Beginning E-Rate Services

Applicant and Service Provider Training

June 20, 2024

Universal Service Administrative Co.

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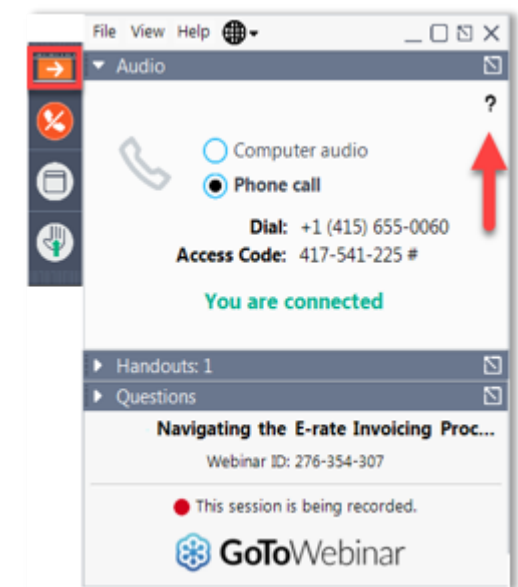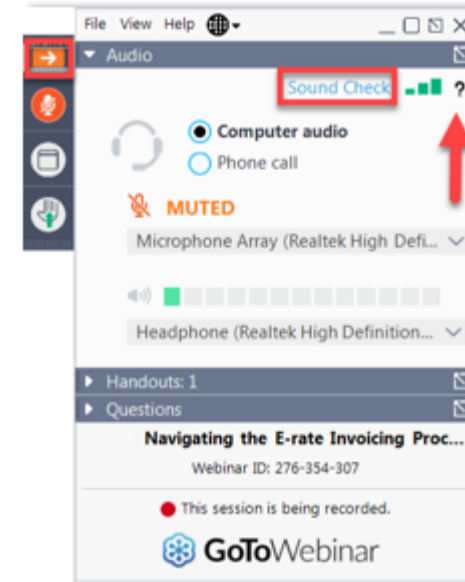
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  - Ask one question at a time.
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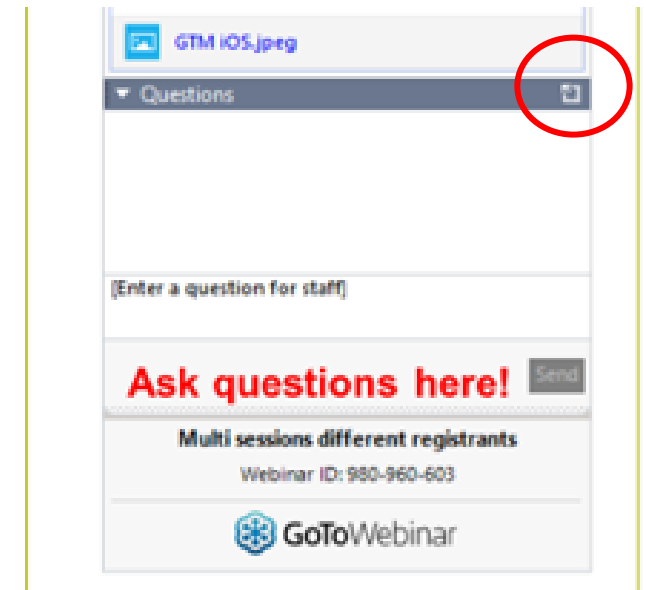
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Create a customer service case

