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STAFF REPORT
ACTION REQUIRED

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

Date:	June 19, 2017
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 service contract for data communications with Rogers to support Phase 3 implementation of the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Pilot Project. All service contracts exceeding $500,000 require Board approval.

The Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Pilot Project supports and is funded by the City of Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy to help further its strategic objective of *expanding service access and availability.* The project began in 2016 as a pilot study to determine how the service might be delivered and to focus distribution to low-income households. Phase 1 was launched on June 1, 2016 and ended on November 30, 2016, and Phase 2 was launched on February 1, 2017 and is scheduled to end on July 31, 2017. Data plans for Phases 1 and 2 were awarded under the City Librarian's delegated authority.

Planning for Phase 3 is currently underway. Included is a commitment from Rogers to donate approximately 550 free Wi-Fi hotspot devices subject to a two-year unlimited data plan for the devices. The total cost for the service contract over the two-year period is approximately $685,000, excluding Harmonized Sales Tax (HST). Awards greater than $500,000 require Board approval.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The City Librarian recommends that the Toronto Public Library Board:

1. approves the service contract for data communications to Rogers to support Phase 3 implementation of the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Pilot Project, which is comprised of:

    a. approximately 550 Wi-Fi hotspot devices at no cost to the Library; and

b. a two-year unlimited data plan for the devices at a cost of approximately $685,000, excluding HST.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

TPL's 2017 operating budget includes funding of $250,000, which has been provided through the City's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

The total value of the two-year service contract with Rogers for 550 devices is approximately $685,000, excluding HST, for data communications to support Phase 3 implementation of the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Pilot Project. The contract is expected to start on July 1, 2017 and end on June 30, 2019. The Phase 3 cost in 2017 is approximately $174,000, and Phases 1 and 2 will cost $76,000 and end during in 2017.

A $135,000 donation from a Google donation through the Foundation will be carried forward and used to fund the initiative in 2018.

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

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN

The Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Pilot Project supports the Library's 2016-2019 strategic plan priorities of *breaking down barriers to access and driving inclusion*, and *expanding access to technology and training*. There is a specific 2017 strategic work plan initiative to *expand the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Pilot Project*.

DECISION HISTORY

On May 16, 2017, the Toronto Public Library Board received an information report providing findings of Phase 1 of the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Pilot Project, as well as future directions for the project. A full copy of the report can be found at: http://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/content/about-the-library/pdfs/board/meetings/2017/may15/22-wi-fi-hotspot-lending-pilot-update.pdf

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Pilot Project supports and is funded by the City's Poverty Reduction Strategy to help further its strategic objective of *expanding 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 a basic human right as more information and services are becoming available 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 pilot provides home access to Internet service for access outside of library hours to low-income households. In partnership with the City, Google Canada and Rogers, TPL offers Wi-Fi hotspot lending in high-needs areas of the City to address an immediate need. The Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Pilot is offered in branches serving communities with a large number of low-income households. The program is part of TPL's strategy to expand access to technology and digital literacy training across the City.

COMMENTS

Development of the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Pilot Project
In August 2015 the Toronto Public Library Foundation approached library staff to indicate that Google was prepared to fund a pilot project to lend Wi-Fi hotspots to library customers. Following the approval of the pilot project, broad implementation parameters for the program were developed, including selection of a data plan along with the appropriate hotspot device. After an unsuccessful RFP process, TPL negotiated with its vendor to purchase a limited data plan and equipment within budget. The pilot was to have lasted for one year.

Implementation of Phase 1 (Jun. 1 – Nov. 30, 2016) and Phase 2 (Feb. 1 – Jul. 31, 2017)
The Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Pilot Project was officially launched in June 2016. The devices were circulated at six pilot branches located in city-designated Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs).

Pilot branches in conjunction with community partners, recruited participants that met the borrowing profile – low income households without Internet access. Borrowers were loaned the hotspot devices for six months (June 1, 2016 – November 30, 2016), with an initial limited plan of 10gb. In September 2016, an unlimited data plan became available, at which time the devices were migrated to this new plan.

With the unlimited monthly data plan in place, Phase 2 was launched on February 1, 2017, and is scheduled to end on July 31, 2017. Data plans for Phases 1 and 2 were awarded under the City Librarian's delegated authority.

Findings from Phase 1 & Phase 2
Overall, Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the pilot project have run smoothly. While there were some service issues at the outset of Phase 1 related to the 10GB data cap, these issues were resolved once the plan was upgraded to this new unlimited data plan. The continuation of the service is dependent on maintaining an unlimited data plan.

Implementation of Phase 3
As mentioned, planning for Phase 3 implementation is underway with an anticipated start in late August. This service contract, offering free devices with a two-year unlimited data plan, supports the Library's strategic work plan initiative to expand the Wi-Fi Hotspot Lending Pilot Project, and ensures delivery of the service over the next two years. In Phase 3, the goal is to distribute approximately 550 devices. Distribution of devices will continue to focus on low-income families living in high-needs areas, and be expanded to include seven additional branches, Bookmobile Services and the Community Librarian Pilot Project.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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