



## Data Plans and Connectivity Options for Families (as of) April 17, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic prevents maintaining many in-person connections. The ability to use technology to bridge those connections depends upon access to devices and internet availability. Please see the below options that have been compiled by the Office of Family Voice.

### Device Options

**Personal Computers:** There are many PC options. Consumers using personal computers may need an external camera. Webcams begin at \$25. Consumers using personal computers will generally need to connect to the internet via Wi-Fi, as opposed to a data plan.

**Smartphone:** Smartphones will support cellular data plans and/or Wi-Fi. Almost all smartphones come with a camera and have the ability to host virtual meetings on most of the platforms discussed below. The consumer may need to download a free app to use the platform.

**Tablet:** Tablets begin as low at \$35. Most inexpensive tablets cannot connect to a data plan and will require Wi-Fi. DCPP has recently provided guidance to field staff that they are permitted to purchase tablets for some families that are in need.

**IPads:** IPads are the best-selling tablets. The most inexpensive [IPads](#) retail for \$150.

**Android Tablet:** [The RCA Voyager 7" 16GB Tablet](#) is one of the least expensive tablets on the market. It is currently available at Walmart. It costs \$35.

### Internet Connection

**Internet Connection (Wi-Fi) vs Cellular Connection (Data Plan):** There are two ways to connect to the internet, a cellular connection or an internet connection through a router. Consumers with limited data plans use their data in combination with Wi-Fi by conserving data and connecting to a Wi-Fi network whenever possible.

**Lifeline:** Is a government program backed by the FCC. It provides a monthly phone / internet service discount of \$9.25 for low-income households that qualify. The discount may be applied to a data plan or an internet plan but can only be applied to one.

### Internet Connection (Wi-Fi)

- Wi-Fi connects a device to the Internet via a router. The consumer needs access to a router and connection to a network in order to access the internet.
  - Hotspots: Wi-Fi access points that are generally available to the public. Hotspots may be free or pay per use (common on a flight or at a hotel)
    - [Wefi](#) is an app that has uses crowdsourced data to build global hotspot maps. Consumers can use it to find hot spots near them
    - Companies like Comcast have opened and [mapped](#) free hot spots during COVID.
- Generally no data limits for Wi-Fi connections.
- Wi-Fi provides connectivity for any device that has the right password.
- Cons:
  - A consumer who is homeless, cannot purchase Wi-Fi, they must find free Wi-Fi.
  - Consumers must pay a reoccurring monthly bill and credit issues may prevent them from getting services.
  - Consumers need to rent or buy a router.

### Popular Low-Cost Internet Options

**EveryoneOn:** EveryoneOn is a nonprofit that connects low-income families to affordable internet service. If families meet the requirements they could be provided with services for \$10 a month with no activation fee and no modem fee.

**Comcast:** Comcast offers 'Internet Essentials'. Eligible Households pay approximately \$10/month for service. Due to COVID -19 new Internet Essentials customers two free months of Internet service if they apply by 5/13/20. Households with outstanding debt owed to Comcast may be still be eligible. They are waiving the qualification if you apply and are approved by 5/13/20.

**Verizon:** Verizon offers an additional discount for consumers with approved for Lifeline (see above). Service is approximately \$20/month. Verizon will not charge a late fee or terminate service if someone is experiencing a hardship because of COVID-19. The policy is currently in effect through 5/13/20. They must complete a short form found [here](#). Verizon also offers two months of waived internet for current Lifeline customers.

## Other Low-Cost Internet Options

**Spectrum:** Offers service to households where one member is a recipient of the National School Lunch Program, Community Eligibility Provision of the NSLP, or Supplemental Security Income. Internet Assist costs \$15 per month and offers faster speeds than Xfinity Internet Essentials. The ISP charges an extra \$5.00 per month for Wi-Fi.

*Spectrum is only available in New Jersey in the following North Jersey towns: Cliffside, Edgewater, Englewood, Englewood Cliffs, Fairview, Fort Lee, Guttenburg, Leonia, Little Ferry, Moonachie, Palisades Park, Ridgefield, Ridgefield Park, Teterboro*

**NetZero DSL Pro:** NetZero offers DSL. It is slower than standard Wi-Fi but consumers don't pay for the wireless router. There no data usage caps. Costs \$27 per month.

**FreedomPop:** Offers a few options for free internet service. The company offers both free mobile phone service and free home internet service via 4G LTE connections. Consumers are limited to 1 GB of data per month.

## Cellular Connection (Data Plan)

- The cellular connection is specific to device such as a smartphone or a tablet.
- Common for data limits to be imposed on cellular connections.
- Cellular data allows your phone or tablet to connect to the Internet via a cell phone signal. The consumer does not need a router.

Data usage differs depending on the quality of call setting. As an example streaming Netflix for an hour uses between 1 – 3 GB. A Zoom 1:1 call uses between 540MB -1.6GB per hour. A Zoom call with multiple people will use between 810 MB and 2.4GB per hour. Companies offer a multitude of data plans. The following data plans have been identified by publications and/or blog sites as good options. All plans below offer unlimited talk and text.

## Low Cost Data Plans

**Verizon 8GB Prepaid Plan:** \$45/month

Data: 16GB (current promotion for the 8 GB plan offers 16GB for the same cost)

**Metro By T-Mobile 10GB Prepaid Plan** \$40/month

Data: 10GB

**Cricket Wireless** \$50/month

Data: Unlimited

Note: Due to COVID -19 Cricket is waiving the reactivation fee and the Automated Phone System fee that applies to service payments.

[T-Mobile Connect Plan](#) \$15 / Month

Data: 2GB (cannot go over)

[Republic Wireless](#) \$15 plus (see below)

Data: \$5 for each GB (i.e. \$25 for 2 GB of data, \$40 for 5 GB)

[Safelink](#): (Program offered through Lifeline)

Data options are limited. Texts and Minutes may also be limited.

### **Apps and On-line Conferencing Tool**

Through a conference website, app or video conferencing tool, participants can join virtual meetings. Virtual conference allows remote participants to access live onsite meetings and events from their computers. Many consumers are using these platforms for the first time due to the Pandemic.

#### **Virtual Conferencing for business. (At least one member will need a paid account)**

- Microsoft Teams (One participants needs to have access)
- Skype for Business
- Zoom (Offers a free trial)
- GoToMeeting (One participants needs to have access)

#### **Free versions of business conferencing:**

- Zoom (Free trial up to 40 minutes for groups >2)
- Google Hangouts

#### **Social Meet Up:**

- Whatsapp (supported by NJ DCF IT)
- Skype (supported by NJ DCF IT)
- Facebook Messenger
- Google Duo
- FaceTime (must use an Apple Device)