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USING NEEDS ASSESSMENTS TO APPLY FOR E-RATE PROGRAM SUPPORT

MAY 3, 2022

The E-Rate Program - Overview

- The E-Rate Program provides support to schools and libraries across the nation to obtain affordable, high-speed broadband services and internal connections to connect students and library patrons with learning opportunities and services.

- **Annual Funding Cap:** $4.276 billion, adjusted annually for inflation.

- **Eligible Services:** Eligible schools and libraries may apply for funding for the following:

  - *Category One*: Services that support connectivity **to** schools and libraries. This includes, for example, data transmission and Internet access service, including special construction services for network builds.

  - *Category Two*: Services that support connectivity **within** schools and libraries. This includes, for example, internal connections (i.e., routers, switches, cabling); managed internal broadband services, and basic maintenance of internal connections.

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The E-Rate Program - Eligibility

Eligible Applicants: Public or private schools (K-12), libraries, and groups of schools and libraries (e.g., consortia, districts, systems) can apply for funding for eligible equipment and services.

Update on Tribal Library Eligibility:

- On January 27, 2022, the FCC unanimously adopted an Order to add "Tribal library" to the definition of a "library" in the E-Rate rules.

- Tribal councils and governments can designate a library as a Tribal library (for example, through a Tribal Resolution), and Tribal libraries can demonstrate eligibility by having three basic characteristics of a library:

  - Regularly scheduled hours,

  - Staff, and

  - Materials available for library users.

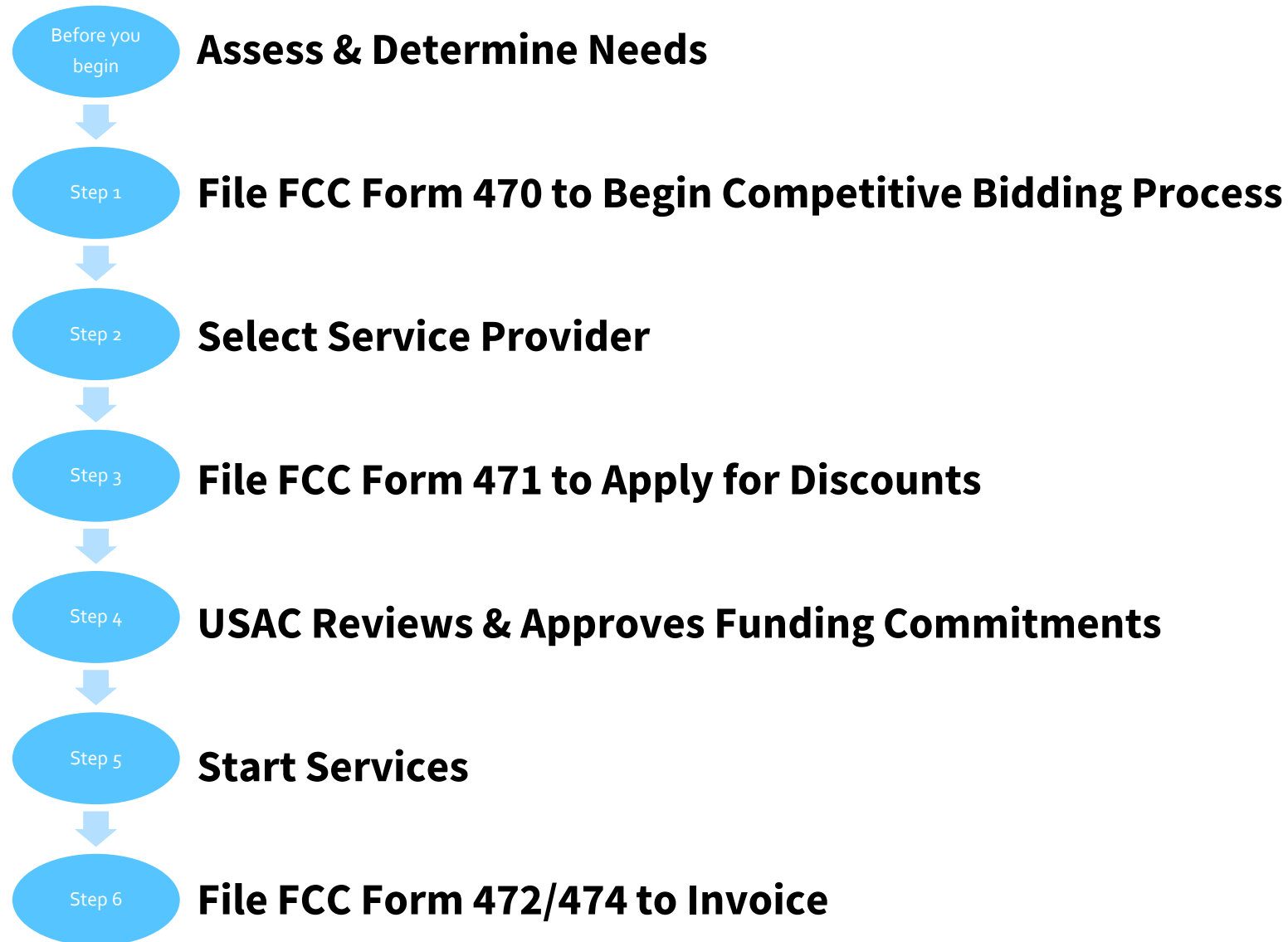Federal
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The E-Rate Program – Discount Rates

