

Libraries = Learning Without Limits

Library Hotspot Lending Extends Opportunity for All



Whether searching for jobs, completing the GED online, attending a telehealth appointment, or completing after school assignments, an internet connection powers education, career, civic participation, and self-sufficiency. Yet one in five U.S. households lack home broadband internet access, creating an opportunity gap for millions of people.



20% of U.S. adults lack access to home broadband internet services



27% of U.S. adult rural residents are not connected to the internet at home



44% of U.S. adults with a high school education or less lack access to home broadband

Source: Pew Research Center: [pewresearch.org/internet/2021/09/01/the-internet-and-the-pandemic](https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/09/01/the-internet-and-the-pandemic)

America's public libraries have long worked to bridge these gaps with more than 17,000 technology-enabled and convenient locations and trusted staff trained to connect people with the resources they need.

More recently, libraries have extended their digital reach with amplified Wi-Fi signals and laptop, tablet, and hotspot lending to patrons. Federal investments in library broadband services boost digital opportunity and self-sufficiency for all.



In 2023, 46.9% of public libraries circulated hotspots for patrons use in their homes (69.4% urban, 39.2% rural). This is a 14% increase from 2020.

Source: Public Library Association: [ala.org/pla/data/plasurveys](https://www.ala.org/pla/data/plasurveys)

Hotspot lending programs power opportunity and self-sufficiency across the United States:

- Extend skill building and training opportunities into nights and weekends when schools and some libraries aren't open.
- Facilitate vital access to healthcare with telehealth appointments and online resources from healthcare providers.
- Support commuter students who may not have access to home internet.

"Hotspot lending programs give families and individuals flexibility in using internet resources for education, work, and telehealth on their schedule."

Lauren Abner, State E-rate Coordinator, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives

Hotspot lending provides a critical alternative for individuals who lack home internet or whose connection may be insufficient to meet the needs of the household.

Hotspots connect people during times of disaster

A patron of the **Houston Public Library** in Texas shared: “I’m displaced due to Hurricane Harvey . . . There’s no internet connection here. We’ve been able to use [the library’s] device to help with FEMA and recovery efforts for our home.” During a disaster, wireless infrastructure tends to be easier to restore than wired internet infrastructure, and therefore mobile hotspots can be a great benefit to those who may temporarily lack connectivity due to a storm or other natural disaster. Additionally, the mobility and portability of the mobile hotspot permits use outside of the home, which can help those who have been displaced by a disaster and need internet access.



Hotspots fill connectivity gaps in rural communities

The **Caribou Public Library** in northern Maine loans hotspots to people who do not have home internet access, as well as those who have a disability or are homebound. The library uses its bookmobile to deliver and pick up the hotspot if the patron cannot come to the library. The program focuses on supporting remote workers as well as on helping people access certification programs and skills building to move up or over to better careers.



Hotspots propel individuals toward positive goals

The **Indianapolis Public Library** offers Wi-Fi hotspots and Chromebooks to patrons for use to pay bills, search for jobs, and build digital skills. A library patron shared: “This Chromebook and Hotspot Program is awesome. It’s helping me out so much. I’m at a domestic violence shelter and without this program I wouldn’t be able to get my bachelor’s degree to start a new life.”



Hotspots provide flexible alternative connectivity solutions

The Morehead State University in Kentucky was the victim of a cyberattack in 2024. During that time, the school was not able to provide internet access to students or staff on campus meaning residential students had no internet access. The **Rowan County Public Library** hotspot lending program provided students hotspots during this time to continue their school work.



Hotspots promote digital resilience and learning

The **Lubbock Public Libraries** in Texas made 100+ hotspots available for checkout through 2023 with Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF). The library worked with South Plains College so students could checkout a device for the entire semester, as well as with Literacy Lubbock, a non-profit offering classes, such as English as a Second Language, adult basic education, and GED preparation. Former Library Director Stacy McKenzie said, “A lot of the people in those programs are trying to learn all these things just on their phone, and that’s very difficult to learn on a phone. So, we’re working with them to have a limited number of these for checkout for their students, so that they can have a full educational experience.”



Hotspots help servicemembers, veterans, and their families

The **Broward County Library** in Florida launched the “Veterans Connect Hotspots Program,” which provides 450 Wi-Fi hotspots to local veterans, active military members, and their dependents. The hotspots can be borrowed for four months at a time and assist veterans in accessing employment-related resources, online job coaching from the library, and other assistance in transitioning from military to civilian life.