1. Log in to the **E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC)**

2. Select the **Contact Us** link from the upper right menu on the landing page.

MEET OUR TEAM

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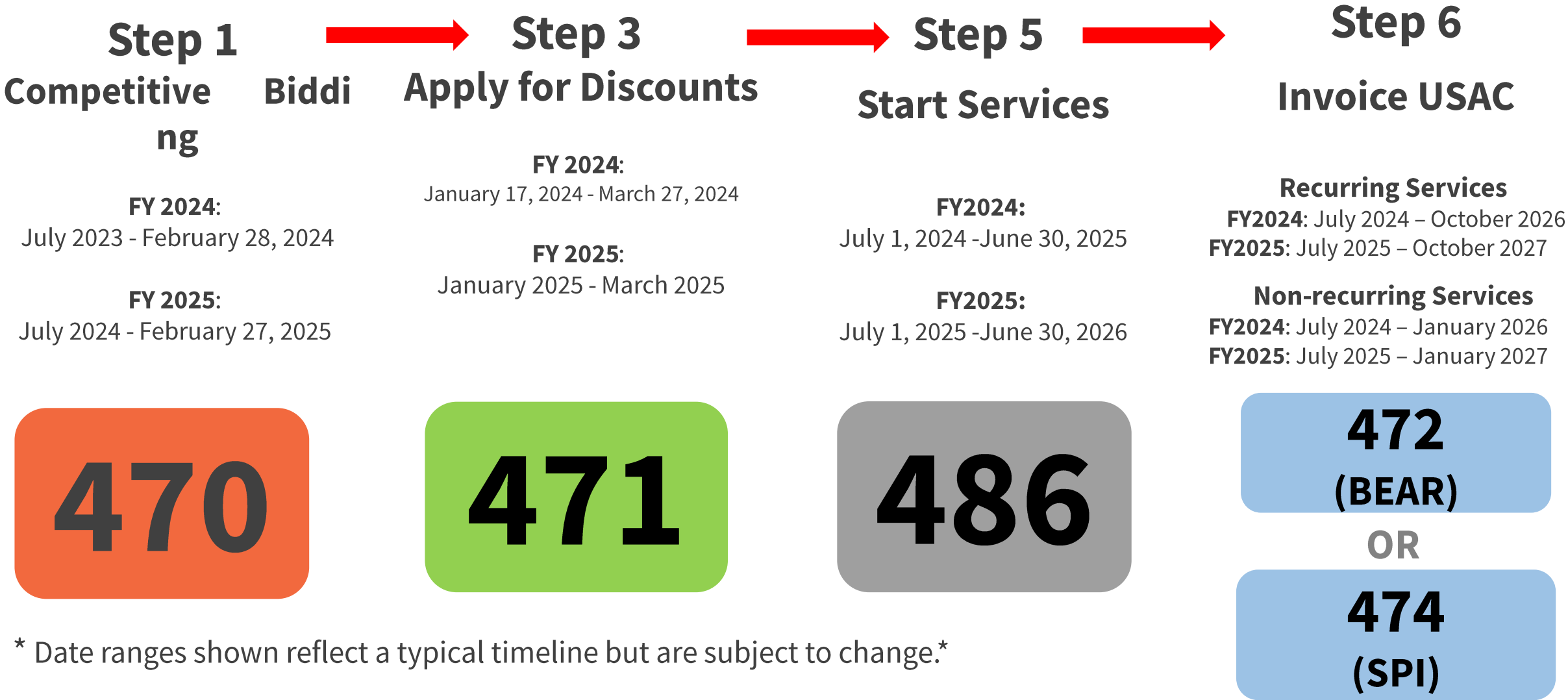
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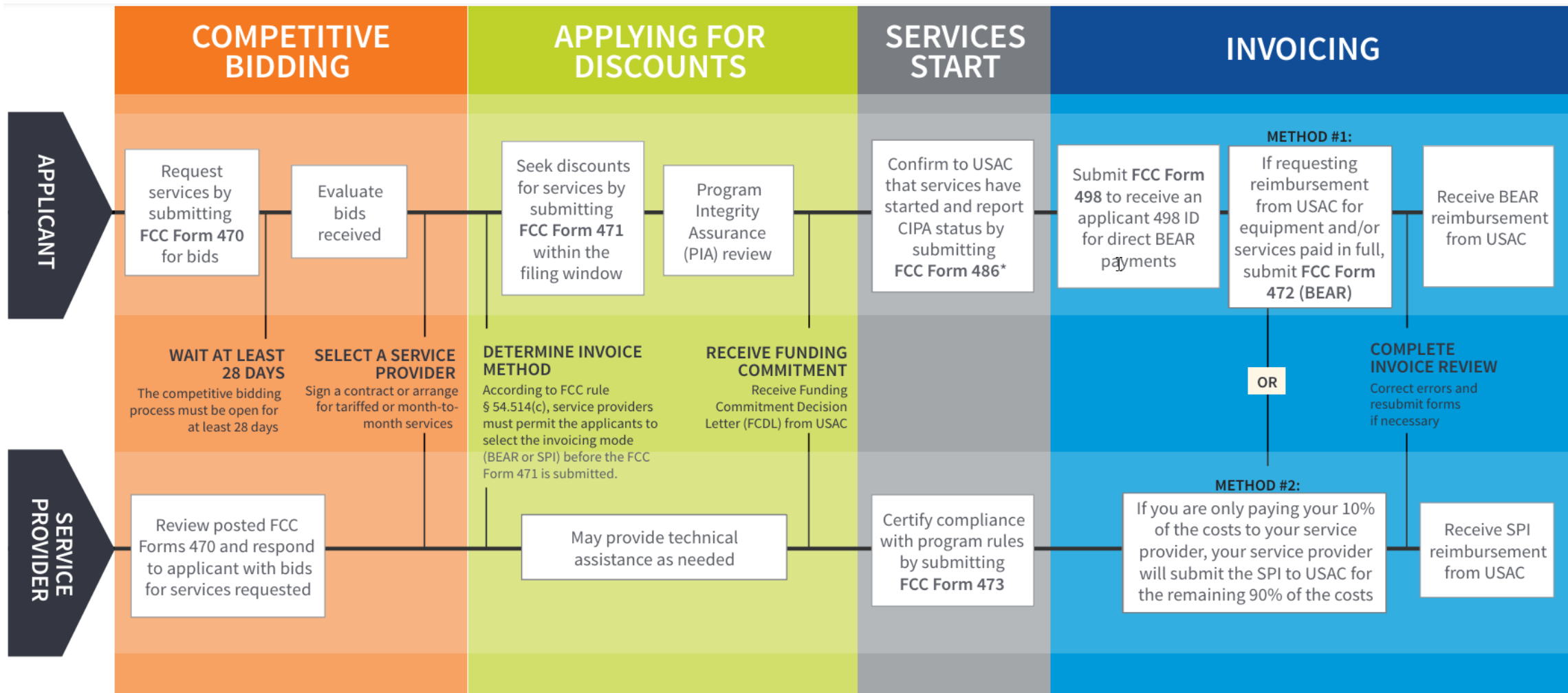
Agenda

