



E-Rate Funding—Guaranteed

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Using the USAC Website

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Introduction

On-Tech is a technology consulting firm focused on managing the E-Rate process for schools and libraries. We provide a full range of E-Rate services for applicants, including: handling the entire application process; consulting on construction projects to ensure maximum E-Rate funding; and reviewing proposals to ensure E-Rate compliance. In addition, On-Tech obtains E-Rate funding for school and library construction projects. On-Tech is not associated with any service provider.

Dan Riordan has been involved with the E-Rate since 1997, when he was trained by the New Jersey Department of Education to offer assistance to school districts in completing the application. Since then, he has worked on the E-Rate as a trainer, a district technology coordinator, and now a consultant.

Overview

First, we'll take a quick look at the USAC website in general.

usac.org

This is the site for USAC as a whole. In general, the information on this part of the website is of little interest to E-Rate applicants. So from here, you should:

1. Click on the vertical purple bar which says "SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES."
2. Click on the white banner across the picture, where it says "Providing discounts on telecom...."

You will then be taken to the Schools & Libraries portion of the site, which is where you want to be. If at any point the various colored bars are any color other than purple, you have left the Schools & Libraries site, and you need to get back.

usac.org/sl

This page is the page you should have bookmarked. All of our exploring will come from this page. The following sections will go through various links from this page.

Subscribe

In the upper right-hand corner of the page are four links. The only one that applicants are likely to need is the "Subscribe" link. This will allow you to get the weekly E-Rate News Brief from USAC if you're interested. To subscribe, just provide your email address and name, click the checkbox next to "SL Program News Brief" and click the "Subscribe" button.

Note that the subscription page does not have the purple toolbars; you have left the Schools & Libraries portion of the USAC site, and you'll need to get back after you subscribe.

The "Search" Box

Don't bother. The search results are rarely what you want. You will get much better results by using Google. Use the "site:usac.org" modifier in Google. If you want to find information on,

for example, how to calculate your discount, you would go to Google, and search for “library discount calculate site:usac.org” (without the quotes).

SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES (E-RATE) Navigation Bar

Across the top of the page is a purple bar. From any page, click on this bar to get back to the main page of the Schools & Libraries main page. This bar has a few links on the right end. Those links are also available from the list of links along the left side of the page, which is how we’ll access them.

“LATEST NEWS” and “QUICK LINKS” Sections

These sections have links to recently released documents that may be of interest to applicants.

The “APPLICANTS” Bar

This bar is a good place to start.

Above the picture of bookshelves is a purple bar which says “APPLICANTS.” At the right end of the bar is a down arrow. Click on it to see the steps of the application process. Click on each step, and you will go to a page that answers common questions about that part of the process.

The page for each step is organized the same way. At the top, there is a gray bar with links to other pages covering topics related to this step. Below that is an overview of that part of the application process, with links in the text to related pages.

Left-side Navigation Links

On the left side of the page, there are two sections of links to help you quickly move around the S&L portion of the site.

USAC Home Schools and Libraries Program

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

This links are a good place to start if you are looking for general information about the program

Getting Started

This brings you to a page that provides information for people completely new to the program.

Acronyms & Terms (PDF)

What is a BEAR? A “Block 4 Worksheet”? This link opens a 7-page PDF with common E-Rate jargon.

Reference Area

This area has an alphabetized list of categories of information. It seems like it would be handy, but actually it’s often hard to guess what category you need. For example, if you were interested in the use of surveys to determine you discount level, you need to click on the “Alternative Discount Mechanisms” link.

Program Integrity

You'd think this section would tell you about Program Integrity Assurance (PIA), the E-Rate jargon for application review. No, it's information about audits.

Eligible Services List

The quickest way to get to the annual list of what services and equipment can be funded through E-Rate, for this year and past years.

Document Retention

Not a very helpful page. But it does have the basics: keep all your documents for 5 years after the last date to invoice.

Trainings & Outreach

You can find out what trainings are coming up, see materials from past trainings.

You can also subscribe to the New Brief here, or click on the "View News Brief" link to see past news briefs.

RESOURCES & TOOLS

This are links that you are likely to use over and over again as you work through the funding process.

Apply Online

This link takes you to the main landing page for filing forms online. It also has links to look at applications that have been filed.

Forms

If you want instructions for filing a form, or paper copies of the forms, click here.

Deadlines

If you're not sure when a form is due, click here. You can then click on a form, and see when it's due.

Latest News

When items age off the main page's "LATEST NEWS" sections, they come here. Everything's organized by date, which is not usually the easiest way to find what you need.

Samples & Examples

If you need examples of letters you may need to create, this page has a pretty complete list of the letters you'll need.

Funding Commitment Tool

This is not the best tool to get the information. Instead, click on the "Data Retrieval Tool" link to access USAC's data.

Search Tools

The most commonly used tools on this page are the BEN and SPIN search. We'll look at some of the foibles of these tools.

Submit a Question

If you have a question, you can call the Client Service Bureau (CSB) at 888-203-8100. But it's often handy to have a written answer. So you can use this link to submit a written question.

If you're not happy with the response, you can also email to ombudsman@usac.org.