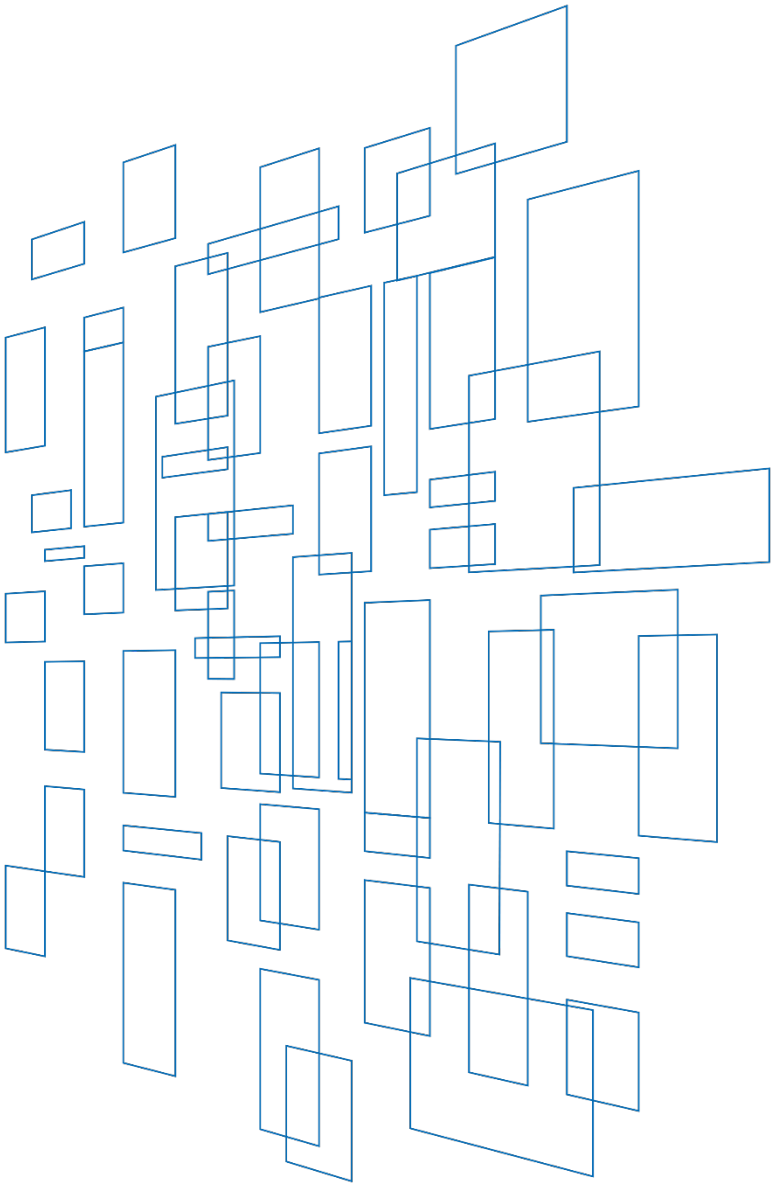

Schools and Libraries (E-Rate) Program Overview

Revised May 2025

Universal Service Administrative Co.

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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 (IC), Managed Internal Broadband Services (MIBS), and Basic Maintenance of Internal Connections (BMIC). 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 E-Rate Program also supports services and equipment needed for broadband connectivity **within schools and/or libraries** and services and equipment needed to bring broadband **into** and provide it **throughout** schools and libraries. The school or library is responsible for providing resources such as the end-user equipment (computers, tablets, telephones, etc.), software, professional development, electrical capacity, and the other elements that are necessary to effectively use the requested E-Rate 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 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. EPC 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 USAC review questions, and ask program-related questions.

Learn more about EPC on the EPC webpage. There, you'll find links to instructional videos, user guides, and more.

The Eligible Services List

Each funding year, before the FCC Form 471 application filing window opens, the FCC releases an Eligible Services List (ESL) for the upcoming funding year. This list contains a description of the

products and services that will be eligible for discounts, along with additional helpful information such as eligibility conditions for each category of service for each specified funding year.

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. "RFP" or "RFP document" can refer to any bidding document that describes the project and requested services in more detail than what the applicant provides on the FCC Form 470.

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.

Before selecting a service provider, applicants must wait at least 28 days after the FCC Form 470 is certified in EPC and posted to the USAC website. Applicants must consider all bids received and must select the most cost-effective service offering using price of the eligible equipment 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.

- 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 a 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 the price of the eligible equipment and services as the primary factor.
- 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.

