



E-Rate News Brief

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E-Rate Tips

- **FY2026 Window Waiver Requests.** If you need to request a waiver of the Funding Year (FY) 2026 application filing window deadline, **be sure to certify and submit your FCC Form 471** in the E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC) **before you file your waiver request** with the FCC. Note that you will receive an out-of-window status notification after you certify your form. If the waiver request is granted, the FCC Form 471 will be treated as timely filed during the filing window. See the [E-Rate Appeals Waiver Guide](#).
- **Interim SPIN and RAL.** If you used the interim Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN) 143666666 to submit your FY2026 funding requests, **submit a Receipt Acknowledgement Letter (RAL) modification request** to provide the actual SPIN. View the [FCC Form 471 Receipt Acknowledgment Letter Modification Guide](#). USAC will not issue a funding commitment decision letter until the Interim SPIN has been updated to the selected service provider.
- **FCC Form 500 Updates for Invoicing Method Changes.** Beginning with Funding Year (FY) 2026, applicants were required to select an [invoicing method](#)

(FCC Form 472/BEAR or FCC Form 474/SPI) for each funding request number (FRN) on their FCC Form 471 applications. If you need to modify the invoicing method on your FY2026 FRNs, you can submit a [RAL Modification Request](#) during the review of your FCC Form 471 application. The RAL modification **must be submitted before** you receive funding commitment decision letters (FCDLs) from USAC. **After you receive an FCDL, you can request invoicing method changes** via the [FCC Form 500](#) using the new “Invoicing Method” change request. This change request must be submitted before any invoice is submitted for the FRN.

Funding Year (FY) 2025 Commitments

FY2025. USAC released FY2025 Wave 49 Funding Commitment Decision Letters (FCDLs) on April 9. As of April 15, FY2025 commitments total over \$2.64 billion.

On the date that FCDLs are issued, you can access your FCDL notification from the **Notifications** section of your landing page in EPC.

You can also use the [E-Rate Search Commitments Tool](#) to look up prior funding year commitment data.

Program Integrity and Your Role

Ensuring effective stewardship of the E-Rate program by protecting against misconduct is a priority shared by the FCC and USAC. Misconduct may include instances of alleged misuse of funds, failure to comply with program rules, or other potential waste, fraud, or abuse of funds. Below we provide information on recent FCC enforcement actions and what you can do to report suspected misconduct.

Recent FCC Enforcement Actions

The FCC’s Enforcement Bureau (EB) announced in a March 20, 2026 [news release](#) that it barred seven individuals convicted of defrauding the E-Rate program from participating in activities associated with any Universal Service Fund-supported program. Companies controlled by these individuals received over \$14 million in E-Rate funds from 2010 to 2016 but failed to provide much of the equipment for which they had billed the federal government.

EB also announced April 7, 2026 (see [news release](#)) that it suspended seven additional individuals from participating in Universal Service Fund programs because the individuals illegally enriched themselves through schemes to defraud the E-Rate program, including by lying in official filings with USAC and by overbilling the E-Rate program.

USAC’s [E-Rate Suspensions and Debarments](#) page maintains a list of individuals and companies that are suspended and debarred from the program.

School Consultant Pleads Guilty to Kickback Conspiracy

On January 22, 2026, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of New York [announced](#) that E-Rate consultant Richard Bernstein pleaded guilty to conspiracy to defraud the United States in connection with his agreement with others to steer federal funds to school vendors in exchange for a share of the vendors’ profits. Mr. Bernstein faces up to five years’ imprisonment.

Mr. Bernstein was the founder and Chief Executive Officer of E-Rate Consulting, LLC and the president of E-Rate Management Solutions Inc. (together, EMS). EMS offered services to schools in New York and elsewhere related to the E-Rate and Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) USF

programs. Mr. Bernstein acted as an agent for schools seeking access to resources under both the E-Rate and ECF programs. Mr. Bernstein agreed with vendors to steer the schools he served to work with those vendors and he simultaneously entered into secret side agreements with the vendors to share as much as half of their profits with him. In total, EMS received more than \$100,000 in kickbacks from vendors funded through the E-Rate and ECF programs.

FCC Updates Suspension and Debarment Rules.

