

Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending – Award of Contract for Data Communications

Date:	February 26, 2018
To:	Toronto Public Library Board
From:	City Librarian

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to request Toronto Public Library Board approval to enter into an additional service contract for data communications with Rogers to support Phase 4 implementation of the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Project.

The Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Project supports and is funded by the City of Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy to help further its strategic objective of *expanding service access and availability*. The project began in 2016 as a pilot study to determine how the service might be delivered and to focus distribution to low-income households. Phase 3 of the project began on September 4, 2017 and is scheduled to end on March 5, 2018. Data plans for Phases 1 and 2 were awarded under the City Librarian's delegated authority. The data plan for Phase 3 was approved by the Board in June 2017.

The approved 2018 operating budget includes an additional \$350,000 to expand the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Project and planning for the expansion of the project in Phase 4 is currently underway. Included is a commitment from Rogers to donate another approximately 550 free Wi-Fi hotspot devices subject to a two-year unlimited data plan for the devices. The total cost for the additional service contract over the two-year period is approximately \$660,000, excluding Harmonized Sales Tax (HST). Awards greater than \$500,000 require Board approval.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Librarian recommends that the Toronto Public Library Board:

1. approves the service contract for data communications to Rogers to support Phase 4 implementation of the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Project, which is comprised of:
 - a. approximately 550 Wi-Fi Hotspot devices at no cost to the Library; and
 - b. a two-year unlimited data plan for the devices at a cost of approximately \$660,000, excluding HST.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The approved 2018 operating budget includes an additional \$350,000 to expand the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Project, bringing the total available funding to \$550,000, which has been provided through the City's Poverty Reduction Strategy. The \$350,000 budget increase will be used to acquire approximately 550 devices with a data plan.

The total value of the additional two-year service contract with Rogers for 550 devices is approximately \$660,000, excluding HST, for data communications to support Phase 4 implementation of the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Project. The contract, which will cost approximately \$330,000 annually, is expected to start on March 1, 2018 and end on February 29, 2020. The cost of the additional contract in 2018 is approximately \$275,000.

A \$135,000 donation from Google Canada through the Foundation carried forward from 2017 will be used to support the initiative in 2018.

The Director, Finance & Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and is in agreement with it.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN

The Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Pilot Project supports the Library's 2016-2019 strategic plan priorities of *breaking down barriers to access and driving inclusion*, and *expanding access to technology and training*. There is a specific 2018-19 strategic work plan initiative to *expand Wi-Fi hotspot lending program to 1000 devices available for loan to low-income individuals in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas*.

DECISION HISTORY

On May 16, 2017, the Toronto Public Library Board received an information report providing findings of Phase 1 of the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Project, as well as future directions for the project. A full copy of the report can be found at:

<http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2017/may15/22-wi-fi-hotspot-lending-pilot-update.pdf>

On June 19, 2017, the Toronto Public Library Board approved the service contract for data communications to Rogers to support Phase 3 of the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Project. A full copy of the report can be found at:

<http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2017/jun19/12-wi-fi-hotspot-lending-approval-of-contract-for-data-comms.pdf>

As a result, Phase 3 launched on September 4, 2017 and is scheduled to end on March 5, 2018.

On January 29, 2018, the Toronto Public Library Board received an information report providing findings of Phase 2 of the project. A full copy of the report can be found at: <https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2018/jan29/21-wi-fi-hotspot-lending-project-phase-2.pdf>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Project supports and is funded by the City's Poverty Reduction Strategy to help further its strategic objective of *expanding service access and availability*. Access to the Internet and technology supports full participation in society, education, employment, government, and community, and is increasingly seen as a basic human right as more information and services are becoming available online. Public libraries are important access points for technology and, for some people, the public library is their only access to the Internet. Public libraries promote digital inclusion and digital literacy, including the safe use of the Internet. While the Library provides free access to computers and Wi-Fi in all branches, this pilot provides home access to Internet service for access outside of library hours to low-income households. In partnership with the City, Google Canada and Rogers, TPL offers Wi-Fi hotspot lending in high-needs areas of the City to address an immediate need. The Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Project is offered in branches serving communities with a large number of low-income households. The project is part of TPL's strategy to expand access to technology and digital literacy training across the City.

COMMENTS

Development of the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Project

In August 2015 the Toronto Public Library Foundation approached library staff to indicate that Google was prepared to fund a pilot project to lend Wi-Fi hotspots to library customers. Following the approval of the pilot project, broad implementation parameters for the program were developed, including selection of a data plan along with the appropriate hotspot device. After an unsuccessful RFP process, TPL negotiated with its vendor to purchase a limited data plan and equipment within budget. The pilot was to have lasted for one year.

Implementation of Phase 1 (Jun. 1 – Nov. 30, 2016) and Phase 2 (Feb. 1 – Jul. 31, 2017)

The Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Project was officially launched in June 2016. The devices were circulated at six pilot branches located in city-designated Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs).

Pilot branches in conjunction with community partners, recruited participants that met the borrowing profile – low-income households without Internet access. Borrowers were loaned the hotspot devices for six months (June 1, 2016 – November 30, 2016), with an initial limited plan of 10G. In September 2016, when an unlimited data plan became available the devices were migrated to this new plan.

With the unlimited monthly data plan in place, Phase 2 was launched on February 1, 2017, and ended on July 31, 2017.

Implementation of Phase 3 (Sept. 4, 2017 – Mar. 5, 2018)

Phase 3 of the expanded project began on September 4, 2017. A total of 570 new devices were provided by Rogers as part of a new service contract, which includes free devices with a two-year unlimited data plan, and ensures delivery of the service over two years. An additional 55 devices from Phase 2 have been activated for Phase 3, providing over 600 devices for the current phase of the project. Distribution of devices remains focused on low-income families living in high-needs areas, and was expanded to include seven additional branches, as well as the Community Librarian Project and Bookmobile stops in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas. Phase 3 is scheduled to end March 5, 2018.

Implementation of Phase 4

Planning for Phase 4 implementation is currently underway, and staggered start dates are anticipated. Loans for existing devices will begin late March and loans for new devices acquired through this additional service plan will begin in late April. In Phase 4, the goal is to distribute over 1,100 devices. As per the previous phases, distribution of devices will continue to focus on low-income families living in high-needs areas, and be expanded to include 11 new branch locations, including additional units for distribution by Community Librarians.

CONTACT

Pam Ryan; Director, Service Development and Innovation; Tel: 416-393-7133;
Email: pryan@torontopubliclibrary.ca

SIGNATURE

Vickery Bowles
City Librarian