If an applicant 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 an FCC Form 471 to apply for discounts on the equipment and services provided under that multi-year contract.

Submit and 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, during the FCC Form 471 application filing window each year. Once the filing window opens, the applicant can submit and certify the FCC Form 471 online in EPC. Applications that are not certified within the application filing window may not receive funding. Available funding is capped at just over $4 billion per funding year, indexed for inflation.

Data provided by the applicant on the FCC Form 471 is used to calculate 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) or by other-alternative discount mechanisms available for schools that do not participate in NSLP or choose not to use NSLP figures, and the urban/rural designation of the entity. The FCC Form 471 also lists the individual funding requests, which must be separated by category of service, 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 equipment 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.
- Applicants should only seek discounts for equipment and services on the FCC Form 471 if they were included on an FCC Form 470 (i.e., they were competitively bid).

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 that the data on the funding requests are accurate and compliant with E-Rate Program rules. Once USAC has reviewed the FCC Form 471, it issues one or more Funding Commitment Decision Letters (FCDLs) in EPC to both the applicant and the service provider(s), setting forth its funding decision for each funding request.

Submit and 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 submits and certifies the FCC Form 486, Receipt of Service Confirmation Form and Children's Internet Protection Act Certification Form. This form lists the service start date for each separate funding request for which the service provider has begun to deliver services and certifies the applicant's compliance with the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA).

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

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 to pay the discount amount on services for which funds have been committed.

It is the applicant's choice on which invoice method is used:

- 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 invoicing entity (applicant or service provider) must also obtain and maintain a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) available through SAM.gov. This identifier is used by the federal government to make E-Rate disbursements.
- Before invoicing for either the BEAR or SPI, service providers are required to complete the FCC Form 473 Service Provider Annual Certification (SPAC) Form for each year they participate in the E-Rate program.

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 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 if they still disagree.

Parties seeking a waiver of FCC rules (i.e., late payment fees, waiver of form or invoice deadlines, etc.) must file a waiver request directly with the FCC. USAC cannot waive FCC rules. See the E-Rate Appeals Waiver Guide for more information.

Other Forms

There are several actions that may be required outside of the regular application process. Listed below is additional information on these actions. The applicant must initiate changes involving applicant forms.

The applicant can submit an **FCC Form 500** (Funding Commitment Adjustment Request Form) to make the following requests:

- To adjust the funding year Service Start Date (SDD) reported on a previously filed FCC Form 486
- To adjust the contract expiration date listed on the FCC Form 471
- To cancel a Funding Request Number (FRN)
- To reduce the amount of an FRN
- To request a service delivery extension for non-recurring services

A **Service Substitution** request can be submitted by the applicant to substitute a piece of equipment or service for another that provides the same or similar functions. Service providers can initiate the request if they are no longer offering the specific piece of equipment or service but are offering a replacement. This is considered a "global" service substitution.

In certain situations, applicants and service providers can request a change of the Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN). This is known as a **SPIN Change**.

- An Operational SPIN Change is a decision made by the applicant to change their service provider. Restrictions may apply.
- A Corrective SPIN Change is when a service provider corrects data entry errors, or a service provider consolidates SPINs after a merger or acquisition. Applicants can use a corrective SPIN change to provide the correct SPIN.

Retention of Records and Audits

Program participants must maintain all E-Rate program 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, whichever is later, to be in compliance with program rules. The records must be made available if requested for audits or other inquiries or investigations.

How to Get More Information

All of the material covered in this overview is available on USAC's website at USAC.org.

You can obtain specific information on completing the individual forms by reviewing our training materials including the new E-Learning Modules (eLM's) and EPC User Guides on our Video's page.

Our Webinars page includes recordings and slides covering things such as program updates, new rules and orders to E-Rate, guidance about compliance and filings, stakeholder support, and more.

You can also subscribe to our E-Rate News Brief. The E-Rate News Brief will give you information about upcoming program deadlines, tips to help you through the application process, and other timely information.

