



E-Rate News Brief

December 15, 2023

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E-Rate News:

- The FCC Wireline Communications Bureau (WCB) released the Funding Year (FY) 2024 Eligible Services List (ESL) on December 15, 2023 and the **FY2024 FCC Form 471** Filing Window Opens on **January 17, 2024**. More information on these topics can be found below in this News Brief.
- The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is seeking comment ([FCC 23-91](#)) on proposals to allow eligible schools and libraries to receive E-Rate support for Wi-Fi hotspots and to allow wireless Internet services that can be used off-premises. The FCC is also seeking comment on related issues such as the applicability of the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) requirements and whether, if other services are made eligible, E-Rate funding would remain available for its primary purpose of providing connectivity to schools and libraries. **Comments are due in WC Docket No. 21-31 by January 8, 2024. Reply comments are due by January 22, 2024.**

Funding Year (FY) 2024 FCC Form 471 Filing Window Opens January 17, 2024

The Funding Year (FY) 2024 FCC Form 471 application **filing window will open on Wednesday, January 17, 2024**, at noon ET and **will close on Wednesday, March 27, 2024**, at 11:59 p.m. ET. In addition, the E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC) Administrative Window will close, Friday, January 12, 2024.

Wednesday, February 28, 2024 is the last date that you can submit and certify an FCC Form 470 and still wait the required minimum 28-day period before submitting and certifying your FCC Form 471 by March 27, 2024, the last date of the FY2024 application filing window.

Don't forget to update your E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC) profiles. All applicants can now review their profiles and make any additional updates for changes that occurred after USAC's review of their Funding Year (FY) 2023 FCC Forms 471. As in the past, the [EPC administrative window](#) to update profiles will close – and the applicant profiles will be locked – on **January 12, 2024** before the FY2024 application filing window opens January 17, 2024. View the EPC Administrative Window [webinar slides](#) to learn more.

Funding Year (FY) 2024 Eligible Services List Released December 15

The FCC Wireline Communications Bureau (WCB) released the Funding Year (FY) 2024 Eligible Services List (ESL) on December 15, 2023. You can review the 2024 ESL on the [Eligible Services List page](#) to learn which services are eligible for E-Rate discounts for the upcoming funding year.

WCB adopted minor changes to the FY2024 ESL, clarifying that the software necessary to operate or maintain Category One network equipment is eligible for E-Rate support and that consulting fees not related to the installation and configuration of eligible components are ineligible for E-Rate support. In addition, WCB addressed a number of items that the Commission directed the Bureau to seek comment on and related to Commission's Declaratory Ruling ([FCC 23-84](#)) finding that the use of Wi-Fi, or other similar access point technologies, on school buses is an educational purpose, and the provision of such service, including the equipment needed to provide such service, is eligible for E-Rate support. Pursuant to the Declaratory Ruling, these services and the equipment needed to enable them are eligible for funding beginning in FY2024 (see below for information on how to apply for funding).

How to Apply for Wi-Fi on School Buses in FY2024

As noted above, pursuant to FCC 23-84, the FCC made equipment and services for Wi-Fi, and other similar access technologies, on school buses eligible in the [FY2024 eligible services list \(ESL\)](#). Below, we provide information on how to competitively bid for equipment and services for Wi-Fi on school buses, how to complete the FCC Form 470 to seek bids for the equipment and services, and how to submit these funding requests on the FCC Form 471. USAC will continue to provide guidance regarding requesting and applying for Wi-Fi on school buses in future E-Rate News Briefs.

As a reminder, the FY2024 FCC Form 471 filing window will open January 17, 2024 at noon E.T. and will close March 27, 2024 at 11:59 p.m. E.T. The last day to file an FCC Form 470 for the FY2024 FCC Form 471 application filing period and meet the required 28-day waiting period is **February 28, 2024**.

