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Funding Status for E-Rate and ECF

E-Rate for FY 2023:

USAC issued Wave 34 for FY 2023 on Thursday, December 14th, for \$6.46 million, none for North Carolina. Total funding is now \$2.45 billion including \$83.9 million for North Carolina. At this point, USAC has funded 96.7% of the originally submitted applications representing 86.3% of the dollars requested.

ECF for 2021-2023:

A small Wave 38 for Window 3 was also [issued](#) on Thursday, December 14th, for \$458 thousand, none for North Carolina. Total commitments for all three ECF windows are \$6.45 billion including \$192 million for North Carolina.

E-Rate for FY 2024:

The Form 471 filing window for FY 2024 opens on Wednesday, January 17th, at noon EST and will close at 11:59 p.m. EDT on Wednesday, March 27, 2024. The EPC administrative window, which is currently open to allow applicants to update their entity profiles, will close on January 15th. At that point, entity profiles will be locked for the duration of the application window.

ESL for FY 2024 with School Bus Wi-Fi

Late Friday, the FCC released the FY 2024 Eligible Services List (“ESL”) ([DA 23-1171](#)), a necessary step that will allow USAC to open the Form 471 application window as it has traditionally done in mid-January. More importantly this year, the ESL establishes the basic eligibility rules for school bus Wi-Fi including the following:

- Both Wi-Fi equipment (e.g., antennas, routers, modems, and associated installation charges), and wireless internet services will be considered Category 1.
 - By not classifying the equipment as Category 2, applicants will not be required to file separate applications for Category 1 services and Category 2 equipment. It also means that applicants having used most of their Category 2 budgets will not be precluded from filing for bus Wi-Fi.
 - Rural schools can enter into contracts with multiple service providers on their buses to assure coverage over wide areas; urban schools are restricted to using only one provider per bus (but may use different providers on different buses).
 - Maintenance and operation services are deemed ineligible (although the FCC “may revise these eligibility determinations in a future funding year upon further review of the costs associated with these services and equipment”).
- Eligibility applies to school-owned, leased, or contracted school buses.
 - “Services may be reimbursed for all twelve months of the funding year with no discount or premium during the summer months.” “However, applicants may not warehouse equipment or fail to turn on the service for student use during the twelve months.”
 - “Occasionally used chartered buses (e.g., used for school field trips), municipal and city buses generally used for the transport of non-students, and other types of school-owned, leased, or contracted vehicles (e.g., vans and cars)” are not eligible.
- Applicants utilizing bus Wi-Fi will be expected to ensure that the service is used primarily for educational services consistent with E-rate rules.
 - This means implementing “content and user network restrictions consistent with the restrictions that they place on their building-based broadband network, as described in their Acceptable Use Policies (AUPs) and any other policies that limit a school’s network access.
 - General community use “outside of permissible educational purposes” is prohibited and would require Wi-Fi connections to be disabled.
- Funding for Wi-Fi on school buses “remains subject to all existing E-Rate rules and requirements, including those related to competitive bidding, cost allocation, and discounting rules.”

Instructions on the bus Wi-Fi bidding process and forms was left to USAC. Initial filing guidance from USAC was provided on Saturday in the News Brief referenced below. It included the following:

- File a Form 470 to seek competitive bids for either services only or services and equipment to provide Wi-Fi on school buses.
 - Select “Category 1 – Data Transmission and/or Internet Access” in the Service Requests section under Category(s) of Service.
 - In the Narrative section, indicate that the 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.

- To add a new service request, select the following EPC Guiding Statement 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.
- Once the application window is open, and after waiting at least 28 days, file a Form 471. USAC is currently working on updates to the Form 471 that will allow applications for Wireless School Bus Service. USCA recommends that applicants:
 - Submit a separate Form 471 for Wireless School Bus Services.
 - Submit a separate funding request for each contract or vendor for these services.
 - Use “School Bus Wi-Fi” or similar name as the Form 471 nickname.
 - List all schools as recipients of service that will be served by the buses.
 - Clearly explain the number of buses on your request in the FRN Narrative.

USAC indicates that it will provide additional details on how to complete your FY 2024 Form 471 funding application in the next issue of its E-Rate News Brief.

Updates and Reminders

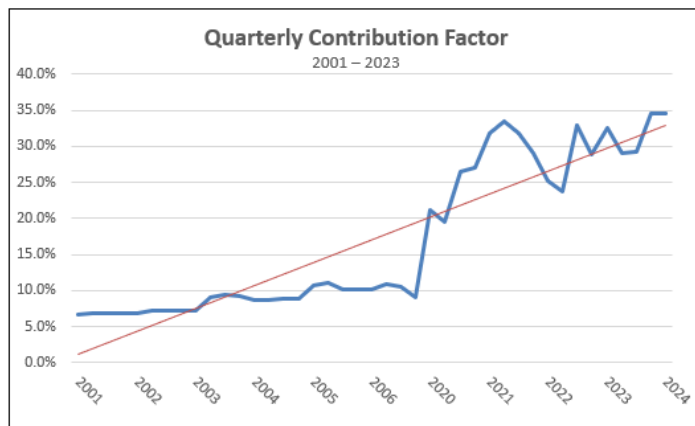
Upcoming Dates:

