Frequently Asked Questions

What will successful applicants receive?

CCFC will connect successful applicants with SCS Communications, a contracted technology vendor. Successful applicants will receive state-of-the-art WiFi equipment that will be installed and configured by SCS. SCS will work with each successful applicant to determine where WiFi hotspot equipment can be installed to serve the designated area(s) and install and configure the hotspot equipment. No technical knowledge or skills will be required of successful applicants. Applicants will also receive three years of maintenance and monitoring of the hotspot including usage information.

A three-year, no cost lease will be included with the equipment that asks successful applicants to:

- Ensure that the hotspot equipment and Wireless Access Points are kept in working order and are active after the hotspot equipment becomes the responsibility of the applicant.
- Be the first point of contact for community members with questions once the hotspot is live.
- Provide internet service to the hotspot which may include self-funding / allowing private sponsorships.
- Provide proof of general liability insurance.

How will applications be ranked and when will I be notified?

Applicants will be notified of their status on a rolling basis.

Applicants will be ranked using a scoring rubric. The maximum number of points is 12. Application criteria with associated points are marked below.

- Alignment with the Maine West Technology Plan (pages 2-3) (1 point)
- Numbers of residents and businesses served (2 points)
- Available installation locations (3 points)
- Location in Maine West geography (i.e., towns located in SAD44, RSU10, RSU56 and SAD17) (2 points)
- Participation in the Maine West Broadband Boot Camp (1 point)
- Commitment to provide internet service (e.g., self-funding or private sponsorship) for at least five years for each hotspot requested (3 points)

Total points = 12

What are the benefits of a community WiFi hotspot?

They have the capability to:

- Allow people to access email and other smartphone tools in a faster, more efficient manner without using their cellular data plan
- Provide free connectivity for computers and tablets for residents who don’t have access to the internet at home or have poor internet connectivity at home
- Promote access to local amenities:
  - Tourism related attractions
  - Lodging and food options
  - Where public restrooms are located
- Allow a “sponsor” to advertise its business
Community WiFi hotspots typically report more than 1,000 unique users accessing broadband connectivity each month.

**Who will install the equipment?**

Community Concepts Finance Corporation has contracted with SCS Communications to design, purchase and install public wireless hotspots. SCS, based in Hallowell, ME, is a leader in New England in the design and implementation of wired and wireless networks with experience serving municipal projects, resorts, apartment complexes, campgrounds and many other customers. Most recently SCS has designed and implemented public WiFi hotspots in South Portland, Sanford and Millinocket.

**How much does it cost?**

The Northern Border Regional Commission grant CCFC received will pay for labor and installation, hardware, and licensing. Ongoing costs may include an additional internet subscription (e.g. cable or DSL connection or cellular plan) to provide internet service for a hotspot if it is not already available. If an additional internet subscription is needed the costs would be the responsibility of the host site and would be paid directly to the internet service provider.

As the lessee, a community will also be asked to provide proof of general liability insurance (“ACORD” certificate) in the amount of one million dollars per occurrence/ two million dollars per policy period for bodily injury and property damage. A community must list CCFC (the Lessor) as an additional insured to defend, indemnify and hold harmless CCFC against any claims arising out of the use of leased equipment.

**What equipment is being installed?**

Ubiquiti AC Mesh Pro ([UniFi AC Mesh Datasheet](ui.com)) will be installed it on community facilities. SCS’s team will design, build, configure and connect the necessary equipment and mounts to make sure each wireless access point (WAP) is up and running as it should be.

**What sites are eligible?**

Common locations include parks and green spaces, libraries, community centers, government offices, in some cases schools, and more. Service to individual residences and businesses are not included in this project.

Site requirements include but are not limited to...

- Key features of each location will be access to electrical power and an internet source, lighting and safety. It is preferred that there is existing wired internet access (DSL, cable, fiber) at each site. Wireless, satellite and cellular internet service are possible options, but fixed wired access is usually better. In some circumstances existing connectivity can be extended to serve a hotspot.
- The WiFi equipment that is being installed is weather resistant. It is typically mounted on the exterior of a building and requires power from a standard household outlet inside the building (PoE injector or PoE switch) or an outdoor outlet with a small weatherproof box to house the power injector.
- Open and well-lit locations that provide a safe space for people to congregate. Easily accessible parking at or near the hotspot site.
What if there’s no internet connection at the site?

SCS will do its best to find a solution, for example by identifying commercial internet service providers (including cellular and satellite carriers), installing a wireless bridge from another facility, and partnering with other organizations to explore newer technologies. Please keep in mind that CCFC is unable to pay for recurring internet subscription fees.

Can I request more than one hotspot and at different locations?

Yes. A community may apply for as many as three WFi hotspots. If more than one location and hotspot is being considered please prioritize the locations.

What is the range of the WiFi?

This depends on environmental factors, including wireless noise, obstructions like trees, how the WiFi access point is mounted, etc. We typically use a 100-150 meter radius from the access point as a rule of thumb for good quality WiFi outdoors.

How do I submit a site request/request assistance?

Please fill in the Maine West Hotspot Application.

What is the timeline?

Requests will be responded to on a rolling basis. In general installations have been made within 60 days from the time that a request is approved. The availability of hardware is the biggest variable determining the timing of installations.

Who is responsible for maintenance?

During the three-year lease of the hotspot equipment to the community, CCFC will assume responsibility for maintenance and monitoring. At the end of the lease responsibility for maintenance and monitoring will be transferred to the community.

What are the limitations?

There are a few limitations to what this project provides:

- The purpose of the project is not to provide service specifically to individual residences or businesses though those living or working in close proximity to the WAP (Wireless Application Protocol) may receive connectivity.
- There will be an open network for public access. Without this a wireless password would have to be used by every party accessing the network.
- If a community is going to apply for multiple hotspots, SCS suggests spacing them out by at least 200 meters as each of the wireless access point should have an effective range of 100-150 meters.
- The monthly cost of internet service is not included in the grant funding. One option for covering these costs is securing sponsorships and providing the sponsor with the opportunity to promote its services/products on a splash page that will be viewed by anyone that connects to a hotspot. Another option is to utilize an existing internet package for a municipal building. CCFC and SCS are happy to discuss further if there are questions.
• The cost to maintain, service and monitor the hotspots after the three-year lease is not included in this grant funding. If a community is interested in these services it should discuss this option with both CCFC and SCS for an ongoing service level agreement.

**How secure are the WiFi hotspots?**

In the design of each network SCS Communications uses standard security protocols to block malicious or inappropriate websites and content. Furthermore, SCS employs client isolation settings in each network which prevent devices on the same network from “seeing” each other.

**What does an installation look like?**

![Image of a community center with a WiFi hotspot sign]

**How can residents and visitors be informed about the location of a WiFi hotspot?**

Signage at the hotspot site indicating that WiFi internet service is available is important along with noting where free WiFi internet service is available on selected websites (e.g., municipal, chamber of commerce).

**Can WiFi be provided at an E-rate funded site (schools and libraries)?**

Yes! At the beginning of the pandemic, the [FCC published a public notice](https://www.fcc.gov) that clarified that schools and libraries are permitted to allow the general public to use E-Rate-supported WiFi networks.