



Inter-Institutional Mobile Hotspots Lending Handbook

November 15, 2022
Becky Croxton

Contents

	Page
<u>Acknowledgements</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Project Partners & Participants</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Overview</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>Identify & Articulate</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>Create Partnerships & Secure Funding</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>Make Key Decisions and Assemble the Proposal</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>Clarify Partner Roles & Responsibilities</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>Inventory Devices, Distribute, & Catalog</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>Create an Assessment Plan & Timeline</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>Market the Project</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>Plan for Sustainability</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Disseminate Your Work</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>Appendix A. Hotspot Follow-up Survey</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>Appendix B. Marketing Materials</u>	<u>18</u>
<u>Appendix C. Conference Poster</u>	<u>26</u>

Acknowledgements



Supported by grant funds from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) as administered by the State Library of North Carolina, a division of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (IMLS grant number LS-249980-OLS-21)

Project Partners & Participants



UNC Charlotte J. Murrey Atkins Library Lead Institution

Becky Croxton, Project PI
Head of Strategic Analytics & Special Projects

Bob Price
Associate Dean for Planning, Innovation, &
Engagement

Alva Jones
Evening Supervisor

Tracie Krubmine
Patron Services Manager

Ashleigh Venezia
Assessment Analyst

Bailee Ford
Assessment Assistant

Appalachian State University University Libraries

Kelly McAllister
Associate Dean of Libraries

Michael O'Hara
Tech Desk Manager

East Carolina University Joyner Library

Ann Carol Stocks
Head, ILS Services

Elizabeth City State University G.R. Little Library

David Dusto
Electronic Resources Librarian

UNC Asheville Ramsey Library

Brandy Bourne
Interim Library Dean

Noel Jones
Head of Access Services

UNC Pembroke Mary Livermore Library

Jessica Collogan
Dean of Library Services

Christopher Bowyer
University Library Technician for Patron Services
& Web Information

Winston-Salem State University C.G. O'Kelly Library

Wanda Kay Brown
Chief Library Officer

Thomas Flynn
Associate Director for Archives, Research,
Learning, & Outreach

Overview

This handbook outlines key components of a inter-institutional mobile hotspots lending model that was developed as a collaborative initiative between seven University of North Carolina System institutions. The project was made possible by grant funding from the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) (IMLS grant number LS-249980-OLS-21). The LSTA grant program, administered by the State Library of North Carolina, funds library projects across the state that advance excellence and promotes equity by strengthening capacity, expanding access, and community engagement in North Carolina's libraries.

The handbook presents a model and includes recommendations for how other collaborative entities can launch a similar inter-institutional lending program. Information covered in the handbook addresses (1) identifying and articulating need, (2) establishing a funding and project management model, (3) managing lending policies and guidelines, (3) balancing supply and demand needs across institutions, (4) managing pooled resources and service contracts, (5) assessment strategies, (6) sustaining the project after the grant, and much more.

The inter-institutional lending model that was created through this collaborative effort enabled project partners to purchase 180 mobile hotspots, cover monthly service fees, and loan these devices to students, faculty, and staff who are dispersed throughout the state of North Carolina. This program is helping alleviate internet connectivity barriers for individuals who (1) cannot afford to pay internet service costs, (2) do not have broadband internet access in their homes due to their geographic location, or (3) require additional internet options due to overloaded home networks.

While the handbook outlines a mobile hotspots lending program, this model can be adapted for other types of technologies.



Identify & Articulate Need

Define the Purpose & Outcomes

Every successful project needs a clearly defined purpose and vision of success. This helps all stakeholders stay focused on what it is you're trying to accomplish, the importance of doing so, and outlines how you'll know if you're successful.

For the mobile hotspots project described in this handbook, the purpose and outcomes were outlined by the project team as follows:

- The purpose of this project is to improve the ability for students, faculty, and staff across the state of North Carolina to participate in online courses, complete course assignments, or fulfill work obligations by alleviating internet connectivity barriers.
- To address this need, project partners will acquire a pool of mobile hotspots, identify and secure funding to cover monthly internet service costs, and loan these devices to students, faculty, and staff who have internet connectivity barriers.
- Circulation and Verizon usage data will be used as indicators that the project is advancing towards its goal of reducing or eliminating a barrier, at least for some individuals, in achieving academic and/or work success.
- Feedback gathered from user follow-up surveys, particularly the qualitative responses, will help to provide rich, contextual information that will help partners understand whether/how the devices are helping to fulfill an unmet need by reducing or eliminating the internet connectivity barrier.

