices will vary.

Hotspots distribution

Questions to consider when distributing the hotspots include:

Where will the person pick up the hotspot? Will the pickup be at a specific library branch, with the partner organization, etc?

Can the user pick it up at any time the location is open or by appointment only?

What information (if any) will the user need to bring when picking up the hotspot? For instance, their library card or state ID, documents related to any eligibility requirements the library or partner is using to target high-need communities?

Will the user need to fill out a user agreement? To be ECF-compliant, the user will need to sign an agreement. Examples include:

Norfolk Public Library <https://www.slideshare.net/nebraskaccess/hotspot-checkout-agreement>

Texas State Library and At2W*g in

Can the battery, charging cord, or other components be replaced after the warranty ends but before the service contract expires?

Can replacement peripheral items be purchased through existing contracts?

End User Support

End users will need to know how to resolve technical issues with their hotspot device and their personal devices. In most cases, service providers will provide some technical assistance.

Libraries should have a plan in place to assist users if a question is not answered by the service provider.

Provide resources and phone numbers needed to resolve technical issues to users.

Provide documents in the users' preferred language. Share this information with library staff so they can assist users who come to the library.

Will you check-in with the user periodically?

Will you reach out to the user if several months of no data use is reported in the usage statistics?

Returning the Hotspot

When the loan period ends, what will the library do with the hotspot? If time remains on the service contract or service can be extended, ensure the hotspot is returned, test that it still works and prepare it for the next users. Before loaning the device again, update the inventory information to reflect the hotspot was returned and document who now has the hotspot.

As the end of the loan period approaches, the library or partner should share with the user options for securing internet in the home. That can include:

Providing them a list of service providers in their area.

Outline programs that exist that could reduce their monthly fee, such as the [Emergency Broadband Benefit](#) program, [Lifeline](#), and low-cost programs through broadband providers, such as those shared at [EveryoneOn.org](#).

Provide a guide or personal assistance to help users select the right plan for their needs.

Assessment

How can you assess this service to ensure you are meeting your project goals, as well as use

San Jose Public Library: Wi-Fi Hotspots for San Jose Students
<https://www.sjpl.org/hotspot-schools>

Additional Resources

Public Library Association Hotspot Playbook

<http://www.ala.org/pla/initiatives/digitallead/hotspot-playbook>

Mobile Beacon offers mobile hotspots to libraries. Learn more about their program.

<http://www.techsoup.org/mobile-beacon>

schools