

Rating the E-rate

A new national survey reveals a great deal about the program's strengths—and needs

Bonnie Tollefson, director of the Levi County, Fla., Public Library System, knows the trials and tribulations of applying for federal E-rate discounts all too well.

"My predecessor was filing at the deadline, and the system went down," Tollefson said. "When he checked again a week later, the application was in [the system] but not certified." The former Levi County library director tried certifying his application at that time—but because the program's filing window already had closed, the thousands of dollars in telecommunications discounts he had requested through the program were denied.

Said Tollefson: "He was forced into retirement because of this very expensive error. Is it any wonder I get extremely anxious just talking about the E-rate?"

Tollefson's anxiety isn't unique. With so much money at stake, and a byzantine application process, the E-rate is the source of nightmares for many participants. Yet, despite the program's complexity, three out of four applicants say the E-rate is meeting its goal of connecting schools and libraries to the internet, according to a comprehensive new survey—and many applicants say they couldn't do without it.

Conducted by *eSchool News* and E-rate consulting firm Funds For Learning LLC, the survey polled more than 700 E-rate applicants on a wide range of questions about the program.

The survey responses, which come a full decade into the E-rate's existence, provide the most complete picture yet of who the typical E-rate manager is, how much time applicants invest in the program, their attitudes and opinions about various aspects of the E-rate process, the key challenges that participants face in applying—and their ideas for how to improve the E-rate program.

Although 77 percent of respondents said the E-rate is meeting its goal, fewer than half (46 percent) said the program is well managed. Common complaints included too much paperwork, an inconvenient timeframe for applying, and inconsistent support from the Schools and Libraries Division of the Universal Service Administrative Co. (USAC), the agency that administers the E-rate.

"The constantly moving deadlines for paperwork are a problem," wrote one survey respondent. "It would seem these dates are annual and could be set, rather than changing from year to year and even from month to month."

"The types of documentation and wording accepted by the reviewers is *not* uniform, no matter what the presenters say at the annual E-rate training sessions," wrote another. "Documentation and descriptions that have not been problematic in previous years ... may not be accepted by some reviewers in any given year. Frequently, the documentation required isn't even reasonable. Applicants should not have to dumpster-dive to find packing labels to prove a building is a school."

We asked applicants to rank their level of familiarity with various parts of the E-rate process on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being "most familiar." Interestingly, there was little variation among the average responses, which all fell in the range of 3.2 to 3.8—with one glaring exception: The rules governing deadline extensions and service substitutions garnered an average score of 2.6. This suggests that USAC should consider focusing more training and outreach on this aspect of the program.

Not surprisingly, the more time applicants invested in the E-rate and the more years of experience they had, the more familiar they were with the program overall. But applicants who have experienced an audit (4.0), site visit (4.2), or HATS (Helping Applicants To Succeed) instruction (4.3) also considered themselves more familiar with the E-rate than those who've experienced none of these interventions (3.2).

"This should encourage USAC to keep doing these activities—especially the HATS visits," said John Harrington, Funds For Learning's chief executive.

There were few statistically significant differences between how small and large applicants responded to the survey questions. But there were key differences between how low- and high-discount applicants answered.

For instance, while 89 percent of high-discount applicants (those who qualify for discounts of at least 80 percent) said the E-rate is meeting its goal, only 64 percent of low-discount applicants (those who qualify for discounts

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under 50 percent) said the same thing. And while 54 percent of high-discount applicants said the program is well managed, just 34 percent of low-discount applicants—in other words, those who qualify for less funding—think so.

One area where there was a slight difference in the responses of small and large applicants was whether they use the money saved through the E-rate to buy other technology products or services. Fifty-six percent of large applicants (those serving at least 15,000 students) said yes, compared with 46 percent of small applicants (those serving fewer than 5,000 students). On average, 49 percent of applicants use the money they save through the E-rate to purchase additional technology.

Despite the E-rate's many challenges, several applicants said the program is improving—and decisions such as the Bishop Perry Order certainly have helped. This FCC directive requires USAC to be less rigid and more user-friendly in how it processes applications, and 72 percent of applicants said it has had a positive affect on the program.

