

# The Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF)

This one-time, 7.2 billion emergency funding opportunity was set aside in the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act in response to at-home connectivity inequities exacerbated by the pandemic.

**Deadline:** A 45-day application window will open on **June 29, 2021 and close in August 13, 2021**. During this time, eligible schools and libraries may apply for funding for the purchase of eligible equipment and services made between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022, and provided during that time period to students, school staff and library patrons who still lack access to adequate connected devices, other eligible equipment or eligible services.

**Eligibility:** Libraries, schools, and consortia of schools and libraries that are eligible for support through the E-rate program.

Entities do not need to be currently participating in E-rate to use these funds. However, E-rate eligibility rules do apply.

*Note: the ECF is separate from/in addition to the annual E-rate program which provides funding for in-school connectivity improvements. ECF funding is intended for equipment and service that provide access anytime learning is not occurring on campus (i.e. sponsored wireline programs and wi-fi connections on school buses).*

**Reimbursement Rules:** The ECF is for off-campus learning and remote library services and equipment. Devices may be used in-class as well if they are also used for remote learning.

Eligible equipment: Wi-Fi hotspots, modems (i.e. air cards), routers, devices that combine modem and router, connected devices such as tablets and laptops.

Eligible Services: cable modem, digital subscriber line (DSL), leased lit fiber (i.e. fiber to the home or to the premises), satellite internet, wireless internet.

Support is limited to \$400 for connected devices and \$250 for Wi-Fi hotspots

Reimbursement will be prioritized based on the most-economically disadvantaged schools and libraries including rural entities

Note: Funding is for future purchases first; if there are still funds available following the first round of applications, they will be made available for reimbursement of services and equipment purchased in 2020.

**Next Steps:** Now is the time to help your state's schools and libraries prepare their applications. The following are some additional tips:

Partial list of information applicants will need to complete application:

- Thorough knowledge of state, local, and tribal procurement rules
- Documentation of how the applicant determined "unmet needs"
- Quote from service provider clearly outlining the services/devices being applied for and their prices
- Decision about reimbursement method (BEAR, Pre-reimbursement, or SPI)
- SAM registration (information link)

To ensure that funding is focused on unmet need and collect data on the size of the homework gap, schools are required to certify, as part of their funding application, that they are only seeking support for:

- Eligible equipment provided to students and school staff who would otherwise lack access to connected devices sufficient to engage in remote learning
- Eligible services provided to students and school staff who would otherwise lack broadband services sufficient to engage in remote learning

Applicants will be asked to submit estimates about:

- The number of students in their school or school district who did not have access to adequate connected devices, broadband connections, or both when the pandemic began.
- The number of students who do not currently have access to adequate connected devices, broadband Internet access connections, or both.
- How they expect those numbers to change with receipt of requested Emergency Connectivity Fund Program support.



## Frequently Asked Questions

### Do all districts equally qualify or what is the criteria for selection?

All entities that qualify for E-rate support will also qualify for ECF support. Funding will be prioritized and awarded first to rural entities and to those that serve the highest percentage of families who qualify for the National School Lunch Program. Should demand exceed available funds, applications will be prioritized and processed based on the Category 1 E-rate discount rate associated with a school or library. Rural applicants will receive a 5% “bump” to the discount rate used to calculate the priority of their applications. For example, rural schools and libraries who qualify for a 90% discount rate in the E-rate program will use a 95% discount and will receive top priority over their urban counterparts who also qualify for a 90% E-rate discount. If there are insufficient funds available to fund an entire discount band, priority will be given to applicants with the highest percentage of low-income students.

### If we are 100% in person, do we qualify?

Yes, you may still qualify for ECF support if your school is 100% in person. ECF funding supports remote learning activities that take place off-campus, no matter what time of day, or day of the week. If a student, school staff member, or library patron is participating in educational activities off-campus, then their internet access or connected learning device may qualify for support even if they participate in a certain amount of on-campus education. The three key criteria are (1) the user engages in remote educational activities and would otherwise lack sufficient resources to do so, (2) the service and/or device was purchased with the intent of providing off-campus remote learning opportunities, and (3) the service and/or device is not used solely on school or library grounds. These guidelines align with the ECF’s goal to close the homework gap.

### Does an applicant have to wait until a funding decision is made to move forward with a purchase?

No. The only requirement that the FCC has made is that the purchases have to be made between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022 to be considered for reimbursement. It should be noted that applications for ECF funding are not guaranteed to be funded.

### How soon after a funding decision is made, when could we expect reimbursement to occur?

The FCC has tasked USAC to begin accepting requests for reimbursement within 15 days of the first wave of funding commitments issued. USAC will not begin reviewing or funding applications until after the filing window closes. The earliest that funds are likely to be disbursed is September or October of 2021.