

# Emergency Connectivity Fund Program: What You Need to Know to Apply

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it impossible to ignore the persistent digital divide separating millions of Americans from the broadband and connected devices needed to access online education, employment resources, health information, and essential connections to family and friends. In March 2021, Congress allocated \$7 billion to establish the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) program to help libraries and schools bridge these connectivity gaps for students, teachers, and library patrons.

The ECF program presents an unprecedented funding opportunity for libraries to expand broadband equity to those who need it most beyond the confines of library walls. With 100 percent reimbursement of costs for eligible equipment and the ability to receive upfront reimbursement, *now* is the moment to consider how your library can leverage this new funding to boost access to broadband, laptops, and tablets for those lacking these critical resources. It's an opportunity to add capacity to existing technology lending programs--as well as think outside the box for new ways to keep your community connected.

Let's get started!

On May 10, 2021, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) established rules for the ECF program. It provides funding for public and tribal libraries and K12 schools to purchase connected devices (e.g., tablets and laptops) and broadband internet connections for use off of library and school grounds by students, teachers and staff, and library patrons who otherwise don't have internet access during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) is administering the ECF program. While the ECF program is not the same as the [E-rate program](#), USAC will leverage some existing E-rate forms and processes to streamline and speed the application and reimbursement processes. Public libraries, tribal libraries, and library consortia eligible for the E-rate program are eligible to apply for ECF funding. **Important to note is that ALL tribal libraries are eligible for ECF even if they are not currently eligible for the E-rate program.**

The application window for applying for the ECF program will be 45 days. The date the application process opens will be announced soon. Eligible libraries and schools can apply for funding for the purchase of eligible equipment and services made between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022.

## What Libraries Should Do to Prepare for the Filing

A good place to start is to reach out to your [E-rate State Coordinator](#). This person will be your best resource to help you throughout the ECF application process. If your state coordinator doesn't know the answer to your questions, they can point you in the right direction. Go to the [E-rate State Coordinator](#) page to find your state's coordinator.

Libraries applying for reimbursement from the ECF Program must be registered in the federal government's System for Award Management (SAM) and have an E-rate Productivity Center (EPC) account to seek funding.

### Create a SAM Account System for Award Management (SAM) Registration

It can take up to 20 days for SAM registration to become active. **Please apply as soon as possible.**

To register with SAM:

1. Go to <https://www.sam.gov/>
2. Create a Login.gov account by clicking on the Log In button at the top left-hand side of the page. [Instructions on how to create an account](#) are available.
3. After you create your SAM account, you will need to register your library.
  - a. Go to <https://www.sam.gov/>.
  - b. Make sure you are logged in with your SAM account.
  - c. Scroll halfway down the page.
  - d. Click on the file folder icon under the heading Register Entity.
  - e. Complete the application.
  - f. [Instructions on how to Register an Entity](#) are available.
4. If you need assistance creating an account or registering your entity, you can contact your [E-rate State Coordinator](#) or the Federal Service Desk at [www.fsd.gov](http://www.fsd.gov), or by telephone at 866-606-8220.

### Create or Update EPC Account

Your library will use the E-rate Productivity Center (EPC) to apply for funding from the ECF program. You must have an EPC account to file the ECF program forms, receive notifications, etc. If you've applied for E-rate funding in recent years, you already have an account, but may need to update it through the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC).

## Multi-factor Authentication (New)

On March 11, 2021 USAC added multi-factor authentication (MFA) to increase the system's security. If you have not logged in to the USAC portal since MFA was added, or you are creating an EPC account for the first time, you will be prompted to set up MFA. [MFA sign on instructions](#) are available. If you experience problems, check the [MFA Troubleshooting Guide](#).

## EPC Account (Existing Account Holders)

If you have an EPC account but have not used the account in a while, you should log in to verify that your login credentials work.

## Forgotten Password

If you have forgotten your password, you have two options:

1. Click the "forgot password link" on the [EPC login page](#). A video tutorial on [how to reset your password](#) is available. The reset password will be sent to the email account of the library's account administrator.
2. You can call USAC Client Service Bureau (CSB) at (888) 203-8100 for assistance logging into your account.