Less certain, however, has been the impact of the Two-in-Five Rule, which USAC created to allow more applicants to receive discounts for internal connections. The rule states that applicants cannot apply for discounts on these Priority 2 services more than twice in any given five-year period. Yet 52 percent of applicants said this new rule has had no effect, or they weren't sure of its impact. The other half of respondents were about evenly split between those who said it has been a positive development and those who disagreed.

"Statistically speaking, the Two-in-Five Rule hasn't helped," said Harrington. "What's more, it adds a whole new layer of complexity, which actually slows down the funding process."

The No. 1 complaint expressed by survey respondents was the amount of paperwork the E-rate requires, which many applicants find overwhelming.

"I can't afford an assistant administrator, and my biggest worry is how to get someone trained to [manage] the E-rate when I retire," wrote one respondent. "It is one of the most complicated programs I have ever seen, and it keeps changing all the time." Said another: "The learning curve is way too steep. It shouldn't be; it places the disadvantaged at an even greater disadvantage."

Applicants would like to see the E-rate process simplified for those who are requesting discounts only on Priority 1 services (telecommunications services and internet access) and for smaller schools and libraries.

"We receive only \$3,000 per year, and yet we have to jump through all the [same] hoops [as] the bigger schools," one applicant said. "Perhaps [USAC could implement] something like the IRS system, and have a Form 470EZ."

Many applicants also questioned why they must reapply for the same services each year, or supply the same information to reviewers over and over again.

"If nothing really changes from year to year, why can't we just check a box that says the same as last year for all forms and be done with it?" one respondent asked.

That's not the only example of redundancy that applicants cited.

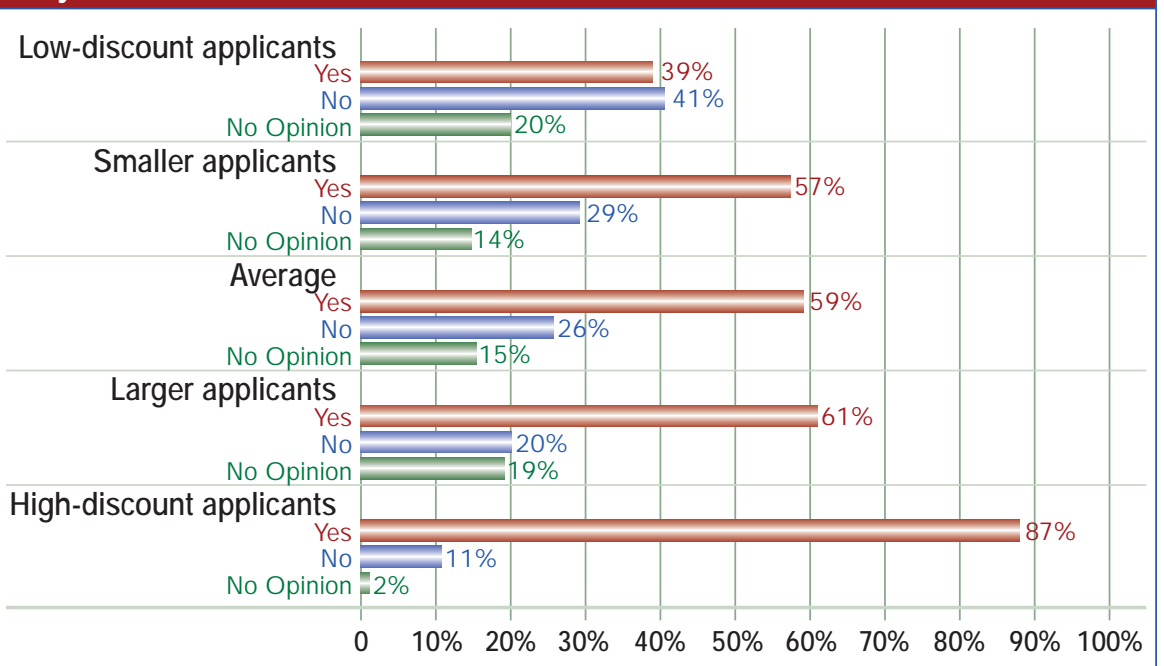
"Everyone in the client services bureau needs to be able to access the information that you supply, instead of repeatedly asking for the same information as your application goes through each level of review," another said. "You get asked the same questions during initial review, final review, and even selective review—and you have to supply the same information and paperwork each time. ... To me, that is not a good use of my time or the time of the reviewer."

