PLP Innovation and Technology Opportunity Grant Program

1. One paragraph project summary.

The focus of the "Wi-Fi to Go" project is to provide wireless access to the internet to patrons from rural areas in Monterey County from home through the initiation of a Wi-Fi hotspot lending program. The plan is to circulate Wi-Fi hotspots with unlimited data plans in most of the libraries throughout our service area. We are looking at the two main service providers: ATT and Verizon. We have determined which vendors have the best cellular signals in each region and will equip branches with a hotspot from the most suitable cell provider. A recent survey done by our south county branches disclosed that most people do not have an internet service in their homes and mainly access the internet through a limited data plan on their cell phones. Circulating Wi-Fi hotspots would allow people unlimited access to job applications, homework assignment and other data from their homes when the library is closed. The idea for the program was inspired by a webinar looking at the success of Wi-Fi hotspot lending programs at NYPL and in rural Oklahoma and also looking at the shortcomings of the Wi-Fi lending program in rural Maine.

2. Explain how this project fits with the library's strategic directions.

MCFL's strategic plan states the following: *"Technology is the backbone of the library. Incorporating state of the art technology resources into its operation and services is essential for the library's long-term relevance as a community asset."*

As technology evolves and improves MCFL strives towards improving all our patron's access to the internet. Improving the speed and bandwidth of internet access within our library facilities is an ongoing priority. At the most recent MCFL staff day, "internet access" was determined by staff to be the most important service we provide. The strategic plan recognizes that our ability to provide access make us a "community asset."

The Wi-Fi to Go hotspot lending program would augment our commitment to improving internet access for patrons from library "in-house" to their house. It builds on our ideology of creating a library without walls and extends one of the most valuable and sought after services we provide into the community and into their homes. We especially want to extend this resource into our poorest and most rural communities.

The 2nd goal of the technology portion of our strategic plan states the following:

*"**Goal 2:** Communities enjoy top quality, innovative and easily accessible library services supported by technology solutions".*

The Wi-Fi to Go project aligns perfectly with this goal by providing an innovative, easily accessible technological solution to the technological needs in our small and rural communities and homes.

3. A description of the proposed project including the population served and the demographics of that population.

The term "digital divide" is now a commonplace expression that a Google search describes as "the gulf that exists between those who have ready access to computers and the Internet, and those who do not." Branch library staff in Monterey County sees the digital divide daily.

MCFL serves many communities over 3771 square miles and each community is unique. Yet most of our jurisdiction is rural and many small communities that we serve have high poverty rates. Census data indicating the percentage of residents living below the poverty line from a sampling of the communities that we serve show the following data: Pajaro 31.9%, Castroville 25.2%, Gonzales 23%, Greenfield 25%, King City 23.9%, San Lucas 38% and San Ardo 28.8%. More than half of the communities we serve show that between one quarter and one third of residents live below poverty level. The national average of residents living below poverty level is 14.7%. Residents in our service area cannot afford services that have become essential to many of us including easy, reliable internet access.

Research and our own experience make us aware that rural residents have fewer options when it comes to internet service providers both in the home and via cellular networks. Nevertheless, their need for access is just as great. The need to access library resources afterhours exists, the need to fill out job applications online after work when the library is closed exists, the need to complete homework assignments that were not complete afterschool exists and sitting outside the library, in the parking lot to tap into our Wi-Fi is not always an option. Some of our smallest branches are open 18 hours per week limiting access to needed resources. The Wi-Fi to Go project will help us bridge the well-known digital divide.

The framework for the project is to purchase Wi-Fi hotspot and service plans from the two service providers in our area that have the best coverage: ATT and Verizon. We have determined that ATT has the best coverage for North County communities and Verizon has better coverage in South County. Most branches and 2 bookmobile will get 1 Wi-Fi hotspot to circulate. For our 4 smallest branches that are only open 18 hours per week we plan to purchase 2 hotspots per library to circulate. This will offer residents added support and access to online resources. These branches are Pajaro, Aromas, San Lucas and San Ardo. A total of 20 hotspots will be purchased. The service plan will include an unlimited monthly data package.

