Emergency Connectivity Fund Solution: Laptop/Tablet Lending

Libraries and schools are working to connect their community to the internet but that may not be enough. Even if a person has internet access at home, they may not have the device (e.g., laptop) to connect to the internet or enough devices for the number of people in the home. To combat this problem, many libraries are lending individual laptops or tablets or bundling them with other library services that provide internet support.

This guide is meant to help libraries design, plan, and implement a program to lend laptops or tablets. The guide also includes an overview of what libraries need to consider when requesting funding through the FCC's Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) program. More scenarios are available at www.ala.org/advocacy/ECF.

Goals

To support the activities of community members who do not have access to internet-enabled devices like tablets and laptops, this program will:
- Increase access to devices required to access the internet.
- Enable students to participate in distance learning from their home and complete homework when it is convenient for them and their household.
- Increase community members' participation in activities related to our society, democracy, and the economy.
- Provide access to internet-enabled devices when users want to use them instead of only when they can get to a location with a computer, like the library.
- Build digital skills.

Pros

- Each device is reimbursable up to $400 under the FCC's ECF program if purchased to be used beyond the library walls.
- Provides access to a laptop or tablet when the user needs it and is easy to take it with them wherever they go.
- Long-term, regular technology use builds and sustains digital skills.
- Libraries can pre-load the device with educational and other library resources.
- Because the solution is mobile, it is a good solution for individuals who are housing insecure but need access to a device regularly.

Cons

- In addition to the device, users still need access to the internet.
- Set up and maintenance of the devices requires staff time.
- While the laptop and tablet are ECF-eligible expenses, any software needed to maintain and manage the device is not an eligible expense.
- Laptops do wear out with sustained use, so a replacement plan is recommended to maintain service levels over time.

ECF Program Requirements

The Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) is administering the ECF program. Listed below are some of the requirements library staff should be aware of as they develop a device lending program. An [ALA summary of the FCC's ECF Order](#) also provides direct references to key provisions referenced below.

CIPA Compliance

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The American Library Association created [The Emergency Connectivity Fund and CIPA Compliance](#) scenarios to help libraries determine if their ECF request needs to be compliant with the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) to meet program requirements.

Inventory Requirements

The ECF program requires recipients document eligible services and equipment. Applicants should review the program's [Device and Service Inventory Requirements](#) to ensure documentation is compliant with program rules.

Libraries must retain their records to demonstrate compliance with ECF program rules for at least 10 years from the last date of service or delivery of equipment.

How to Set Up Your Laptop or Tablet Lending Program

Determine who is eligible for the program.

Will anyone with a valid library card be able to check out a device, or will you target certain groups? The ECF requires device users to sign an appropriate use policy stating they do not have a device. Some examples of people who could use the device include:

- Any valid library card holder.
- K-12 student enrolled in the local school district.
- Anyone enrolled in a specific library or partner program.
- Students enrolled in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).
- Unemployed job seekers.
- Students enrolled in a local community college.
- Someone who is currently unhoused.
- Individuals eligible for the Supplemental Security Income program (SSI).
- Seniors.
- Veterans.

Which device(s) will the library lend?

Each device is reimbursable up to $400 through the ECF program. Installation, activation, and initial configuration costs, taxes, shipping charges, and other reasonable fees incurred with the purchase of eligible equipment and services are also eligible for support. Ineligible expenses include:

- Administrative costs, e.g., personnel expenses, consultant fees, payroll, training, customer service, project management, records management, etc.
- Software, user licenses, filtering and firewall services that are purchased separately and are not included in the base price for the equipment.
- Back-up power equipment, e.g., back-up batteries, redundant power cords, and surge protectors.
- Separate costs for non-connected accessories, e.g., cases, mouse pads, cable clips, laptop bags, tablet stands, and charging stations.

Applicants should review the program's Eligible Equipment and Services to ensure their request is compliant with the program rules.

In general, look for devices that are durable and can stand up to the wear and tear of regular use. Some users have problems using a trackpad so consider including a mouse with the laptop. Peripheral items can be lost so the library may want to have extra mice, charging cords, etc. on hand to be quickly replaced instead of having to wait for a replacement piece to be ordered and shipped. Peripheral items are not an ECF-eligible expense.

Here more things you should consider as you determine which device best meets your needs:

Windows or Mac OS Laptop

- Windows is a popular operating system (OS) and users should be familiar with it. Mac OS also is popular.
- Microsoft and Mac operating systems include the ability to install applications on the computer that can be used without access to the internet. In many cases these applications include more features than the web app equivalent.
- Some Windows laptops are two-in-one devices with tablet capabilities.
- It will be difficult to find a durable Windows laptop for $400. New Mac laptops are not available in this price range.
- The library will need to identify a solution that will remove personal information and restore the computer to original settings before the laptop is recirculated.

Chromebook Laptop/two-in-ones (laptop/tablet combination)

- Runs the Google Chrome OS.
- Lots of models available for purchase under $400.
- In most cases Chromebooks require an internet connection to access applications, but many popular apps include an offline mode if an internet connection is not available.
- If there are specific applications or programs the library wants/needs to provide, ensure it runs on the Google Chrome OS. For instance, the Microsoft suite (e.g. Word, Excel and PowerPoint) and Adobe Creative Cloud only work when the user has an active internet connection to the web. Web versions of these applications do not include all the features available in the applications used on a Microsoft or Mac OS laptop.
- Because the OS and apps are web-based, they do not need much computer memory (RAM) vs. a Microsoft or Mac OS laptop, which reduces the device cost.
- Resetting the Chromebook between patron uses is as easy as clicking a few buttons.
- Libraries can purchase a Chrome Enterprise license to manage the device. The license allows the library to set computer policies, set up Chrome features for users, disable laptops, etc. This license is not eligible for reimbursement under the ECF Program.
- Chromebooks have an Auto Update Expiration date. After that date the device will not receive software updates from Google.

