GOT E-RATE?

Ensuring libraries have sufficient, high-capacity broadband and internet access is essential for modern library services. This capacity is critical for completing education, jump-starting employment and entrepreneurship, and fostering individual empowerment and community engagement for people nationwide. In December 2014, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recognized this 21st century reality as it completed a major reform of the E-rate program—the most important national telecommunications program for libraries and schools.

In this reform effort, the FCC adopted two E-rate Orders that together:
- Add $1.5 billion, bringing total fund availability to $3.9 billion annually;[1]
- Create new opportunities to build faster broadband connections and wi-fi capacity;
- Set goals for broadband speed and take measures to reduce broadband costs;
- Promise more timely processing of E-rate applications;
- Phase out or eliminate some legacy services to focus funding on broadband.

Today, close to half of all libraries have broadband connection speeds similar to the average home speed of just 10 Mbps. This falls far short of the 100Mbps and 1Gbps goals for library connectivity established by the FCC as part of its E-rate reforms. Libraries have an historic opportunity to boost the infrastructure needed to launch and sustain technology-rich programs and resources in our increasingly dynamic, multi-user and multipurpose spaces. From high-definition videoconferencing to telehealth to personalized cloud services, slow broadband connections must not be allowed to limit our ability to serve our communities.

For the first time in over a decade, there will be the financial certainty of nearly $4 billion annually to enable libraries to pursue large-scale broadband improvements. The FCC believes this increase likely means *all E-rate applications can be funded* through at least 2019. This increase is a major victory that was hard-fought by the ALA Washington Office with support from the Public Library Association, state library agencies and other library

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[1] Indexed annually for inflation.

and education groups. ***But E-rate funding will not flow to our public libraries and schools unless they apply***.

What's new?

Highlights of 2014 E-rate reforms include:[2]
- Increased choices for deploying and maintaining high-capacity broadband connections to libraries and schools;
- Greater flexibility in how to pay for new broadband construction costs;
- Up to 10% increase in the E-rate discount for broadband build-out when states match this percentage;
- Setting a five-year budget for wi-fi and other internal connection upgrades based on library building square footage and population size, with a minimum of $9,200 (non-discount) available per library building;[3] and
- New tools to make it easier to compare broadband and other costs and negotiate with vendors.

Find detailed summaries of the reforms at www.ala.org/advocacy/telecom/erate.

What now?

The application window for 2015 E-rate funding is open until March 26. Now is the time to consider your library infrastructure upgrade needs and match them to the new E-rate program opportunities.

➢ Public librarians: talk with your state E-rate coordinator and/or visit the application website (http://www.usac.org/sl/) for details;
➢ School librarians: talk to your school administrators about your library needs; and
➢ Everyone: consider your library's broadband services and demand likely to emerge in the coming five years to be prepared to claim your share of new E-rate funding.

The ALA Office for Information Technology Policy (OITP) is working with its E-rate Task Force and others to help libraries take advantage of program changes and new funding. Join us in this effort to enhance library broadband infrastructure to better support *The E's of Libraries*™, which include education, employment, entrepreneurship, empowerment and engagement. Get the latest news by following us @oitp and #libraryerate or logging on at www.ala.org/advocacy/telecom/erate.

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[2] Some reforms take effect immediately, while others wait for 2016. See ALA summaries for details.
[3] E-rate discounts for wi-fi and internal connections require compliance with the filtering requirements of the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA).