



The FCC Updated Its Rules to Make It Easier For Tribal Libraries to Get E-Rate Support

Recognizing the urgent need to expand Internet access throughout Indian Country and the significant role libraries play in providing digital access, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) unanimously approved an Order ([FCC 22-8](#)) on January 27, 2022 to update its E-Rate rules and make it easier for Tribal libraries to apply for E-Rate support. The Order adds “Tribal library” to the definition of a “library” in the E-Rate rules, and amends the rules to recognize that Tribal libraries are eligible for support from state library administrative agencies under the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) and the Museum and Library Services Act of 2018.

Now, we need your help to spread awareness to qualifying Tribal libraries that may be interested in applying!

What is the E-Rate program?

The E-Rate program makes telecommunications and information services more affordable for schools and libraries, including Tribal libraries. With funding from the Universal Service Fund, the E-Rate program provides discounts of up to 90 percent for broadband connections to schools or libraries and internal connections (e.g., Wi-Fi networks) within eligible schools and libraries. Where it is the most cost-effective option, libraries and library consortia may seek funding for special construction or network construction to get much-needed connectivity to unserved libraries.

What constitutes a Tribal library eligible for E-Rate support?

Tribal government entities can designate a library as a Tribal library (for example, through a Tribal Resolution). Tribal libraries should also be able to demonstrate that they have three basic characteristics of a library:

1. Regularly scheduled hours;
2. Staff; and
3. Materials available for library users.

Tribal libraries may also work with the state library administrative agency where they are located.

Please Note: Under the E-Rate program rules, libraries must be independent from any schools to be eligible. As such, Tribal libraries that are part of a Tribal elementary school, college, or university are ineligible for E-Rate support.

What is the overall E-Rate application process?

The process starts with competitive bidding for the services you need. You then select the most cost-effective provider. After you sign a contract or establish a service agreement, and the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) issues you a funding commitment, you can start to receive discounts on the services USAC has approved. You must file an application requesting E-Rate funds each year.

When does a Tribal library apply each year?

Applicants should start thinking **now** about what services and equipment they need for the next funding year (FY). The E-Rate program has an annual cycle. Applicants may start their competitive bidding process after July 1st of each year. They then request E-Rate funding during the E-Rate application filing window, which opens in mid-January and closes in mid-March, in advance of the start of the funding year that runs from July 1st to June 30th.

When does FY 2023 start?

The next funding year, FY 2023, will run from July 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024. The FCC Form 470 will be available after July 1, 2022, which is when applicants can begin their competitive bid process for FY 2023. Applicants will request funds during the FY 2023 application filing window, which will open in mid-January of 2023, and close in mid-March of 2023.

How do we begin the application process?

- (1) Obtain an FCC Registration Number.
 - ❖ All entities must have an FCC Registration Number issued through the FCC's [Commission Registration System](https://www.fcc.gov/licensing-databases/commission-registration-system-fcc) (CORES), <https://www.fcc.gov/licensing-databases/commission-registration-system-fcc>, to participate in the E-Rate program. Call (877) 480-3201 with questions.
- (2) Obtain a Billed Entity Number (BEN) and create a user profile in the E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC) Portal.
 - ❖ To obtain a BEN, contact USAC's Customer Service Center (CSC) at (888) 203-8100. USAC assigns a BEN, or unique identifying number, to each entity that participates in the E-Rate program.
 - ❖ If a Tribal government wishes to create a consortium for its Tribally controlled schools and libraries, the following information is needed before calling CSC:
 - i. Contact information of the consortium leader;
 - ii. Contact information of the account administrator for each library that will join the consortium; and
 - iii. A Letter of Agency, establishing that applicant entities have authorized the person identified in the letter to act on their behalf. See a sample [Letter of Agency](https://www.usac.org/wp-content/uploads/e-rate/documents/samples/loa-sample-clean.pdf) (<https://www.usac.org/wp-content/uploads/e-rate/documents/samples/loa-sample-clean.pdf>).
- (3) Designate your entity's Tribal status in EPC.
- (4) File the FCC Form 470 in EPC to start the competitive bidding process and solicit bids for eligible services and equipment, and wait at least 28 days before selecting your service provider(s).
- (5) File the FCC Form 471 in EPC during the E-Rate application filing window to request funding.
- (6) Retain documentation.

The FCC and USAC want to help!

To learn more or apply, please visit <https://www.usac.org/e-rate/learn/tribal-training/> or call the USAC CSC at (888) 203-8100, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET. You can also email USAC at TribalLiaison@usac.org for help figuring out where to start.