Filing the FCC Form 470

Applicants may request E-Rate funding for wireless Internet service and equipment needed to provide Wi-Fi on school buses using the current FY2024 FCC Form 470. The form has not changed since USAC posted it on its website in July 2023, and we are providing instructions in order for (1) applicants to use existing drop downs to seek bids and (2) service providers to find such requests. The FCC E-Rate rules remain the same for competitive bidding and for submitting the FCC Form 470, which identifies requested equipment and services, including Wi-Fi on buses. The applicant must select the most cost-effective provider(s) based on its bid evaluation factors with price of the eligible equipment and services being the primary bid factor, and adhere to the 28-day competitive bidding waiting period.

To request bids for either services only or services and equipment to provide Wi-Fi on school buses on the FCC Form 470, select "Category 1 — Data Transmission and/or Internet Access" in the **Service Requests** section under **Category(s) of Service**.

For FY2024, due to system settings, EPC will require you to upload a Request for Proposal (RFP) document for this service selection so be sure to select YES under RFPs for Service Requests. You are not required to provide an RFP pursuant to the FCC rules, but you will need to upload a document to be able to certify and submit your FCC Form 470 in EPC. You may use this document upload feature to include basic information needed for a vendor to provide a response to your request for wireless school bus service and/or equipment, including the number of buses being outfitted or whether the applicant is seeking service only for existing equipment. You are also strongly encouraged to provide geographic location/route information of the buses along with the service requirements for the bus route(s). This should help mitigate service area limitations that may be vendor specific. Please follow the same guidance provided in the [FCC Form 470 FY2022-FY2024 User Guide](#).

Here are several key data points you should provide as you complete your FCC Form 470 for this newly eligible service, as well as step-by-step guidance on how to request bids:

- **Narrative:** "Applicant seeks bids for wireless school bus service and (if applicable) associated equipment to make the service functional to provide Wi-Fi. Reference the associated "RFP" document for additional information." You can insert additional text to this as needed for your situation.
- **Add New Service Request.** When you create your new service request, you will need to select the following EPC Guiding Statements in sequential order:
 - I seek bids for internet access and/or data transmission service.
 - I seek bids for Internet access and data transmission service (provided over any combination of transmission medium, e.g., fiber-only networks, fiber/non-fiber hybrid networks, or non-fiber networks such as cable, DSL, copper, satellite, or microwave).
 - I seek bids for data plans or wireless adapters (Air Cards) for mobile devices for commercial wireless service for a school or library that does not have an existing broadband internal connections.

After you select the guiding statements, you will fill in the details such as the quantity (i.e., the number of bus Wi-Fi connections) and entities (e.g., must be School District, Individual School, and Consortium with at least one school member) receiving these services, minimum and maximum capacity, and whether you are also seeking equipment, installation, activation, or initial configuration of the service.

Once the FCC Form 470 and document(s) with additional detail about your school bus Wi-Fi request are posted, you must wait the required 28-day waiting period before selecting service provider(s) and entering into contract(s).

Filing the FCC Form 471

After waiting 28 days and selecting the most cost-effective service provider(s), the next step is to submit and certify the [FCC Form 471](#) during the upcoming FY2024 application filing window. USAC is working on making updates to the FCC Form 471 that will allow applicants to apply for Wireless School Bus Service.

Once the form becomes available, and to make FCC Form 471 submission and review of school bus Wi-Fi funding requests easier, USAC also recommends that:

- You submit a separate FCC Form 471 for Wireless School Bus Services.
- You submit a separate funding request for each contract or vendor for these services.
- You use "School Bus Wi-Fi" or similar name as the FCC Form 471 nickname.
- You list all schools as recipients of service that will be served by the buses.
- You clearly explain the number of buses on your request in the FRN Narrative.

We will provide additional details on how to complete your FY2024 FCC Form 471 funding application in the next issue of the E-Rate News Brief.

Funding Year (FY) 2023 Commitments

FY2023. USAC released FY2023 Wave 34 Funding Commitment Decision Letters (FCDLs) on December 14. As of December 15, FY2023 commitments total over \$2.45 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).

