

Public WiFi Service for Small Libraries - By Ernest Williams, Network Systems Manager, eiNetwork, Allegheny County

This document outlines the basic requirements for making your library a WiFi “hotspot” for your patrons. A WiFi “hotspot” allow patrons to bring in their own laptops and connect to your wireless network for Internet access.

1. Get an Internet service

- Cable or DSL services should provide sufficient speeds if you intend to provide WiFi access to approximately 10 simultaneous users.
- If you intend to use your existing library network’s Internet connection, be sure to secure your library assets and data from WiFi users.\*

2. Install a router

- Many routers allow you to configure DHCP so that many computers can use the same Internet service at the same time. Routers can also be purchased with built-in firewall functionality to add security to your network setup.
- Be sure to change the default password provided when you first setup your router.
- If you are working under a strict budget, routers with built-in access points could be a viable option.

3. Install an access point

- The access point provides the wireless signal to your WiFi users. You will configure an SSID, which is an identifier where users will connect.
- Choose the appropriate wireless standard for your environment. Current options include 802.11b, 802.11a, and 802.11g. It is recommended you choose 802.11g at this time as it provides the best interoperability with other standards. Depending on your timeframe newer standards may be available and should be researched to determine if they are right for your situation.
- Be sure to change the default password provided when you first setup your access point.

4. Create documentation for your patrons

- Tell users what wireless standard you use and identify your SSID.
- Make sure users are aware of the risks associated with public WiFi usage. A user’s connection to your WiFi service is likely unsecured by default. It is also a good idea to recommend that they have anti-virus software as well as a personal firewall.
- Also update/incorporate your library’s Internet Use Policy.

\* If you intend to use your existing library network to provide WiFi services to your patrons, check with your network administrator to identify the best approach within your setup. It is important to separate WiFi users from your library’s electronic assets and data and the best way to do this depends on your network design.