Among the many other suggestions for improvement, one respondent said she thinks USAC's web site should allow program participants to track the status of their application, and another said the rules about whether products or services are eligible should be relaxed. For example, "restrictions on how internet access is used outside of school inhibits the rollout of one-to-one initiatives," she said.

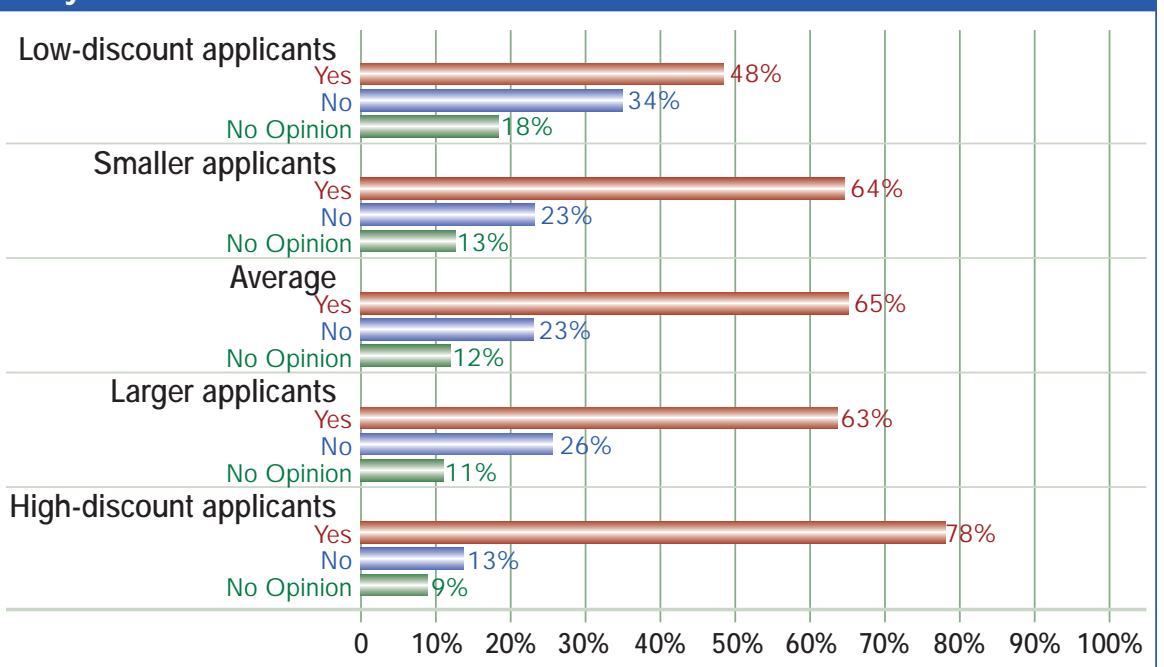
The challenges of applying for E-rate discounts aside, more than half of survey respondents said they would be unable to sustain their current level of connectivity without the program.

"Our system would not be able to survive were it not for the E-rate," one applicant concluded.

