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1.   PROJECT TITLE

CCPL: Granting Access During COVID-19

2.   ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted a disparity in how the public accesses library services, with an emphasis on digital resources. When North Carolina residents were asked to stay at home, they no longer had physical access to their local libraries. Many library services turned digital, but without reliable home internet residents are cut off from their library. The CCPL: Granting Access project aims to provide mobile hotspots to residents of Cabarrus County and give internet access to those who need it. Under this program, patrons may check out mobile hotspot devices at no cost to them. Our goal is to circulate the devices on a first come, first serve basis, and to provide equal access to all library services for all residents.

3.   LIBRARY USERS AND NEED

a.   The CCPL: Granting Access project will benefit the residents of Cabarrus County, North Carolina who do not have home internet access. This grant will positively impact the lives of those living in Cabarrus County, North Carolina. The close proximity to the Charlotte Metro region has contributed to the rapid diversification of the population in Cabarrus County[1]. According to the Census Bureau, more than 200,000 people reside in Cabarrus County. The demographic breakdown in the county is a majority white, but with growing minority populations. Over the past ten years, the number of residents with a Bachelor's degree or higher rose four percent. The Cabarrus County Public Library Strategic Plan: FY2020 – FY2025 identified the area as aging less rapidly than the rest of the state, and showed comparative growth among the percentage of minorities compared to the rest of the state, higher level of education compared to the rest of the state, and higher economic well-being compared to the rest of the state.

At the same time, GIS data reveals that five census tracts in Cabarrus County have 30%-40% of their 18,000 residents living in poverty. Four of these tracts (CT041000, CT041901, CT041902 and CT042101) are adjacent to or surrounding two branches of the county's library system, Concord and Kannapolis. Adjacent to these branches and tracts are another five census tracts (CT042000, CT042102, CT042300, CT040800, CT040703) that report close to 20% of their almost 20,000 total residents are living in poverty. Additionally, another census tract (CT041502), near the Harrisburg and Midland branches, reports almost 20% of its 7,300 residents live in poverty. All of these poverty rates are far higher than the national rate of 11%.[2] Yet, these results are juxtaposed with 15 census tracts in the county

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[1] QuickFacts Cabarrus County, North Carolina. Accessed: 2/16/2020.
https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/cabarruscountynorthcarolina/POP060210
[2] Income and Poverty in the United States: 2018.
https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2019/demo/p60-266.html

that show 0%-4.9% of the tract living in poverty. These juxtapositions are significant and only upon deeper examination do they reveal the need of the community.

Using the same GIS data, more than 20,000 residents in five census tracts in Cabarrus County (CT042300, CT041901, CT042101, CT041000, and CT040703) show that only 75%-85% of the population has access to the internet, which is below national levels[3]. Three of these tracts (CT041000, CT041901, and CT042101) also have more than 32% of the population living in poverty. These same census tracts around the Concord and Kannapolis branches also have the highest percentage of their population reporting as Black or Hispanic, and report the highest percentage of the population with education levels less than high school.

With the reported growth in the percentage of minorities, rise in level of education, and economic well-being compared to the rest of the state, disparities will grow more pronounced within the county. Research has found that a digital divide exists along racial and socio-economic lines[4]. The digital divide will only be amplified by the growing disparity among residents of Cabarrus County. All of these factors are indicators that residents in these areas need access to the internet, something the library hopes to provide with the Granting Access project.

b. This grant proposal seeks to provide access to library services for our patrons that cannot physically access our facilities and patrons that cannot access our services from home. Providing access is one of the touchstones for libraries. Policy V in the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights states the following: "A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views."[5] A Pew Research Center study found that 10% of Americans still do not access the internet, and Americans with the least amount of education (less than a high school diploma) are most affected by their lack of access[6]. Based on SimplyAnalytics data, multiple census tracts representing tens of thousands of residents in Cabarrus County fall far outside the national average of residents with access to the internet at home, with access levels at 85% and less.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and shutdown of non-essential services and buildings, the lack of access is profound. While many libraries are expanding their electronic services, those families without steady access to the internet are falling behind and are cut off from educational opportunities and job opportunities. On March 19, 2020, Cabarrus County signed a joint Declaration of a State of Emergency along with the Towns of Midland and Mt.