The Customer Service Center can answer your questions by telephone at (888) 203-8100, weekdays from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time, or you can submit your questions by creating a customer service case 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 (Description of Services Requested and Certification Form)	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
EPC Administrative Window	Closes just before the application filing window opens (Exact dates for each funding year will be posted on the website)
FCC Form 471 (Description of Services Ordered and Certification Form) Application Filing Window	Period when applicants can submit and certify FCC Form 471 for a funding year. Forms must be certified no later than 11:59 p.m. ET on the day of the closing of the FCC Form 471 application filing window (The exact date will be announced and posted on the Website each funding year)

FCC Form 486 (Receipt of Service Confirmation and Children's Internet Protection Act Certification Form)	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 (Applicant 498 ID)	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 (Billed Entity Applicant Reimbursement (BEAR) Form) FCC Form 474 (Service Provider Invoice (SPI) Form)	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
FCC Form 473 Service Provider Annual Certification Form (SPAC)	Submitted by a service provider every funding year service providers participate in the E-Rate program
FCC Form 500 (Funding Commitment Adjustment Request Form)	As soon as the applicant is aware of the need to change service providers and before the SDD
Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN) Change	As soon as the applicant is aware of the need to change service providers and no later than the last day to invoice for that FRN
Service Substitution	Submitted before the Service Delivery Deadline (SDD)
120 Day Invoice Deadline Extension	Submitted on or before the invoice deadline. The invoice deadline is whichever of the following is later: 120 days after the last day to receive service or 120 days after the FCC Form 486 Notification Letter date

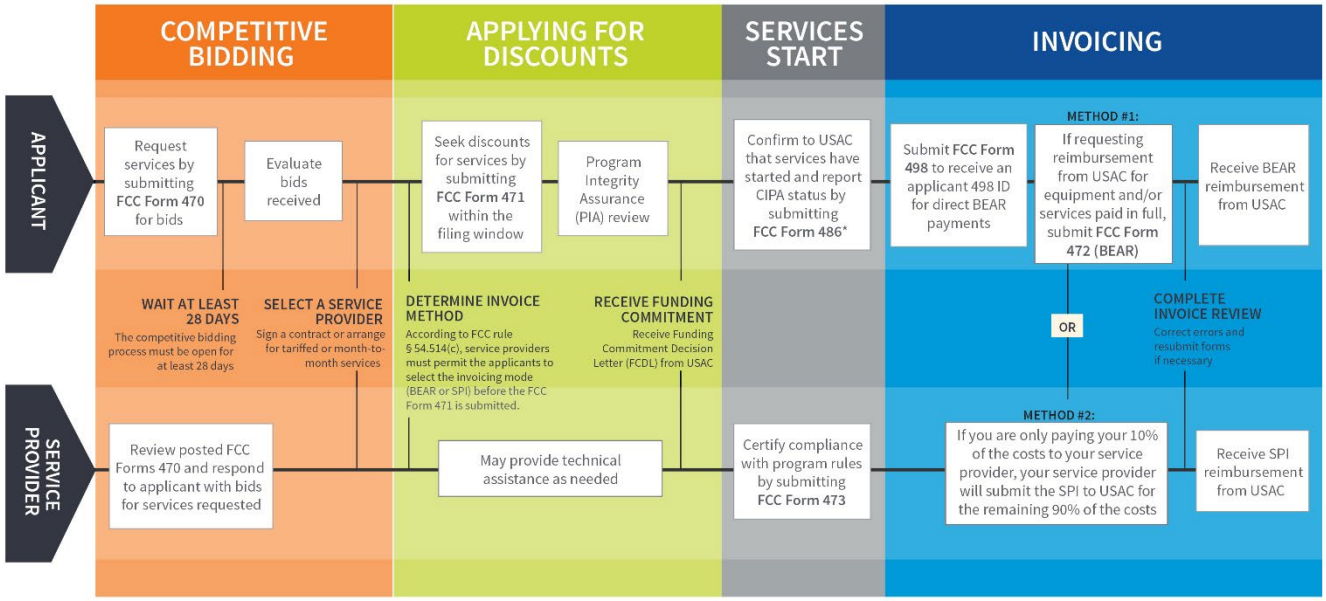
*All deadlines are moved to the next business day if the deadline falls on a weekend or federal holiday.

Universal Service Administrative Co.

Schools and Libraries (E-Rate) Program
APPLICATION PROCESS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

APPLICANTS: Applicants must first have an entity number and an E-rate Productivity Center (EPC) account.
SERVICE PROVIDERS: Service providers must first obtain a Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN /service provider 498 ID) by submitting FCC Form 498.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Website: The application process is broken down in detail for both applicants and service providers on the Schools and Libraries Program website (www.usac.org/sl).
- Glossary of Terms: Definitions for program terms and acronyms.
- *Consortium members report their CIPA status by submitting the FCC Form 479 to their consortium leader. The consortium leader then files the FCC Form 486.
- To adjust funding commitments and/or modify the dates for receipt of services after the FCDL is issued, file the FCC Form 500.

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