Determine & Articulate the Need

Before spending time and energy asking for money or deciding to pursue a collaborative lending program, you will be well served to first do your homework to understand IF there is a need and then find a way to articulate your need in a way that will resonate with your potential funders. Relying on hunches or anecdotal evidence isn't typically an effective strategy to determine if there are particular needs that should be addressed and whether your proposed solution may be a good fit to address the problem. Consider asking questions like those outlined below as a first step to identify need with evidence to support your claims.

- Are there surveys that have been conducted that can provide evidence of a need?
- Does your institution serve a population with a great deal of financial need?
- Are there geographic locations in your service area that do not have reliable internet service? (Your state may have county distress rankings (see Fig 1).)
- Are there broadband availability indices or maps that can help you understand the broader need?

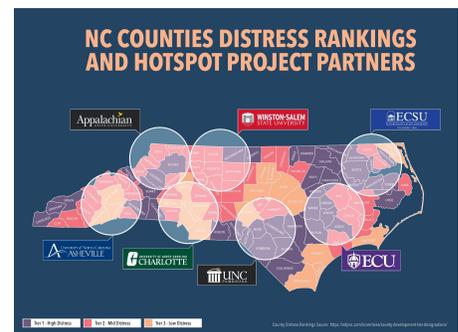


Figure 1. NC County Distress Rankings & Project Partners

Create Partnerships & Secure Funding

Identify Partners

Having an engaged set of project partners and support from each partner's dean, director, or leadership team from the beginning is a must. The partners you invite to the project may be part of a system or consortium (such as the UNC system, of which the seven project partners described in this project belong) or may be known

colleagues at other organizations who have identified a similar need among the populations they serve.

Assemble the Project Team

It is recommended that every collaborative lending project has an identified project leader who will provide oversight for the project and keep track of all the moving parts. At a minimum, each partner should have one representative on the project team who will participate in meetings and decision making. In fact, you may find it helpful to have two representatives from each partner organization - one library leader with decision making authority and another person who will manage logistics of implementing the project at their institutions.

Secure Funding

It's likely that your project will require some sort of "new" funds that are not already earmarked in your library's or institution's budgets. If this is the case, then you will need to identify one or more potential funding sources. You may have community leaders who serve on a board of directors or advisors who can point you to potential donors or you may decide that pursuing a grant opportunity is your best course of action. If your project plan involves acquiring and lending a pool of technologies (e.g., hotspots), then you might want to explore funding opportunities available from your state library, as they are often charged with distributing federal funds provided by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) to libraries across your state. The project described in this handbook was supported by IMLS and LSTA grant funds as administered by the State Library of North Carolina (IMLS grant number: LS-249980-OLS-21).

Preparing and submitting a grant application is usually handled by the project leader (or principal investigator). If your library is part of a larger organization, such as a state-funded university, there are likely individuals on your campus who specialize in grants and contracts with whom you'll need to collaborate to prepare and submit the grant application. It is advisable to reach out to these campus partners at the beginning of your grant proposal process to ensure that you cover all of the necessary steps and meet all of your organizational requirements and approvals before submission. Finally, be sure you build in time and opportunities before your grant proposal is submitted to gather ideas and feedback from your project partners.



Make Key Decisions & Assemble the Proposal

Make Key Decisions & Gather Approvals

As you prepare the proposal, you'll need to decide if your grant will include partner subgrants. This decision relates primarily to how funds will be dispersed. If you elect to only have one institution receive and manage funds, then they will assume the fiscal responsibilities for the grant including purchasing the equipment and supplies for the

project, establishing and paying for service contracts (e.g., mobile hotspots monthly service fees), and determining how any cost share requirements will be handled.