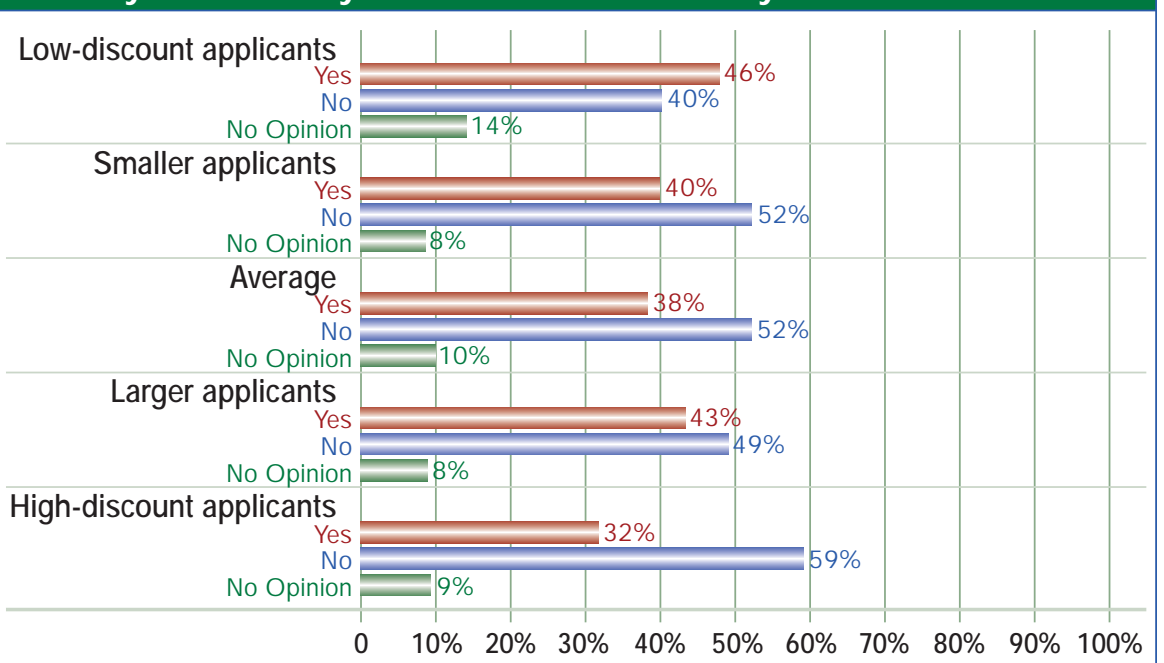
Do you have more classrooms connected now than if the E-rate hadn't existed?



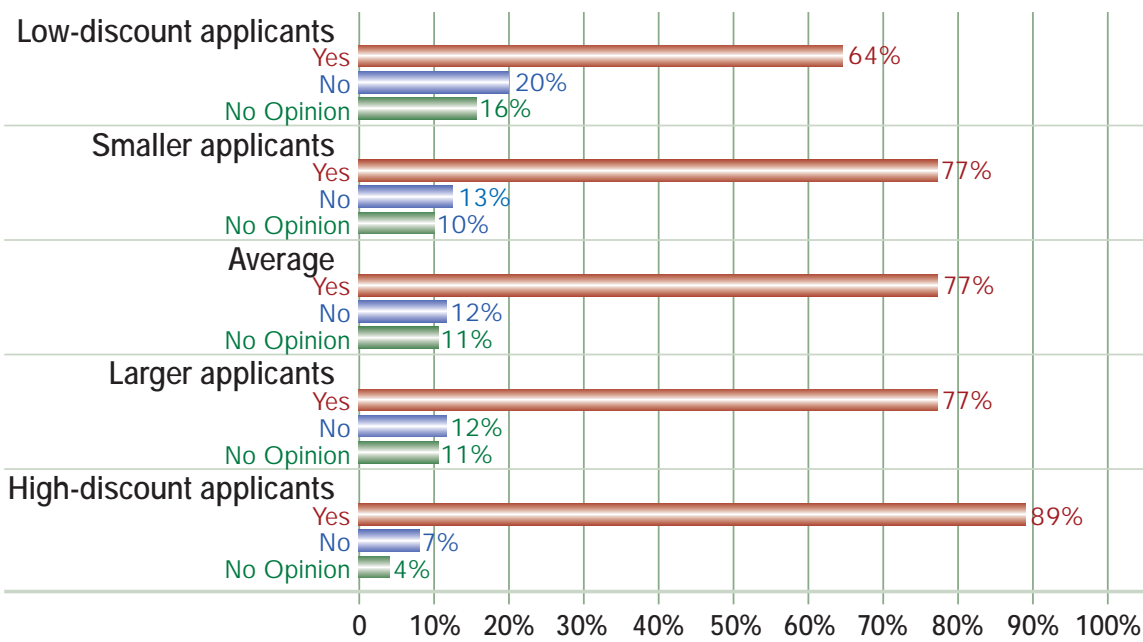
Do you have faster connections now than if the E-rate hadn't existed?



