Emergency Connectivity Fund Solution: Subsidized Internet Service in the Home

One way libraries and schools are providing broadband access in their community is to pay for an internet connection to a person's home for a specific length of time.

This guide is meant to help libraries design, plan, and implement a program where the library subsidizes an internet connection to a person's place of residence. The guide also includes an overview of what libraries need to consider when requesting funding through the FCC's Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) program. More ECF-eligible programming scenarios are available at www.ala.org/advocacy/ECF.

Goals

To support the connectivity of individuals that do not have high-speed, reliable internet access in the home, this solution will:

- Increase internet access in homes that can't afford the service.
- Enable students to participate in distance learning from their home, as well as complete homework when it is convenient for them and their household.
- Allow users to search and apply for jobs.
- Allow community members to apply for social services.
- Increase community members' participation in activities related to our society, democracy and economy.
- Internet access is accessible when it is convenient for them.
- Build digital skills.

Pros

- Regular internet use builds and sustains digital skills
- Fairly easy to set up and support the end user.
- Multiple Wi-Fi enabled devices can connect at the same time.

Cons

- Library may lose contact with the patron because they do not need to interact with the library while using home internet access.
- Solution may be difficult to implement for individuals and families experiencing housing insecurity.

- People must live in the service area of the selected internet service provider (ISP).
- User is bound by any service provider's agreement, and users should contact the ISP with any technical issues.
- The user's personal information (e.g., name, address) must be made available to the ISP.

Staff Skill Level Needed to Set Up Solution

Staff who select the service provider will either need to understand or become familiar with specific terminology related to consumer internet service in the home to select the plan and service provider(s) that best meets the needs of the programmatic goals. When selecting a provider these terms may be used in the terms of services of agreement: data limits, throttling, bandwidth, etc.

Equipment/Service Needed

- Equipment required by the ISP (modem, router, etc.)
- Internet service

Note: Some patrons also may need access to a computer to use the internet in the home. The ECF program may be used to reimburse up to $400 per mobile device. See Laptop or Tablet Lending solution for more information.

ECF Program Requirements

The Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) is administering the ECF program. Listed below are some of the requirements library staff should be aware of as they develop a device lending program. An ALA summary of the FCC's ECF Order also provides direct references to key provisions referenced below.

Eligible Expenses

Applicants should review the program's Eligible Services List to ensure their request is compliant with the program rules. The list below highlights eligible expenses of interest:

- Modem or router
  - Including any manufacturer components necessary for the equipment to operate, for example cords and chargers.
  - A manufacturer's multi-year warranty for a period of up to three years that is provided as an integral part of an eligible component, without a separately identifiable cost, is also eligible.

- Internet service

Installation, activation, and initial configuration costs, taxes, shipping charges, and other reasonable fees incurred with the purchase of the eligible equipment and services are eligible for support under the ECF program.

CIPA Compliance

The American Library Association created [The Emergency Connectivity Fund, E-rate, and CIPA Compliance](#) scenarios to help libraries determine if their ECF request needs to be CIPA compliant to meet the program requirements.

Certification of Need

The ECF requires that the user sign an acceptable use policy (AUP), which explains that the ECF equipment or service is intended only for patrons who do not have internet access sufficient to meet their needs.

Inventory Requirements

The ECF program requires that libraries who receive funds from this program document eligible services and equipment. Applicants should review the program's [Device and Service Inventory Requirements](#) to ensure their documentation is compliant with the program rules.

Libraries must retain their records to demonstrate compliance with all the ECF rules for at least 10 years from the last date of service or delivery of equipment.

Selecting the Right Service Provider

Who is Eligible for the Program?

Anyone who lacks internet access is eligible. You may want to collaborate with community organizations, however, to better target unserved community members. A local partner can provide expertise, experience, and connections to help prioritize applicants, promote the service, and/or manage the application and selection process. Target groups might include:
- Individuals eligible for the Supplemental Security Income program (SSI).
- K-12 students enrolled in the local school district (Note: K12 schools also are eligible to participate in the ECF program, so these students may be served in this way.)
- Anyone enrolled in a specific library or partner program.
- Unemployed job seekers.
- Students enrolled in a local community college.

Program Terms

When setting up the program you will need to determine how many households you can support, and how long the library will pay for the service. Will the library select a certain time period like three months or one year? If the program is targeted at students, will the program last a semester or a school year? If your program is targeting job seekers, will service end within 60 days after they are employed, for instance, or for four months regardless of job status?

Service Plans

There are many factors to consider when selecting the right service plan to support your program goals. They include:

- What ISPs serve the geographic areas targeted in your program?
- How much does the plan (or plans, if there are multiple providers) cost?
- Are there data limits?
- Can the bandwidth be throttled when a certain data limit is reached in a month?

How to Set Up the Program

The Account

The library will be the initial account holder of record with the ISP. Ensure the selected provider can support your billing requirements.

Application Process

The ISP will require the following information:

- Individual's name
- Address where the internet service will be installed
- Phone number
- Email address

The library may also gather information to ensure applicants meet the program requirements, such as certification of need.

Because the library is the account of record, households with outstanding debt from a previous internet service subscription should be eligible to participate. The outstanding debt may be an issue if the household chooses to continue service after the library's service ends.

The Dayton Public Library has posted their application and user agreement online.

Setting up the Service

Equipment

Once a household is selected, they will need equipment. The library will need to work with the ISP to ensure the equipment is installed in each household. Equipment could be mailed directly to the household, someone from the household could pick up the equipment from a specific location, or the provider may install it.

Service Date

Set the date the service begins. Service usually commences the day the equipment provided by the ISP connects to the internet from the designated address. Even if the equipment has not been set up after a specific date, the provider may begin service.

End User Support

End users should be provided information needed to resolve technical issues with the internet service and personal devices they may have. In most cases, ISPs provide some assistance to the end user to troubleshoot issues with the equipment. The level of support should be a *key factor* when evaluating providers. Libraries should:
- Have a plan in place to assist users when questions are not answered by the provider.
- Provide user resources and contact information for when they need help troubleshooting technical issues.
- Provide documentation to the user in their preferred language.
- Determine if staff will check in with the user periodically.
- Reach out to the user if several months of no data use is reported in the usage statistics.

End of Service

The library should remind the user their service will terminate on a specific date, and they will no longer have access to the internet via this program.

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](#) program, 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.

Once the service ends, the library may need to work with the patron to return equipment provided by the ISP to either the library or the provider

Assessment

How can you assess this service to ensure you are meeting your project goals, as well as use data to advocate and secure additional funding? When launching a new service, you should identify both quantitative and qualitative data to gather. Examples include:

- Number of users
- # of sessions
- Data usage statistics, such as overall amount of data used, max data used, average data used, number of users who have used no data.
- Program Assessment
  - Pre- and post surveys to measure if any behaviors, skills, perceptions or comfort level changed after long term access to the internet. Questions should support the goals of the project.
  - Track and analyze data usage: over time, on average # of days used per month, # of unique devices connected.

Other Considerations

Patrons may need additional services or support when they use the internet connection in their home. As you develop this program, look for ways to promote and integrate these library and partner services:

- Homework help both in person and online
- Digital skills coaching
- Job searching
- Entrepreneurship and small business development opportunities

Examples

- Dayton Metro Library Bridges the Digital Divide with GET CONNECTED Program http://www.daytonmetrolibrary.org/news/3871-getconnected-announced
- Chicago Public Schools Chicago Connected FAQ https://www.cps.edu/strategic-initiatives/chicago-connected/chicago-connected-faq/