

Providing Internet Access to Robeson County Library Patrons: Budget Report

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Introduction

Public libraries play an integral role in the efforts to bridge the digital divide and connect their communities to broadband internet (Grimes and Porter, 2023). Internet access is a necessity to connect communities, provide educational access, increase access to healthcare, and help build a better workforce (Internet for All, n.d.). A recent survey of Robeson County Public Library (RCPL) users showed that 45% of respondents lack access to internet services at home and rely on the library for connectivity. To bridge the digital divide in the community, RCPL intends to provide a hotspot lending program for patrons. A project such as this depends on a stable and realistic budget that takes into consideration all financial needs and limitations. The purpose of this paper is to outline suitable funding sources that align with the project, a comprehensive budget plan with anticipated costs, and strategies to manage the financial resources. This detailed budget plan is necessary in maintaining the longevity of the project, as well as continuing to financially support the lending program.

Funding Sources

As with any other long-term effort to provide new services in the library, identifying a source of funding that is both reliable and predictable is a challenging key to success. The cost of the material items (hotspots, cases, chargers) and peripheral support costs (training for staff, negotiating with service providers) requires an innovative assessment of possible sources of support for this program. The team undertook an examination of potential sources and identified the following as the most suitable:

Funding Source	Description	Estimated Contribution	% of Total Budget
Federal Grants	Planning Grants or Community-Centered Implementation Grants aligned with supporting digital access and literacy from the National Leadership Grants for Libraries. (Institute of Museum and Library Services, n.d.)	\$40,000 for continued service costs over five years (plus legal contingency)	87%
State Agency Grants	LSTA or other State Library Grants aligned with facilitating equitable access to information and technology. (North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, n.d.)	\$5,000 to purchase the hotspot devices from service provider	11%
Corporate Donations	Donations from the service provider and other companies specializing in the creation of training programs and/or materials (cases, etc) to support hotspots technology. (Evans & Greenwell, 2020)	\$2,500 to support continued staff and patron training	6%
Private Foundations and Nonprofit Organizations	Specific Program Grants from entities such as Americorps aligned with improving academic performance in STEM while serving underserved and indigenous individuals both on and off reservation lands. (Demco, n.d.)	\$4,500 for outreach to patrons living in remote areas (over next five years)	10%
Friends of the Library (FOL)	Donations from a percentage of all sales and/or membership fees for a specified period of time will be dedicated to providing a stipend for a one-day-a-week training session led by a local expert in the field of wireless internet to continue for four weeks. The library will record these training sessions and make them available on the website. (Robeson County Public Library, n.d.)	\$500 plus in-kind donation in the form of volunteered time	1%
Total		\$49,500	115%

These funding sources align with our library's goal to provide a sustainable hotspot program for our community by addressing the need to sustainably purchase the necessary materials and services while also affording the time and dedicated fiscal resources to train both staff and patrons on this new service. Utilizing diverse sources will support the goal to provide this service for the long-term, not just on a temporary basis, which in turn supports the library's mission to address the digital literacy gap in our community.

Detailed Budget Plan

The comprehensive budget plan below provides an estimate of all costs associated with introducing mobile hotspots to Robeson County Public Library. Each category has been calculated based on the project's scope to ensure adequate funding for five years of hotspot lending. Previously, we stated we would get 15 devices, but after our budget calculations we decided to increase that number to 25.

Category	Item	Cost Estimate	Justification
Device Costs	25 JEXtream RG2100 5G Mobile Hotspots	\$4,500	5G mobile hotspots that will provide reliable internet access.
Service Costs	Annual Mobile Hotspot Data Plan	\$6,000/year for five years	A high speed unlimited data plan to help patrons stay reliably connected.
Accessories and Replacements	Hotspot Carrying Cases	\$500	Carrying cases will help protect hotspots and will keep hotspot accessories (charging cord, instructions, etc.) together.
	Reserved Funds for Replacement Devices and Accessories	\$2,500	A contingency fund to cover inevitable losses and damages.
Legal Counsel	Contingency Plan for Any Issues With Carrier	\$3,000	Dealing with a carrier for a hotspot data plan could create legal issues, such as breach of contract.
Staff Training	Hotspot Training Led by IT Department	\$1,500	Creating a training program for hotspot lending will help staff get

			more comfortable with the process and create a better user experience.
Promotional Materials	Social Media Posts, Fliers, Staff Outreach	\$1,000	Promoting this service will help reach a broader audience and can justify continuing it into the future.
Total Estimated Budget		\$43,000	

Each item's cost has been calculated to align with current market rates to ensure that the budget is comprehensive, thorough, and realistic.

Fiscal Resource Management

To ensure that provided funds are used properly and do not exceed the provided amount, the following strategies will be used.

- **Clear Communication with External Sources and Internal Employees:**

Communication will be maintained with external sources on the timeline of provided funds, pricing, and steps in the project rollout. Internally, communication regarding timelines, restrictions, and overall changes in budget will be provided to staff. This ensures that the system works toward the common goal of avoiding overspending. Since this is a large project, all staff should be aware of fiscal changes and responsibilities the library system takes on. It is imperative that everyone is on the same page and that everyone is aware of what goes into this process and each step required (O'Hara et al., 2020).

- **Budget Tracking and Maintaining Documentation:** To ensure the project does not exceed its budget, the team will create a timeline to track budget spending. Checkpoints will be provided as a guideline for the amount of money spent at any given time. Along with this, the team will maintain documentation and receipts for any portion of spent

money. This will ensure that the project remains on track and that there is no unnecessary spending (Oyelude & Ola, 2008).

- **Grant and Donation Management:** There will be a specialized team that focuses on communication with any grants or donations received. Their job will be to ensure the project meets grant requirements and timeline checkpoints. The project will do the same with any outside resources such as donations and Friends of the Library contributions. This keeps the project and its team accountable and on track. In order to advance to the next step in the created timeline, the team must track and maintain statistics. Lastly, this also ensures that funds are used only for their intended purpose (Oyelude & Ola, 2008).
- **Contingency Planning:** The last strategy that will be utilized is contingency planning. To do this, the team will ensure that the project starts toward the beginning of the fiscal year so that if any alterations need to be made, there is time to prepare and propose changes early (Holley, 2014). By using the above mentioned strategies, the team will be prepared for any contingencies that may arise and will be able to reevaluate at any given checkpoint for the next step or for the next fiscal year.

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