

# Memo

**To:** Montana State Library Commission

**From:** Jennie Stapp, State Library  
Tracy Cook, Lead Consulting Librarian  
Cara Orban, Statewide Projects Librarian

**Date:** April 24, 2020

**Re:** **COVID-19 related funding recommendations**

On April 13, 2020 the State Library received notice from the Institute for Museum and Library Services that we will receive \$96,573 in CARE Act funds awarded under the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Grants to States Program.

Additionally, staff projects year end balances that we recommend adding to this federal funding to address the priority needs for Montana libraries and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Funding Available**

CARE Act funds	\$96,573
Fiscal Year 2019 LSTA funds	\$45,300
<u>Additional MSL funds</u>	<u>\$150,000</u>
Total available	<b>\$291,873</b>

## Notes about funding sources

- CARES Act spending principles
  - To prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19
  - To expand digital network access, purchase internet accessible devices, and provide technical support services
- CARES Act funds must be spent by September 30, 2021
- Fiscal Year 2019 LSTA Funds must be committed by June 30, 2020 and spent by September 30, 2020.

- State funds must be committed by June 30, 2020 and can be accrued under a signed contract

The Network Advisory Council (NAC) met on April 23, 2020 and made the following recommendations to the State Library Commission to expend the available funds.

**Replace old broadband/wifi routers** for libraries that have routers older than five years or where the libraries are reporting unreliable service. As reported in the Gigabit Toolkit study, thirty-three libraries have routers older than five years and eight libraries report unreliable wifi. Quality replacement routers average \$250 per router. Improved internet access will help those libraries that are open and/or may allow patrons to use the library by appointment to use public access computers and will also allow libraries to extend their wifi access outside the building for those libraries that are closed or during hours when the library is not open. Extended access allows patrons to use the internet from the parking lot or building grounds.

**Recommendation 1. The NAC recommends allocating \$10,000 for the purpose of replacing this outdated equipment.**

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**Procure an online summer reading system** for interested public libraries. During the summer, Montana public libraries provide summer reading programs to encourage reading and to prevent the summer reading slide. This is an essential service provided by all public libraries in Montana. Due to current restrictions imposed by the state of emergency and directives issued by local health authorities, Montana libraries seek a solution to offer summer reading programs online. This solution must be both affordable and fully operational for libraries beginning no later than June 1, 2020. Given the need to deploy a solution rapidly, staff and librarians evaluated two solutions and recommends that the State Library exercise the exigency exception to the state procurement policy to contract with ReadSquared. More information about ReadSquared is available online at: <https://www.readsquared.com/>

**Recommendation 2. The NAC recommends contracting with ReadSquared for two years at a level that allows forty public libraries to participate in the contract. Estimated total contract amount is \$25,000.**

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**Purchase additional content for MontanaLibrary2Go.** This e-book and e-audio service already struggles to meet demand for content. During the pandemic, the number of holds placed by patrons has increased 20%. Information about the increased use of MontanaLibrary2Go during the COVID-19 pandemic is available online at: <http://about.msl.mt.gov/publications/statistics>

**Recommendation 3. The NAC recommends allocating \$96,000 to MontanaLibrary2Go to purchase content in accordance with their collection development policy and processes.**

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**Create a demonstration project to circulate mobile hotspots** to Montanans through public libraries. Currently four Montana libraries circulate hotspots to patrons that do not otherwise have internet access. As experienced by those libraries, the hotspots are in constant circulation. The need for increased internet access is even more dire due to the pandemic as families use the internet to both work and attend online classes, apply for unemployment, communicate with healthcare providers through telemedicine services, etc. This demonstration project will allow Montana libraries to pilot the circulation of hotspots in their communities to both address this immediate need, albeit in a small way, while at the same time determining whether or not this service is one a library might choose to continue after the pandemic. The State Library would make use of term contracts to procure wifi hotspots with a one-year prepaid data plan. These hotspots could be deployed immediately to participating libraries. The estimated annual cost per hotspot is \$480.

**Recommendation 4. The NAC recommends allocating a total of \$160,000 to purchase hotspots. They recommend that this funding be used to purchase two hotspots per library at an estimated cost of \$80,000. They further recommend using the remaining \$80,000 to target ten libraries based on need that will receive additional hotspots. These ten libraries would receive 18 hotspots.**

Based on the recommendation that the hotspot program be considered a demonstration project that targets libraries according to need, staff further recommends that we evaluate need based on both limited broadband availability in the community and the percentage of students who receive free and reduced school lunches. Staff recommend this metric because it is the metric used to determine the amount of federal funding schools and libraries are eligible for through the E-rate program.