With subgrants, each partner would receive an allocated portion of the grant funding and be responsible for their own spending, etc. In the project described in this handbook, the project partners elected to have the grant managed, in full, by UNC Charlotte, the lead institution and did not initiate subgrants.

Before submission of the grant proposal, expect that all partners will be required to gather the approval and signatures of the library dean or director AND, for some institutions, an authorized university representative (often the person who oversees grants and contracts administration). Build in some time in your proposal submission timeline for this important step.

Common components of grant applications include:

1. Abstract (Summary of your project)
2. Statement of Need
3. Description of Proposed Project (and how it will address the stated need)
 - a. Partners
 - i. Roles & Responsibilities
 - ii. Benefits & Potential Impacts to Partners
4. Evaluation (How will you measure the success of the project?)
 - a. Expected outcomes (How will you know if you met the goals or objectives of the project?)
5. Project Timeline
6. Budget (Table or Spreadsheet)
 - a. Budget Justification (Narrative describing the funds you are requesting and how you plan to spend them)
7. Quotes from Vendors
8. Attachments (varies depending on grant opportunity)
 - a. Partner Agreements
 - b. Resumes or CVs
 - c. Letters of Reference
 - d. Letters of Support

Clarify Partner Roles & Responsibilities

Clarify "Who Will Do What"

It is recommended that you outline the individual roles and responsibilities for all partners, including the project lead, from the onset of your project. This is an important part of your "playbook." Clarifying these roles ahead of time will help minimize confusion, everyone will know what is expected of them, and you'll all be ready to engage to make your project a success.

Outlined below are the roles and responsibilities of the project partners who participated in the mobile hotspot project described in this handbook.

As the lead applicant, UNC Charlotte will:

- Manage the purchase of and service contracts for the pool of mobile hotspots,
- Pay monthly service fees for all devices using LSTA grant funds,
- Convene quarterly partner meetings,
- Provide a graduate student/temporary employee to help administer the day-to-day requirements for the project under the guidance of the library's Head of Assessment and the Associate Dean for Planning, Innovation, and Engagement,
- Develop assessments proposed by the project partners, analyze data, and prepare summary reports about the assessments,
- Draft a model template or handbook for dissemination to other institutions,
- Prepare a dissemination plan, and
- Complete and submit required reports to LSTA.

Project partners will contribute time, effort, knowledge, experiences, and ideas to create and pilot an inter-institutional mobile hotspot lending program. Roles and responsibilities relating to these contributions are outlined in detail below.

Partner Roles:

A representative from each partner institution will participate in quarterly project team meetings during which attendees will:

- Discuss progress and challenges and propose solutions as necessary,
- Review and adjust the distribution of mobile devices held by each partner library as needed,
- Develop shared mobile device lending policies and best practices,
- Develop assessment strategies for the project that will be carried out by partner libraries,
- Provide input in the development of model template or handbook for dissemination to other institutions, and
- Collaborate in developing and implementing a dissemination plan.

Inventory, Distribute, & Catalog

Create a Centralized Inventory

Managing a shared pool of devices requires that you have a centralized inventory in place BEFORE you distribute the devices to your project partners. This will ensure that you always know which items have been sent to each partner. In the shared lending model outlined in this handbook, UNC Charlotte, the lead institution created a master

Inventory spreadsheet that included a project inventory number for each device (e.g., LSTAEZ001, LSTAEZ180), Device ID, SIM ID, Mobile Number, and assigned Project Partner. All devices and storage boxes were also labeled with the project inventory number. Any time that a device was transferred to another partner or needed to have service deactivated, the item location on the spreadsheet was updated.

Distribute to Partners

You'll need to think about how many devices each partner will initially receive. In our project, we knew we wanted to build in flexibility that would allow us to redistribute the devices throughout the project period based on borrower needs, but we found it difficult to anticipate these supply and demand needs in advance. Initial conversations with partners included discussion about "weighting" the number of devices that would be sent to each partner based on the size and financial need of the borrowing population. Ultimately, it was decided that, for the initial distribution of devices, all partners would receive an equal amount (except one library who had an existing pool of hotspots and elected to receive a reduced number). At subsequent meetings, partners discussed their supply and demand needs and came to consensus about how devices would be redistributed to meet those needs.

