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Funding Status for E-Rate and ECF

E-Rate for FY 2023:

USAC issued Wave 25 for FY 2023 on Thursday, October 12th, for \$21.5 million, none for North Carolina. Total funding is now \$2.25 billion including \$81.2 million for North Carolina. At this point, USAC has funded 87.1% of the originally submitted applications representing 82.6% of the dollars requested.

ECF for 2021-2023:

Total commitments for all three ECF windows are at \$6.47 billion including \$191 million for North Carolina. USAC has now funded 97.9% of submitted applications.

USAC Training for FY 2024

For the first time since the COVID pandemic, USAC held a full day, in-person E-rate workshop in Washington DC last week for over a hundred applicants, consultants, service providers, and state coordinators. The following presentation decks from the workshop are available online at:

- [EPC Administrative Window](#)
- [FCC Form 470 and Competitive Bidding](#)
- [FCC Form 471 Applying for Services](#)
- [E-Rate Invoicing](#)
- [E-Rate Eligible Services](#)

The traditional E-rate training topics — Form 470, Form 471, eligible services, etc. — were all covered in detail. Most useful to the more experienced participants were the topics dealing with changes expected for FY 2024, most importantly:

- Urban/rural designations will be updated based on the 2020 census. USAC will be updating EPC entity profiles to reflect the changes before the opening of the

Administrative Window on October 24th. This is expected to affect, positively or negatively, a modest number of entities with existing discount rates below 80%. Consortia, with members at discount rates below this level may also be affected.

- The maximum Category 2 discount for Tribal libraries will increase from 85% to 90% and the minimum Category 2 budget for Tribal libraries will increase from \$25,000 to \$55,000.
- Libraries, but not schools, will be exempt from competitive bidding requirements (including the need to file Form 470s) for Category 2 purchases aggregating \$3,600 per year per branch.
- Applicants filing for internet services (not WAN services) that are at least 90% eligible will no longer have to allocate out the ineligible portion. This may prove particularly useful, for example, in those states in which pre-K students or facilities are deemed ineligible. (Note: This is not the case in North Carolina where both pre-K and Head Start facilities and students are eligible.)
- Applicants and service providers creating or updated Form 498s will be required to have a UEI number and a current SAM.gov registration.
- The FY 2024 Eligible Services List contains minor clarifications on Category 1 software and the ineligibility of project management consulting fees. A more significant change, if approved by the FCC in this week's October 19th open meeting, will be the new eligibility of Wi-Fi equipment and services on school buses.
- Effective November 7, 2023, as discussed in the News Brief section below, BEAR and SPI invoice processing will transition from USAC's legacy invoicing system into EPC.

We have an interesting year ahead of us. Please take advantage of all training opportunities available.

Updates and Reminders

Upcoming Dates:

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| October 18 | Next USAC webinar for applicants and service providers covering the new EPC-based invoicing systems (see News Brief article below). |
| October 19 | FCC open Commission meeting to include consideration of a Declaratory Ruling to allow E-rate funding for Wi-Fi on school buses (see our newsletter of October 2nd). |
| October 23 | Due date for reply comments on the FCC's Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking portion of (FCC 23-56) regarding additional rule changes to simplify E-rate. |
| October 24 | Opening of the EPC administrative window to allow applicants to update entity profiles (including student counts and NSLP percentages) in advance of the FY 2024 application window. USAC will close the administrative window shortly before the Form 471 application window opens in mid-January at which point EPC entity profiles will be locked during the window. |

- October 24 Nominations are due for six positions, including one school representative, on the USAC Board of Directors (see [DA 23-753](#)).
- October 26 Due date for reply comments on the FCC’s Draft Eligible Services List for FY 2024 ([DA 23-819](#)).
- October 30 E-rate invoice deadline for FY 2022 recurring services. (Note: October 28th, the normal invoice deadline, falls on a Saturday this year.) This is also the deadline for requesting an invoice deadline extension for the same FRNs.
- October 30 ECF invoice deadline for most Window 1 and Window 2 committed FRNs with service delivery deadlines of June 30, 2023. For details on other upcoming invoice deadlines, see USAC’s [Emergency Connectivity Fund Invoice Deadline Tool](#).
- October 30 First Form 486 deadline for FY 2023, for FCDLs issued on or before July 1st (i.e., Waves 1-9).