On March 26, 2026, the FCC adopted a Report and Order ([FCC 26-18](#)) that modified its suspension and debarment rules to align with the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Guidelines on Governmentwide Debarment and Suspension; adopted FCC-specific rules tailored to its programs, and sought comment on expanding the rules to cover the Supply Chain Reimbursement program and any future FCC programs. The Report and Order adopted rules allowing the FCC to promptly and efficiently exclude or otherwise limit bad actors' participation in FCC's programs, including the USF, the Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS), and the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program (NDBEDP). The FCC will now be able to consider a wider range of misconduct by program participants that warrants removal, act more quickly in appropriate cases to address bad actors, and promote transparency and due diligence among program participants by requiring any prior misconduct to be disclosed and curtail inadvertent participation by unscrupulous actors down the supply chain (i.e., subcontractors and other lower-tier participants).

How to Report Suspected Incidents

Bad actors and bad actions hurt all of us. There are several ways individuals can help USAC and the FCC protect program integrity by reporting suspected incidents of misconduct.

On the USAC website, you can [Submit a Whistleblower Alert](#) if you suspect someone is misusing funds, failing to comply with program rules, or otherwise participating in fraud, waste, or abuse of funds. In the E-Rate section of USAC's website, you can **submit a whistleblower alert on the [Program Integrity](#) page**, which also provides resources on competitive bidding requirements, Program Integrity Assurance reviews, and invoicing rules and requirements.

The FCC's Office of Inspector General provides a [hotline](#) to **report waste, fraud, or abuse by calling 1-888-863-2244 or 202-418-0473** to report suspected incidents **or by [submitting a complaint online](#)** either confidentially or non-confidentially.

Overview of the PIA Review Process

[Program Integrity Assurance](#) (PIA) is the process USAC uses to review FCC Forms 471 for compliance with E-Rate program rules and requirements. USAC reviews the information on your application and may contact you with additional questions on specific items. Below is a summary of the Initial Review, Final Review, and Quality Assurance steps in the PIA review process.

Initial Review

USAC assigns an Initial Reviewer to process your FCC Form 471. The information you provide on your form may be sufficient for the Initial Reviewer to complete your review. If not, the Initial Reviewer prepares the questions that USAC must ask based on the information you provided (or did not provide) on your application.

The Initial Reviewer issues questions to you via EPC and you will receive an email when the PIA questions are available. If you are a public school or library, we also notify your state E-Rate coordinator.

- You can click the link provided in the email to access our questions. You can also navigate to the **Pending Inquiries** section of your organization's landing page in EPC

and, using the drop-down menus, choose "FCC Form 471" for the **Type** and "2026" for the **Funding Year**.

- Read each question carefully. The inquiry may require you to provide a Yes/No answer, a short response in a text field, or a file or scanned document.
- Only one user can work on a specific inquiry at one time, although different users can work on different inquiries simultaneously. One user can allow another user to review and/or edit their work by saving a draft response and then exiting the inquiry.

Please respond promptly to any PIA requests for information or documentation.

Reviewers will continue their attempts to contact applicants to ensure that they are available to respond to inquiries.

During the PIA review process, you always have the following options:

- If you do not understand one or more questions, you can ask your Initial Reviewer what the question means or what information USAC expects in your response.
- You can ask for more time to respond. However, note that your Initial Reviewer may not be able to return to your application quickly once you provide the information.
- You can ask to speak to a manager if you are having trouble communicating with your Initial Reviewer. USAC will not penalize you for doing so, and the manager can help you understand the questions USAC is asking and the responses USAC expects to receive.

If USAC intends to modify or deny a funding request, your Initial Reviewer will notify you through EPC. You can provide additional information at this point, but you must respond quickly because we do not stop the review process to wait for a response.

Final Review and Quality Assurance

Final Review is a review of the work done during Initial Review conducted by a more experienced reviewer. The Final Reviewer checks each step of the Initial Review process to verify that they followed the correct procedures, asked the appropriate questions, and received complete answers. If the Final Reviewer has any concerns, they will return the application to the Initial Reviewer for follow-up.

As a result, your Initial Reviewer may contact you with additional questions to gather the required information that they did not request or receive during Initial Review. Make sure you understand what supplemental information is being requested and that you respond as quickly and as accurately as possible.