Catalog Devices and Establish Lending Policies

As a group, you'll also need to consider how devices will be cataloged and policies determined. For example, depending on your partnerships, it may make sense to have items cataloged in one library's catalog ... or you could decide that each library will handle their own cataloging and policies.

In our shared model, we decided that project partners would catalog the devices in their own library catalogs and establish their own lending policies. When devices were transferred from one partner library to another, the bibliographic record at the original library was deactivated and a new record created by the receiving partner library.

Outline a Process for Handling Lost or Damaged Items

It is nearly inevitable that when you have a large pool of devices dispersed across many partners and loaned to myriad borrowers, that loss or damage will occur. In our project, partners agreed that in cases of lost or damaged items, the borrower would be billed through each library's billing system. UNC Charlotte would then invoice the responsible library for the lost or damaged item at the initial purchase price and apply those funds back to the grant.

Create an Assessment Plan & Timeline

Identify Assessment & Evaluation Strategies

An important element of any project is the evaluation and assessment plan. Consider what types of assessments you'll need to have in place to help you evaluate if/how well you've met the goals or outcomes identified for the

grant. You may want to consider ongoing or periodic assessments throughout the project in order to identify any components or processes that may need to be adjusted mid-cycle in an effort towards continuous improvement.

Consider Multiple Types of Assessments

Compiling circulation data from your project partners is a simple first level of assessment. If you're seeing checkouts occurring ... and hopefully increasing over time ... then that's a good sign that your project is on the right track and hopefully meeting the needs of your borrowers. If you're loaning mobile hotspots, capturing and tracking data usage provided by your service provider may also be helpful. (The checkout trends and data usage trends are likely to mirror each other.)



Gathering qualitative feedback from your borrowers via surveys, focus groups, or interviews may provide you with particularly meaningful data when it comes time to evaluate whether, or to what degree, you met your goal (e.g., alleviating internet connectivity barriers for students, faculty, and staff). While Likert-type questions (rating on a scale) can elicit information about levels of agreement, satisfaction, or impact, open-ended questions are likely to elicit the rich, meaningful responses that will help you know if the "project made a difference" for your borrowers. See [Appendix A](#) for a sample survey that was used in the model described in this handbook.

Create an Assessment Timeline

Plan out in advance when you'll conduct your assessments. You may want to build in check-points to review circulation and usage data. You might also find it useful to periodically survey your borrowers throughout the project duration while their borrowing experiences are still "fresh" in their minds, rather than waiting until the end of the project. If you decide to conduct follow-up borrower surveys, it is recommended that you have standardized set of questions that all partners will use so that, at the end of the project, the data can be more easily compiled, analyzed, and summarized.

Take Note! As you review your monthly hotspots billing/data usage statements, check to see if your devices are reaching a data usage threshold at which the internet transfer speed slows (e.g., 25GB). If you find this is the case, you may want to consider rotating the items in your collection so that loaning out "fresh" devices to borrowers is prioritized. (The Verizon data usage cycle resets at the beginning of each billing cycle.)

Market the Project

Get the Word Out!

Spreading the word far and wide that you have a new set of mobile hotspots to loan is important! Otherwise, you run the risk that all of your hard work will result in items sitting unused on a library shelf. You may want to consider a multifaceted marketing campaign that includes both print and digital signage, fliers, press releases, announcements

in campus newsletters, targeted email outreach to units across your organization, and more. In the collaborative model described throughout this handbook, the UNC Charlotte J. Murrey Atkins Library marketing and communications team took the lead to create materials to use for their library and campus marketing campaign, with all materials having a consistent look and feel. The materials that were created at UNC Charlotte were shared with project partners in editable file formats that could be adapted for their own libraries.

Make & Implement a Plan to Spread the Word

Outlined below are a few examples of how UNC Charlotte marketed their pool of hotspots to students, faculty, and staff. Samples of all marketing materials are included in [Appendix B](#).