- File FCC Form 486

- Comply with the Children's Internet Protection Act

- Case Studies

- Post-Commitment Adjustments

  - SPIN Changes

  - Update Your Equipment and Services

  - Appeal a USAC Decision

  - Resolve a Commitment Adjustment

  - Receive Notifications after Post Commitment Changes

- Account Administrator and Updating User Permissions

- Resources

Applicant Forms and Important Dates Reminder

Step 1
Competitive Bidding

FY 2024:
July 2023 - February 28, 2024

FY 2025:
July 2024 - February 27, 2025

470

Step 3
Apply for Discounts

FY 2024:
January 17, 2024 - March 27, 2024

FY 2025:
January 2025 - March 2025

471

Step 5
Start Services

FY2024:
July 1, 2024 -June 30, 2025

FY2025:
July 1, 2025 -June 30, 2026

486

Step 6
Invoice USAC

Recurring Services
FY2024: July 2024 – October 2026
FY2025: July 2025 – October 2027

Non-recurring Services
FY2024: July 2024 – January 2026
FY2025: July 2025 – January 2027

**472
(BEAR)**

OR

**474
(SPI)**

* Date ranges shown reflect a typical timeline but are subject to change.*

9

After you receive your funding commitment, you can start receiving services.

COMPETITIVE BIDDING

APPLICANT

Request services by submitting **FCC Form 470** for bids

Evaluate bids received

WAIT AT LEAST 28 DAYS
The competitive bidding process must be open for at least 28 days

SELECT A SERVICE PROVIDER
Sign a contract or arrange for tariffed or month-to-month services

SERVICE PROVIDER

Review posted FCC Forms 470 and respond to applicant with bids for services requested

APPLYING FOR DISCOUNTS

Seek discounts for services by submitting **FCC Form 471** within the filing window

Program Integrity Assurance (PIA) review

DETERMINE INVOICE METHOD
According to FCC rule § 54.514(c), service providers must permit the applicants to select the invoicing mode (BEAR or SPI) before the FCC Form 471 is submitted.

RECEIVE FUNDING COMMITMENT
Receive Funding Commitment Decision Letter (FCDL) from USAC

May provide technical assistance as needed

SERVICES START

Confirm to USAC that services have started and report CIPA status by submitting **FCC Form 486***

Certify compliance with program rules by submitting **FCC Form 473**

INVOICING

Submit **FCC Form 498** to receive an applicant 498 ID for direct BEAR payments

METHOD #1:
If requesting reimbursement from USAC for equipment and/or services paid in full, submit **FCC Form 472 (BEAR)**

Receive BEAR reimbursement from USAC

OR

COMPLETE INVOICE REVIEW
Correct errors and resubmit forms if necessary

METHOD #2:
If you are only paying your 10% of the costs to your service provider, your service provider will submit the SPI to USAC for the remaining 90% of the costs

Receive SPI reimbursement from USAC

File FCC Form 486

File Your FCC Form 486

Applicants file the FCC Form 486 to:

- Notify USAC that **services have started** for the Funding Request Numbers (FRNs) listed on their FCC Form 471.

- Report current status of their compliance with the **Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA)**.

When Do I File the FCC Form 486?

- The FCC Form 486 MUST be certified no later than 120 days after the **Service Start Date (SSD) reported on the FCC Form 486** or 120 days after the date of the **Funding Commitment Decision Letter (FCDL)** - whichever is later.

- If you miss the FCC Form 486 deadline, USAC will adjust your SSD to a date 120 days before the date you certified your form.

- Your funding commitment may be reduced to reflect the reduction in Months of Service.

FCC Form 486: Service Start Date

What is my Service Start Date?

- The earliest date for which USAC will begin to fund recurring services.

- The first day of the funding year, July 1.

- Any date after July 1, but before June 30 of the funding year, or the date that services actually started on.

- **Early Service Start Date** - For installations that started before July 1 of the funding year, the SSD is still July 1.

14

FCC Form 486: Service Start Date

Service Start Date Example:

- If the Applicant received their FCDL May 1, 2024, they have until November 29, 2024 to file their FCC Form 486.

