Maine Public Library Annual Report
Wireless Sessions FAQ

The Maine Public Library Annual Report asks libraries to report:

Total Number of Wireless Uses (8.3)
Report the total number of uses (sessions) of wireless access in the library during the reporting year. A typical week or other reliable estimate may be used to determine the annual number.

Note: Count each use of wireless access regardless of the amount of time spent online. Do not include wireless use of library equipment in this count.

Accurately tracking WIFI usage can be a difficult task and the various levels of IT resources in Maine libraries make it impossible to provide a one-size-fits-all-solution. The good news is that regardless of the size of your library there are several strategies that will allow you to accurately and easily report this data.

Q: Should the duration of the session be counted?

A: There is no need to count length of sessions or type of sessions.

Q: What is the best way to count the sessions?

A: To determine the number of wireless sessions, count the individual sessions of use of a library's wireless service as captured by the library's router software. Usage can be tracked using network logs, web analytics, or network scanning.

Do not attempt to get this number by sampling observations of people in the library or on library grounds using their own laptops, cell phones, etc. as this number is meaningless.

Network Logs
Data from your WIFI hardware's log will be the most accurate source for counting usage. Make sure to set your hardware to log for a minimum of 12-24 hours. It is important to plan, as it is likely that your WIFI router or firewall won't be able to log a full year's worth of activity, which means you'll have to use data from a typical day or week.

Web Analytics
Many public WIFI services require that users authenticate after connecting. Usually this means submitting a username, password, ID, or the like. Other times it is as simple as presenting users with a "splash" or portal page and requiring them to agree to "Terms of Service" or "Acceptable Use" policies. Either way, if your library requires users to authenticate then it is likely that you can log or track that activity using a web analytics solution such as Google Analytics.

Network Scanning

If you don't have access to your WIFI hardware and/or network logs, don't worry, you can still report usage. Every device that connects to your WIFI network broadcasts a unique identifier called a MAC address. Because MAC addresses are a) unique and b) visible to everyone on the network, you can use them to count the number of devices using your WIFI service at any given point in time.

Using network scanning software to count usage will be less accurate because you will be limited to periodically logging into your WIFI router(s) and manually scanning and counting each device. Use a free network scanner like SoftPerfect Network Scanner to make the job easier.

Q: Should only the usage inside the library be counted?

A: Count all library wireless use regardless if the service was accessed within the walls of the library or from the parking lot, etc.

It doesn't matter who is using the wireless, what time of day it is, whether it's during the library's opening hours, or what websites the user is accessing.

Q: What if I can only obtain the data for a limited amount of time?

A: If an annual count is unavailable, determine an annual estimate by doing a yearly sampling during a typical week and multiply the count by 52.

Q: What is meant by "wireless session"?

A: A wireless session is every time someone connects to the library's Wi-Fi network to use the internet.

A wireless connection allows users to make a connection to the library's Internet using a personal laptop, tablet, or smart phone.

Do not include use of library equipment in this count.

Q: What should I do if I cannot get this data?

A: If this data is not being collected, please report **N/A** to indicate that you had usage during the reporting year, but you do not have access to the data.