Some applications go through a third level of review called Quality Assurance (QA). QA reviews are an additional check to verify that the PIA reviewers correctly completed all parts of the application review. As with the Final Review, the QA Reviewer may return applications to the Initial Reviewer for follow-up requests.

The review process is not linear. If a QA Reviewer returns an application to the Initial Reviewer, the status on the progress bar at the top of your FCC Form 471 may move to the left – that is, to an earlier review status. If you do see such a movement, monitor your email in case the Initial Reviewer attempts to contact you.

FY2026 Application Filing Window Next Steps

The application filing window for FY2026 has closed. Below we provide a few reminders for actions you should take while the application process is still fresh in your mind.

Review your FCC Form 471 and submit a RAL Modification Request to correct or update information. Double-check your certified [FCC Form 471](#) for accuracy. If you find any information that should be corrected or updated, you can submit a Receipt Acknowledgment Letter (RAL) Modification Request. To learn how to submit modification requests for your FCC Form(s) 471, view the [FCC Form 471 Receipt Acknowledgment Letter Modification Guide](#).

Entity information. If your EPC entity profile was locked before you could update the information for your organization and/or your member entities, you can file a RAL Modification Request to provide your updates. Specifically, you should pay attention to the following:

- **School districts:** Review the contact information for your school district and each of your individual schools, along with their actual or estimated student counts (for your Category One discount calculation and your Category Two budget calculation), their approved [Community Eligibility Provision](#) (CEP) percentage (if they have one), their [urban/rural status](#), and their entity attributes (such as public, private, or Tribal).
- **Library systems:** Review the contact information for your library system and each of your library branches, bookmobiles, and kiosks, along with their square footage, their urban/rural status, and their entity attributes (such as public, private, or Tribal). You must have identified one library as the main branch and identified the school district in which the main branch is located.
- **Independent schools and libraries:** Review the contact information for your entity and your entity information necessary for the Category One discount calculation and the Category Two budget calculation as noted above.
- **Consortia:** Review your own contact information and the list of [consortium](#) members you reported as receiving or sharing services on each FCC Form 471.

FCC Registration Number. Check this 10-digit number to make sure it is correct, especially if this is the first year you have filed E-Rate program forms. To verify your [FCC Registration Number](#), you can use the FCC's [Commission Registration System](#) (CORES).

Costs and cost allocations. Check your math. The pre-discount costs of your funding requests should match the information in the [contract\(s\)](#) or other documentation you used to prepare your form. If you notice any incorrect information in any of the above fields, you can submit a RAL Modification Request to correct this information.

Review and retain the competitive bidding process documentation that you relied on to complete your FCC Form 471. As part of your application filing process, you may have produced, accessed, or received many documents, and you may need to refer to one or more of these documents at various times during the application review process. If you collect and store this documentation in a manner that allows you or your successor to easily access and produce these documents, you can respond much more quickly to USAC requests for information or documentation.

All E-Rate program participants – applicants, consortia, and service providers – are required to maintain documentation that demonstrates compliance with the statutory or regulatory requirements for all E-Rate program purchases of services and equipment for a period of 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.

We recommend that all applicants and services providers take the time now to organize and save [all documents related to your application](#) in a manner that will allow you to easily locate and retrieve them for any future needs. Go to the [E-Rate Document Retention](#) page and review the [E-Rate Program List of Documents to Retain for Audits and to Show Compliance with Program Rules](#) to learn more.

Prepare for PIA review. During [PIA review](#), we verify information on your FCC Form 471, and we may have additional questions to help us in our review. We will notify you by email and in your EPC **News** feed if there are PIA questions waiting for you to answer. This would be a good time to alert your service provider that you may need help with network diagrams, product descriptions, and other data that they should be able to supply. Please respond promptly to any PIA reviewer's requests for information or documentation.

Monitor your contact email address and your EPC account. The contact person you identified on your FCC Form 471 should regularly monitor their email account and EPC account so that they know when we have posted PIA review questions. You can file a RAL Modification Request to update your holiday/vacation contact information if we should use a different email address or telephone number to contact you, or if you have delegated someone else to answer questions on your behalf.

Monitor the status of applications for your district or state. You can check the status of your funding request using the Open Data [E-Rate FRN Status Tool FY2016+](#). The tool has easy-to-use filters so you can quickly isolate your data by Billed Entity Number (BEN), Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN), state, or Funding Year. View a [video](#) on how to use the tool.