Adjusting Your Category Two Budget

The current five-year Category Two (C2) budget cycle began in FY2021 and goes through FY2025. Your C2 budget is determined when the first C2 FCC Form 471 in the budget cycle is certified. In the event that your student count has increased, you may request to update your C2 budget in any subsequent year of the budget cycle, but you are not required to do so. Libraries may also update their square footage information if it should increase. This update based on the new student count is referred to as a "replacement C2 budget" request by USAC.

You can request to update your C2 budgets in EPC during the EPC administrative window, which closes January 12, 2024, and during the FCC Form 471 application filing window up until the budgeted entity's first C2 FCC Form 471 for that funding year is certified. If you do not request an adjustment, the C2 budget will remain fixed. You can access the EPC Administrative Window webinar, which contains information about changes that can be made in EPC during this window, through the **Learn** page. The Administrative Window [webinar slides](#) also provide information on how to request a replacement C2 budget in EPC. We also have a short [video](#) that demonstrates the process. Go to the [C2 Budget](#) page to learn more about the EPC administrative window and requesting changes to your existing C2 budget.

The [Category Two \(C2\) budget tool](#) provides data on the FY2021-FY2025 C2 budget cycle if you want to view your C2 budget information. It is available on the [Tools](#) page along with a [video](#) on how to use the tool.

Customer Service Center Holiday Hours

The Customer Service Center (CSC) provides customer service across USAC programs with specialized agents trained to answer your E-Rate program questions. At the end of December, CSC will be reducing its open hours around the Christmas and New Year's holidays.

CSC will be open during its customary hours through Friday, December 22 (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET).

CSC, however, will be closed over the next two weeks on:

- Monday, December 25, 2023 - CLOSED
- Monday, January 2, 2024 - CLOSED

CSC will resume its customary hours starting at 8:00 a.m. ET on Tuesday, January 2, 2024.

Winter Deferral Period Starts December 22

Many E-Rate program participants are unavailable during the winter holiday season, and USAC recognizes that participants may need additional time to respond to requests for information. Winter deferral extends from the Friday before Christmas Day through the Friday following New Year's Day.

During our annual winter deferral period - **Friday, December 22, 2023 through Friday, January 5, 2024** - USAC will only continue reviews of forms and requests where documentation was received or where participants respond to information requests sent in the E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC).

If USAC does not receive a response during this period, the form or request will be placed in a deferred status until January 8, 2024. However, we will be reviewing applications during the winter deferral period if we have answers to our questions. For those of you who can respond to our questions, please do so. This will allow us to continue reviewing applications and issue funding decisions more quickly.

EPC Invoicing Tips

- **Review your invoicing permissions in the E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC).** If you cannot see your user permissions, contact the Account Administrator for your entity. Use the [Entity Search Tool](#) to find your Account Administrator and confirm your EPC invoicing access is available prior to invoicing. You may have to search at the Billed Entity level to find your administrator. Applicants, view the [BEAR User Permissions video](#). Service providers, view the [Service Provider User Permissions video](#).
- **Update BEAR User Permissions.** Applicants that will invoice E-Rate via the BEAR form (FCC Form 472) in EPC will need to ensure that their users have the appropriate permissions to view, prepare, submit, and certify the forms. BEAR submissions are now made in EPC. The Account Administrator can manage its entity's users and any consultant users from the **Manage User Permissions** screen. To grant a user BEAR Form permissions, the Account Administrator can assign rights under the BEAR/472 Permission column.
- **Use the [E-Rate Invoicing Requirements Filing Guide](#) to submit your invoice in EPC.** The guide provides the list of requirements for successful invoicing in EPC, and where to check – in either EPC or Open Data – if you've met those requirements. You can learn how to determine if a funding request (FRN) has been committed and is available for invoicing, if the FCC Form 486 for the FRN was approved, if the service provider filed the FCC Form 473/SPAC for a particular funding year, and more.

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