Back

Universal Service Administrative Co.

E-Rate

E-Rate News Brief

October 29, 2024

Contents

- E-Rate Tips
- Commitments for Funding Year (FY) 2024
- FCC Provides Relief for Program Participants Located in Disaster Areas Affected by Hurricanes Helene and Milton
- Tips for the EPC Administrative Window
- Updating Account Administrators in EPC: Applicants and Service Providers
- 2024 Training and Outreach

E-RATE TIPS:

- The FCC's Wireline Competition Bureau (WCB) **adopted the final Funding Year (FY) 2025 eligible services list** (ESL) for the Schools and Libraries program (E-Rate) October 25 (DA 24-1104). In the order, WCB revised the description of "wireless" service to read "Wireless (e.g., fixed wireless; microwave; mobile service for use on school buses; or mobile service for use with Wi-Fi hotspots)" and amended the explanation of "Wireless services and wireless Internet access" to note the eligibility of off-premises use of Wi-Fi hotspots and mobile wireless Internet services. A new note was added that basic technical support, software upgrades, bug fixes, and security patches are eligible for school bus Wi-Fi network equipment. The eligibility of off-campus wireless service on a school bus was clarified, as well as the requirement of cost allocation of certain off-campus use of E-Rate-funded services. WCB also clarified that the cost-effectiveness test for data plans and air cards applies only to on-campus use and noted that E-Rate's eligibility rules for basic firewall services are unchanged for FY2025.

- **Disbursement Issue Resolved**. After a recent payment system update, disbursement recipients received individual payments for each invoice line instead of aggregated payments for all invoices attached to a single 498 ID. This meant that some recipients may have received multiple itemized payments instead of a single aggregated payment. However, the total payment amount was not affected. USAC fixed this issue on October 25 and going forward disbursement recipients should again receive a

single, aggregated payment with remittance statements that include itemized details for the payment.

- **More Competitive Bidding Resources**. Over the past few months, we have provided important FCC Form 470 and competitive bidding tips and reminders (see recent issues on the E-Rate News Brief page). The Competitive Bidding & FCC Form 470 FAQs and the Pre-Commitment Process Webinar (view slides) provide information on competitive bidding best practices, exemptions, requirements, and reminders. The Competitive Bidding infographic also guides you through the competitive bidding process and provides best practices.

- **Applicants: Don't forget to file your FCC Form 486** if you have received a positive funding commitment and your services have started. USAC cannot process invoices for Funding Year (FY) 2024 services from applicants or service providers without an approved FCC Form 486 on file. Use the E-Rate FRN Status tool FY2016+ to find your funding request numbers (FRNs) and check the "FCC Form 486 Status" column. For FRNs with a service start date of July 1, 2024, and where the funding commitment decision letter (FCDL) was issued before July 2024, the **deadline to submit the FCC Form 486 is October 29, 2024**. If your FCC Form 486 appears to be late, we will send you an **FCC Form 486 Urgent Reminder Letter** after October 29 to remind you of the upcoming deadline. You have 15 days after the date of the reminder letter to submit and certify your FCC Form 486 without having your service start date changed and your funding commitment potentially reduced for that FRN. View the FCC Form 486 Filing page to learn about submitting the form and actions for late-filed forms.

- **Service Providers: Don't forget to file the FCC Form 473** in the E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC) to **certify your compliance with E-Rate program rules**, which is required for each year you participate in E-Rate. Service providers must submit and certify an FY2024 FCC Form 473 (Service Provider Annual Certification) as soon as possible, if you have not already done so. (See 47 C.F.R. § 54.504(f).) USAC **cannot pay an invoice** from either an applicant (FCC Form 472) or a service provider (FCC Form 474) unless both the FCC Form 486 and the SPAC forms have been certified and approved. There are currently 503 service providers associated with FY2024 commitments who have not submitted their FCC Form 473. View **Module 2: File an FCC Form 473** in the SP Course 1: Submitting and Certifying Invoices in EPC learning module to see step-by-step instructions.

- **Legacy FRN Status Tool Sunset**. USAC is consolidating all E-Rate tools in our open data platform. The legacy FRN Status Tool was decommissioned on October 17. Please use the E-Rate FRN Status Tool FY2016+ in open data. Additional details for FRNs can be found the E-Rate Request for Discount on Services: FRN Status (FCC Form 471 and Related Information) dataset.

- USAC **strongly encourages all service providers to review and update their FCC Form 498 data on an annual basis**, and revise as necessary, **including General Contact, Company Officer, and banking information**. If you do make updates to your FCC Form 498, you will also need to provide a SAM.gov Unique Entity Identifier (UEI). Visit the Manage Your 498 ID page and review our UEI bulletin to learn more.