1. Create a list of people and departments across your organization (campus) who can help you spread the word, particularly those who may know of or come in contact with students who may benefit from the availability of the hotspots. (p. 19)
 - a. Send these identified colleagues a personalized email from your library director or dean that includes information about the project, a digital flier, and an image that they can include in their newsletters to students, etc. (pp. 20-22).
2. Display information about the hotspots program on your library and campus digital signage/TV screens. (p. 22).
3. Include a spotlight image on your library's homepage. (p. 23)
4. Share press releases via library newsletters. (p. 24)
5. Collaborate with your campus communications team to include an article in the campus-wide newsletter. (p. 25)



Plan for Sustainability

Make a Sustainability Plan

Don't wait until the end of your project period to figure out how you'll sustain the project once grant funding is depleted. You'll thank yourselves later if you work on your plan throughout the entire project.

Establish Flexible Contracts with Vendors

When you negotiate your contract with your mobile hotspot service provider, be sure you build in flexibility so that you have the freedom to suspend or discontinue service for any of your devices without penalty at any time, no questions asked. Also, be upfront with the vendor that at the end of the grant period, you will be transferring responsibility to your partners to assume payment for their own pool of devices. You'll want to have a written and signed agreement in place that ensures that the vendor will honor the price that was negotiated for the larger project when the new partner agreements are established.

Plan Ahead to Make Room in Your Own Institutional Budget

Make your partners aware of the costs that will be required to maintain service for their pool of mobile hotspots after the grant funds are depleted. This way, they can plan ahead to ensure they have funds earmarked in their budgets to cover ongoing service costs when fiscal responsibility is transferred to them.

Assess to Determine Supply and Demand Needs

Throughout the project period, all partners should continuously monitor the checkout trends and supply and demand of their pool of hotspots. This way, when it's time to assume responsibility for continuing service after the grant, they'll know how many devices to keep active in their pool.

Transfer Responsibility of Service to Project Partners

Two or three months before the end of project funding, connect with your partners and the vendor to begin the necessary steps to transfer responsibility for paying for service for all devices to each partner institution. This will require identifying the specific devices that each partner will keep activated in their own pools, identifying which devices should have service "turned off," and making connections between vendor representatives and the individuals at each partner institution who will need to complete a new agreement. Preparing for these steps in advance will help to avoid lending and internet service disruptions for your borrowers.

Disseminate Your Work

Share What You've Learned

You've worked hard to make your project a success. Share with others so they can learn from you as they consider their own projects. Be open and share not only your successes, but also the lessons learned and hurdles you faced along the way. If you've created an information piece, such as

this handbook, make a plan for how you'll disseminate it to others. You might consider adding it to an institutional repository, sharing information and links on professional listservs, emailing to your colleagues at other libraries, and sharing at conferences, to name just a few ideas.

Conference presentations, including poster-presentations, are a great way to share your work with colleagues. Since you've worked with partners throughout the project, consider collaborating with them in new ways to submit proposals and present together. Cast your net wide! Your funders gave you a chance to do something special. Now it's time for you to give back to the profession and demonstrate what good stewards you were with this funds they gave you.

See [Appendix C](#) for a Sample Conference Poster.

Appendix A. Hotspot Follow-up Survey

Atkins Verizon Hotspot Use

We're pleased you were able to borrow a Verizon mobile hotspot from the library. Please let us know what prompted you to borrow the mobile hotspot and tell us about your experience. Your input will help us understand and address your internet access needs and those of UNC Charlotte's students, faculty, and staff.

We will keep your information confidential and your personal information will not be shared.

Thank you.

Becky Croxton
Atkins Library Head of Assessment
becky.croxton@uncc.edu

1. Email *

2. What was your reason for borrowing a Verizon mobile hotspot? (Check all that apply.)

Check all that apply.

- Internet access is not available in my geographic location.
- I cannot afford to pay for internet access.
- I have internet access in my home, but it is not reliable.
- I have internet access in my home, but the home network is often overloaded.
- I was/will be traveling to a location without reliable internet access.
- Other: _____

3. Describe how the library's mobile hotspot lending program has impacted your ability to fulfill your academic and/or work obligations.

