



Universal Service
Administrative Co.

December 2025 Tribal Nation Newsletter

December 30, 2025 | [Universal Service Administrative Company \(USAC\)](#)



Tribal Nation News

Join USAC for the January 2026 Tribal Teleconference to learn about the Tribal Library E-Rate Program (T-LEAP). During this webinar, USAC's Tribal Liaison and Tribal Library Advocates will share general information about the E-Rate program, including eligibility and program requirements, and how T-LEAP can support your Tribal library with applying for and receiving E-Rate funding. There will be time for Q&A. Please join us on **Tuesday, January 13, 2026, at 4 p.m. ET** – [Register](#).

Notes from USAC's Tribal Liaison

T-LEAP

T-LEAP offers direct support to Tribal libraries and Tribal college and university (TCU) libraries in navigating the E-Rate application process, including one-on-one assistance with applying to the program, preparing FCC forms, and receiving E-Rate support.

To learn more, please visit the [T-LEAP page](#) or contact the [USAC Tribal Liaison](#). Interested Tribal libraries can [sign up here](#) year-round to join T-LEAP.

[E-Rate](#)

Funding Year 2026 FCC Form 471 Application Filing Window Opens January 21, 2026

The Funding Year (FY) 2026 FCC Form 471 application filing window will open on **Wednesday, January 21, 2026, at noon ET** and will close on **Wednesday, April 1, 2026, at 11:59 p.m. ET**.

Because April 1 is the last day of the FCC Form 471 filing window, March 4, 2026, is the last date that you can timely submit and certify an FCC Form 470 to request bids for FY2026. E-Rate rules require applicants to post FCC Form 470 for at least 28 days before selecting service provider(s) and submitting the FCC Form 471.

Applicants can now review their E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC) profile and make additional updates for changes that occurred after USAC's review of their FY 2025 FCC Forms 471. The [EPC Administrative Window](#) will close and applicant EPC profiles will be locked on **January 16, 2026**. You will need to contact USAC to make changes to your EPC profile after the administrative window has closed. View the EPC Administrative Window [webinar recording](#) and [webinar slides](#) to learn more.

FY2026 E-Rate Program Updates

FY2026 Eligible Services List Adopted

The FCC's Wireline Competition Bureau (WCB) released the FY2026 Eligible Services List (ESL) Order [DA 25-1069](#) on December 17, 2025. WCB adopted its proposal to treat all currently eligible software- or remote-based services, including bug fixes, security patches, software-based technical assistance, and configuration changes the same and have applicants request all software- and remote-based services with the internal connections equipment that they support. Applicants will no longer need to separate software- and other remote-based services into internal connections and basic maintenance of internal connections (BMIC) services.

The Order also permits applicants that had sought funding for software-based BMIC services on a pro-rated basis in prior funding years to request discounts on the remainder of the contract in FY2026 or continue requesting pro-rated support. The Order further clarifies that applicants who seek support for software- or remote-based services as internal connections in FY2026 that were competitively bid as BMIC services are not violating the Commission's competitive bidding rules.

New BEAR/SPI Selection Added to FY2026 E-Rate FCC Form 471 Application

The FY2026 FCC Form 471 was updated with a new field below the Narrative field to collect the invoicing method for every Funding Request Number (FRN). Pursuant to section 54.514(c) of the program rules, the applicant is permitted to select the invoicing method for each FRN. The applicant can select either the FCC Form 472/BEAR (Billed Entity Applicant Reimbursement) or the FCC Form 474/SPI (Service Provider Invoice). Please review the [Select an Invoicing Method in E-Rate](#) to learn more. If you are copying an FRN from a previous funding year that does not have the invoicing method assigned, you will be prompted to select the BEAR or SPI invoicing method once the request has been copied on your FY2026 FCC Form 471. The selected invoicing method will be displayed on the PDF copy of the FCC Form 471 and on the FRN Record in EPC.

Applicants should notify their service providers of the invoicing method early in the process of preparing their funding requests. Please note that applicants will be able to request a different invoicing method prior to requesting reimbursement if the method needs to be changed. The applicant's service provider will need to agree to the invoicing method change after the FCC Form 471 has been submitted.

Category 2 Budget Updates for FY2026- FY2030

The FCC Form 471 was updated to reflect the FY2026-FY2030 [Category 2 Budget](#) cycle. The **Entity Details** section on the **Category Two screen** now shows FY2026-FY2030 Category Two budget cycle data based on the latest entity profile information entered by applicants. The PDF copy for Category Two FCC Form 471 applications was updated to reflect this latest entity profile data for student counts (schools/school districts) and square footage (libraries/library systems) for the FY2026-FY2030 budget cycle.

Bus Wi-Fi/Wi-Fi Hotspots Services are Ineligible for FY2026

The FCC rescinded the eligibility of school bus Wi-Fi, or other similar access point technologies, including the equipment needed to provide such service on school buses, in a Declaratory Ruling adopted September 30, 2025 ([FCC 25-63](#)). The decision applies beginning with FY2025 funding requests and forward.

In an Order on Reconsideration ([FCC 25-62](#)), adopted September 30, 2025, the FCC also made the off-premise use of Wi-Fi hotspots and Internet services ineligible for E-Rate support. Applicants cannot request funding for off-premises Wi-Fi equipment and services in FY2026. Wi-Fi on school buses and Wi-Fi hotspots and Internet services are not included on the FY2026 FCC Form 471.

The [FCC Form 470 Services Guiding Statements Table](#) (FY2025-FY2026) and the [FCC Form 470/Competitive Bidding eLM and User Guide](#) have been updated to reflect these changes. Since the FY2026 FCC Form 470 was released before these rulings were adopted, applicants and service providers may notice that these services are still included on the FY2026 FCC Form 470. The services are not included on the FY2026 FCC Form 471 application. The FCC Form 470 will be updated when the FY2027 FCC Form 470 is released this summer.