- View **recent updates to the E-Rate website** including Off-Premises Wi-Fi Hotspots Overview, Wi-Fi Hotspot FAQs, Wi-Fi Hotspots Budget Infographic, Competitive Bidding & FCC Form 470 FAQs, and the How to Update Your E-Rate EPC Profile During the Administrative Window learning module.

Commitments for Funding Year (FY) 2024

FY2024. USAC released FY2024 Wave 27 Funding Commitment Decision Letters (FCDLs) on October 24. As of October 28, FY2024 commitments total over $2.32 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.

FCC Provides Relief for Program Participants Located in Disaster Areas Affected by Hurricanes Helene and Milton

On October 1, the FCC waived several E-Rate rules and deadlines, on a temporary basis, to assist participants and providers located in the areas affected by Hurricane Helene in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia (see DA 24-1025). On October 9, the FCC waived several E-Rate rules and deadlines, on a temporary basis, to assist participants and providers located in the areas affected by Hurricane Milton and its immediate aftermath (collectively, the Milton Weather Events; see DA 24-1059).

The FCC also provided this same relief to any other areas that may be subject to future Emergency Declarations or Major Disaster Declarations signed by the President due to hurricanes, typhoons, tropical storms, tropical cyclones, and wildfires during the remainder of calendar year 2024. With regard to relief for future hurricanes or other applicable future disasters occurring in 2024, the waiver and relief period will begin on the first day of the incident period and will expire 150 days later.

For applicants located in Hurricane Helene or Hurricane Milton affected disaster areas, the FCC provided up to 150 calendar days from the release date of the orders (i.e., February 28, 2025 for Hurricane Helene, and March 8, 2025 for Hurricane Milton) to submit the following:

1. Requests for appeals or requests for waiver; and
2. FCC Forms 486, 472, and 474.

The FCC also waived the following:

- **Service Implementation Deadline for Non-Recurring Services** – The FCC extended the FY2023 implementation deadline for non-recurring services **to September 30, 2025**, for applicants in the Affected Disaster Areas, and the FCC **extended the deadline for all other applicants that have non-recurring service funding requests with September 30, 2024 as the deadline** and are located in the Affected Disaster Areas.
- **Service and Equipment Substitutions** – FCC rules allow applicants to substitute a service or product if certain conditions are met (e.g., the service or product has the same functionality, the substitution does not violate any contract provision, does not result in an increase in the percentage of ineligible services or functions, and is within the scope of the controlling FCC Form 470). For applicants in the Affected Disaster Areas, the FCC waived the requirement that the substituted service or product(s) must have the same functionality as the service or product being replaced (section 54.504(d) of the FCC's rules) to allow applicants greater flexibility based on their local needs without being constrained by categories of service or service types. Applicants must request approval of service and/or equipment substitutions by submitting a Service Substitution request to USAC.
- **Document Retention Requirements** – The FCC also waived section 54.516(a) of the FCC rules **for destroyed records**. Applicants and service providers will not be penalized for failure to retain or produce records destroyed by the hurricane. Applicants and service providers that rely on this waiver as a basis for not retaining or producing records, upon request from USAC or the FCC, will be required to certify that the records, and any copies of such records, were destroyed by the hurricane.

For Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) Program applicants located in Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton Affected Disaster Areas, the FCC waived section 54.1718(b) of the FCC rules and provided 150 days from the release date of the respective orders to submit appeal and waiver requests. The FCC also waived section 54.1715(b) of the FCC's rules provided that applicants and service providers that rely on this waiver certify that the records, and any copies of such records, were destroyed by the hurricane.

Tips for the EPC Administrative Window

The FY2025 EPC administrative window opened October 15. The EPC administrative window is the period during which applicants can make updates to their entity profile information in EPC to prepare for the upcoming FCC Form 471 application filing window. The administrative window **will close shortly before the FY2025 FCC Form 471 application filing window opens in early 2025** when applicant entity profiles will be locked.

Here are a few things to consider while you prepare to update your entity profile information in EPC during the administrative window.

Need to add an entity? Do it now.
To add a new entity (e.g., an individual school to a school district or a library branch to a library system) to your organization's profile, open a customer service case in EPC or call the Customer Service Center (CSC) at (888) 203-8100. After the administrative window closes, CSC can still create the entity for you, but generally, you must file a Receipt Acknowledgment Letter (RAL) modification request to add it to your organization's profile. However, be sure to read the caveat below about FY2024 RAL modifications and appeals.

You may also remove an entity that closed or no longer exists (e.g., school from a school district or library branch from a library system) during this period. On the **My Applicant Landing Page**, click the blue hyperlink next to **Welcome!** Under the **Related Actions** tab, click **Manage Organization Relationships** and then click **Remove a Relationship**. Find the entity you want to remove, check the box next to the entity and click **Submit**.