## Transfer Library Administrative Account to a New Staff Person

If the staff member who was the library's account administrator is no longer with the library, the library staff member assuming the E-rate administrator role will need to call the Client Service Bureau (CSB) at (888) 203-8100 Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET to transfer the account.

## EPC Account (New Accounts)

If your library does not have an EPC account, you will need to create one. The library will need to select a library employee to act as the account administrator. The account administrator needs to set up a Billed Entity Number (BEN) and the EPC Account. After the EPC account is created, the library account administrator is responsible for managing the library accounts, granting rights to other users, and providing or updating information on the libraries in your library system.

## Billed Entity Number (BEN)

In order to create an EPC account, the library needs a BEN. Each library outlet and branch, including library buildings that don't have areas open to the public, must have its own entity

number to receive funding. To create a BEN, the library will also need a [FCC Registration Number](#). Call USAC Client Service Bureau (CSB) at (888) 203-8100. They can assist the library in identifying which steps they need to complete in order to obtain an EPC Account, including if an FCC Registration Number is needed.

### Setting Up a New EPC Account

Once the BEN is set up, the library administrator will need to call the Client Service Bureau (CSB) (888) 203-8100 Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET to set up the EPC account.

Once the EPC account is set up, the account administrator can create accounts for other library staff who will require access to the EPC system.

Please note that each step -- creating a BEN, getting an FCC Registration Number and creating an EPC account -- can take 1-2 business days to complete, so plan ahead!

## What is an Eligible Equipment and Services Expense?

Libraries should understand which services and equipment are eligible and ineligible as part of the ECF Program. The good news, eligible equipment and services purchased with ECF support will be fully (100%) reimbursed, although the FCC may deny any costs it deems unreasonable.

The equipment and services ***must be used at locations other than the library***. Service locations may include, but are not limited to, homes, community centers, churches, school buses, bookmobiles, and any other off-campus locations where students, school staff, and library patrons are engaged in remote learning activities or seek basic internet access.

Applicants should review the program's [Eligible Services List](#) to ensure their request fits with the program rules. The list below highlights eligible expenses of interest:

- Wi-Fi hotspots. The fund will reimburse up to \$250 for a hotspot device. (This cost does not include the data plan which will be reimbursed at 100%.)
- Modems, routers or devices that combine a modem and router
- Connected devices such as a laptop or tablet. The fund will support up to \$400 for connected devices. (note: desktop computers are not eligible.)
- Aircards (note: mobile phones, including smartphones are not eligible)

Libraries cannot receive ECF support for more than one fixed (i.e., wired) internet connection *per location*. They also cannot receive support for more than one Wi-Fi hotspot or device *per patron* (e.g., a household with an adult library patron and a school student can get two hotspots).

The ECF program will not provide support for eligible equipment and services that have already been reimbursed through other federal pandemic relief programs (e.g., CARES Act, IMLS, Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) Program, or provisions of the American Rescue Plan Act); state programs specifically targeted to providing funding for eligible equipment and services; or other external sources of funding or gifts specifically targeted to providing funding for eligible equipment and services.

## Other Important Considerations

### ECF Call Center

It has been announced that USAC will be setting up a call center to answer questions related to the ECF Program. When the call center is set up, this page will be updated with the contact information.

### CIPA Compliance

The American Library Association created a document [The Emergency Connectivity Fund and CIPA Compliance](#) to help libraries determine if their ECF request needs to be CIPA compliant to meet the program requirements.

### Competitive Bidding Process

Libraries will **not** need to conduct a competitive bidding process to apply for reimbursement from the ECF. Libraries will need to certify that they have complied with all applicable local, state, and Tribal procurement requirements. If your library is not subject to public (e.g., state, municipal) procurement rules, it should then follow its own procurement process and rules.

### Document Retention Requirements

Libraries need to retain records that demonstrate compliance with the ECF program rules for at least 10 years from the last date of service or delivery of equipment. This is in line with the E-rate Program requirements.