- Their **earliest** service start date is July 1st, 2024.

  - If the Applicant started to receive service May 20th, 2024, their service start date **remains** July 1st, 2024.

  - If the Applicant starts to receive service August 1st, 2024, their service start date becomes August 1st, 2024.

Example of an Adjusted FCC Form 486 Due to Late Filing

- If you received the Funding Commitment Decision Letter on May 1, 2024, and the Service Start Date on the FCC Form 471 is July 1, 2024, you will have 120 days from July 1, 2024 to certify the FCC Form 486. This gives you a deadline of **October 29, 2024**.

- If you file the FCC Form 486 on **December 22, 2024**, (past the FCC Form 486 certification deadline) the Service Start Date for the FRN(s) will be adjusted to August 24, 2024 (December 22, 2024 minus - 120 days). Your recurring services **before the adjusted Service Start Date of August 24, 2024 will not be funded**.

- If you wish to appeal a USAC decision adjusting your Service Start Date based on a late FCC Form 486, you must first file the appeal with USAC, not the FCC.

Service Reminder

- **Recurring services** (e.g., monthly Internet access service) must be delivered during the funding year.

- **Non-recurring services** (e.g., equipment installations) can generally be installed through September 30 following the close of the funding year.
  - The September 30 deadline may be extended, either automatically or by request. Requests to extend this deadline must be submitted in EPC by the service delivery deadline.
  - Delivery and installation may start before the funding year.

FCC Form 486 Notifications

- After you submit the FCC Form 486, USAC sends you and your service provider:
  - A confirmation of receipt.
  - A letter informing you of USAC's decision.

- After USAC has approved your FCC Form 486 and services have started, you or your service provider may begin invoicing USAC for the discounted amount of the costs of the approved equipment and services.

Respond to Any "Urgent Reminder" Notification

- The FCC Form 486 MUST be certified no later than 120 days after the **Service Start Date (SSD) reported on the FCC Form 486** or 120 days after the date of the **Funding Commitment Decision Letter (FCDL)**, whichever is later.
- If you receive an "urgent reminder" regarding your FCC Form 486, it means you appear to have missed the deadline to certify based on the service start date reported on the FCC Form 471.
- USAC delivers this letter in your **News** Feed within the E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC).
- Applicants have 15 days from the date of the letter to submit and certify the FCC Form 486 without penalty (if the service start date reported on the FCC Form 471 was the actual service start date).

19
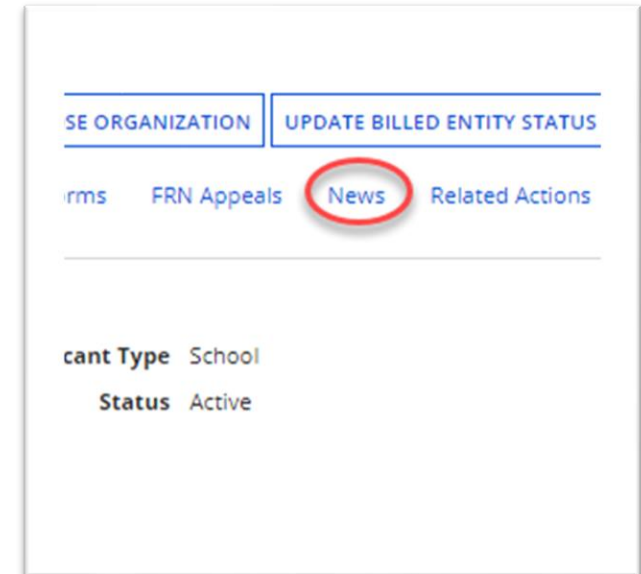
Children's Internet Protection Act

Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA)

- Schools and libraries must enforce safety measures preventing minors from accessing obscene content on the Internet.

- Schools and libraries must <u>maintain documentation</u> demonstrating CIPA compliance for all funding years.

  - In the first and second year of participation in the E-Rate program, you may show work **toward** CIPA compliance, but by the third year, your documentation must show full compliance.

- To be CIPA compliant, you must have the following:

  - Internet Safety Policy

  - Technology Protection Measure/Public Notice

  - Public Notice and Hearing or Meeting

CIPA: Internet Safety Policy

- The Internet Safety Policy must address:

  - Minors' access to inappropriate subject matter on the Internet and World Wide Web;

  - The safety and security of minors when using electronic mail, chat rooms, and other forms of direct electronic communication;

  - Unauthorized access, including hacking and other unlawful activities by minors online;

  - Unauthorized disclosure, use, and dissemination of personal information regarding minors; and

  - Measures designed to restrict minors' access to information and subject matter that is harmful to minors.

CIPA: Internet Safety Policy

- **Additional requirements for schools**:
  - Must also include monitoring online activities of minors.
  - Must educate minors about appropriate online behavior, including:
    - Interacting with other individuals on social networking websites and in chat rooms.
    - Cyberbullying awareness and response.