Service Providers: Have You Filed the FCC Form 473?

Have you checked your filing status for [FCC Form 473](#) (Service Provider Annual Certification (SPAC)) in EPC for FY2026 and prior funding years? USAC started sending reminders to service providers who have not yet filed their annual SPAC on April 2, 2026, and will send subsequent reminders periodically through June 30, 2026.

FCC rules require service providers to annually file a SPAC (47 C.F.R. § 54.504(f)) and a SPAC Form must be on file before USAC can pay invoices – FCC Forms 472 (BEAR) or FCC Forms 474 (SPI) – for that specific funding year. Only **Full or Partial Rights users** can complete the SPAC in EPC. For step-by-step directions on how to complete the SPAC online, go to the [FCC Form 473 \(SPAC\) User Guide](#).

Service providers can check the status of their FCC Form 473 for a given funding year by opening their organization's summary page in EPC. Applicants and Service Providers can also use the [E-Rate FRN Invoicing Deadline Tool](#) to lookup the status of any Service Provider Identification Numbers (SPINs) and check the **SPAC Filed?** column.

Update Your Contract Award Date to Aid Quicker PIA Reviews

If you are using a new or existing contract on your FY2026 FCC Form 471, you must have a [contract record](#) for that contract in your EPC profile. A contract record provides specific details about a contract – e.g., the establishing FCC Form 470, the number of bids received, the service provider, the contract terms, the contract award date (CAD), etc. – so that this information can be auto-populated from your profile to the appropriate funding request on your FCC Form 471.

It is particularly important to make sure the CAD is accurate for the contract you cited on your FCC Form 471. An accurate CAD and uploading a copy of the contract to the contract profile can help PIA reviewers expedite the review process by avoiding additional outreach.

To create a contract record in your EPC profile, go to the organization page for the parent organization (independent school, school district, independent library, library system, or consortium), click **Contracts** from the menu choices at the top of the page, then choose **Manage Contracts**, and click on **Add a New Contract**.

- You do not need to create a new contract record for a multi-year contract or a contract with voluntary extensions, if you previously created the contract record in EPC.
- For a contract that has been voluntarily extended through FY2026, you can cite the existing contract record on the appropriate funding request on your FCC Form 471 and then enter the extended date in the field labeled "What is the date your contract expires for the current term of the contract?"

If you have a new contract or need to make changes to an existing contract record, **you must create a new contract record**. EPC does not allow edits to a contract record after it has been submitted. You are encouraged – but not required – to upload a copy of your contract into your contract record. If you do not upload your contract, be sure to keep a copy handy in case USAC requests it during the review of your application.

View the [How to Create a Contract Record](#) video for a demonstration on entering your contract information.

RAL Modification Requests and Post-Commitment Corrections

USAC issues an FCC Form 471 [Receipt Acknowledgement Letter](#) (RAL) to both the applicant and service provider(s) in EPC after an FCC Form 471 application is submitted and certified. The letter contains many of the details submitted on the FCC Form 471 and provides a means to correct any mistakes. If you were not able to make all the appropriate updates to your applicant profile in EPC before the close of the EPC FCC Form 471 administrative window, you can provide updated information by filing a RAL Modification Request after submitting and certifying your FCC Form 471 application(s) **but before you receive your Funding Commitment Decision Letter** (FCDL).

Many times, FCC Form 471 applications are submitted with multiple types of equipment placed on a single funding request (FRN) Line Item, which can slow down the PIA review process. **You can use the RAL Modification Request process to separate unique types of equipment into separate FRN Line Items**, which will help reviewers more quickly complete your form reviews.

Applicants receive the RAL in their EPC **News** feed after submitting and certifying an FCC Form 471. The RAL Modification function in EPC allows you to provide specific information in an organized format, which makes it easier for PIA reviewers to locate and understand the changes you want to make. Go to the [Ministerial & Clerical Errors](#) page to see the types of changes that are allowed and not allowed for the FCC Form 471. To learn how to submit modification requests for your FCC Form(s) 471, view the [FCC Form 471 Receipt Acknowledgment Letter Modification Guide](#).