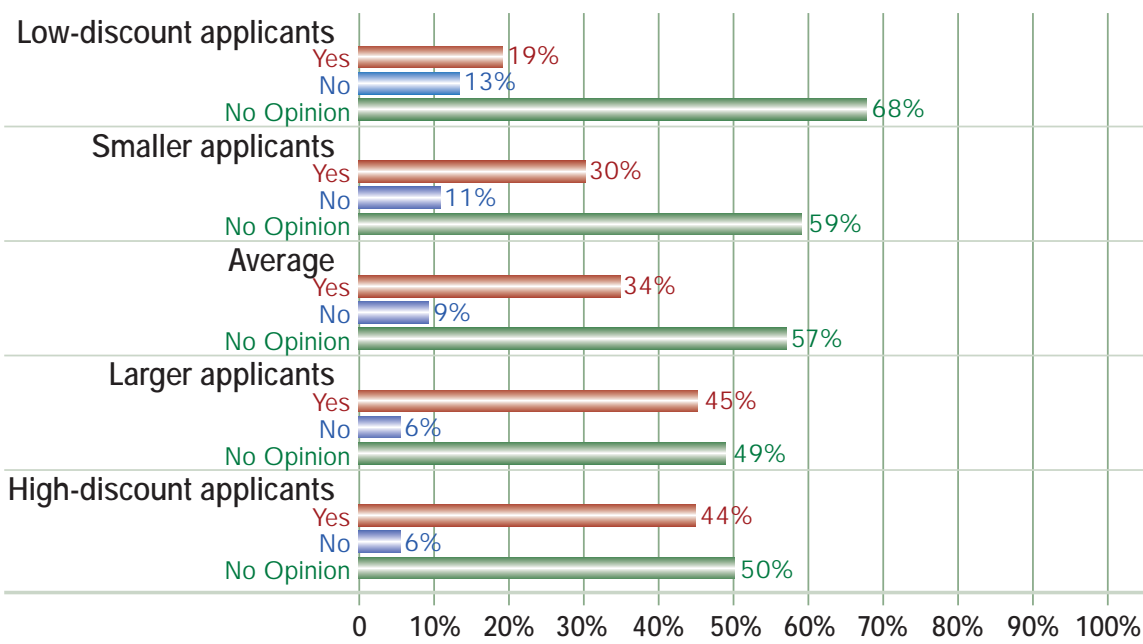
Could you sustain your current connectivity without the E-rate?



