



# Schools and Libraries (E-Rate) Program Overview

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# SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES (E-RATE) PROGRAM

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Updated: February 2019

## Program Overview

The Schools and Libraries (E-Rate) Program provides discounts to assist eligible schools and libraries to obtain affordable internet access and telecommunications services. E-Rate funds the following service types: Data Transmission Services and/or Internet Access, Internal Connections, Managed Internal Broadband Services, and Basic Maintenance of Internal Connections. Discounts range from 20-90 percent of the costs of eligible services, depending on the level of poverty and the urban/rural status at the school district level. Eligible schools, school districts, and libraries, may apply individually or as part of a consortium. Starting with Funding Year (FY) 2019, voice services are no longer eligible.

The E-Rate Program supports connectivity, which is the conduit or pipeline for communications using telecommunications services or the internet. The school or library is responsible for providing resources such as the end-user equipment (computers, telephones, etc.), software, professional development, electrical capacity, and the other elements that are necessary to effectively use the requested eligible services and equipment.

The E-Rate Program is one of four universal service programs funded through the federal Universal Service Fund (USF). The Federal Communications Commission (FCC or Commission) appointed the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) as the permanent administrator of the USF and the universal service programs, including the E-Rate Program.

Below is an overview of the requirements and processes for schools and libraries to use to apply for and receive E-Rate Program discounts. This high-level overview is not intended to be a substitute for the FCC rules, form instructions or other official guidance materials.

## Set Up an Organization Account in the E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC)

The E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC) is the account and application management portal for the E-Rate Program. This system is the primary point of entry for E-Rate participants (e.g., applicants, consultants, and service providers). In EPC, applicants can complete and certify forms, obtain the status of their applications, submit requests, receive timely reminders and notifications, respond to Program Integrity Assurance (PIA) review questions, and ask program-related questions.

To get started, learn more about this system on the [EPC webpage](#). There, you'll find links to instructional videos, user guides and more.

## Certify FCC Form 470 to Open Competitive Bidding for Desired Services

To begin the competitive bidding process, the applicant must complete and certify an FCC Form 470, Description of Services Requested and Certification Form, in EPC. The form notifies service providers that the applicant is seeking the products and services identified on the form and in the request for proposal (RFP), when applicable. Note that “RFP” or “RFP document” can refer to any bidding document that describes the project and requested services in more detail than what the applicant provided on the FCC Form 470.

Before selecting a service provider, applicants must wait at least 28 days after the FCC Form 470 is certified in EPC and consider all bids that were received. The applicant must select the most cost-effective service offering using price of the eligible goods and services as the primary factor. In addition to complying with the FCC’s competitive bidding requirements, applicants must also comply with all applicable state and local procurement rules and requirements.

- An applicant cannot seek discounts for goods and services on the FCC Form 471 if they were not included in an FCC Form 470.
- The FCC Form 470 MUST be completed by the entity that will negotiate with potential service providers.
- The FCC Form 470 cannot be completed by a service provider who will participate in the competitive process as a bidder. If a service provider is involved in preparing the FCC Form 470 and that service provider appears on the associated FCC Form 471, this will taint the competitive process and lead to denial of funding requests.
- The FCC Form 470 applicant is responsible for ensuring an open and fair competitive bidding process and selecting the most cost-effective provider using price of the eligible goods and services as the primary factor.
- The applicant should carefully consider whether to receive discounts on bills directly from the service provider or receive reimbursements for goods and services paid in full to the service provider.
- The applicant must retain all competing bids and other documentation to demonstrate compliance with the competitive bidding rules. All such bids must be retained for at least 10 years after the last date of service delivered.

Note that once an applicant has signed a multi-year contract in a prior funding year as a result of a posted FCC Form 470, they do not need to certify a new FCC Form 470 during the term of the contract. Instead, they can rely on the underlying FCC Form 470 and submit a FCC Form 471 to apply for discounts on the goods and services provided under that multi-year contract.

After the applicant certifies the FCC Form 470 in EPC, USAC issues an FCC Form 470 Receipt Notification Letter (RNL) in the applicant's News feed. This notification provides important information, including the Allowable Vendor Selection/Contract Date (ACD) — the earliest date the applicant can select a service provider, execute a contract, and certify an FCC Form 471.

## Certify FCC Form 471 to Seek Funding for Eligible Services

After selecting a service provider, the applicant is ready to request funding by filing the FCC Form 471, Services Ordered and Certification Form. The FCC Form 471 must be filed during a specific application filing window each year. Once the filing window opens, the applicant can certify the FCC Form 471 online. Applications that are not certified within that filing window will likely not receive funding. Available funding is capped at about \$4 billion per funding year, indexed for inflation.

The FCC Form 471 calculates the discount percentage to which the applicant is entitled. In general, the E-Rate Program discount is based on the percentage of the local school district population eligible for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) (there are alternative discount mechanisms available for schools that do not participate in NSLP or choose not to use NSLP figures) and the urban/rural designation. The FCC Form 471 also lists the individual funding requests, which must be separated by service type and service provider.