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[3] Pew Research Center. 10% of Americans don't use the internet. Who are they?
https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/22/some-americans-dont-use-the-internet-who-are-they/
[4] Perzynski, A. T., Roach, M. J., Shick, S., Callahan, B., Gunzler, D., Cebul, R., Kaelber, D. C., Huml, A., Thornton, J. D., & Einstadter, D. (2017). Patient portals and broadband internet inequality. *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association : JAMIA*, *24*(5), 927–932. https://doi.org/10.1093/jamia/ocx020
[5] Library Bill of Rights. http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill
[6] Pew Research Center. 10% of Americans don't use the internet. Who are they?
https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/22/some-americans-dont-use-the-internet-who-are-they/

Pleasant[7]. Citizens are required to quarantine inside their homes and may only leave to receive or provide "essential services." Schools across the county were closed and will remain closed through the end of the 2019-2020 school year. Classes were moved online, with teachers creating digital content for their students. However, students and families without internet access at home are left unable to participate in class discussions. Additionally, with the library closed to the public, students cannot access the free internet at the library. With the uncertainty of reopening schools and businesses stretching into the next school year, the need for increased access to the internet is even greater now that families are being asked to self-quarantine at home and are not able to visit their local libraries.

4.   PROJECT DESCRIPTION

a.   This grant will address the lack of internet access among the portion of the county whose population has the highest reported poverty, lack of education, and lack of internet at home. Among the 20 hotspots purchased by this grant, a majority of the hotspots will be permanently loaned from the Concord and Kannapolis branches of the system. All five branches will receive some number of hotspots based on their community need. Patrons will have the ability to check out a mobile hotspot, just like a book. They will have the same access to online information at home as they would if they were able to visit their physical library location. Using a similar model to the one working in the Durham County Public Library System[8], we will allow patrons to reserve their use of the device by placing a hold. Patrons can check out the material for two-weeks, but will be unable to renew the device.

b.   This solution was selected because it best meets the current needs of the population during the COVID-19 pandemic, but also addresses existing issues of access in the community. Students are being asked to complete their assignments online, so internet access is a critical need at this time.

c.   If this project is successful, we will have aided in closing the "digital divide" that exists for users who do not have internet access. Students under self-quarantine will be able to use the mobile hotspots to complete their assignments online. In addition, this project will offer a form of connectivity so that they may interact with their teachers and fellow classmates during this difficult time of isolation.

d.   This grant will allow the Cabarrus County Public Library System to evaluate the effectiveness of a large scale mobile hotspot program. Currently, the library system budget could afford to cover the yearly cost of 13 mobile hotspots. However, should this program prove effective and efficient there is a possibility of finding matching funding through partners, such as the public school system. Modeling the replacement policy after the policy established by Durham County Public Library, we will assess a $40 replacement fee for any

[7] Emergency Stay at Home Proclamation - March 26, 2020. (2017). Retrieved April 22, 2020, from https://www.cabarruscounty.us/resources/emergency-stay-home-proclamation-2020-03-26
[8] Email to Matthew Colbridge, Technology Management Administrator Durham County Libraries

damaged devices. Additionally, when the hotspot becomes overdue, the internet service will be suspended. Once the device has been returned, service will be reinstated for that hotspot.

e. Natural partners for the grant are the Cabarrus County Public School System and the Kannapolis City School System. There is also the potential of partnering with the Rowan County Public Library System, since Cabarrus and Rowan libraries share residents of the City of Kannapolis. The immediate role of the school systems would be serving as advertisers of the mobile hotspot program with their families. There are dozens of identified schools within the most affected census tracts (greatest poverty, least amount of access to the internet, highest minority populations). As these residents are the segment of the population this grant addresses, these schools would be most equipped to identify and target potential users. The benefits for the library include sharing our resources with potential non-library users, since the residents have to physically visit a branch location to borrow a hotspot. The schools would benefit through their students, who would finally have access to steady internet at home.