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|-------------|--|---------|------------|---------|------------|---------|------------|---------|------------|
| December 22 | Start of the winter PIA deferral period. The deferral period extends through Friday, January 8 th . | | | | | | | | |
| December 22 | The Form 486 deadline for FY 2023 Wave 18. More generally, the Form 486 deadline is 120 days from the FCDL date or from the service start date (typically July 1 st), whichever is later. Upcoming Form 486 deadlines are: <table border="0" style="margin-left: 40px;"><tr><td>Wave 19</td><td>12/29/2023</td></tr><tr><td>Wave 20</td><td>01/05/2024</td></tr><tr><td>Wave 21</td><td>01/12/2024</td></tr><tr><td>Wave 22</td><td>01/19/2024</td></tr></table> Applicants missing their Form 486s deadlines should, within the week, received Urgent Reminder Letters from USAC proving a 15-day grace period. | Wave 19 | 12/29/2023 | Wave 20 | 01/05/2024 | Wave 21 | 01/12/2024 | Wave 22 | 01/19/2024 |
| Wave 19 | 12/29/2023 | | | | | | | | |
| Wave 20 | 01/05/2024 | | | | | | | | |
| Wave 21 | 01/12/2024 | | | | | | | | |
| Wave 22 | 01/19/2024 | | | | | | | | |
| January 8 | Due date for comments on the FCC’s NPRM (FCC 23-91) on the eligibility of hotspot loans (see our newsletter November 13th). Reply comments will be due January 24 th . | | | | | | | | |
| January 15 | Close of the EPC administrative window. | | | | | | | | |

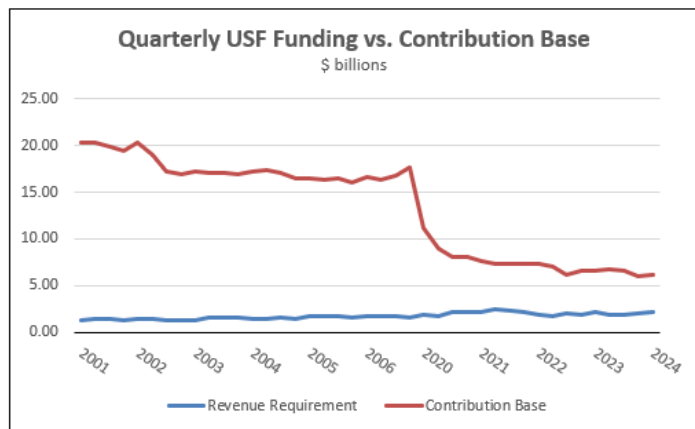
- January 17 The Form 471 filing window for FY 2024 opens at noon EST and will close at 11:59 p.m. EDT on Wednesday, March 27, 2024.
- January 29 Invoice (or invoice deadline extension request) deadline for FY 2022 non-recurring services FRNs.

USF Quarterly Contribution Factor Inches Higher:

The FCC announced ([DA 23-1156](#)) that the Proposed First Quarter 2024 Universal Service Contribution Factor will be 34.6% — just above the current quarter’s previous high of 34.5%. This is not good news at a time that the FCC is planning to initiate a new USF-funded cybersecurity pilot program and to expand E-rate funding for school bus Wi-Fi and residential hotspots for students and library patrons.



The underlying problem, as we have long discussed, is not that USF expenses (i.e., the revenue requirements) are rising but that interstate telecommunications revenues (i.e., the contribution base) have fallen sharply over the last decade and a half. The only real long-term solution, as summarized in [our earlier comments](#) to the Senate Universal Service Fund Working Group, would be to expand the contribution base with internet service and/or content provider revenues (see our [newsletter of August 21st](#)).



New and Reappointed USAC Board Members:

The FCC [announced](#) the appointment or reappointment of six members of the USAC Board for three-year terms beginning January 1, 2024. Most interestingly, from the perspective of schools and libraries, the appointments included:

- Mona L. Thompson, General Manager of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Telephone Authority as the representative for Tribal communities. The inclusion of a Tribal representative is a new position created last summer under the FCC’s Tribal Order ([FCC 23-56](#)) (see our [newsletter of July 24th](#)).
- Joan H. Wade, Ed.D., Executive Director, Association of Educational Service Agencies as the representative for schools that are eligible to receive discounts pursuant to section 54.501 of the Commission’s rules (reappointment for a new term).
- Angela Siefer, Executive Director, National Digital Inclusion Alliance as the representative for low-income consumer. Most notably, Ms. Siefer has been an avid proponent of the ACP and ECF programs.

USAC E-Rate News Brief Dated December 15 – FY 2024 Filing Window

In addition to announcing the release of the Eligible Services List for FY 2024 and outlining how to apply for Wi-Fi on buses, as summarized above. [USAC’s E-Rate News Brief dated December 15 2023](#), announced that the Form 471 application filing window will open on Wednesday, January 17th at noon EST and will close on Wednesday, March 27th at 11:59 p.m. EDT.

The News Brief also discussed:

- Adjusting Category Two budgets during the EPC administrative window.
- Customer Service Center (“CSC”) hours through the holidays.
- EPC invoicing tips.

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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