Tablet

- Lightweight and portable.
- Touchscreen interface. Most will also work with an external keyboard, which is not an ECF-eligible expense.
- If there are specific applications or programs the library wants/needs to provide, ensure it runs on the tablet's OS. For instance, the Microsoft suite and Adobe Creative Cloud

only work in the web app, which does not include all the features available in the application used on a Microsoft or Mac OS laptop.
- Tablet batteries on average last longer than laptops.
- Usually cheaper than Microsoft and Mac OS laptops.

Program Terms

Here are questions to consider and references to review to help the library design a laptop and/or tablet lending program.

- Managing the device.
  - How will the library remove personal data from the device and return it to original default settings before it is lent to the next user? Can public services staff perform this task, or will IT staff need to be involved? Can the solution used to manage the in-library public computers be adapted to manage circulating laptops or tablets?
  - Will the end user have administrative rights to the computer, which allows them to download software and change settings? Will the end user be able to save files to the computer or a thumb drive?
  - What software will be installed, and what will be the procedure for applying software and operating system updates and security patches?
  - How will the library track the device inventory? Will the library use the service tag number or add a library barcode? The service tag number will be required when working with the manufacturer to resolve equipment issues.
  - Identify a secure place to store the device while it is waiting to be picked up.

- Staff training
  - Staff who support the end user should be offered the opportunity to use the device.
  - If possible, keep a device on site to assist staff in troubleshooting issues.

- Device checkout
  - How long can someone check out the device?
  - Where will the person pick up and return the device?
  - Can the user pick it up any time the location is open or by appointment only?
  - What information (if any) will the borrower need to provide when picking up the device?
  - Checkout. Will the library use its integrated system to check out the device? Will the library allow holds, or will the user need to contact a library staff member to reserve the item?

- Will the user fill out a paper or online user agreement? Some examples:
    - Loveland Public https://www.lovelandpubliclibrary.org/home/showpublisheddocument/54426/637466713777470000
    - Oak Park Public Library https://www.oppl.org/use-your-library/technology/device-checkout-agreement-form/
    - San Jose Public Library https://www.sjpl.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/device-policy-user-agreement-eng-508.pdf

- Returned device. Provide staff a checklist to ensure all items are returned and in working order. Before the item is given to the next user ensure all items (laptop or tablet, cables, mice, documentation) are in the package. If not, replace the missing item or put it aside until the missing item(s) is available.

End User Support

End users may need to know how to use the device and how to resolve technical issues.
- What information will the patron need when using the device?
- Which languages will be needed? Documentation should be available in the languages used in the community.
- Examples of end user documentation:
    - Lexington Public Library How Do I Get Started? https://www.lexpublib.org/laptop-checkout
    - San Jose Public Library User Manual https://www.sjpl.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/dell-latitude-user-manual-english.pdf
- Libraries will need to decide how much user support they will provide to patrons once the device is checked out.
- Libraries should share information on any digital skills training or coaching services available with the end user at checkout.

Lost or Broken Devices

Before the program begins, know what the policies and procedures will be for lost or broken devices and peripherals (e.g. mice, power cords).
- How much will it cost to replace a lost device or charging cable?
- Will the library keep an inventory of replacement pieces on hand so they can be replaced quickly?

- Will the library charge for damage to the device, even if it still works?
- Who will pay for the replacement?
- If a component, like the battery or charging cord, is damaged after the warranty ends but before the service contract expires, can it be replaced?
- Can replacement peripheral items be purchased through existing contracts?
- If a laptop or tablet is lost, what will be the replacement plan? Will the library replace it after it's lost for two months, or will the lost item be withdrawn from the collection?

Additional Library Examples

- Devices for Students
  - Jacksonville Public Library/Florida State College at Jacksonville Academic Success https://jaxpubliclibrary.org/services/fscj-laptop-borrowing
    Students currently enrolled at FSCJ can borrow a laptop for a full academic term.

- Devices for Library Card Holders
  - Fort St John Public Library iPad Lending https://www.fsjpl.ca/ipad-lending/
  - LA County Library (Chromebook) https://lacountylibrary.org/laptop/
    Library card holders can check out a Chromebook with hotspot for 21 days.
  - Loveland Public Library Laptop Checkout (PC) https://www.lovelandpubliclibrary.org/information/how-do-i/check-out-a-laptop
    Library card holders can check out a laptop for one week.
  - Peoria Public Library Laptop Lending Program (Chromebook) http://library.peoriaaz.gov/polaris/library/userdef/ud_laptop_lending.aspx
    Library card holders can check out a Chromebook with hotspot for 21 days.
  - San Jose Public Library Borrow a Laptop (PC) https://www.sjpl.org/laptops
    Library card holders can check out a laptop for 90 days with one 30-day auto-renewal.
  - Sno-Isle Libraries Laptop to Go https://www.sno-isle.org/computers-printing/
    Library card holders can check out a laptop for one week.

- Supporting Job Seekers
  - Berks County Public Library Mobile Job Lab https://www.berkslibraries.org/services/whats-happening/mobile-job-lab
    Provides free workforce resources, instruction, computer stations with wireless internet connection, and a printer.
  - Charleston County Public Library Career Connections Kits https://www.ccpl.org/news/ccpl-now-offering-career-connection-kits-checkout

Chromebook and hotspot kit available for check out by adult library cardholders for a period of four weeks (28 days) and are not renewable.

- Devices for Seniors
  - St Louis County Library GrandPad https://www.slcl.org/using-the-library/grandpads