Discounts: The program allows eligible schools and libraries to receive universal service discounts for eligible equipment and services.

- Discounts range from 20-90% based on level of poverty (based on percentage of students eligible for National School Lunch Program), urban/rural status, and type of service (i.e., Category One or Category Two).

Percentage of Students Eligible for Free /Reduced Lunch	Category One		Category Two	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Less than 1%	20	25	20	25
1% to 19%	40	50	40	50
20% to 34%	50	60	50	60
35% to 49%	60	70	60	70
50% to 74%	80	80	80	80
75% to 100%	90	90	85	85

The E-Rate Program – Process

Before you begin → **Assess & Determine Needs**

Step 1 → **File FCC Form 470 to Begin Competitive Bidding Process**

Step 2 → **Select Service Provider**

Step 3 → **File FCC Form 471 to Apply for Discounts**

Step 4 → **USAC Reviews & Approves Funding Commitments**

Step 5 → **Start Services**

Step 6 → **File FCC Form 472/474 to Invoice**

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- **Needs Assessments:**
  - Tribal libraries can use their needs assessments to determine what equipment and services are necessary to bring broadband connectivity to their communities.
    - Determine the bandwidth speeds the Tribal library will need to provide the broadband services to patrons at the library.
    - Determine the locations where broadband connections are needed. If the Tribal library has multiple branches, these locations can be added to the FCC Form 470 if eligible services and equipment will be needed at these locations.
      - For example, a smaller library may only need a 100 Mbps broadband service from their local provider, but a library system with multiple locations may need higher bandwidths, as well as a wide area network to connect the library branches. In more remote areas with no available options, a library or library system could consider seeking special construction to reach their location.

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- **Needs Assessments:**
  - Tribal libraries can also use their needs assessments to determine what equipment and services are necessary to provide service *within* the library (e.g., a Wi-Fi network).
    - Determine what internal connections will be necessary.
      - Internal connections include the equipment (i.e., routers, switches, wireless access points) and cabling needs to have in the local network.
      - Internal connections also include the licenses needed for the equipment to function.
      - Basic maintenance of the eligible internal connections being purchased with E-Rate funds (i.e., the internal connections discussed above).
  - Please note that there is a budget, or limit, to how much Category 2, or the internal connections, equipment and services that applicants may request, which is based on the square footage of the library. All libraries are eligible for discounts on at least $25,000 over five funding years.

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- **Request for Services (FCC Form 470):**
  - o The FCC Form 470 will be the first form that will need to be completed to apply for E-Rate support.

  - o This is the form that the Tribal library will use to request bids for Category 1 services (i.e., data transmission and Internet access services) and for Category 2 services (i.e., equipment and services that will be needed to bring broadband connectivity within the library, like Wi-Fi).

  - o The goal of the competitive bidding process is to have as many bidders as possible respond to an FCC Form 470 so that the applicant can receive better service and lower prices. When reviewing bids, the process must be fair and open.
    - o Open means there are no secrets in the process. All bidders should be provided with the same information.
    - o Fair means that all bidders are treated the same and that no bidder has advance knowledge of the project information.

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- **Request for Services (FCC Form 470):**
    - Applicants should include a range of bandwidth speeds for the broadband connections needed.
        - For example, applicants might seek bids on 50 Mbps, 100 Mbps, 500 Mbps, and 1 Gbps broadband services. This allows vendors to respond to the request and allows applicants to select a service provider that competitively bid for multiple bandwidths, allowing them to increase their E-Rate request in future years without redoing the competitive bid process if their bandwidth needs increase.
    - Applicants cannot request a specific vendor's equipment or service without also including "or equivalent" language on any documentation provided with the FCC Form 470.
        - Although a Request for Proposal (RFP) if not required in most circumstances, if an applicant attaches an RFP to the FCC Form 470 detailing its needs and what they are seeking, it should not say the applicant is seeking XYV Brand Routers. This stifles competition and is against program rules.
    - Applicants will need to include information on the locations and quantities that are being requested for internal connections to allow service providers to submit accurate bids.

