

Hot Spot Lending Program

Montana State Library (\$1,200,000)

Program Description

COVID has forced people to live, work and learn online. With mobile wifi hot spots and unlimited data plans procured by the Montana State Library (MSL), Montana libraries are “checking out the internet” for patrons to use in their homes and in other locations without reliable internet. Patrons report using wi-fi hot spots for remote learning and homework, remote work, filing online government applications, telemedicine and other online services. Missoula County is using a hot spot to provide wifi access at a COVID-19 vaccination site. While need for this program exists for the foreseeable future, libraries consider the program a band aid service until Montana addresses broadband concerns holistically. More information and metrics about the current program are available at:

https://about.msl.mt.gov/publications/hotspot_program.



Required Resources

Due to increasing usage, MSL sees a need to expand this service. MSL requires additional funding to pay for monthly data costs with hot spot providers Verizon, T-Mobile, and Nemont. The funding request would continue the service for four years.

Funding	
Total OTHER ARPA Funds	\$1,200,000
Estimated Costs	
Monthly unlimited data plans x 48 months	\$1,200,000

Objectives and Measurable Outcomes

The purpose of the hot spot lending program is to provide internet access to those Montanans who continue to work, learn and access services remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic and who are not currently served by adequate broadband. More than 25% of Montana lacks access to terrestrial broadband service.* Many more cannot afford service that might otherwise be available to them. 44 counties are served by the current hot spot lending program. With additional funding MSL intends to expand and extend the program to serve all 56 counties and to increase the number of circulating hot spots from 800 to 1250. With additional promotion of this service, MSL intends to increase circulation of the hot spots to a circulation rate of 80% or higher.

*BroadbandNow, March 18, 2021, [Internet Access in Montana: Stats & Figures \(broadbandnow.com\)](https://www.broadbandnow.com)