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Universal Service Administrative Co.

E-Rate

E-Rate News Brief

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E-RATE TIPS:

- The **Funding Year (FY) 2025 FCC Form 470 became available** in the E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC) on **September 19**. The FY2025 FCC Form 470 has modifications from last year. View the FY2025 FCC Form 470 changes in the August 2024 E-Rate News Brief. View the How to File an FCC Form 470 learning module to learn how to submit the form.

- For **applicants that received an extension of the FY2023 September 30, 2024 deadline** for delivery and installation of **nonrecurring services**, you should work with your service providers to extend your contracts to cover the additional time if necessary. You can then report the new contract expiration date to USAC by filing an FCC Form 500.

- **Disbursement Schedule Changes**. Beginning **October 7, 2024, USAC will change the E-Rate disbursement schedule to one time per week** (Mondays). If a Monday is a holiday, disbursements will go out the following Thursday. USAC currently processes E-Rate disbursements twice a week (Monday and Thursday). E-Rate payment files will be run on September 23 and October 3 (and not

September 26 and September 30 as is our current schedule) before the schedule changes to one time per week.

- The **Cybersecurity Pilot Program** (Pilot Program) **application filing window opened September 17, 2024**. Schools, school districts, libraries, library systems, and consortia applicants can enter their project information on the FCC Form 484 Part 1 in the E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC). Each applicant **can only complete one Pilot Program application** and apply as either an individual school or library, or as part of a consortium. Applicants can review the FCC Form 484 Part 1 User Guide before submitting their application. The **application window will close November 1, 2024**. Visit the Cybersecurity Pilot Program page for more information. The Pilot Program Learn page provides links to webinars, newsletters, and FAQs.

- **View USAC's recent fall training webinar recordings and slides** on the E-Rate Webinars page including E-Rate Program Overview (September 16), the E-Rate Pre-Commitment Process (September 19), and Eligible Services 101 (September 24).

- **View recent updates to the E-Rate website** including Competitive Bidding, 28-Day Waiting Period, Document Retention, and the Document Retention List.

Commitments for Funding Year (FY) 2024

FY2024. USAC released FY2024 Wave 22 Funding Commitment Decision Letters (FCDLs) on September 19. As of September 25, FY2024 commitments total over $2.25 billion.

On the date that FCDLs are issued, you can access your FCDL notification from the **Notifications** section of your landing page in the E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC).

You can use the E-Rate Search Commitments Tool to look up prior-year commitment data.

FY2023 Invoicing Filing Deadline Reminder for Recurring Services

In most cases, **October 28, 2024 is the deadline** to file an invoice or to request an invoice deadline extension (IDE) **for most Funding Year (FY) 2023 recurring services Funding Request Numbers** (FRNs). This invoice filing deadline applies to both applicant and service provider invoices – the FCC Form 472 (Billed Entity Applicant Reimbursement (BEAR Form)) and the FCC Form 474 (Service Provider Invoice (SPI) and (eSPI)), respectively.

How To Request an Invoice Filing Deadline Extension for FRNs From FY2016 and Forward
Both applicants and service providers can request an invoice filing deadline extension in EPC by following the steps below. Remember that there is no penalty for requesting an invoice filing deadline extension and not using it.

- **Applicants:**

    - On your invoicing landing page, click the link to the billed entity record (the name in the **Welcome!** link near the top of the page or the first entry under the **My Entities** section).

    - Select the **Related Actions** menu and choose **Invoice Deadline Date Extension Request**.

- **Service Providers:**

    - From the **Records** tab at the top of any EPC page, click the **Service Providers** option.
    - Use the **Search** function to locate your service provider record.
    - Select the **Related Actions** menu and choose **Invoice Deadline Date Extension Request**.

You can use the E-Rate FRN Status Tool FY2016+ to find the invoicing filing deadline by searching for the FRN(s) and looking in the "Last Date to Invoice" column.