Go to the [Eligible Services List](#) page to learn which services are eligible for E-Rate support for the upcoming funding year.

To learn more about the E-Rate program, please review the [December 2025 E-Rate News Brief](#).

[Lifeline](#)

Reminder: FCC Form 555 Due February 2, 2026

The 2025 FCC Form 555 (Annual Lifeline ETC Certification Form) is available for completion in [One Portal](#). This form is used for the annual recertification process and non-usage reporting for the Lifeline program. The form must be submitted to USAC in One Portal by **Monday, February 2, 2026**.

A copy of the FCC Form 555 must also be filed in the FCC's [Electronic Comment Filing System](#), referencing Docket 14-171 in the "Proceedings" field, and with relevant state and Tribal governments.

For additional support in completing the form, service providers are encouraged to reference the resources below:

- FCC Form 555: [December 2025 Lifeline webinar](#)
- [FCC Form 555 User Guide](#)
- [FCC Form 555 Supplemental Information](#)
- [FCC Form 555 Demo](#)
- [FCC Form 555 FAQs](#)

For One Portal login assistance, please email CustomerSupport@usac.org.

Reminder: Keep 'Companies Near Me' Information Up to Date

Providers should maintain up-to-date and accurate information with USAC, including details on where they offer Lifeline-supported service. This information is used in USAC's [Companies Near Me tool](#) to help consumers find and sign up with providers that offer service in their area.

Consumers rely on the tool to find a list of every service provider that participates in the program for a given city, state, or ZIP code. Each provider listing includes the provider's website, customer support

phone number, and type of service offered.

Requesting ‘Companies Near Me’ Updates

Providers should email LifelineProgram@usac.org with the subject line “Companies Near Me Update” to provide the following:

- Updates to website URL, customer support phone number, and type of service offered.
- Updates to ZIP codes where Lifeline-supported service is offered.

USAC may also periodically contact providers to confirm the accuracy of information displayed on the tool.

Rural Health Care (RHC)

FY2026 Filing Window Opened December 1, 2025

The FY2026 filing window is open from December 1, 2025, to April 1, 2026. This means that you must submit your funding requests (FCC Forms 462 or 466) no later than 11:59 p.m. ET on April 1, 2026. We highly encourage you to submit your funding requests as early as possible. Learn more about [filing windows](#).

For FY2026, Healthcare Connect Fund (HCF) Program and Telecommunications (Telecom) Program participants will use RHC Connect to submit their FCC Forms 462 (Funding Request Form for the HCF Program) and FCC Forms 466 (Funding Request Form for the Telecom Program).

To learn more, please visit the following webpages:

- HCF Program – [Welcome to RHC Connect – FCC Form 462](#)
- Telecom Program – [Welcome to RHC Connect – FCC Form 466](#)
- HCF Program – [RHC Connect User Guide FCC Form 462](#)
- Telecom Program – [RHC Connect User Guide FCC Form 466](#)

Important Deadlines and Reminder

The following are recommended dates to submit the FCC Forms 460, 461, and 465 with enough time to file funding requests (FCC Forms 462 and 466) before the end of the FY2025 filing window.

HCF & Telecom Program Form	Last Day to Submit for Individual HCPs using a Request for Proposal (RFP)
FCC Form 460 (Eligibility)	January 5, 2026 (Recommended Date)
FCC Form 461 & 465 (Request for Services)	February 1, 2026 (Recommended Date)
FCC Form 462 & 466 (Funding Request)	April 1, 2026 (Deadline to Submit)

HCF & Telecom Program Form	Last Day to Submit for Individual HCPs NOT using a Request for Proposal (RFP)
FCC Form 460 (Eligibility)	January 8, 2026 (Recommended Date)
FCC Form 461 & 465 (Request for Services)	February 10, 2026 (Recommended Date)

Please note that these tables are not mandatory deadlines per the program rules, but rather recommendations to ensure that the FCC Forms 461 and 465 are posted to USAC's website early enough for a 28-day competitive bidding period before the deadline to submit FCC Forms 462 and 466. If FCC Forms 461 and 465 are submitted with an RFP, allow at least an additional 10 days for review.

Key Dates and Trainings

E-Rate

- E-Rate Pre-Commitment Process - January 22, 2026, at 2 p.m. ET – [Register >](#)
- E-Rate Pre-Commitment Process Q&A Session - February 19, 2026, at 2 p.m. ET – [Register >](#)

Fall Training Series Recordings and Webinar Slides

- [E-Rate Program Overview](#)
- [Eligible Services 101](#)
- [Pre-Commitment Process](#)
- [Invoicing](#)
- [Category Two Budgets](#)
- [Post-Commitment Process](#)
- [Administrative Window](#)

Lifeline | National Verifier 101 for Service Providers

Wednesday, January 14, 2026, at 3 p.m. ET – [Register >](#)

RHC | FY2026 Telecom Program Office Hours

Wednesday, January 14, 2026, at 2 p.m. ET – [Register >](#)

RHC | Third-Party Authorizations and User Management in RHC Connect

Wednesday, January 21, 2026, at 2 p.m. ET – [Register >](#)

RHC | Consortium Best Practices

Wednesday, January 28, 2026, at 2 p.m. ET – [Register >](#)

Tribal Teleconference

T-LEAP Overview– January 13, 2026, at 4 p.m. ET – [Register >](#)

USF Program Technical Assistance

The USAC Customer Service Center (CSC) provides customer service for all USF programs. Visit the [Contact USAC](#) page to get in touch with specialized agents trained in the specifics of each program.

Questions or suggestions? Contact USAC's Tribal Liaison at TribalLiaison@usac.org.