The Wi-Fi hotspots will be added to the collection and circulated from the branches to the public. At check-out patrons will be shown how to use the hotspot and instructions will be included in the packaging. Patrons will also sign a user agreement in order to check out the hotspot. The agreement will list fines for late returns and replacement fees for lost items.

Several teams of staff will be involved in the development of the project. During the initial planning phase the following will be put in place:

1. An ad hoc group from the circulation team will determine barcoding, packaging, fines/fees and circulation length.
2. The policy team will come up with a plan for a user agreement for patrons to sign at check-out.
3. Program staff will be involved with promotions and advertising to the community.
4. Management staff will be involved in rolling out the news and training front line staff on the goals of the project, the use of Wi-Fi hotspots, an instruction sheet, the user agreement and how to handle fines, fees and loss of items.
5. Management staff will create user surveys for patrons to circulate with the devices and will create a survey monkey poll for staff to get feedback on improving lending procedures.

Staff recognizes that computers and internet access are a prized commodity that provide a lifeline of connection to needed services for our rural and small community residents. The availability of the Wi-Fi hotspots will allow that lifeline to be extended from the library to the patron's home.

4. Goals and objectives of the project.

The goal of the project is three-fold:

1. To expand the strategic initiative stated in our strategic plan of using top quality technological solutions for our communities to access resources by initiating the circulation of Wi-Fi hotspots.

2. To meet community need and avail our patrons of access to the internet while the library is closed or patrons are at home.

3. To evaluate this service and learn if and how the circulation of Wi-Fi hotspots benefits the residents in our communities and how to improve the program for patrons and staff.

5. Project timeline (activities).

The planned timeline is as follows:

1. Investigate Wi-Fi hotspot service plans—Fall 2017 (done)
2. Create team to research best practices for circulating Wi-Fi hotspots—Fall 2017
3. Write instruction sheet and user agreement—November 2017

4. Create user survey to determine benefits of program—November 2017
5. Create staff training plan—November 2017
6. Create publicity plan for the staff and public—November/December 2017
7. Purchase the Wi-Fi hotspots and monthly service plans—January 2018
8. Promote the program to staff and initiate training plan—January 2018
9. Publicize program to public —January 2018
10. Launch Wi-Fi to Go and start circulating hotspots—January/February 2018

6. Evaluation of the project.

The evaluation of the project will be ongoing and we aim to solicit feedback from both staff and patrons. Staff will create a user survey to circulate with the Wi-Fi hotspot to gain feedback on an ongoing basis to be evaluated quarterly. To determine popularity and demand we will look at circulation statistics and hold lists.

In addition we will create a staff survey via survey monkey to get information from front line staff on how the program is working. The project is dynamic and we will adjust initial procedures as determined by staff feedback. We will use the data collected from patrons, staff and circulation statistics to determine best practices for our organization.

7. Project budget.

While e-rate does not fund mobile data plans, libraries in California get discounts through NASPO, National Association of State Procurement Officers, for both devices and unlimited service plans. There are no activation or cancellation fees associated with government contracts which are additional savings.

Project cost:

Verizon service plan for 10 devices unlimited data	10 * $45 *12 months =	$ 5,400.00
Purchase of 10 Verizon MiFi hotspots	10 * $20 per device =	$ 200.00
ATT service plans for 10 devices unlimited data	10 * $50 *12 months =	$ 6,000.00
Purchase of 10 ATT Velocity hotspots	10* $15 per device =	$ 150.00
Hotspot device portable hard-sided case+shipping	20 * $25 per case	$ 500.00
Packaging (Demco vinyl bag for barcode)+shipping	20 * $10 per bag	$ 200.00
Total		**$12,450.00**

In-kind contributions:

Publicity (flyers, service agreements) in-kind contributions	$ 350.00
Staff time, in-kind contributions (managers & staff)	$ 5,000.00
	$5,350.00

8. Sustainability analysis

In 2016, MCFL became a CIPA compliant library in order to avail ourselves of more technology grants and increased e-rate discounts. In addition to these cost reductions, we will be phasing out 14 networked Wi-Fi devices and replacing them with a faster more economical solution making more money available. With these cost saving measures, the annual budget cost to maintain the data plans for this program of **$11,400.00** can be absorbed into our budget. Replacement of lost devices is affordable at $15 and $20 per device. If the project proves to be popular we will seek new grants to expand the project.