CIPA: Technology Protection Measure (e.g., Internet Filter)

A technology protection measure blocks or filters internet access.

- Entities must enforce the technology protection measure on their computers with Internet access.
- The school or library administrator may authorize disabling the Internet filter during use by an adult to enable access for bona fide research or other lawful purposes.
- The local community (school board, local educational agency, library, or other authority) decides what content is inappropriate for minors.

CIPA: Internet Safety Policy - Public Notice

- You must provide **public notice** and hold at least **one public hearing or meeting** to address the Internet safety policy.

- For private schools, public notice means notice to your constituent group.

- Additional meetings are not necessary – even if the policy is amended – unless those meetings are required by state, local rules, or by the policy itself.

Retain CIPA Documentation

Entities must keep records:

- Schools and libraries must <u>maintain documentation</u> demonstrating CIPA compliance.
- In addition, maintain a copy of your Internet safety policy, along with any updates to your policy.
- <u>Documentation</u> of the policy's adoption. For example, approval in the minutes of the required hearing or meeting or documented adoption by a school or library board.

Document for Technology Protection Measure

- A description of the filter.

- A report or other relevant documentation on the school's or library's use of their Internet filter.

- The documentation must show that the Internet filter was installed and functioning properly during the funding year in which the entity was CIPA-compliant.

  - If the filter is provided by service provider, the school could provide **archived Internet access reports** of internet sites blocked or bills from the service provider verifying the filter was fully functional.

  - If the school purchased its own filter, they must **provide logs from their IT staff** showing hours the filter was in use.

CIPA: Documentation for Public Notice and Hearing

Documentation that the school or library gave public notice and held a public hearing or meeting on the policy, for example:

- A copy of a website announcement for a regular school or library board meeting open to the public where the policy was discussed.

- An advertisement in a local newspaper of a county government hearing or meeting where the policy appeared as an agenda item.

- Copy of the minutes of the hearing or meeting and the date on which the hearing or meeting occurred.

Case Studies

Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA)

My two funding requests (FRNs) were funded for **internal connections and telecommunications services** . On my FCC Form 486, I selected the option indicating **CIPA does not apply** because the recipients of service represented by the FRNs on this FCC Form 486 are receiving discount services for telecommunications services.

Question:

Did I select correctly?

Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA)

My two funding requests (FRNs) were funded for internal connections and telecommunications services. On my FCC Form 486, I selected the option indicating CIPA does not apply because the recipients of service represented by the FRNs on this FCC Form 486 are receiving discount services for telecommunications services.

Question:

Did I select correctly?

Answer:

No, CIPA is required because there is a request for internal connections.

Service Delivery Deadline

You received your FCDL on July 2, 2023 for an FY2023 application for internal connections with a service delivery deadline of September 30, 2024.

Question:
On November 22, 2024, if services have not fully been delivered/installed, can you still file and **receive an approval** of your FY2023 service delivery extension request?

Service Delivery Deadline

You received your FCDL on July 2, 2023 for an FY2023 application for internal connections with a service delivery deadline of September 30, 2024.

Question:
On November 22, 2024, if services have not fully been delivered/installed, can you still file and receive an approval on your FY2023 service delivery extension request?

Answer:
You will not be eligible for a service delivery extension because you missed your service delivery deadline. You cannot request service delivery extensions after the deadline.

SPIN Changes

SPIN Changes

An applicant may change their service provider for one or more funding requests by requesting a Service Provider Identification Number (**SPIN) Change**.

- An **Operational SPIN Change** is a decision made by the applicant to change their service provider. Some restrictions may apply.

- A **Corrective SPIN Change** is when a service provider corrects data entry error or reflects a merger or acquisition. Applicants can use a corrective SPIN change to correct data entry errors.

When a SPIN Change is Necessary

- In some cases, applicants are required to update their service provider information on their FCC Form 471 after services have started.

- If **the same service provider will be doing the work**, and you're only correcting the ID number:
    - If you have not received an FCDL, complete a Receipt Acknowledgment Letter (RAL) Modification and correct it with your PIA reviewer.
    - If you have already received an FCDL, submit a SPIN Change request in the E-Rate Productivity Center.
    - We call this a "Corrective SPIN Change."

- If **a different service provider will be doing the work**,
    - Request the update with a Corrective or Operational SPIN change depending on the reason for the change.
    - You can only request this after the you receive a commitment.
    - Applicants may appeal if they disagree with USAC's decision.

Corrective SPIN Changes

- Corrective SPIN Changes include:
  - Data entry errors
  - Mergers and acquisitions
  - Other changes not initiated by the applicant
- When to file:
  - File your request **on or before the last date to invoice**.
  - Service providers can initiate these requests due to a merger, acquisition, or consolidation.
  - Corrective SPIN changes **can also be made before commitment** by filing a Receipt Acknowledgement Letter (RAL) modification or by notifying your Program Integrity Assurance (PIA) reviewer.

