WiFi4EU… and for Libraries

Potential Financial Support for Installing High-speed WiFi in Libraries

A Briefing for Libraries in the European Union, 27 March 2018

The European Union has created a €120 million fund – WiFi4EU – to promote public Internet access by paying for WiFi equipment and installation costs

Libraries are explicitly mentioned as potential beneficiaries. Those which do not have high quality WiFi should contact local governments to find out about getting involved

This brief offers background on WiFi4EU, suggested next steps, and arguments to use with local authorities

The European Union has underlined the importance of public access to the Internet as part of its efforts to promote a more inclusive digital economy and society. For those people and communities which currently do not benefit from high quality connectivity to their homes, good free public access options offer an effective alternative. This briefing offers more information about the scheme, and then suggestions on what individual libraries can do.

WiFi4EU

The WiFi4EU initiative aims to support the delivery of public WiFi around the EU. It is targeted, in particular at:

- Public spaces (parks, squares), libraries, museums, and public buildings…
- … where there is no similar public access scheme in place…
- … across the EU.

In its first phase, municipalities (find the [defined list here](#)) can register, and apply for a 'voucher' worth €15 000, in order to pay for equipment and installation of WiFi equipment. The municipality must commit to pay for maintenance and Internet subscriptions for three years. Successful municipalities can then commission the relevant work from an approved contractor, whom the European Commission will pay directly.

This first phase was launched on 22 March 2018. Municipalities are invited to register – this is an essential (and easy) first step before bidding for money to install WiFi equipment. Subsequently, a more detailed process to apply for vouchers will open. Vouchers will be offered on a first-come-first-served basis to eligible municipalities.

More information is available in this [factsheet](#), and in this longer set of [frequently asked questions](#).

WiFi4EU and Libraries

IFLA has long argued for the importance of public access in libraries. Access itself is increasingly vital in order to take advantage of learning opportunities, find jobs, use government services, and take part in democratic life. Libraries provide a highly appropriate setting for free access, given their non-commercial status, familiarity and trust of communities, and the possibility to offer other services and support in parallel.

While most libraries in Europe do offer Internet access to users, this project offers an opportunity to fill in the last gaps. Where Internet speeds are inadequate, it may be possible to use the initiative to move to a better service.

WiFi4EU can therefore potentially support a valuable collaboration between libraries and local authorities, for the benefit of citizens.

Arguments to Use in Convincing Local Authorities to Engage

- *This is a great opportunity to provide a highly-valued service to members of the community.*
- *Better WiFi will help libraries deliver better education, job-search support, public health information, digital literacy training and other services. It will also support people in using eGovernment services.*
- *It is not hard – the European Commission is making a special effort to make the process simple. Municipalities will also be able to choose who installs the equipment.*

How Can Your Library Take Advantage of This Offer?

1) Think about whether your library could benefit – is there no WiFi, or is the quality low? Is there no other good option in your area?
2) Check if there is a national coordinator for WiFi4EU (for example, [France has one](#)) – they may have additional information.
3) Check on [this list](#) if your municipality has already signed up. If so, find out through your local town hall who the responsible person is.
4) If not, share the information provided by the EU (in all [EU languages](#)) with the person in the town hall responsible for libraries (and digital issues if possible).
5) Underline the importance of library connectivity. Libraries have many advantages:
    a. A welcoming, non-commercial space
    b. Skilled staff ready to help and provide support
    c. Other services linked to information access
6) Recommend that the municipality registers (**before 15 May 2018**). You may want to talk at this point about the costs of connectivity (see questions below).
7) Once the second call for vouchers is published, your library can apply directly.

Questions

- *How many vouchers will there be in the first round?* At least fifteen per country, and more depending on how many apply for them
- *Are there any costs to municipalities?* Yes – the cost of Internet subscriptions and maintenance of the equipment. If the project costs more than €15000, the municipality will also need to pay.
- *How much money is available?* €120 million
- *Can libraries apply directly?* Not yet, although this may become possible in a second phase.
- *Will the WiFi connection be free and non-commercial?* Yes, this is necessary for a project to receive money. It may be necessary to log in in order to use the system. This may pose some questions as to whether users can browse anonymously. We will continue to explore this question.