# BC LIBRARIES COOPERATIVE LENDABLE TECHNOLOGY WORKING GROUP REPORT

November, 2021

# INTRODUCTION

As part of the work funded with the Digital Initiative Projects to support public library connectivity, and after consultation with various library directors, the BC Libraries Cooperative commissioned its connectivity consultant Stephen Forrest to produce a [Guide to Planning Lendable Connectivity Projects](). This guide was delivered in November 2020 and was well received by both libraries and the provincial funder.

As 2021 commenced it was clear that there was a strong potential that the two funds operated by the Co-op to help libraries improve their connectivity would not be exhausted by year's end. This, coupled with feedback from many libraries (especially smaller ones) that while the report was helpful, they likely did not have either the time, capacity or resources to currently act on it, led to an amendment of the initial Connectivity Consultant remit. In March 2021, a Connectivity Working Group was struck to help guide additional work that might help the sector engage in such connectivity lending projects.

The Working Group was made up of three larger lower mainland and three outside the lower mainland libraries (Surrey, Richmond, North Vancouver City, Penticton, Thompson Nicola Regional District and Powell River.) These were selected based on prior expressed interest and desire to implement such a program, and was limited to six in order to keep organizing logistics manageable.

During their initial meeting, the working group set the following goals:

1. Identify, and then approach, potential lendable connectivity solutions providers and engage them to get the best pricing possible for public libraries.

2. Share a model Lending Tech policy and process example and as a group develop that into a suitable model for public libraries to use in introducing initiatives if and when a financial deal from the carriers that make it viable for us could be obtained.

The group met five times between March and July, but did suffer from both turnover, the ongoing pandemic, emergency conditions around the province, summer vacations and various other setbacks.

# Working Group Outputs

The results of the discussions of the group were as follows:

## 1 - Identify, and then approach, potential lendable connectivity solutions providers to negotiate the best SIM pricing for BC Public Libraries

### Rogers

Rogers Communications were the only carrier to participate in invitations to discuss mobile hotspot lending or Lendable Connectivity programs for the libraries with the Consultant. The end result was that Rogers corporate office supported an offer by the BC Sales contact that BC public libraries would be offered a service rate of $85 per month for unlimited data SIM's to enable hotspots sold by Rogers to the libraries directly. This is the only Rogers offer that will be made to the libraries. This rate is the same rate offered to BC municipalities under a Master Services Agreement with the Province of BC, and is confidential information not to be shared with other telecommunications companies who may compete with Rogers in BC.

Subsequent discussions with Rogers on the vulnerability of the consumer hotspots offered as standard by all the Canadian telecom carriers resulted in an offer to sell libraries either of two more rugged devices, both more expensive than the standard offering.

### Kajeet

Rogers are also one of two mobile carriers with contracts to supply mobile network data capacity to Kajeet, a service provider that offers a value-added cell-connected service that delivers mobile network Internet service to schools, buses, and libraries. The cost of this service is much lower than the rates offered by Telus, Bell and Rogers directly, due mainly to various bandwidth reducing strategies such as excluding certain high bandwidth uses and sites. The excluded sites are chiefly video-gaming and video streaming sites that consume the bulk of the data contracts on phones, tablets and computers connected to the Internet.  However, Kajeet clients can control the filtering of the devices contracted to their service, with a corresponding increase in price.

### Telus

Telus Mobility did not respond to attempts to open a discussion on SIM programs or pricing for the libraries. Individual Telus sales reps across the Province are authorised to offer pooled SIM data caps as part of corporate mobile phone and device programs but prices are fixed at levels over $100 per month for unlimited data and no negotiations are allowed. One library shared an offer from Rogers for $29.75 per month for SIM's with a 5Gb data cap.  On Telus web site a 6Gb plan costs $70 per month.

## 2 - SHARE A MODEL LENDING TECH POLICY

Only one member produced a document during the working groups tenure, and that was a list of headings from the November 2020 Lendable Connectivity advice document, which did not advance the level of support to the libraries in introducing lending programs. On May 14th , the Consultant circulated a Word doc of the ALA guide to introducing lending programs to the group members, as a template for the group to use to customize The group did not wish to pursue any amendments of the document through May and June.

The intent to build a model specific to BC libraries with the working group was suspended by the Consultant. The ALA guide is a very good document that can be amended quickly and easily to act as a base for policy and processes in programs.

The online versions is at https://www.ala.org/pla/initiatives/digitallead/hotspot-playbook

## ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK FROM THE WORKING GROUP

The Lendable Connectivity Working Group also had many discussions on issues that were known or thought to be barriers and drivers for worthwhile lending initiatives to BC public libraries and which limit the viability of such programs.

The main challenges in establishing and running Library Technology Loan Programs are;

1. The costs (both initial and monthly) are unfunded.
2. Finding and maintaining funding. Currently the BC libraries have little to no short-term funding and no operating funding for technology and communications lending programs.
3. Partnering with a viable wireless communications vendor.
4. Partnering with local social service organizations and charities to identify, involve and interface with lending program participants in their local communities. Libraries believe they are not sufficiently knowledgeable in societal demographics in their communities to take the lead in these projects. These social service organizations may also have access to funding bodies and individuals through avenues not accessible to public libraries.
5. A lack of wireless (cell) network coverage in mountainous rural areas of BC is also often stated as a barrier to satisfactory delivery of remote Internet services. Partial cell coverage in individual library geographies is a serious issue in the reach and reliability of lending programs that several libraries regard as show stoppers.
6. Rural BC communities are largely reliant on consumer level cell service packages to deliver wireless Internet to citizens. Aggregated deals are often only available to corporate clients who have no presence.
7. A lack of independent professional guidance on alternative solutions in extension of services through other communications technologies. The issue cannot be solved by any individual business or organization in rural areas.
8. Regional, Provincial and federal government regulations drive a much more involved, and expensive, project formulation that very few communities and libraries have the expertise and resources to attempt, and no funds to hire big city consulting companies.

9. A detailed planning process to define the goals, client and library outcomes, a multi- year budget and a well-defined stakeholder identification exercise can result in a successful Connectivity Lending program.
10. These programs have faced high costs and indifferent sales and service support by the wireless service providers.


## Recommended Next Steps

Based on the findings of the working group and the availability of remaining funds in the Connectivity envelope, the Co-op is exploring the possibility of funding a year-long pilot project in early 2022 to help fund lendable connected devices for public libraries. If it is feasible, the project is hoped to offer libraries some choice between the "all-in one" solution from Kajeet and the "unlimited data but without device purchase or management" that the Rogers deal offers, recognizing that libraries are at different places in their process around lending out connectivity, and wanting to equitably support these different approaches. More details should become available in early 2022.