Operational SPIN Changes

- Operational SPIN changes can be requested as soon as you are aware of the need for a change and under the following conditions:
    - If they are allowed under state and local procurement rules.
    - If they are allowed under the terms of the contract between the applicant and the original service provider.
    - If you have notified the original service provider of your intent to change SPINs.
    - If the reason to change is recognized by program rules as legitimate (e.g., breach of contract, unable to provide service, but NOT simply lower price).
    - The new service provider must be the runner-up in your original bid evaluation process.
- When to file:
    - File your request after your FCDL is issued and **on or before your last date to invoice**.

Update Equipment and Services

Update Equipment and Services

- **Services invoiced to E-Rate must match your Funding Commitment Decision Letter (FCDL).**
  - Invoices must be for the specific equipment and services, at contracted rates not to exceed the quantities and rates approved on your FCC Form 471, for the approved Recipients of Service (ROS).
- Fix a discrepancy discovered **after the issuance of the funding commitment** with a Service Substitution or an FCC Form 500.

- The substituted equipment and services:
  - Must have the same functionality as equipment and services approved on the original FCC Form 471.
  - Must not violate any contract provisions or state or local procurement laws.
  - Must not result in an increase in the percentage of ineligible equipment, services or functions.
  - Must be within the scope of the establishing FCC Form 470, including any request for proposal (RFP) documents for the original equipment and services.

Equipment & Service Substitution Requests

- Filing an Equipment & Service Substitution Request DOES NOT increase the funding commitment:
  - Equipment & Service Substitutions may result in a change in the pre-discount price for the supported service
  - E-Rate program **funding will be based on** either:
    - The pre-discount price of the equipment or service for which support was originally requested, or
    - The pre-discount price of the new, substituted equipment or service **whichever is lower**.

Service Substitutions

When to file:

- If the applicant needs to make a change to equipment or services, Service Substitutions can be filed **after** USAC has issued the FCDL.

  - **For example:** The original bandwidth changed from 50 MB to 500 MB as reflected in the actual contract.

- Service Substitutions **must be submitted before the Service Delivery Deadline (SDD)**. The request should include a detailed narrative explaining the need.

Adjust Approved Funding

Adjusting Approved Funding

- Use an <u>FCC Form 500</u> to request specific changes to your funding commitments after USAC issues your Funding Commitment Decision Letter, such as:
  - Modifying the Contract Expiration Date (CED) listed on your FCC Form 471.
  - Changing the Service Start Date (SSD) listed on your FCC Form 486.
  - Requesting an extension of the Service Delivery Deadline (SDD) for non-recurring (one-time) services.
  - Canceling or reducing funding.
    - If you do not use all of your Category Two funding commitment, you can submit an FCC Form 500 to return unused committed funds on existing FRNs to your Category Two budget.
- The FCC Form 500 should be filed as soon as they are aware of new circumstances requiring adjustment to their FRN(s) and must be filed before the SDD

Returning Unused Funding to the C2 Budget

- As we approach the end of the Five-Year Category Two Budget Cycle in Funding Year 2025, applicants should check if they have any unused C2 funding from previous funding years in the cycle.
    - Use the <u>E-Rate FRN Invoice Deadline Tool</u> to identify committed funds for the current C2 budget cycle but weren't disbursed.
    - File the <u>FCC Form 500</u> to return unused funds to the C2 budget for use in FY2025.
- View the <u>FY2021-2025 Category Two (C2) Budget Management Guide</u> for more information.

Post-Commitment Adjustments

Receive Notifications of Post-Commitment Decisions

- Post-commitment decisions are communicated through the Revised Funding Commitment Decision Letter (RFCDL) in EPC, including decisions for:
  - Appeals
  - Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN) Changes
  - Equipment and Service Substitutions
  - FCC Forms 500

- For Funding Year 2015 and previous funding years:
  - Paper letters for appeal decisions and FCC Forms 500
  - Email notifications for SPIN changes and service substitutions

Appeal a USAC Decision

When to File an Appeal

- If you disagree with a USAC decision, you have 60 days from the date of that decision to request a **review of the decision**. This request is called an <u>appeal</u>.

  - File your appeal in the E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC).

  - To appeal a decision from 2015 or prior, create a customer service case in EPC, or you may submit an appeal directly to <u>Appeals@usac.org</u>.

Include Pertinent Information in Your Appeal

- Applicant's billed entity number (BEN) or Service Provider's SPIN

- Contact information including name, address, telephone number, and email address of the person who can discuss the appeal with USAC in detail

- Nickname for the appeal (to help you identify the appeal)

- Funding year of the decision being appealed

- Funding Request Numbers associated with the appeal

Include Pertinent Information in Your Appeal (cont.)

- A narrative that explains precisely the USAC decision(s) being appealed and what specific relief is being sought.

