

Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending – Award of Contract for Data Communications

Date:	April 25, 2022
To:	Toronto Public Library Board
From:	City Librarian

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to request Toronto Public Library Board approval to enter into a new service contract for data communications with Rogers Communications Canada Inc. to support continued delivery of the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Program.

The Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Program is an initiative in support of the City of Toronto's Poverty Reduction Strategy to help further its strategic objective of increasing service access and availability. The program began in 2016 as a pilot study to determine how the service might be delivered and to focus distribution to low-income households, and the program has since grown, along with sustainable funding from the City.

The total cost for the proposed service contract over the new two-year term, from May 2022 to April 2024, is approximately \$1,200,000, excluding Harmonized Sales Tax (HST). Awards greater than \$500,000 require Board approval.

TPL supports low-income families and individuals that do not have reliable internet access with Wi-Fi hotspots, furthering the City of Toronto's efforts to bridge the gap in accessibility to internet connectivity among vulnerable residents of the City. TPL continued this vital service throughout the pandemic and continues to do so.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Librarian recommends that the Toronto Public Library Board:

1. approves the service contract for data communications to Rogers Communications Inc. to support delivery of the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Program from May 2022 to April 2024, which is comprised of:
 - a. approximately 1000 Wi-Fi hotspot devices at no cost to the Library; and
 - b. a two-year unlimited data plan for the devices at a total cost of approximately \$1,200,000, excluding HST.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The total value of the additional two-year service contract with Rogers for 1000 devices is approximately \$1,200,000, excluding HST, for data communications to support service delivery of the program. The annual cost of the program is approximately \$600,000 which is part of the approved 2022 operating budget. The contract is expected to start on May 1, 2022 and end on April 30, 2024.

Rogers Communications Canada Inc. is the vendor of record (VOR) for the acquisitions of paging and mobile devices and services for the Province of Ontario (OSS-00415819). This VOR arrangement may be optionally used by provincially funded organizations and is currently being leveraged by the Library for corporate devices. Rogers and the Library have amended the existing Master Adoption Agreement to include the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Program.

The Director, Finance & Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and agrees with it.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN

Broadening Toronto's Digital Access & Inclusion: With the continued delivery of the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Program, TPL will help to provide access to internet connectivity and supports to help families and individuals remain connected in their communities and provide equitable access to online resources and services.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending program has a positive impact on all equity-seeking groups, with a focus on low-income families, by providing opportunities for them to remain connected in their communities and provide access to online services.

DECISION HISTORY

On May 16, 2017, the Toronto Public Library Board received an information report providing findings of the [Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Program](#), as well as future directions for the project.

On June 19, 2017, the Toronto Public Library Board approved the [service contract for data communications to Rogers](#) to support service delivery from July 2017 to June 2019.

On January 29, 2018, the Toronto Public Library Board received an [information report](#) providing findings of the program.

On February 26, 2018, the Toronto Public Library Board approved the [service contract for data communications to Rogers](#) to support additional service from March 2019 to February 2020.

On April 27, 2020 the Toronto Public Library Board approved the [service contract for data communications to Rogers](#) to support additional service from May 2020 to April 2022.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Program supports the Poverty Reduction Strategy initiative to help further the City's strategic objective of *increasing service access and availability*. Access to the internet and technology supports full participation in society, education, employment, government, and community, and is increasingly seen as essential as more information and services are becoming available only online. Public libraries are important access points for technology and, for some people, the public library is their only access to the internet. Public libraries promote digital inclusion and digital literacy, including the safe use of the internet. While the Library provides free access to computers and Wi-Fi in all branches, this program provides unlimited home access to internet service for low-income households. In partnership with the City, TPL offers Wi-Fi hotspot lending in branches serving communities with a large number of low-income households. The program is part of TPL's strategy to broaden Toronto's digital access & inclusion across the city.

TPL has offered the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending program in select branches since June 2016. Staff selected branches based on their proximity to city-designated Neighbourhood

Improvement Areas. The program is aimed at supporting low-income families with limited internet access in their homes.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, TPL supported the City of Toronto's emergency efforts by working with the City's Community Coordination Plan cluster tables to distribute units with the support of community agencies. Units distributed supported low-income families and individuals who did not have internet access, and were further impacted by the closure of Toronto Public Library branches and other community services.

COMMENTS

With the approval of this award, the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending program will continue through to April 2024. There will be a consistent number of 1000 units for each lending period over the term of contract. The distribution of units will remain focused on low-income families living in high-needs areas.

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SIGNATURE

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