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- **Request for Services (FCC Form 470):**

  o The Funding Year (FY) 2023 FCC Form 470 will be available after July 1, 2022.

    - Reminder: FY 2023 will run from July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024. The annual E-Rate application filing window generally opens in mid-January and closes in mid-March. (This would be January 2023 for FY 2023).

  o Applicants can begin their competitive bid process for FY 2023 after the FCC Form 470 is available after July 1, 2022.

  o Training and a sample FCC Form 470 are available at "Session 2 Tribal Training" at https://www.usac.org/e-rate/learn/tribal-training/ and additional step-by-step videos for completing this form are available at https://www.usac.org/e-rate/learn/videos/#FCC-Form-470-and-Competitive-Bidding.

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The E-Rate Program – Competitive Bidding

- **Competitive Bidding Requirements:**
  - o Applicants must seek competitive bids for eligible equipment and services by submitting the FCC Form 470 to the USAC. USAC will post the FCC Form 470 requests for services on its website.

  - o Service providers can review the posted FCC Forms 470 on USAC's website and directly respond to applicant with bids for equipment and services based on the information contained in FCC Form 470.

  - o Applicants must wait at least 28 days after the FCC Form 470 is posted before selecting and entering into an agreement with the service provider offering the most cost-effective option, using price as the primary factor in the evaluation process.

The E-Rate Program – How to Apply

- **Applying for Funding:**

  o After selecting their service providers, applicants submit funding requests for the eligible equipment and services by submitting the FCC Form 471 to USAC during the application filing window.

  o The FCC Form 471 application filing window typically opens in January and closes in March, before the July 1 start of the funding year.

- **Application Review Process:**

  o USAC will review the requests and they may ask for additional information. USAC will then issue a funding commitment decision for each request.

- **Starting Services:**

  o Applicant can start receiving the discounted services for the funding year (e.g., July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024).

The E-Rate Program – How to Receive Funds

- **Invoicing Process:**
  - Applicants must pay their non-discounted share of costs. This is the portion of the costs of the eligible equipment and/or services that applicants are required to pay.
  - Applicants may request reimbursements from USAC for the discount share paid to service providers (FCC Form 472 or Billed Entity Applicant Reimbursement (BEAR) Form), or
  - Service providers may request payment from USAC for discount share of bill (FCC Form 474 or Service Provider Invoice (SPI) Form).

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Resources

Further information about Tribal Applicants and the E-Rate Program can be found at:

- https://www.fcc.gov/general/e-rate-schools-libraries-usf-program
- https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-connecting-tribal-libraries-through-e-rate-program-0
- https://www.usac.org/e-rate/
- https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-21-1602A1.pdf (FY 2022 Eligible Services List)
- https://www.usac.org/e-rate/learn/tribal-training/ (Tribal Trainings)
- https://www.usac.org/e-rate/learn/epc-training-site/ (EPC Training)
- https://data.usac.org/publicreports/Forms/Form470Rfp/Index (to search for FCC Forms 470)
- https://data.usac.org/publicreports/Forms/Form470Detail/Index (to download FCC Form 470 data)

You can also register for upcoming Office Hours for Tribal E-Rate Applicants and speak directly with USAC E-Rate team members on May 17, 2022, at 4 pm E.T. You can register for this Office Hours session at https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/102346872611922433.

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The Emergency Connectivity Fund Program

Overview

- The **$7.171 billion Emergency Connectivity Fund** was created as part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to help schools and libraries provide connected devices and broadband connectivity to students, school staff, and library patrons during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

- On **May 10, 2021**, the FCC adopted a Report and Order (FCC 21-58), establishing the rules for the distribution of funding to eligible schools and libraries for the purchase of connected devices, Wi-Fi hotspots, routers, modems, and broadband Internet connections for use by students, school staff, and library patrons with unmet needs at locations other than a school or library, during the COVID-19 emergency period.

- **Eligible schools or libraries** include all schools, libraries, and consortia of schools and libraries that are eligible for support under the E-Rate Program.
  - Note: Tribal libraries are eligible for support under LSTA and are therefore eligible for Emergency Connectivity Fund Program support.

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The Emergency Connectivity Fund Program

•**The third ECF application filing window opened on April 28, 2022 and will close on May 13, 2022.**
- •During this third application filing window, eligible schools, libraries, and consortia of eligible schools and libraries can submit requests for funding to purchase eligible equipment and up to 12 months of services between July 1, 2022 and December 31, 2023.

•Interested schools and libraries can find more information and apply at www.emergencyconnectivityfund.org.

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Questions?