- Documentation of USAC's decision (e.g., a copy of USAC's decision letter).

- Supporting documentation such as forms and previous correspondence.

- If USAC requests additional information, please respond promptly. If you fail to submit missing information to USAC within the time prescribed, USAC will review the appeal with the information available, which may result in the denial of the appeal.

Granting Appeals

- USAC grants appeals under the following limited circumstances:
    - When the appeal makes clear that USAC made an error in its initial review (for example, the PIA reviewer made an error).
    - You provide USAC with new information and/or documentation it did not provide when the original request was made.
    - When USAC receives a policy clarification, or a new policy impacts the original decision.
- If you are seeking a waiver of an FCC rule, you must file a waiver directly with the FCC.
    - For example, requests to consider FCC Forms 471 filed after the window closed must be directed to the FCC as a window waiver request.

You Will Be Notified of Your Appeal Status

- After filing an appeal, USAC issues an **Appeal Confirmation Letter**.

- If an appeal reviewer has questions or requires additional information, they will reach out through the E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC).

- USAC issues its appeal decision in a Revised Funding Commitment Decision Letter (RFCDL).

- If USAC denies the appeal, you may file an appeal with the FCC.

Commitment Adjustments and Recoveries

Causes for Commitment Adjustments and Recoveries

USAC conducts the following types of reviews that may result in an adjustment to an applicant's commitment or monetary recovery from the applicant and/or service provider:

- Audits

- Payment Quality Assurance (PQA)

- Invoicing

- Appeals

- Heightened Scrutiny

- Program Integrity Assurance (PIA)

Commitment Adjustments and Recoveries

- As a result of these reviews/audits, USAC may discover that certain funds were committed and/or disbursed in error.

- The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) requires USAC to rescind commitments and recover funding that has been improperly disbursed.

- USAC refers to this process as the Commitment Adjustment or "COMAD" process.

- Commitment Adjustment (COMAD) Letter and Recovery of Improperly Disbursed Funds (RIDF) letter are issued with all relevant details of the review/audit that resulted in the adjustment to the applicant's commitment or request to return program funds.

- If a COMAD action is necessary, a COMAD or RIDF letter will be issued to the applicant and/or service provider.

How to resolve a Commitment Adjustment (COMAD)

- When a **Commitment Adjustment (COMAD)** letter is issued, but no funds have been disbursed, no monetary recovery is being sought by USAC, and the applicant does not need to take further action.

- When a **Commitment Adjustment (COMAD) with Monetary Recovery** letter is issued, the applicant and/or service should return the program funds requested in the letter.

- When a **Recovery of Improperly Disbursed Funds (RIDF)** letter is issued, the applicant and/or servicer provider should return the program funds.

- If you do not agree with the recovery letter received, you have 60 days to appeal the decision to USAC.

Commitment Adjustment/Recoveries

What happens if no action is taken when the recovery letter is received?

- A Demand Payment Letter will be issued, creating a debt.

- If payment is not made in response to the two demand payment letters, the responsible party will go on Red Light status.

  - All pending applications will be held.

  - All invoices submitted will be held and/or subject to rejection.

  - Applicant/Service provider will not be able to participate in E-Rate or ECF, or the other universal service programs, including the Schools and Libraries Cybersecurity Pilot Program, until the debt is resolved.

  - Debt will be sent to the U.S. Treasury for collection.

Document Retention Requirement

Applicants and service providers are required to keep records relating to the application for, receipt, and the delivery of supported services and equipment for 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.

TIP: In your personal record keeping, use file names and folder names that are specific and descriptive to locate them more easily.

Learn more on the Document Retention page where you can view a list of each type of document to retain for each step in the E-Rate process.

Resources

On the USAC website, you can find detailed information on these topics:

- FCC Form 486 Filing

- Changes

- Service Substitutions

- FCC Form 500

- Appeals

- Service Provider Webinar

- E-Rate Program Overview Webinar Slide Deck

Learn more about the E-Rate program

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Account Administrator and Updating User Permissions

EPC User Permissions: Reminders

- Each Applicant and Service Provider Account administrator is responsible for maintaining access for their EPC users for all E-Rate forms.

- Account administrators manage EPC permissions for all users, **including themselves**. Without the proper permissions, your forms may be delayed or denied.

- Reach out to your Account Administrator if you have any questions about your access in EPC or believe a change needs to be made to your EPC security profile.

- E-Rate EPC Users can find their Account Administrator by selecting "Related Actions" then selecting "Modify Account Administrator".

- Users with partial permissions in EPC can generate and fill out forms, but **only** full rights users can certify completed forms.

Account Administrators: Updating EPC User Permissions

- Select "Manage User Permissions" on the EPC homepage.

- Select the appropriate level of permissions for each user per category.

- By default, service provider profiles have invoicing and FCC Form 473 permissions set to "View Only".

