SCLS Mobile Hotspots Pilot Project

What Are Mobile Hotspots?

Mobile hotspots are devices about the size of a smartphone that use a cellular signal to connect to the internet. Once the hotspot is online it sends out a wireless signal. You can connect to this signal using any normal wireless device. Just like that you have an internet connection wherever you are!

How are other libraries using mobile hotspots?

Library staff are using mobile hotspots for outreach and programming, and some libraries are loaning hotspots to provide internet access to patrons who might not otherwise have it at home.

See these articles for more information:

- Library Journal - "Bridging the Gap: Libraries across the country lend mobile Wi-Fi hotspots" http://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2015/09/11/bridging-tech-gap-wi-fi-lending

- TechSoup for Libraries - "Library In A Box: How Worthington Brings Library Services Anywhere" http://www.techsoupforlibraries.net/blog/library-in-a-box-how-worthington-brings-library-services-anywhere

About the SCLS Mobile Hotspot Pilot Project

SCLS has been granted LSTA funds which will allow us to offer mobile hotspots to our members for a 6 month pilot project. This project supports goal number 1 of the SCLS Five Year Technology Plan which is "Take advantage of new technology in order to help our member libraries meet their communities' changing needs."

All libraries that responded to the survey to sign up will be included in the project and will receive 1 staff and/or 1 patron hotspot (depending on what your library requested). The project will kick off with staff hotspots in July, and once libraries are familiar with hotspots the patron portion of the project will occur in September (tentative). Most of the hotspots will use Verizon as a carrier, unless SCLS staff determines that Verizon doesn't have good coverage in your area.

Goals for the mobile hotspot project

1. Library staff will become familiar with and comfortable using mobile hotspots
2. Libraries will test hotspot coverage in their communities
3. Libraries will experiment with using hotspots to provide library services and programming outside the library
4. SCLS and libraries will develop circulation policies and procedures for loaning hotspots to patrons
5. Libraries will gain some experience loaning hotspots to patrons

Hotspot configurations

Staff hotspots

- Duration: 6 months, July – December
- Uses: Mobile circulation, community outreach, programming, etc.

Patron hotspots
- Duration: 6 months , September – February (tentative)
- Uses: checkout to patrons and/or community organizations

SCLS Mobile Circ Kits
During the staff hotspot pilot, SCLS will also provide 2 mobile circ kits. Each kit will include:

- Laptop
- USB barcode scanner
- Battery-powered portable receipt printer
- Verizon hotspot*
- Surge suppressor

*The equipment in the mobile circ kit can also be used with EW, other wireless signals, or another provider's mobile hotspot (AT&T, Sprint, US Cellular, etc).

FAQ
What will it cost to participate in this project?
Nothing! Zero! Zilch! The LSTA grant will cover the cost of the device(s) and the monthly service for 6 months.

How many devices can my library get?
Each library that indicated interest in staff and/or patron hotspots will receive a hotspot of each type requested for the duration of the pilot.

Are there any data limits or do they slow down the data after a certain amount is used?
All data for this project is unlimited. Due to the nature of our contract with the three vendors, we are not subject to any data caps or data slowdowns.

What Cellular Service Provider will be used?
SCLS has contracts with Verizon, Sprint and AT&T. SCLS will work with your library to determine the best cellular provider in your area. If you know for certain that **a particular vendor** *does not* have good coverage in your area, please let us know.

Why don't I see US Cellular on the list of vendors?
US Cellular does not offer unlimited data plan. They currently limit each hotspot to 5GB per month. It would be very easy to use that amount of data and during our pilot project and we don't want to worry about paying overage charges.

What if we loan a hotspot to a patron and the patron doesn't return it?
Contact SCLS. We will be able to shut off service to the hotspot which will hopefully inspire the patron to return it.

What if we want to continue using hotspots after the pilot project is done?

If your library wishes to continue using hotspots after the pilot project is done, your library will need to subscribe to and pay for hotspot service from your preferred provider.

SCLS has not yet determined what level of support, if any, it will provide for hotspots after the pilot project is complete.

How much would it cost for my library to pay for a hotspot after the pilot project is done?

Hotspot service pricing is dependent on factors such as: data limit (capped vs. unlimited), provider, contracts, and discounts/promotions.

This sounds great! Is there anything we (libraries) can do to contribute to this project?

Why, YES! Thank you for asking. Read on for "Next Steps"!

Next Steps

Start thinking about how you'll use the hotspot(s)

Staff hotspots

If your library signed up for a staff hotspot, you will receive it in the early part of July. Start thinking about how you'll use the hotspot to deliver library services outside your library so you're ready to go when your hotspot arrives!

Patron hotspots

ILS staff will work with libraries interested in circulating hotspots to patrons to determine appropriate procedures and policies. SCLS will provide information about other libraries circulating hotspots and the decisions those libraries made as far as policies, PR, loan periods, etc.

Experiment and play!

The mobile hotspot project is an opportunity to try things out, test coverage in your community, and experiment. Jump in and make the most of it!

Let us know how the hotspots are being used

Library staff will be asked to fill out short surveys to let us know how the hotspots were used (Where did you take it? For what type of programming was it used? What worked? What didn't work?). Patrons who borrow hotspots also be asked to give us brief feedback on their experiences.

Keep in mind this is a pilot project

Although we will try to choose the best provider for your area, we may guess wrong or coverage might not be as great as we hoped it would be. It will be important to let us know how things are going for your library. If things aren't working so well, we may be able to help.

Let us know what questions you have

What haven't we covered? What are you still wondering? Please let us know!