4. If you did not have access to a hotspot, how would you have completed your tasks/assignments?

5. Please rate your satisfaction with the Verizon mobile hotspot you borrowed from the library.

Mark only one oval.

not at all satisfied

1

2

3

4

5

extremely satisfied

6. Please explain your satisfaction level.

7. How did you learn that the library had hotspots available for checkout?

8. Is there anything else you would like us to know?

Appendix B. Marketing Materials

List of Marketing Materials

1. Campus Colleagues Who Can Help Spread the Word (p. 19)
2. Sample Email Letter from Dean to Campus Leaders (p. 20)
3. Digital Flier (p. 21)
4. Image to Include in Communications Messaging & Digital Signage Displays in Library & Across Campus (p. 22)
5. Image for Library Homepage Rotating Spotlight (p. 23)
6. Press Release Included in Library Newsletter, posted on the Library Website, and Linked to in Other Communications (p. 24)
7. Campus News Article (p. 25)

Campus Colleagues Who Can Help Spread the Word

- Director of Enrollment Communications
- Director, Campus Communications
- Director of Academic Advising Systems
- Director, Distance Education & Summer School
- Director, Office of Disability Services
- Dean of all Academic Colleges
- Director, University Center of Academic Excellence
- Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs
- Director, Transfer Student Office
- Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Dean of Students
- Assistant Provost for International Programs

Sample Email Letter from Dean to Campus Leaders

Subject Line: Mobile Hotspots Now Available from the Library

Dear {{First Name}},

I am delighted to let you know that the library now has 114 new mobile hotspots that are available to loan to students, faculty, and staff. These hotspots were acquired with grants awarded by the State Library of North Carolina and the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Monthly service costs are paid using grant funds.

I encourage you to share this digital flier with anyone you know, including colleagues in {{Affiliation}} who may come into contact with students who may benefit from having a mobile hotspot that they can use to connect to the Internet from their residence or other non-campus location. I have also included a link to an image that can be included in any newsletters you may send out to students from your office.

Please let me (amoor168@uncc.edu) or the project PI, Becky Croxton (racroxt@uncc.edu), know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Anne Cooper Moore, Ph.D | Dean
J. Murrey Atkins Library | UNC Charlotte
9201 University City Blvd. | Charlotte, NC 28223
P: 704-687-0145 | C: 618-964-4358
amoor168@uncc.edu | <https://library.uncc.edu>

Digital Flier



MOBILE HOTSPOT LENDING PROGRAM

ATKINS LIBRARY HAS VERIZON MOBILE HOTSPOT DEVICES TO LOAN TO STUDENTS!

The library was awarded two grants to purchase hotspots to help level the academic playing field for many students, particularly for those for whom internet connectivity is a barrier.

This program especially benefits UNC Charlotte students who:

- ▶ *Cannot afford to cover internet service costs on their own.*
- ▶ *Do not have broadband internet access in their homes due to where they are geographically located.*
- ▶ *Require additional options due to internet traffic congestion either in the home or neighborhood driving down connectivity speeds.*

Students can borrow a mobile hotspot from the first-floor Information and Research Desk. The loan period is seven days with the option to renew two times.

This grant is made possible by funding from the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) as administered by the State Library of North Carolina, a division of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. (IMLS grant number LS-250229-OLS-21)



Image to Include in Communications Messaging & Digital Signage Displays in Library & Across Campus



**MOBILE HOTSPOT
LENDING PROGRAM**

**IS RELIABLE INTERNET
A PROBLEM FOR YOU?**

Borrow a mobile hotspot from Atkins
Information and Research Desk

go.charlotte.edu/hotspots

J. MURREY ATKINS
LIBRARY

INTERNET ISSUES AT HOME?

**BORROW A MOBILE HOTSPOT
FROM ATKINS LIBRARY**

A black, rectangular mobile hotspot device with rounded corners. The front face features a small LCD screen displaying the 'orbic' logo on the left, a signal strength indicator, '4G LTE' text, and battery level icons at the top. Below the signal indicators, a progress bar shows '1.68GB Used'. To the right of the screen is a circular silver button with a power symbol. The device is set against a dark green background with a white diagonal line.