Annual Renewal of SAM.gov Registration Required to Submit BEAR Forms

If you are an E-Rate applicant **that submits the FCC Form 472** (*Billed Entity Applicant Reimbursement* (BEAR)) form to invoice USAC **and you registered for a SAM.gov Unique Entity Identifier** (UEI), **you must renew the SAM.gov registration annually** on SAM.gov.

You may have obtained a UEI if you participated in the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) or if you updated an existing FCC Form 498 (*Service Provider and Billed Entity Identification Number and Contact Information Form*) or submitted a new FCC Form 498 after May 12, 2023.

This is particularly important if you have FY2023 recurring services Funding Request Numbers (FRNs) with an approaching October 28, 2024 invoice deadline date. If you have a UEI and it is not currently active, **you will not be able to submit the BEAR form in EPC**.

You can check the status of your FCC Form 498 in the E-Rate Entity Search Tool. Enter your FCC Form 498 Number in the **Entity Number** filter and look in the **FCC Form 498 Status** column.

If you have not recently changed your FCC Form 498 information, you likely don't have a UEI, so no action is required at this time.

Visit SAM.gov to check your UEI status and renew your entity if needed.

FY2024 FCC Form 486 Deadline Reminder

Generally, **October 28, 2024 is the deadline to file an FY2024 FCC Form 486** if your FCDL **is dated on or before July 1, 2024 and your service start date is July 1, 2024**. If these conditions apply to you, please submit and certify your FCC Form 486 on or before this deadline.

If your FCC Form 486 appears to be late, we will send you an **FCC Form 486 Urgent Reminder Letter** to remind you of the upcoming deadline. The service start date you reported on your FCC Form 471 is used to determine when to send the letter, so if your service start date has changed, your deadline may have changed as well.

This reminder letter is posted to your **News** feed in EPC and is emailed to the contact person on the FCC Form 471. These **letters will start going out after October 28, 2024** for FY2024 commitments.

You have 15 days after the date of the reminder letter to submit and certify your FCC Form 486 without penalty. Again, if your service start date has changed, the service start date you enter on your certified FCC Form 486 will determine whether your filing is considered late.

Applicants whose services started after July 1, 2024, or whose FCDLs are dated after July 1, 2024 (including any that have not yet been issued), will have an FCC Form 486 deadline later than October 28. However, we encourage you to submit and certify your FCC Form 486 as soon as possible after services start for FY2024 and if you can accurately make all the certifications on the form.

E-Rate Program Updates

We want to make you aware of recent program updates that will be applied to FY2025 so you can start preparing for the FY2025 E-Rate FCC Form 471 application filing window that will open in January 2025. There are also some changes that carried forward from FY2024.

Wi-Fi Hotspots/Wireless Mobile Internet Services for FY2025
The FCC released a report and order (FCC 24-76) July 29 that permits eligible schools and libraries to receive E-Rate support for the off-premises use of Wi-Fi hotspots and wireless mobile internet services by students, school staff, and library patrons. The FY2025 FCC Form 470 includes options to request bids for Wi-Fi hotspot devices and wireless mobile internet access services for these devices. See the **C1: Wi-Fi Hotspots for Off Premises Use (Equipment)** and the **C1: Wi-Fi Hotspots for Off Premises Use (Data Transmission)** sections of the How to File an FCC Form 470 learning module for more information. Learn more about how E-Rate support for Wi-Fi hotspots works by reviewing the August 2024 Wi-Fi Hotspot Eligibility webinar and slides.

Recent Program Updates (FY2024 and forward):

- **School Bus Wi-Fi Devices/Wireless Mobile Services**. School bus Wi-Fi equipment and services are eligible for buses that are school-owned, as well as leased or contracted school buses, provided that the school buses are used primarily to transport students to and from school and school-related activities for **educational purposes**. More information is available on the Wi-Fi on Buses – Summary Overview page.
- **Competitive Bidding Exemption for Libraries**. For E-Rate eligible equipment and services **within a library**, the FCC implemented an **exemption to the competitive bidding requirements for all libraries** seeking E-Rate support for **Category Two (C2)** equipment/services that total a **pre-discount price of $3,600 or less per library** per funding year. The Competitive Bidding Exemptions page provides more details.
- **Updated Tribal Definitions**. The FCC updated program definitions and defined Tribal entities, modified eligibility for Tribal college and university (TCU) libraries that serve the public, increased discount rate for C2 services, and increased the C2 budget floor (now $55,000). Go to the Tribal Applicants FAQs.

