

Date: March 9, 2021  To: Chair and Members of General Committee  From: Shari Lichterman, CPA, CMA, Commissioner of Community Services	Originator's files:    Meeting date: March 31, 2021
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## Subject

Laptop Lending Program Pilot

## Recommendation

That the Corporate Report entitled "Laptop Lending Program Pilot" dated March 9, 2021 from the Commissioner of Community Services be received for information.

### Report Highlights

- The Library and Information Technology Divisions developed the Laptop Lending program to provide Mississauga residents the opportunity to borrow computer hardware to assist in finding employment, completing homework and building digital literacy skills.
- This program complements the existing programs provided through the Wireless Mississauga network and the Library's hotspot lending program.
- In 2021, a pilot of 100 laptops will be loaned through the Library's 18 branch locations and funded through the Library's existing operating budgets.
- A program review will be undertaken before any subsequent program expansion is proposed.
- The Library and Information Technology will work with Corporate Sponsorship to seek corporate sponsors to support the program going forward.

## Background

The Library and Information Technology Divisions developed a joint strategy in response to the Library's Future Directions and the Smart City Master Plans. The Laptop and Hotspot Lending program (LHLP) provides support to Mississauga residents who do not have access to the necessary technology or digital tools required to assist in finding employment, do homework and/or increase their digital literacy. This initiative is an important one to support digital inclusion

and is aligned with the Library's strategic direction to provide access to technology to meet the needs of the community.

Digital inclusion refers to the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities, including the most disadvantaged, have access to digital technologies including the ability to acquire knowledge and build technical skills. In 2019, a Library survey of its customers found that 51% of respondents identified that their only access to technology was through the Library. With the advent of COVID and public health restrictions, customers lost access to technology tools as well as the Internet itself, compounding the effects of the digital divide, especially with the increased pressure of online schooling and the requirement to apply online for government assistance.

The provision of equitable access to technology will be an important component in supporting the community as part of the City's Recovery Plan. Lending Chromebooks to customers will facilitate their access to important digital information resources for learning, government support services and support interpersonal connections to loved ones that are not otherwise available during the pandemic. The availability of computer hardware, when combined with City's Wireless Mississauga network and the Library's hotspot lending program, will help to significantly lessen the impact of the digital divide.

## Present Status

In 2019 Library and Information Technology Divisions established a laptop lending project, making equipment available to support digital inclusion through a community loaning program. Key community stakeholders, including the United Way, were contacted to discuss how to effectively distribute laptops to customers who require the service. Through the Library's established circulation procedures, its strong service delivery model and presence in communities across Mississauga, it was decided that laptops would be circulated through its 18 branch locations. A team evaluated various options for use in the program, ultimately recommending the use of Chromebooks for lending due to their alignment with school standards and security features. The Library's 2021 budget includes funds to implement a pilot of 100 Chromebooks for lending at its 18 branch locations. In the future, the Library and Information Technology Divisions will explore sponsorship opportunities to expand the program.

In 2020, the Library expanded its hotspot lending to all 18 branch locations and made them available through contactless holds pick-up. In 2020, hotspots were borrowed almost 1200 times between August and December and 194 times in the first one and a half months in 2021. In addition, the City and Library partnered with the Peel District School Board and the Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board to donate 100 off-cycle City laptops to at-risk students in September to support remote learning needs.

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## Comments

The Library and Information Technology Divisions will monitor the use of the 100 pilot laptops and gather feedback to evaluate the success of the program, reporting back on this before the program is expanded. If successful, it is recommended that the program be increased to approximately 500 laptops over a three-year period. The Library will work with Corporate Sponsorship to seek out corporate partners and sponsors to decrease the impact on the operating budget.

## Financial Impact

The initial cost for 100 Chromebooks, licensing and storage is \$57,400, funded in the 2021 Library operating budget.

## Conclusion

The Library and Information Technology Divisions are looking for ways to decrease the digital divide. The development of the Chromebook lending pilot of 100 units funded through the Library's 2021 budget will help to establish a program to accomplish this, and will include measuring the success of the program including community feedback and uptake. This will enhance the existing Wireless Mississauga and hotspot lending programs.



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Shari Lichterman, CPA, CMA, Commissioner of Community Services

Prepared by: Jennifer Stirling, Manager of Digital Library Services & Collections