- Schools and libraries are required to pay the non-discount portion of the services for which they receive discounts.
- Funding requests should be limited to the cost of eligible services that will be delivered to eligible entities for eligible purposes.
- There are a number of important certifications on the FCC Form 471. Applicants should be sure they can truthfully and correctly make these certifications. USAC checks the accuracy of the applicants' certifications and denies funding if one or more of the certifications are determined to be untrue. False statements on the FCC Form 471 (and other FCC forms) can result in civil and/or criminal liability.
- The FCC Form 471 must contain detailed information about the products and services ordered so that USAC can verify eligibility.
- The FCC Form 471 Receipt Acknowledgment Letter (RAL) issued in EPC after the form is certified provides important information to the applicant and the service provider, including a link to the data from the FCC Form 471.

## Receive Funding Commitment Decision Letter (USAC's Decision on Funding Requests)

After the FCC Form 471 is certified, USAC reviews the data on the form to verify all of the funding requests on the form are accurate and compliant with E-Rate Program rules. Once USAC has reviewed the FCC Form 471, it will issue one or more Funding Commitment Decision Letters (FCDLs) in EPC to both the applicant and the service provider, setting forth its funding decision for each funding request.

## Certify FCC Form 486 to Report the Delivery of Services

In order to ensure that USAC pays service providers only for services that have actually been delivered, the applicant certifies the FCC Form 486, Receipt of Service Confirmation Form. This form lists the service start date for each separate funding request for which the service provider has begun to deliver services.

Applicants who have confirmed that they will begin to receive services on July of the funding year may be able to certify the FCC Form 486 early (on or before July 31 of the funding year).

The FCC Form 486 also informs USAC of the applicant's status of compliance with the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA).

Note that USAC may adjust the service start date and reduce the funding commitment if the form is certified after the FCC Form 486 deadline (see below). Also, non-compliance with the CIPA requirements may result in a funding denial or recovery of disbursed E-Rate funds.

## Complete Invoicing (FCC Form 472 or FCC Form 474) to Request Reimbursement

USAC must receive an invoice in order to pay the discount amount on services for which funds have been committed.

- Service Provider Invoice (SPI) method – If applicants receive discounted bills from service providers, the service providers must submit the FCC Form 474, Service Provider Invoice (SPI) Form, to receive payment for the discounts they have provided.
- Billed Entity Applicant Reimbursement (BEAR) method – If applicants wish to request reimbursement for services for which they have already paid in full, they must submit the FCC Form 472, Billed Entity Applicant Reimbursement (BEAR) Form. Before an applicant can submit the FCC Form 472, the applicant must have certified — and USAC must have reviewed and approved — an FCC Form 498, Service Provider and Billed Entity Identification Number and General Contact Information Form, to provide banking information for reimbursements.

The billing method for each funding request is based on the first type of invoice USAC processes for payment. Payment will not be made on an FCC Form 472 or an FCC Form 474 submitted after the invoice deadline (see below). Receipt of discounts or reimbursements completes the application process.

## Appeals

If an applicant or service provider wishes to appeal a USAC decision, they must first file an appeal with USAC to seek review of the decision before filing an appeal with the FCC.

Parties must submit their appeal to USAC in EPC no later than 60 days after the date of USAC's decision letter or action. After USAC has reviewed the appeal and issued a decision, a party may appeal USAC's decision to the FCC.

Parties seeking a waiver of FCC rules (i.e., late payment fees, waiver of form deadlines, etc.) must file a waiver request directly with the FCC. USAC cannot waive FCC rules.

## Retention of Records and Audits

Program participants must maintain their records for at least 10 years after the latter of the last day of the applicable funding year or the service delivery deadline for the funding request to be able to comply with audits and other inquiries or investigations.

## How to Get More Information

All of the material covered in this overview is discussed in more detail on [USAC's website](#).

You can obtain specific information on completing the individual forms by reviewing the [form](#) user guides and by [watching video tutorials](#). The [Reference Area](#) of the website also contains useful documents.

The Client Service Bureau is also available to answer questions by telephone at (888) 203-8100, weekdays from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET, or through customer service cases in EPC.

## E-Rate Program Timetable and List of Deadlines

Form or Event	Deadline or Dates
Funding Year	July 1 through the following June 30 (Non-recurring services can be delivered and installed through September 30.)
FCC Form 470	Certified at least 28 days before the filing of the FCC Form 471, keeping in mind (1) the timeframe for compliance with all competitive bidding requirements and (2) the FCC Form 471 application filing window opening and closing dates
FCC Form 471 Window	Generally opens 5-6 months before the start of the funding year (Exact dates for each funding year will be posted on the website.)
FCC Form 471	Certified no later than 11:59 p.m. ET on the day of the close of the FCC Form 471 application filing window (Exact date will be posted on the website.)
FCC Form 486	Certified no later than 120 days after the date of the Funding Commitment Decision Letter or 120 days after the Service Start Date, whichever is later
FCC Form 498	Certified by the applicant and approved by USAC once for each of the billed entity's associated banking account(s) before an applicant can receive reimbursements via the BEAR method
FCC Form 472 (BEAR) FCC Form 474 (SPI)	Submitted no later than 120 days after the date of the FCC Form 486 Notification Letter or 120 days after the last date to receive service, whichever is later
Appeals	Submitted no later than 60 days after the date of USAC's decision letter