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Board of Supervisors Approves Funding for LA County Library to Provide Digital Support to Assist Those Negatively Impacted by COVID-19

LA County's Supplemental Coronavirus Relief Fund Spending Plan Includes Funding for More Laptop & Hotspot Loans and Wi-Fi Expansion to Parking Lots

LOS ANGELES COUNTY (September 16, 2020)— The Supplemental Coronavirus Relief Fund Spending Plan approved yesterday by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors includes an allocation to LA County Library to provide digital support to individuals and communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, specifically by expanding the recently-launched Laptop & Hotspot Loan program that allows cardholders to borrow a Chromebook and wireless hotspot kit, and by extending the Wi-Fi network range at libraries, to cover parking lots.

This pandemic has illuminated the digital divide in many LA communities; countless students, individuals, and families lack reliable internet service to mitigate the negative impacts of Coronavirus. For employees whose income has been impacted (e.g., layoffs or reduced hours), unemployment offices and call centers are overrun. For individuals needing health care or mental health care, access has been restricted to treating serious conditions, opening the door for less urgent health conditions to escalate into more serious conditions. For school-aged children, schools are closed and have transitioned to online learning, and yet many households do not have the connectivity to ensure educational success.

As all LA County Library locations remain closed, those who would normally come to the library to use the computers to apply for services or do schoolwork, among other things, are not able to do so. Last fiscal year, LA County Library hosted nearly 1.5 million internet sessions on Library computers and over 4 million sessions on Library Wi-Fi, demonstrating a high level of demand for resources that can't currently be offered.

The Laptop & Hotspot Loan is currently available at 10 Sidewalk Service locations, determined based upon internet subscription rate of households—between 57% and 63% in these areas. Reserved for cardholders 18 and up, the kit can be borrowed for 3 weeks—just like a book—with the opportunity to renew up to 3 times if there are no holds. All 60 kits were borrowed within the first week of the service being available, and there are currently 300 holds placed on the kits, indicating a need much greater than current devices can meet. This next phase will allow the Library to procure 700 more devices and make kits available at all its 46 Sidewalk Service locations, plus 4 Bookmobiles.

As a way to provide Wi-Fi access during its closure, the Library plans to extend broadband network connectivity to its parking lots, to allow people to park and connect. Although the Library's Sidewalk Service program offers customers access to its physical collections, and the range of downloadable and streaming resources provide ready access to educational and skill-building content, the continued closure of libraries to in-person services leaves a gap for those customers who depend on the Library for free, high-speed broadband access, but have slow or limited connectivity in their communities. Current

plans have identified 28 libraries to roll out as a first phase—determined based on internet connectivity rates—by the end of this calendar year, with a future expansion as funding becomes available.

“These unparalleled and unforeseen times call for new and creative ways to support our communities,” said Library Director, Skye Patrick. “While we are proud to have recently launched Laptop & Hotspot Loans and Printing Pickup, we know we can do more, even before we open our doors again. By expanding our offering of Chromebooks and MiFis for checkout and expanding Wi-Fi beyond building walls, we can assist those who need digital assistance so urgently during this time.”

About LA County Library

Founded in 1912, LA County Library is one of the largest and most innovative library systems in the US. It offers free public resources including books, music, multimedia materials, computer and internet access, and educational and recreational services to 3.4 million residents across 3,000 square miles through its 86 community libraries and mobile fleet of 14 vehicles, including 3 bookmobiles, 6 MākMō (maker mobiles), and 5 Reading Machines. LA County Library is dedicated to reducing barriers and increasing access to and equity of public services for all. To learn more, visit [LACountyLibrary.org](https://www.lacountylibrary.org) and follow @LACountyLibrary on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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