Press Release Included in Library Newsletter, Posted on the Library Website, and Linked to in Other Communications

ATKINS AWARDED FEDERAL GRANT

 PUBLISHED ON JUNE 16, 2021



J. Murrey Atkins Library, in partnership with seven state university libraries, has been awarded a \$49,414 grant to create an interinstitutional mobile hotspot lending program. The grant will enable partner libraries to procure a pool of 75 Verizon mobile hotspot devices, cover monthly service fees for 12 months, and loan these devices to students, faculty, and staff who are dispersed throughout the state of North Carolina and have unreliable Internet. The partnering NC university libraries are UNC Charlotte (lead), Appalachian State University, East Carolina University, Elizabeth City State University, UNC Asheville, UNC Pembroke, and Winston-Salem State University.

Dr. Rebecca Croxton, the head of assessment at Atkins Library, served as the Project Lead on the grant proposal. She said the onset of COVID-19, campus closures, and the sudden shift to online learning and work in Spring 2020 made it clear that many of North Carolina's students and employees do not have reliable internet at home, thereby impeding their ability to participate in courses, complete assignments, or fulfill work obligations.

"Though the physical campus provides internet connectivity, there are many individuals in the UNC Charlotte community and across the state who are not afforded the luxury of living or working on-campus," said Croxton. "With these grant funds, Atkins Library, and other UNC system schools across the state, will be able to purchase and loan a pool of mobile hotspots that will help to level the playing field for many students, particularly for those for whom internet connectivity is a barrier.

Initially, this pool of hotspot devices will be divided equally among the partner libraries (12 per partner with 3 in reserve as backups) which will loan these devices to individuals who do not have reliable internet access in their homes and require this connectivity to participate in courses, complete coursework, or fulfill work obligations. The project partners will convene quarterly to review whether the number of devices held at each library should be adjusted to better fit their patrons' needs based on supply and demand.

This program is supported by grant funds from the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). The LSTA grant program administered by the State Library of North Carolina funds library projects across the state that advance excellence and promotes equity by strengthening capacity, expanding access, and community engagement in North Carolina's libraries. These federal funds are investments that help libraries deliver relevant and up-to-date services for their communities. To learn more about the Institute, please visit www.ims.gov.

For more information about North Carolina's LSTA program visit the State Library of North Carolina's LSTA web page at <http://statelibrary.ncdcr.gov/ld/resources/lsta-grants>.

Campus News Article

INTERNET ISSUES AT HOME?

BORROW A MOBILE HOTSPOT FROM ATKINS LIBRARY



By: Brianna Lariviere, intern, University Communications

Friday, January 14, 2022

The pandemic has impacted everyone in many different ways that have become hindrances to many. One of the biggest changes has been the reliance on online versions of the things most people used to enjoy: ordering food, watching movies and participating in classes.

When the WiFi will not load or when there's no internet connection, work and entertainment screech to a halt. Throughout the pandemic, many Americans have experienced spotty internet frequencies, high internet traffic and in some cases, no internet access at all. This has been a problem for students and employees at UNC Charlotte.

"The lack of internet at home has impeded the ability to participate in courses, complete assignments or fulfill work obligations," said Rebecca Croxton, head of assessment at Atkins Library. Now, UNC Charlotte has a fix for this problem — a mobile hotspot lending project.

In June 2021, [Atkins Library](#) receive a \$49,414 grant to create an interinstitutional mobile lending hotspot program, and in September, the library was granted another \$24,910 to expand the program. UNC Charlotte currently has 94 Verizon mobile hotspot devices ready to loan faculty, staff and students.

These hotspots can be borrowed from the first-floor Information and Research Desk in J. Murrey Atkins Library for seven days, with an option to renew two additional times. Verizon monthly service costs are paid using grant funds. This program ensures that anyone who needs stable and reliable internet access has an affordable way to access it and prevent further internet connection troubles. The hotspots make internet access easy with low internet traffic and fewer connection issues.

"The mobile hotspots solution will help to fulfill an unmet need for our students by providing equity of opportunity by alleviating internet connection barriers," said Anne Cooper Moore, dean of Atkins Library.