Competitive Bidding Reminders for FY2025



The FCC Form 470 and competitive bidding are the initial steps in the E-Rate process and can be used for multiple years. Now that applicants can submit and certify their FY2025 FCC Forms 470 to start their competitive bidding processes, we are providing the following reminders to help you through the remainder of the competitive bidding process.

Start FY2025 off right by setting yourself up for success in the program. Ensure you have followed all the FCC's competitive bidding regulations for the E-Rate program with this year's competitive bidding checklist:

- **Provide sufficient information** for potential bidders to **provide a comprehensive bid** (e.g., for managed internal broadband services, specify the exact equipment/services to be managed). Include all information needed on the FCC Form 470/RFP (request for proposals) for potential vendors to provide a comprehensive bid.
- **Ensure an open and fair process**. Provide any FCC Form 470, RFP, and other information/updates in EPC for all potential bidders for at least 28 days and consider all responsive bids in your bid evaluation. Answer questions from potential bidders and make the answers available to all potential bidders. **Potential bidders** (i.e., service providers) **cannot help you complete or file the FCC Form 470**.
- **Abide by the E-Rate Gift Rules**. Receipt or solicitation of gifts by applicants from service providers (and vice versa) is a competitive bidding violation. Gift prohibitions are always applicable – not just during the competitive bidding process. View the Gift Rules video for more details on the gift rules.
- Ensure that **all equipment/services you request on the FCC Form 471 are listed on the FCC Form 470/RFP** (including **all bandwidth speeds**). Specifically for Internet Access/Data Transmission Services, applicants should ensure that speeds of services requested on the FCC Form 471 are reflected on the FCC Form 470/RFP.
- **Wait at least the full 28-day competitive bidding period**. Select a service provider **after your allowable contract date (ACD) and before certifying the FCC Form 471**. The ACD is found on your FCC Form 470 receipt notification letter (RNL). Learn how the 28-day waiting period is calculated.
- Ensure **price is the primary evaluation factor** (highest weighted factor). Only the costs of ***eligible*** equipment/services should be evaluated in this criterion.
- **Follow your state and local competitive bidding rules**. Ensure that you are following all applicable state and local procurement rules and regulations in addition to the requirements of the E-Rate program.
- **Retain all necessary competitive bidding documentation** for ten (10) years after the last day you receive services or the end of that funding year, whichever date is later. View the Document Retention List to retain for audits and to show E-Rate compliance with program rules. If a consultant or another representative is handling your competitive bidding process, you are still responsible for retaining your competitive bidding documentation for the 10-year period.

For a comprehensive review of all things competitive bidding, view the recent Pre-Commitment webinar (September 19) or FCC Form 470 and Competitive Bidding webinar (August 1) on the E-Rate Webinars page.

View the How to File an FCC Form 470 learning module and the FCC Form 470 Services Guiding Statements Reference Table FY2025 on the USAC website to help you get started with your FY2025 competitive bidding process.

EPC Administrative Window Opens October 15, 2024

The EPC administrative window is the period during which **applicants can make updates to their profile information** including student counts, National School Lunch Program (NSLP) participation rates, library square footage, and the entities and individuals associated with your entity including consulting firms, in EPC to prepare for the upcoming FY2025 FCC Form 471 application filing window.

The administrative window **will open Tuesday, October 15, 2024** and will close **shortly before the FY2025 application filing window opens in early 2025**. After this time, applicant profiles will be locked, and you will not be able to make changes to your profile information.

Go to the EPC Administrative Window page for detailed information on updating entity profiles and join our October 24 Administrative Window webinar (see below) to learn more.