If USAC has issued an FCDL, you must request any modifications through a post-commitment request such as a [Service Substitution](#) request, a [SPIN Change](#) request, an [FCC Form 500](#), or an [Appeal](#).

Don't Wait to Register Your Entity on SAM.gov and Obtain a UEI if You Invoice USAC

Beginning August 2026, USAC will use SAM.gov banking information to pay all Universal Service Fund (USF) invoices. To continue receiving USF disbursements, all service providers and E-Rate participants who use the FCC Form 472/BEAR for invoicing **must have an active SAM.gov account, a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)** on their FCC Form 498, and a valid bank account associated with their SAM.gov account.

SPs and BEAR Filers Who Believe They Have an Active SAM.gov Account, UEI, and Linked Valid Bank Account Should:

- Log into E-File (or EPC for BEAR filers) to confirm that the FCC Form 498 (Block 3, Line 24) includes a UEI.
 - Log into SAM.gov to confirm that the UEI is connected to a valid bank account—specifically, the bank account designated to accept USF disbursements, the SAM.gov account is active, and check the annual renewal due date.

After completing these steps, service providers and E-Rate applicants, that file BEARs, will be set to continue receiving USF disbursements. Please remember, you have to annually renew your SAM.gov account. The renewal due date is included in your account on SAM.gov. You will not be able to receive USF disbursements if your SAM.gov account becomes inactive.

SPs and BEAR Filers Who Do Not Think They Have an Active SAM.gov Account, UEI, and Linked Valid Bank Account Should:

- Visit SAM.gov and follow the registration process through to completion. Visit the SAM.gov [Learn How to Register Your Entity](#) page to get started.
 - Once registered with SAM.gov, you will be automatically assigned a UEI.
 - Log into SAM.gov to link the UEI to a valid bank account—specifically, the bank account designated to accept USF disbursements.
- Log in to E-File (or EPC for BEAR filers) to add the UEI to the FCC Form 498 (Block 3, Line 24).

Because the SAM.gov registration process can take up to six weeks, USAC recommends starting as soon as possible. For more information, visit USAC's [SAM.gov UEI Requirement](#) webpage.

E-Rate Outreach and Training

During 2026, USAC will conduct webinars and training focused on E-Rate topics. Below is the schedule of upcoming training events and webinars with the topic, the time, and the recommended audience. We also list the specific materials that attendees should review, if applicable.

If you are interested in attending, register for the training or webinar you want to attend, and review all materials referenced below for the webinar.

In-Person Training

USAC is coming to an event near you in 2026. E-Rate experts will provide training, discuss program updates, and answer questions from new and experienced participants. **Registration for these in-person training events will open April 23, 2026 at 3 p.m. E.T.**

Below are events that we will attend where we can answer your E-Rate questions.

- **E-Rate Training – Phoenix, AZ: September 15, 2026** at the Salvation Army Kroc Center, 1375 E. Broadway Road, Phoenix, AZ. [Register](#).
- **E-Rate Training – Washington, DC: September 24, 2026** at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) headquarters, 45 L Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. [Register](#).
 - The training will also be available live on the FCC’s YouTube page at <https://www.youtube.com/@FCC>.

Webinar Recordings

Program Integrity Assurance (PIA) Review Process Webinar (March 26, 2026). This [webinar](#) provided E-Rate participants with an overview of the Program Integrity Assurance (PIA) FCC Form 471 review process, preparing for a PIA review, handling PIA inquiries, and funding commitment decision letters (FCDL). View [webinar slides](#).

Service Provider Webinar (March 31, 2026). This [webinar](#) is for Service Providers who are new to the E-Rate program. After attending this webinar, you will be able to: accurately describe what E-Rate is and the different steps of the E-Rate process, obtain a Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN), bid on projects, assist the applicant/beneficiary, certify compliance, and invoice USAC. View [webinar slides](#).

Conferences

- **Pacific Northwest Library Association (PNLA) and Oregon Library Association (OLA) Conference** from **April 22-24, 2026** (Portland, Oregon). [Event link](#).
- **American Libraries Association (ALA) Conference** from **June 25-29, 2026** (Chicago, Illinois). [Event link](#).
- **International Society for Technology in Education’s ISTE Live and ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) Conference** from **June 28-July 1, 2026** (Orlando, Florida). [Event link](#).

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