



Frequently Asked Questions

What is unlicensed spectrum?

Unlicensed spectrum is a term used to describe radio frequencies that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) allows consumers to use without needing to buy a license. Any innovator or consumer can use unlicensed spectrum just by following straightforward technical rules—without having to comply with a maze of regulations that apply to licensed services or needing to spend millions of dollars at a government auction. This low-regulation system enables innovators to deliver millions of products and services, such as Wi-Fi hotspots, medical equipment, industrial/logistics/inventory systems, wireless headsets, baby monitors, cordless phones, remote car door openers, RFID technologies and wireless keyboards.

What is WifiForward?

We are a group of like-minded companies, organizations and public sector institutions marshaling support across industries to encourage the Administration, Congress and the FCC to (1) protect and strengthen existing unlicensed spectrum designations, (2) free up new spectrum for unlicensed use at a variety of frequencies, including low, medium, and high frequency bands, and, (3) establish investment-friendly, transparent and predictable unlicensed rules that encourage growth and deployment.

Why now?

The explosive growth of Wi-Fi is an incredible success story. Studies have confirmed this, concluding that Wi-Fi contributes tens of billions of dollars each year to the U.S. economy.

But Wi-Fi performance is at risk. Wi-Fi connections are becoming overwhelmed by the deluge of data from the number of devices we're using and the ever-expanding number of applications and services those devices enable. Like trying to fit rush hour traffic down a two-lane highway, Wi-Fi networks are becoming a victim of their own success—gridlocked by an explosion of traffic on a finite amount of wireless spectrum. And it will only get worse: data traffic is increasing exponentially. Indeed, Cisco predicts that by 2017, Wi-Fi devices will account for a majority of total Internet traffic.

Is there a solution?

Yes. Fortunately, policymakers in Washington—Congress, the Administration and the FCC—have begun to recognize the critical importance of Wi-Fi to our economy. The FCC has initiated several proceedings that have the potential to deliver more Wi-Fi, but making policy statements and starting proceedings are not enough. The

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federal government should enable Wi-Fi use and promote investment and growth through policies that strengthen existing Wi-Fi spectrum designations, free up new frequencies for Wi-Fi, and establish transparent and predictable rules for Wi-Fi spectrum.

What will this coalition do?

We want to demystify this very important part of technology for the people who rely on it every day—consumers. We want to tell the stories of a large and growing part of the economy—and the connected world—that relies on unlicensed technologies including Wi-Fi.

Isn't this just a tech issue?

This is a topic everyone should care about because we all depend on Wi-Fi. From retail stores to hospitals, from hotels and event spaces to transportation hubs and coffee shops—being able to offer superfast wireless connections to consumers is critical to a wide array of businesses. Studies have confirmed that Wi-Fi contributes tens of billions of dollars each year to the U.S. economy. And the importance of Wi-Fi doesn't end there. Schools, public safety organizations, and emergency responders increasingly depend on fast and reliable Wi-Fi every day.

Are you just interested in Wi-Fi?

Wi-Fi is the unlicensed technology with which consumers are most familiar. Though the term refers to one technical standard, coalition members are interested in preserving and expanding unlicensed spectrum for use by technologies using other standards as well.

Who will benefit if you achieve your goals?

If we achieve these simple goals, Wi-Fi will deliver real-world benefits to the country:

- Reliable, critical connections to Wi-Fi and super-fast “Gigabit Wi-Fi” to bring us the next generation of technologies;
- Wi-Fi-enabled homes, businesses, schools and libraries to make possible the emerging “Internet of Things”—communications between everyday devices outfitted with sensors and wireless control mechanisms that support a variety of applications; and
- Cost-effective wireless broadband for unconnected urban and rural areas.