The mobile hotspot lending project will alleviate internet stressors for students and employees so they don't fall behind due to slow internet connections. Whether someone lives in an area where internet connection is weak or cannot afford internet access, the mobile hotspots will equalize the playing field for students and employees at UNC Charlotte.

The mobile hotspots lending project is supported by grant funds from the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) as administered by the State Library of North Carolina, a division of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (IMLS grant number LS-250229-OLS-21).

Appendix C. Conference Poster

INTER-INSTITUTIONAL MOBILE HOTSPOTS LENDING PROGRAM: A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN SEVEN UNC SYSTEM UNIVERSITIES

Becky Crutan
UNC Charlotte
Bob Price
UNC Charlotte
Brady Bourne
UNC Asheville
Jessica Collogan
UNC Pembroke
Amanda McCallan
East Carolina University
Kelly McCallister
Appalachian State University
David Dault
Fibonacci College
Wanda Kay Brown
Winston-Salem State University

PURPOSE

Provide internet access to students, faculty, or staff enrolled in or working at UNC system universities who have internet connectivity challenges.

HOW

UNC Charlotte, as the lead institution, provided grant administration, established device inventory, created marketing templates, and developed an assessment strategy.

Partners determined how to catalog and loan devices as well as market device availability.

WHAT

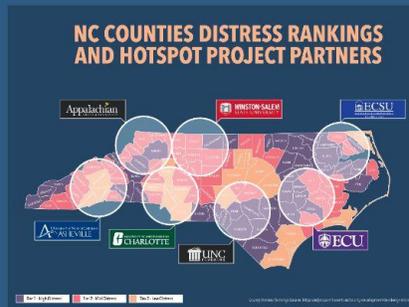
- Secure \$49,414 in LSTA grant funding
- Purchase 180 Verizon Hotspots & 12 months of service
- Distribute hotspots to partners
- Assess ongoing supply/demand at quarterly meetings and redistribute devices as needed.

BENEFITS OF AN INTER-INSTITUTIONAL LENDING MODEL

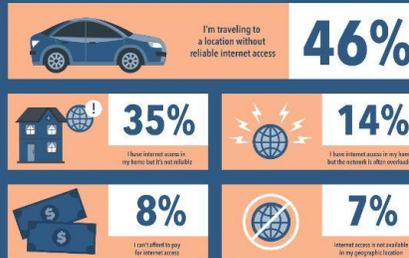
- Allows time to assess supply and demand before committing long-term funds
- More bargaining power/leverage with vendors to secure cost-effective solutions
- Collective problem solving
- Shared expertise and labor minimizes duplication of work

SUSTAINABILITY BEYOND GRANT

- Establish flexible contracts with vendors.
- Plan ahead to make room in your own institutional budget.
- Assess to determine supply/demand needs.
- Transfer responsibility of service to project partners.



TOP REASONS PATRONS BORROWED A MOBILE HOTSPOT DEVICE



ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES



INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM AND LIBRARY SERVICES
 SLNC STATE LIBRARY OF NORTH CAROLINA
 Supported by grant funds from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and Technology Act (ISAW) as administered by the State Library of North Carolina, a division of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (HS-5 grant number IS-249F8B-053-21)



WORDS FROM OUR BORROWERS

The library's mobile hotspot lending program has ...



"Allowed me to access all my course work and attend class meetings I otherwise would have missed since I do not have wifi at my location."



"For the first time since I can remember, all members of the household are able to access the internet for school and work without us having to shuffle each other off the network and schedule our usage."

If I did not have access to a hotspot ...



"Without the hotspot, I was trying to identify coffee shops / libraries / parking lots along my travel route where I would be able to have strong enough internet to conduct Zoom calls. In certain locations, this can be very challenging logistically."



"I likely would have had to walk to campus and hop on a library computer, which would be over an hour of walking just to do my work. This may not sound like much to those with a car or who live closer to [the library], but walking over 30 minutes there and over 30 minutes back just to do schoolwork can be taxing, particularly if it's not the first or second time you've made that trek in a day."

PROJECT PARTNERS