More generally, the Form 486 deadline is 120 days from the FCDL date or from the service start date (typically July 1st), whichever is later. The Form 486 deadline for FCDL’s issued in Wave 10 would normally have been November 3rd (now probably November 7th as result of the EPC shutdown through November 6th).
- November 3 – USAC [announced](#) that EPC will be unavailable to all users from November 3rd at 11:59 p.m. through November 7th at 9:00 a.m. as the FCC transitions the BEAR invoice filing process from its old legacy system into EPC.
November 7

Reminder: Once this transition is complete, Account Administrators should review the BEAR filing permissions in EPC to make sure that the correct BEAR filer(s) is authorized. Last December, USAC carried legacy system permissions into EPC, but any new BEAR permissions established in the legacy system so far in 2023 will have to be reestablished in EPC.
- November 7 Second three-day E-rate “Boot Camp” run by NCDPI to be held in the Research Triangle ([registration](#)).
- November 10 Revised due date ([DA 23-852](#)) for reply comments on the FCC’s Notice of Proposed Rulemaking ([FCC 23-65](#)) on cybersecurity labeling for internet devices (see our [newsletter of August 14th](#)).
- November 20 Nominations are due for a Tribal Board member on the USAC Board of Directors (see [DA 23-903](#)).

Funds For Learning’s 13th Annual E-Rate Survey:

Earlier this year, as has been our practice, we encouraged all of our readers to participate in an annual E-rate survey conducted by Funds For Learning (“FFL”) (see our [newsletter of June 19th](#)). Now in their thirteenth year, these surveys are an important source of information for Congress, the FCC, and USAC to help them evaluate the E-rate program. FFL’s 13th Annual 2023 E-rate Trends Report was released last week (available upon [request](#)). The report is based on responses from more than 2,100 applicants representing roughly 10% of the number of E-rate applicants nationwide.

Three key takeaways from the survey are:

- More than 885 of the respondents recognize the benefits of the E-rate program with 95% considering E-rate funding to be critical to their organization’s internet connectivity goals.
- Not surprisingly, the greatest need for additional E-rate support is cybersecurity equipment and services to secure digital learning environments. We hope (and expect) the FCC to take modest steps in this direction in the near future.
- Many respondents expressed concerns about the program’s complexities and inefficiencies. The FCC’s current proceeding on E-Rate simplification (see our [newsletter of October 2nd](#)) could address many of these concerns.

Broadband Consumer Labels:

Last week, the FCC [announced](#) the date(s) by which consumers will see new Broadband Consumer Labels when they shop for internet services. The new rules will require broadband providers to display, online or in-stores, easy-to-understand, and accurate information about the cost and performance of their broadband services. For most internet providers, these rules ([DA 23-943](#)) will take effect April 10, 2024.

As discussed in our [newsletter of March 20th](#), the new labeling requirement will apply only to individual consumers, not to E-rate type services provided to schools and libraries. The FCC has indicated, however, its belief that “the labels could provide benefits in terms of enforcing E-Rate...rules, such as requirements to offer rates and terms that are comparable to the best available offer to non-Universal Service Fund (USF) recipients, or for purposes of making comparisons between rural and urban rates, or the like.”

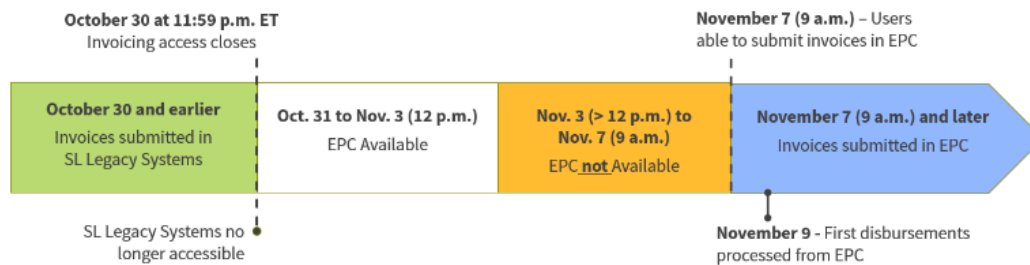
For internet services, the FCC has proposed — much like nutrition labels on food products — the following template:

Broadband Facts	
Provider Name	
Service Plan Name and/or Speed Tier	
<small>Fixed or Mobile Broadband Consumer Disclosure</small>	
Monthly Price	(\$)
<small>This Monthly Price (is/is not) an introductory rate. (If introductory rate is applicable, identify length of introductory period and the rate that will apply after introductory period concludes)</small>	
<small>This Monthly Price (does not) require(s) a [x year/x month] contract. (Only required if applicable; if so, provide link to terms of contract)</small>	
Additional Charges & Terms	
Provider Monthly Fees <small>(Itemize each fee)</small>	(\$)
One-time Fees at the Time of Purchase <small>(Itemize each fee)</small>	(\$)
Early Termination Fee	(\$)
Government Taxes	<small>Varies by Location</small>
Discounts & Bundles	
<small>Click Here for available billing discounts and pricing options for broadband service bundled with other services like video, phone, and wireless service, and use of your own equipment like modems and routers. (Any links to such discounts and pricing options on the provider's website must be provided in this section.)</small>	
Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)	
<small>The ACP is a government program to help lower the monthly cost of internet service. To learn more about the ACP, including to find out whether you qualify, visit affordableconnectivity.gov.</small>	
Participates in the ACP	(Yes/No)
Speeds Provided with Plan	
Typical Download Speed	() Mbps
Typical Upload Speed	() Mbps
Typical Latency	() ms
Data Included with Monthly Price	
Charges for Additional Data Usage	() GB (\$/GB)
Network Management	Read our Policy
Privacy	Read our Policy
Customer Support	
<small>Contact Us: example.com/support / (555) 555-5555</small>	
<small>Learn more about the terms used on this label by visiting the Federal Communications Commission's Consumer Resource Center. fcc.gov/consumer</small>	
<small>(Unique Plan Identifier Ex: F0005937974123ABC456EMC789)</small>	

USAC E-Rate Special Edition News Brief Dated October 12 – System Transition, cont.

[USAC’s E-Rate Special Edition News Brief Dated October 12, 2023](#), provides additional information on USAC’s plan to transition E-rate (not ECF) invoice processing from its legacy BEAR (and SPI) system into EPC early next month. The key dates to understand are:

- The last day to submit an invoice under the old system is October 30th, the invoice deadline for most FY 2022 recurring services.¹
- The first day to submit an invoice under the new EPC system will be November 7th (9:00 a.m. eastern or later).
- In the interim, EPC itself will not be available November 3-6 (a slightly shorter period than had been initially announced).



The News Brief provides the following information to help both applicants and service providers understand the new EPC invoicing process:

- [Four webinars](#) each for applicants and service providers beginning October 18th.
- Links to the earlier training support webinar held on October 4th.
- An overview of the new EPC system’s dashboard.
- A summary of the new notification system available to applicants and service providers.

¹ An earlier News Brief, dated September 14th, incorrectly showing this invoice deadline as October 31st, has been [revised](#) to show the correct October 30th deadline.

Newsletter information and disclaimer: This newsletter may contain unofficial information on prospective E-rate developments and/or may reflect E-Rate Central's own interpretations of E-rate practices and regulations. Such information is provided for planning and guidance purposes only. It is not meant, in any way, to supplant official announcements and instructions provided by USAC, the FCC, or NCDPI.

Additional North Carolina specific E-rate information is available through our Web site — <http://www.e-ratecentral.com/us/stateInformation.asp?state=NC>. Note that this site provides easy access to formatted North Carolina applicant E-rate histories via the Billed Entity Number ("BEN") search mechanism in the upper left-hand corner. Detailed information can be obtained by "drilling down" using the links for specific funding years and individual FRNs.

If you have received this newsletter from a colleague and you would like to receive your own copy of the North Carolina E-Rate Forum, send an email to join-ncerate@lists.dpi.state.nc.us. Please include your name, organization, telephone, and e-mail address.

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