Have RAL modifications or appeals for FY2024 applications? Submit those before you update your EPC profiles.
Submit any FY2024 RAL modification requests or FY2024 appeals before you add new entities or new entity subtypes to your organization's profile information. This will allow us to process your FY2024 RAL modification or appeal more quickly.

Check the fields below for accuracy:

All Billed Entities

- Verify that your FCC Registration Number (FCC RN) is correct. If your application includes child entities (individual schools in a school district or library branches in a library system), you do not need FCC RNs for those child entities.
- Review your address and contact information and make any necessary updates. If you have child entities, review and update their information as well.

School districts

- Update the student counts for the students attending each of your schools.

- Use the most recent validated student information available, which may mean entering or keeping last year's numbers if you do not yet have this year's numbers.

Independent schools

- Update your student counts.
  - Use the most recent validated student information available, which may mean entering or keeping last year's numbers if you do not yet have this year's numbers.
  - Be sure to review your entry for the "peak part-time student counts." This is the greatest number of part-time students at a single point during the school day, NOT the total number of part-time students that attend the school during the course of the entire school day.

Library systems

- Review the entries for the square footage of each of your library branches to make sure they are correct.
- Verify that you have identified the library branch that serves as the main branch for your library system.
- Review the entries for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) locale codes for each of your library branches and provide entries for those that are blank.

Independent libraries

- Review the entry for the square footage of your library to make sure it is correct.
- Identify yourself as the library that serves as the main branch.
- Review the entry for the IMLS locale code for your library and provide an entry if it is blank.

Consortia

- Review your list of consortium members to make sure it is accurate. You can add or remove consortium members through the **Manage Organization Relationships** function in your profile.
- Remind your members to update their EPC profiles so that the discount calculations and other program information will be accurate.

View the How to Update Your E-Rate EPC Profile During the Administrative Window learning module to learn how to update user permissions, update organization entity profiles, and add/remove/update organization relationships including signing up for a consortium or adding a consulting firm.

Updating Account Administrators in EPC: Applicants and Service Providers

Some applicants who intend to update their profiles in EPC during the current administrative window have realized that they do not have an active Account Administrator and cannot perform their updates. If you are in this situation, you can follow the guidance below.

If your Account Administrator is leaving or changing responsibilities and another employee will take over their duties, the current Account Administrator can assign those duties to the employee by using the **Modify Account Administrator** function in EPC.

If your Account Administrator is no longer available, call the Customer Service Center (CSC) at (888) 203-8100 for assistance. Note that you must be an authorized employee of the applicant to assume the Account Administrator role. The Account Administrator role cannot be assigned to a consultant, attorney, or other third-party representative of the applicant.

- If you are already a user on your entity's EPC account and are an authorized employee of the applicant, CSC can assign the Account Administrator role to you.
- If you are not a user on your entity's EPC account and are an authorized employee of the applicant, CSC must first create you as a user on the account. After you have established your username and password and accepted the Terms and Conditions for using EPC, CSC can then assign the Account Administrator role to you.

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.

Upcoming Webinars

- **E-Rate Post-Commitment Process** on **October 31, 2024**, from 2 p.m. - 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.
- **E-Rate 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. However, this session will not cover the new Invoicing functionality in EPC. Register.

Recordings Available

Below are on-demand recordings and accompanying slides from our fall webinars. To watch a webinar recording, click **Watch** next to the session on the Webinars page.

- **The EPC Administrative Window** on **October 24, 2024**. USAC discussed 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 including how to update your EPC profiles, FY2025 Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) changes, and some Administrative Window best practices. View webinar slides.

- **Wi-Fi Hotspot Webinar** on **October 15, 2024**. USAC discussed the FCC's report and order (FCC 24-76) that made E-Rate support available for eligible schools and libraries for Wi-Fi hotspots and mobile wireless Internet services that can be used off-premises including eligibility requirements, hotspots funding budgets and caps, and other requirements. View webinar slides.
- **E-Rate Program Overview** on **September 16, 2024**. USAC provided an overview of the E-Rate application process and explains basic program concepts. We also highlighted the recent Wi-Fi Hotspot Order, FCC Form 470 updates, and managing your FY2021–2025 Category Two budget to capture unused funds for FY2025. The webinar included a Q&A session. View webinar slides.
- **E-Rate Pre-Commitment Process** on **September 19, 2024**. USAC discussed the E-Rate Pre-Commitment process including how to get started, competitive bidding, applying for discounts, and Program Integrity Assurance (PIA) review, followed by a Q&A session. View webinar slides.
- **Eligible Services 101** on **September 24, 2024**. This webinar reviewed FY2025 equipment and services that are eligible for E-Rate discounts. The webinar included programmatic updates such as School Bus Wi-Fi, Wi-Fi hotspots for off-premises use, details on Basic Maintenance of Internal Connections (BMIC), and basic fiber concepts, followed by a Q&A session. View webinar slides.

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 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.

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Back