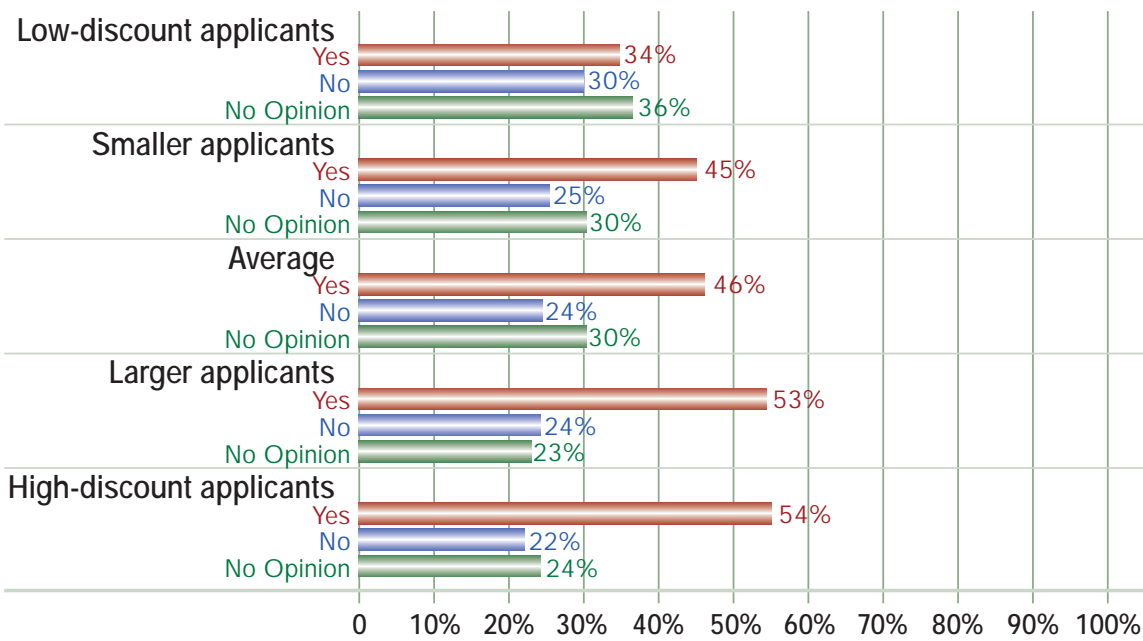
Is the E-rate meeting its goal?



Are the SLD's outreach efforts helpful?



Is the E-rate program well managed?



Key findings from our National E-rate Survey

- Three out of four applicants say the E-rate is meeting its goal of connecting schools and libraries to the internet—but fewer than half say the program is well managed. Still, despite several complaints about the complexity of the E-rate process, only 24 percent of applicants take issue with USAC in particular.
- Common E-rate complaints include too much paperwork, an inconvenient timeframe for applying, and inconsistent support. Not surprisingly, satisfaction is largely tied to who gets money—and who gets audited.
- The No. 1 change applicants would most like to see is a simplified process for those applying only for discounts on Priority 1 services, or for smaller applicants with fewer needs (similar to how the 1040EZ streamlines the tax-return process for those who qualify).
- All complaints aside, 59 percent of applicants say they have more classrooms connected to the internet, and 65 percent say they have faster internet connections than they would have if there were no E-rate program. Only 38 percent say they could sustain their current level of connectivity without the E-rate.
- The Bishop Perry Order, which requires USAC to be less rigid and more user-friendly in how it processes applications, is the single best program development in the last several years, according to E-rate applicants. But the Two-in-Five Rule, which aims to allow more applicants to receive discounts for internal connections (Priority 2 services), is not having its intended effect.
- Applicants are least knowledgeable about the rules regarding service substitutions and deadline extensions. Applicants who have received some kind of special intervention (an audit, a HATS visit, and so on) consistently rate themselves more knowledgeable about the program overall.
- There is a direct correlation between the amount of funding requested and how well the applicant understands the E-rate program. There is no such correlation with respect to whether the applicant uses a third-party web site, consultant, or other outside help when applying.
- Most of those who manage the E-rate process are administrators or IT coordinators, though some are educators, bookkeepers, or procurement officers. Educators and procurement officers have the least familiarity with the E-rate process, most likely because it is furthest removed from their core job responsibilities.
- There appears to be a high rate of turnover among E-rate managers at schools and libraries. Nearly 40 percent of survey respondents said they've been managing the E-rate process for three years or less—and 19 percent said it was their first year doing this.
- The average applicant spends 21 hours a month managing the E-rate process, though this varies widely depending on the time of year. Applicants requesting discounts only on Priority 1 services spend just nine hours a month managing the E-rate process. In general, the larger the applicant, the more time is invested in the program.
- Only about half of applicants say they use E-rate discounts to pay for other technology products and services; the rest put this money back into their general operating budgets.
- More than 2 in 5 respondents (43 percent) have experienced some type of program audit.

