



Making the Most of WiFi – Measuring the Impact

Brian Ashley
Director, Libraries
Arts Council England

Ben Lee
Programme Director
Shared Intelligence



WiFi in Public Libraries

WiFi in Public Libraries Project

Background

- The WiFi in Libraries in England Project was a **time limited** funding programme running from June 2015 to May 2016
- The prime objective for the funding was to ensure that **all public libraries in England** would provide **free WiFi** access to the public
- The secondary objective was for those libraries that already had WiFi installed to **upgrade** their equipment to achieve the benchmark technical specification
- DCMS allocated funding of **£7.1 million** for capital purchases.
- Arts Council England were chosen to administer this funding

WiFi in Public Libraries Project

Completion

- The project met its objectives on time and significantly under budget.
- By the end of the project **99%** of English libraries were providing free public access to WiFi
- **70 authorities** received funding
- Over **1000 libraries** either had new installations of WiFi or received upgrades
- The very small number of libraries remaining without WiFi access were subject to a range of practical factors that prevented its installation within the time frame of the project.
- Total budget for implementation **£7.1 million**
- Final total cost of implementation **£2.6 million**

WiFi in Public Libraries Process

Process evaluation

- Evaluation built into programme
- Activity Report Form included “How we did” survey, which showed **high satisfaction** rate with process
- Only significant area of comment was pressure created on implementation by short timescales
- Detailed feedback received from DCMS/Taskforce again reflecting a high level of satisfaction with the way the project had been delivered.

WiFi in Public Libraries Project

Lessons Learned

- Need to build **sufficient time** into programmes to allow for close down and evaluation.
- **Short timescales** for application and implementation created issues for some applicants, particularly around getting surveys etc. done and fitting in with other corporate IT priorities.
- **Taking time to get the programme design right** at the outset allowed the programme to move smoothly
- **Testing scenarios** with key stakeholders reduced misunderstandings at a later stage

Wifi in Public Libraries Project

Impact Evaluation

- Planning for some **evaluation** of the **impact** of the project
- Applicants advised that a follow up survey of impact and benefits will take place in **Spring 2017** and advised in the offer letter of the data it will be helpful to collect
- Aim to capture usage, connecting devices and associated service developments
- The separately funded “**Making the Most of WiFi**” project was set to pilot activities and evaluation methodology to inform this evaluation



Making The Most of WiFi

Making the Most of Wifi

Main conclusions

- **Demand for good quality free WiFi is incredibly strong.**
Libraries are playing a significant role in meeting that demand; it is now, in effect, part of the library core offer
- **Switching it on is good.....**
.....but Libraries are better than that – meeting new user needs.
- **There are many target groups for whom library WiFi can make a difference.**
Not least primary-aged children, visually impaired users older people and those who are tech-savvy but unengaged in culture
- **Libraries can use WiFi proactively to achieve their own goals and those of their funders and host authorities.**
If they simply turn the WiFi on and leave it running it will become ever more difficult to explain how they are adding value over and above coffee shops, and shopping centres.

‘In just eight weeks, and sometimes in just a few branches, five public libraries have used WiFi with more imagination, and greater social impact than any coffee shop or shopping centre is ever likely to.’

Making the Most of WiFi

Making the Most of WiFi

Findings

Measuring social impact

- Encourage libraries to focus on **proactive** and **instrumental** uses of public WiFi, geared to social outcomes which are priorities for their host authorities and wider public service partners.
- Norfolk's system of using a common set of evaluative statements as a way to focus on outcomes, seems a particularly valuable model which could be adopted by other library services, or used in conjunction with future investment in library WiFi.

Supporting schools on computing – national offer?

- Suffolk's offer on the new computing curriculum seems to have struck a chord with teachers and schools in the county.
- This model could be explored as the basis of a new element of the SCL Universal Offer for Learning, or for Digital.

Making the Most of WiFi

Findings

Gathering WiFi use data and generating useful insight

- Manchester's data on WiFi use helps us see how much insight could be gained if all five library services had been able to obtain their WiFi data in comparable formats and level of detail.
- We strongly suggest that any future funding provides library staff with some leverage to obtain data from digital colleagues.

Build on the Manchester discovery model

- Using LibraryBox should be of interest to others seeking to extend their reach via Heritage and Culture collections.
- Especially given the huge reach of libraries - which is more diverse than for most other cultural activities.

Making the Most of WiFi

Findings

Connecting Rotherham's visual impairment project nationally

- Using Wi-Fi as a means of enabling people with visual impairment to have a better experience of reading for pleasure through e-audio could be a route to wider digital enablement.
- This project might benefit from being connected at a national level to work with NGOs such as RNIB, publishers or specialists in adaptive technologies.

Helping digitally savvy over-70s to become digital mentors

- Cambridgeshire's Tea and Tablets model shows there could be national potential to support people in old age to become digital mentors for their peers.
- Pockets of similar activity already exist around the UK, but this could be aggregated for greater impact.

Making the Most of WiFi

Findings

Sharing these examples nationally

- All of these examples contain actionable learning points which other library services could learn from and put into practice.
- Arts Council England working with SCL and the Taskforce should seek opportunities to **share these findings** including via SCL's (embryonic) innovation network

Making the Most of WiFi

Next steps

What happens next?

- 'Making the most of WiFi' report published
- Ideas about future activity
 - Developing the infrastructure – devices + peripherals
 - Working with new partners
 - Connecting with other initiatives/activity
 - National and local opportunities

Contact Details

Brian Ashley
Director, Libraries
Arts Council England

Brian.Ashley@artscouncil.org.uk

Ben Lee
Programme Director, Shared
Intelligence

Ben.Lee@sharedintelligence.net
[@BenYMLee](#)

[Link to report](#)