- Their Account Administrator **must** change at least one user, including themselves, to "full rights" to file and certify each form type.

User permissions for a **Service Provider** profile:

Apply All	Invoice Permission	Form 473 Permission	Post-Commitment Permission	Appeals Permission
	View Only	View Only	View Only	View Only

SUBMIT

User permissions for an **Applicant** profile:

Apply All	470 Permission	471 Permission	BEAR/472 Permission	498 Permission	Post-Commitment Permission	486 Permission	Appeals Permission
	Full	Full	Full	School or Library Official	Full	Full	Full
	Full	Full	Full	No Access	Full	Full	Full

63

Live Q&A

- Submit your questions about today's topics:
  - FCC Form 471 Review Process
  - Preparing for a PIA Review
  - PIA Inquiries
  - Selective Review
  - Funding Commitment Decision Letters
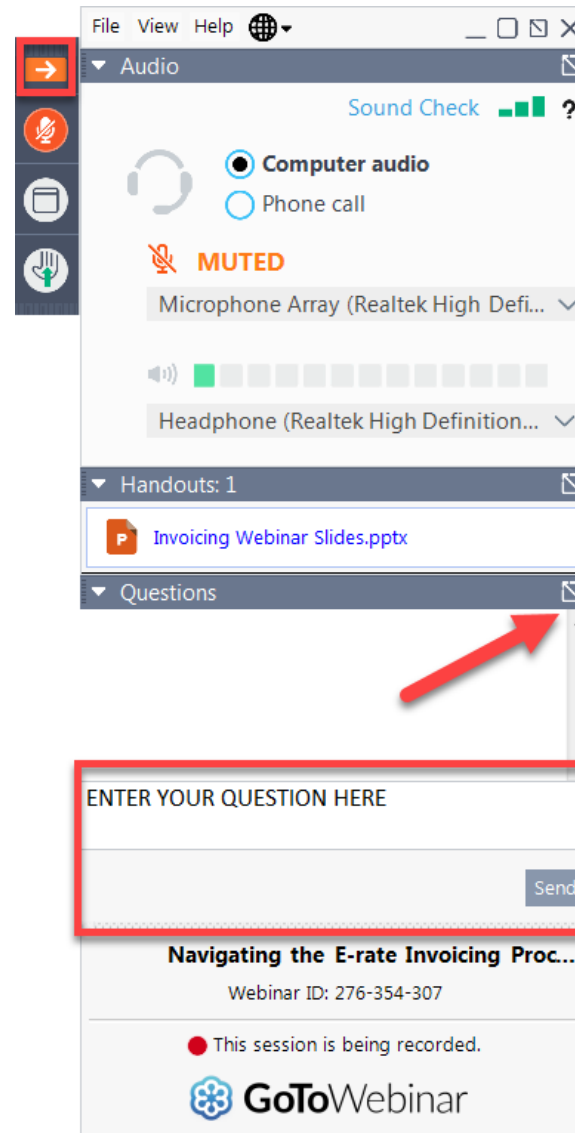
Q&A Tips

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✓ Write in full sentences.

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Questions?

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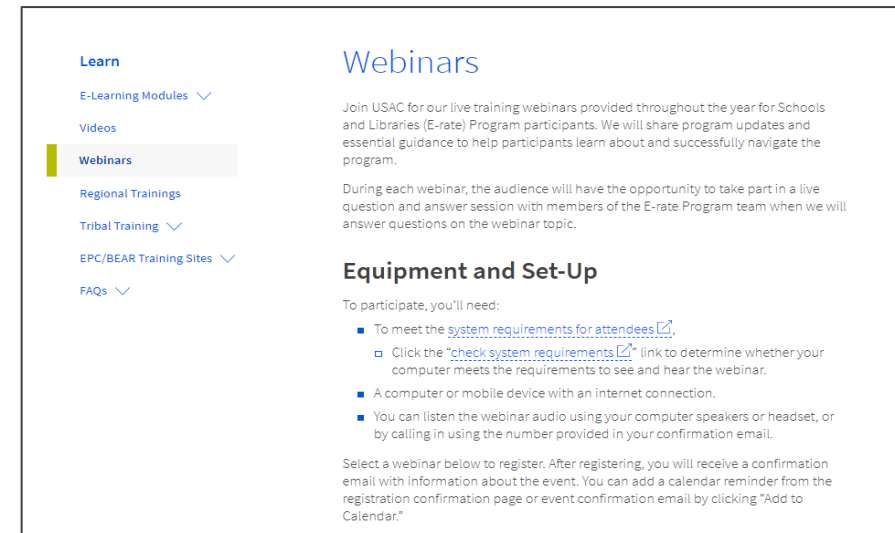
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2. Select the **Contact Us** link from the upper right menu on your landing page.

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- If you are not able to complete the survey today, one will be

  emailed to you within one to two business days.

- We appreciate your feedback!

Thank You!