Other potential partners to include in this project are the Boys and Girls Club of Cabarrus County. In terms of increasing the reach of the program this organization makes logical sense to include in our efforts. The Boys and Girls Club operates a location in close proximity to the Concord branch of the Cabarrus County Public Library and they serve an underserved population in a census tract that was previously identified as a target for the Granting Access program.

5. EVALUATION

a. We will count the number of hotspots circulated and count the number of holds we have on the hotspots. These numbers will be compared every month to determine if there is growth in the program. We will also count the number of new patrons that specifically create an account with us to check out the hotspot device. To encourage participation in the survey, the Cabarrus County Public Library can offer a modest fine waiver for each completed questionnaire returned by the patrons.

When users come to check out the hotspot, they will be given a short questionnaire to evaluate their satisfaction and use of the device. They will be asked, among other questions:

- If they're a new patron to the Cabarrus County Public Library System
- Where they heard of this program
- If they intend to use the Hotspot for "School, Business, or Personal" reasons.

b. This grant is about providing access for patrons that lack access. While it might be difficult to wholly correct the socio-economic issues at the heart of the problem, we can try some methods to improve service and use of the Grant Access program. We can monitor

paron satisfaction level with the hotspots, check out rates, difficulty in using the devices to meet their needs, and the likelihood they would use the service again. Users of the hotspots will be given a questionnaire before checking out a hotspot. After turning the hotspot in again they will be given a new questionnaire to fill out. Questions that will be asked include:

● What was your satisfaction level with the hotspot?
● On a scale of 1 to 10 how easy was it to use the hotspot?
● What issues did you have with the device?
● Did you have enough time to complete your project?
● How likely would you be to recommend this program to someone you know?
● How likely would you be interested in checking out the device again?

Usage data will be analyzed at the end of the year to determine if the program needs to be expanded.

6.   PROJECT TIMELINE

Mobile Hotspot Lending Project Timeline

Bidding process to determine service provider and devices to purchase. After bidding, establish 12-month contract with provider.	Complete staff training for device implementation. Staff will train three days, with additional days as necessary after initial implementation.	Advertise the project to local community members (radio ad, newspaper, etc.) Explain how users can participate and check out devices. 7-day trial period.	Begin offering devices to patrons; record any relevant data and statistics for future success. Offer questionnaire with devices for patrons to comment.	Evaluate success of the program. Assess any issues and plan how to address them. Hold additional meeting with staff members to discuss.
MONTH 01	**MONTH 02**	**MONTH 03**	**MONTH 04**	**MONTH 05**

MONTH 06	MONTHS 07-09	MONTH 10	MONTH 11	MONTH 12
Continue to evaluate program. Revisit budget and costs to ensure all items align. Hold monthly review meeting.	General review: get feedback from patrons and staff. Monthly meeting with staff, bi-monthly meeting with partners.	Budget evaluation; work with partners and administration for continuing feedback.	Service contract negotiations; continue to gather patron feedback.	Complete grant report; evaluate successes and future opportunities to determine course of program.

This table is a rough indication for our prospective roll out of the Granting Access program. All technology purchases in Cabarrus County require approval and implementation by the Cabarrus County Information Technology Department.