2024 Training and Outreach

USAC is holding online and in-person training events to help applicants and service providers through the E-Rate process. Below are some events scheduled over the next few months. Visit the In-Person E-Rate Training Events page to learn more about the events we'll be attending where we can answer your E-Rate questions. Also, keep an eye on the E-Rate Webinars page for information on upcoming training opportunities.

Fall 2024 Training Series Webinars

- **Wi-Fi Hotspots Webinar** on **October 15, 2024**, from 2 P.M. to 3 P.M. USAC will discuss the FCC's report and order (FCC 24-76) that makes E-Rate support available for eligible schools and libraries for Wi-Fi hotspots and wireless Internet services that can be used off-premises including eligibility requirements, hotspots funding budgets and caps, and other requirements. Register.
- **Category Two (C2) Budgets** on **October 17, 2024**, from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. E.T. In this applicant-focused presentation, USAC will provide an overview of C2 budgets and C2 budget guidance for FY2025, as well as how to calculate C2 budgets, equipment transfers, and budget resets. After the presentation, we will conduct a Q&A session. Register.
- **The EPC Administrative Window** on **October 24, 2024**, from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. E.T. USAC will discuss the EPC Administrative Window – the period during which applicants can make updates to their EPC profile information to prepare for the upcoming FCC Form 471 application filing window. We will discuss how to update your EPC profiles, FY2025 Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) changes, and some Administrative Window best practices. After the presentation, we will conduct a Q&A session. Register.
- **E-Rate Post-Commitment Process** on **October 31, 2024**, from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. E.T. USAC will discuss the applicant's roles and responsibilities in the E-Rate Post-Commitment Process and other post-commitment activities including filing the FCC Form 486, the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA), service substitutions, commitment adjustments, appeals, and more. After the presentation, there will be time for questions and answers. Register.
- **Invoicing Webinar** on **November 7, 2024**, from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. E.T. This webinar is designed to help E-Rate program participants (applicants and service providers) understand the invoicing process. Topics for the invoicing webinar will include the steps necessary to prepare for invoicing, filing an FCC Form 498, filing invoicing forms FCC Form 472 (BEAR) and FCC Form 474 (SPI), the invoicing review process, Basic Maintenance of Internal Connections (BMIC) as it relates to invoicing, record keeping, and Open Data. This session will not cover the new Invoicing functionality in EPC. Register.

2024 In-Person Training

E-Rate experts will provide training and discuss program updates. There will be time at the end of the sessions for USAC to answer questions from both new and experienced participants. Each session will cover the E-Rate program lifecycle beginning with the opening of the EPC Administrative Window, running a competitive bidding process, applying for funding, and invoicing for approved equipment and services.

Register for a training by selecting a link below.

- **E-Rate Training**: October 7, 2024 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Eastern Time in **Washington, D.C.** Register. Seats for this session are currently available for the *waitlist only*.
- **E-Rate Training**: October 29, 2024 from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Central Time in **Fayetteville, Arkansas**. Register.
- **Tribal-Focused E-Rate Training**: November 12, 2024 in **Palm Springs, California**. This Tribal-focused training will be held in conjunction with the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, & Museums' (ATALM) annual conference. To attend the E-Rate program training, you must be registered for the conference. Event link.

System Tip: Multi-Factor Authentication Reminder for USAC Systems

Occasionally, when trying to login to USAC systems, you might receive this error code: **"AuthSDKError: Unable to parse a token from the URL."**

When experiencing this issue, users must clear their cache.

If you are experiencing this error while logging in, please use a Chrome, Firefox, or Edge browser and follow the instructions below:

1. Click on the URL bar at the top of the browser to highlight the entire web address.
2. Press and hold the **Ctrl** key on your keyboard. While holding the **Ctrl** key, press the **F5** key once to perform a hard refresh.
3. Release both keys. This action should clear the cache and potentially fix the issue you are experiencing.

For more help troubleshooting MFA issues and logging into USAC systems, please visit our website Multi-Factor Authentication page.

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