

# Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) Summary

Updated 7.28.2021



In March, 2021, Congress passed a new, one-time \$7.1 billion [Emergency Connectivity Fund](#) to ensure that all K-12 students, educators and library patrons have sufficient broadband for off-campus learning. In May 2021, the FCC issued final program regulations and the initial 45-day application window closes August 13, 2021. Qualifying expenses, including laptop and tablet devices and internet access services for those with an unmet need during the upcoming year beginning July 1, 2021 are 100% reimbursable with minor limitations. While applicants will apply and seek reimbursement using the USAC One Portal system, the ECF program is entirely separate from the federal E-rate program which funds broadband and internal connections on school/library campus. The program parameters are as follows:

## Qualifying Expenses

- Connected Devices -- Laptops, tablets, up to \$400 each, subject to unmet need. Warranties (up to 3 years), installation, configuration, also are eligible within the \$400 cap. Desktop computers, smartphones, and spare equipment do not qualify.
- Internet service – Up to 1 Wi-Fi hotspot per student/teacher/patron, or 1 fixed broadband internet connection per home, subject to unmet need. Mobile wireless, cable, DSL, FIOS, and satellite internet services are eligible. Other broadband services such as leased lit fiber, fixed wireless, and microwave also are eligible but far less common. Wi-Fi hotspot equipment is eligible, up to \$250 each. Cellular phone plans do not qualify. Other eligible internet-related equipment: modems, routers, cellular air-cards.
- Eligible Location - Internet service may be requested for any off-campus location where remote learning occurs and there is a documented need. For example, in addition to homes, community centers, churches, and school buses are eligible locations. School buses are eligible whether they are stationary (acting as a hot-spot for students) or transporting students.
- Equipment/services must be received and paid for on or after July 1, 2021, but may be *ordered* prior to July 1, 2021. The last date to receive equipment/services is June 30, 2022.
- If applicants can prove that adequate commercially available internet access is not available to an off-campus location where remote learning is occurring, ECF can be used to construct broadband infrastructure facilities to reach that off-campus location. See <http://e-ratepa.org/?p=33382> for more information.

## Conditions and Restrictions

- The teacher or student must **need** the device or service for remote learning – meaning that without the device or service, they otherwise would not have sufficient access for remote learning.
  - Schools must document their “reasonable efforts” to determine their estimated need for equipment/services during the ECF Form 471 application stage. Estimates can be made using surveys, NSLP eligibility, community broadband data, or other publicly available data. However, schools should be prepared to show documentation of unmet needs by student/teacher at the Form 472 reimbursement stage. See <http://e-ratepa.org/?p=33460> for more information.
  - Library patrons must sign a statement attesting to need when they check out a device.

- Internet access must be used primarily for educational purposes. Devices may only be used by credentialed students, staff or library patrons (meaning, they are not to be shared with family members for non-educational purposes). Devices may be brought to campus but they are not intended to be primarily used on campus.
- Remote learning includes daytime remote learning and also after-school homework. Students attending school in-person qualify for ECF eligible services and equipment if they have an unmet need while off campus.
- Double Dipping: ECF funding cannot be sought where equipment or services have been or will be purchased or reimbursed with other (pandemic-targeted) federal, state or other external funding or gifts.
- Bidding: No federal competitive bidding rules apply but applicants must adhere to any state/local requirements.
- Record Retention: Applicants will be required to keep detailed records of who received exactly which device/service for a period of ten years, as well as asset inventories, vendor invoices, proof of payment, contracts, etc.
- CIPA: If an applicant receives E-rate or ECF funding for internet access or E-rate Category 2 equipment, they must filter **all** school/library owned devices – whether the device is used on or off-campus. This is a new FCC clarification. Also, filtering is not an eligible ECF expense.
- Appeals: Must be submitted within 30 days of FCDL date.

## Invoicing

- Applicants generally have until August 29, 2022 or 60 days from FCDL or RFCDL date or last date to receive equipment/services, whichever is later, to submit a Form 472 BEAR, along with line-item vendor invoices, to USAC for reimbursement of approved equipment/services. Applicants must be registered in the Sam.gov system to receive ECF reimbursements.
- If applicants cannot afford to pay the vendor up-front and then seek reimbursement, they have two choices:
  - Request a “prospective reimbursement” from USAC after equipment/services have been delivered. Applicants must then make payment to vendor within 30 days of receipt of ECF payment. After vendor payment is made, applicants will then submit to USAC verification that the vendor was paid.
  - Request that the vendor seek direct reimbursement from the ECF Fund. If a vendor agrees, the applicant must confirm this in writing and submit this evidence with their E-rate Form 471 application.

## Available Funding

If demand exceeds available funding, funding will be allocated to applicants with the highest E-rate discount rate, with rural applicants receiving priority at each discount band. If demand does not exceed available funding, the FCC will open a second application window and will decide what the qualifying purchase dates will be (another FY 2021 window, or a retroactive window for purchases made between March 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021).

## Resources

FCC: <https://www.fcc.gov/emergency-connectivity-fund-faqs>

USAC ECF Info: <https://www.emergencyconnectivityfund.org/>

ECF Application Portal: <https://forms.universalservice.org/portal/login>

PA ECF Info: <https://forms.universalservice.org/portal/login>