- Month 1: Funds awarded for Granting Access project. Once the IT department reviews available services and contacts in the local area they can make a purchase agreement for the length of the grant.
- Month 2: While the bidding process takes place, staff can be trained on troubleshooting the devices, learning more about the program, and how we can get these devices to the families in the county without internet access at home.
- Month 3: After the units have been acquired and as they are getting ready to be sent to the libraries, we will begin working with local partners to advertise the program. Some previously identified partners include the public school system and Boys and Girls Club. Trial program loan of 1-week extended to two weeks if successful.
- Month 4: Once the units are made available to the public they will be loaned out, with patrons able to place a hold on a device. The families will be limited to one hotspot per address. Patrons will be given a survey when they check out the device and a follow-up survey after they return the device to measure satisfaction level and note any changes that can be made to the Granting Access program.
- Month 5: A review of the completed surveys will occur after one month of service. Possible changes to the system, including advertising or loan time will be noted.
- Month 6: Revisit current expenses for the Granting Access program. Ensure projected budget aligns with allocated funds. Evaluate program and hold monthly review meetings.
- Months 7-9: Monthly reviews of patron feedback about the program. Bi-monthly meetings with partners on feedback from their side of the process.
- Month 10: Budget evaluation of the program. Work with partners and administration on continuing funding of the program at current levels, a reduction of service, or increase in service. Feedback noted and evaluated.
- Month 11: Service contract negotiations begin based on Month 10 assessment. Patron feedback noted and evaluated.
- Month 12: Write grant report. Begin preparation for possible year two of the program. Evaluate successes and opportunities to determine the course of the Granting Access

program. Begin advertising for next year. Continue gathering and noting feedback from patrons.

7. MATCHING FUNDS
a. **No matching funds have been allocated at this time.**

8. BUDGET

A. Salaries/Wages/Benefits

The mobile hotspots are typically user-friendly, so it is not required to hire new staff for this project. However, we plan to offer a brief training session to already established staff to cover usage and troubleshooting for the devices. Staff members must be prepared to assist patrons in turning the devices on and making sure the batteries are charged.

B. Consultant Fees

No consultant fees are required for the implementation and execution of this program.

C. Travel, library staff

There are no travel costs associated with this project.

D. Supplies/Materials

Durham County (NC) Public Library System started lending hotspots to members of their community starting in 2018-2019. All hotspots are provided, and serviced by Sprint. They reported the units had zero initial cost, with a warranty that replaced any faulty unit within the first year of issue. $20 replacement cost was charged for missing and lost items.Service for each hotspot was $29.99 per month for unlimited service.

Replacement Cost for the units are passed on to the patrons.

Hotspots (25 units) - $0.

E. Equipment that exceeds $5,000 per item

No tangangible property in this grant exceeds $5,000 per item.

F. Services

Durham County Public Library System report using Sprint as their service provider. Durham County paid $29.99 per month for unlimited data on each of the hotspots they loan to the public.

We request service funds for: Hotspot Unlimited Service (25 units/year) - $10,000

G.   Subtotal

Total the Matching Funds and LSTA Funds columns.

H.   Indirect Costs

The biggest expense of this project is the mobile hotspot service agreement. Per Cabarrus County policy this program would be subject to a bidding process by certified vendors. Should the Cabarrus County Information Technology Department be unable to secure a low rate of monthly service, we would like to be mindful of that process and try to adjust these numbers to account for an unknown cost factor.

Budget Table

Use the table below to prepare your budget. List all proposed grant and matching expenditures with a brief description for each item that will help reviewers understand how the money will be spent in support of the project. Add rows as needed. Attach quotes where appropriate.

	Budget Category – see descriptions above	Qty of Items	Cost per Item	Matching Funds	LSTA Funds	Total Funds
A	**Salaries/Wages/Benefits**					$0
B	**Consultant Fees**					$0
C	**Travel, library staff only**					$0
D	**Supplies/Materials**					
	Hotspots	25	$0		$0	$0
	Hotspot Replacement	10	$20	$200		$200
E	**Equipment that exceeds $5,000 per item**					

F	**Services**					
	Unlimited Wireless Service	25	$29.99/mo		$10,000	$10,000
G	**Subtotal**					$10,200
H	**Indirect Costs (IDC): applicants must choose one, IDC may only be charged against LSTA Funds.**					
	x The library chooses a rate not to exceed 10% of modified total Direct Costs AND declares it is eligible for the 10% rate.				9%	$998.00
I	**Total LSTA Funds Requested** Round up to the nearest dollar; use this total to enter in Online Signature Page.					$11,118