Your Partner in E-rate Compliance

High Quality Solutions for E-rate Stakeholders

Funds For Learning's mission is to provide high quality solutions for the needs of E-rate stakeholders. We are committed to the long-term success of the E-rate program and we aim to help all E-rate stakeholders understand and effectively utilize the E-rate program for Schools and Libraries and to comply with all of its rules.

We've Been Here for More Than a Decade

Established in 1997, Funds For Learning was formed as the FCC issued its first regulations concerning the E-rate program. Created solely to provide high-quality E-rate support services, Funds For Learning provides support to both applicants and service providers, from technology companies to public and private schools, school districts and libraries.

Nationally Recognized and Respected

Funds For Learning has earned a national reputation for our comprehensive work and depth of understanding of the E-rate program. Having provided services since the beginning of the E-rate program makes Funds For Learning your best partner in E-rate compliance. We have an established code of conduct that guides our business practices to ensure that our clients receive the highest measure of integrity from Funds For Learning, and that we operate within the letter and spirit of the E-rate program's rules and regulations.

Innovative Solutions for Applicants

Funds For Learning offers more than just E-rate consulting. We know that the needs of each client vary based on their size, discount rate, complexity, and other factors. That's why Funds For Learning has services that fit every customer size, budget, and experience level.

Our Clients' Success Speaks for Itself

Less: On average 18% of funding applications are denied nationwide. For Funds For Learning clients, the denial rate is 5%.¹ **More:** Between 1998 and 2005, the national funding utilization rate was 73%. During that same period, Funds For Learning clients' funding utilization rate was 91%.

At Funds For Learning, Less Means More: Taken together, these stats tell a pretty amazing story. Not only are Funds For Learning clients 3 times less likely to be denied funding, they actually receive \$0.18 more for every dollar over other applicants.





Funds For Learning works with public and private schools, school districts, consortia, and libraries of all sizes all across the country to help them navigate the E-rate program. Service at FFL is tailored to the needs of each client, providing an end-to-end solution for some and more limited compliance services for others.

Funds For Learning's breadth of real-world, hands-on E-rate experience provides our customers with "Best in Class" service. Fully committed to helping applicants receive successful benefits through participation in the E-rate program, FFL does not disappear when E-rate applications are filed.

Funds For Learning accepts only a limited number of new clients each year. Requests for application support for the Funding Year 2009 filing window are currently being accepted.



Funds For Learning has developed an extraordinary suite of tools to assist applicants in their pursuit of E-rate funding. Whether you are a private school with a few funding requests or a large school district that needs to track millions of dollars in funding, E-rate Manager for Applicants makes the process easier and provides a robust E-rate solution at an affordable price.

E-rate Manager for Applicants is an award-winning tool that is widely known as the most comprehensive and effective online tools for Schools, Libraries and Consortia. E-rate Manager for Applicants gives you the ability to track your E-rate funding requests, generate E-rate paperwork, and stay on top of deadlines and news that are critical to your E-rate success.

And as the E-rate program evolves, so does E-rate Manager for Applicants, so you'll never be caught off guard by changes in program rules or forms.

Annual subscriptions pricing starts at \$249 per user, based on the size of the applicant.



Funds For Learning compliance and E-rate Manager clients have access to E-rate University, that provides E-rate training on demand. Our online courses give you the information you need when you need it. Courses cover everything from the basics to the most advanced E-rate topics.

Visit Funds For Learning online at www.FundsForLearning.com.

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What E-rate applicants struggle with—and what they'd like to see changed

As part of our National E-rate Survey, *eSchool News* and Funds For Learning conducted a virtual focus group to learn more about the particular strengths and challenges of the E-rate process—and what applicants would change about this process if they could.

The online panel discussion took advantage of EDRoom (www.edroom.net), a secure, private web space where district administrators, school-level educators, and others in the academic community can engage in deep discussions on any topic.

When EDRoom is used for research or journalistic purposes, it is modeled after a traditional focus group to generate group interaction. As with a traditional focus group, a moderator presented questions for discussion. A key advantage over a traditional focus group, however, is that the online conversation took place over the course of an entire week, and participants had flexibility as to when and where they logged on. Panel members took part in the discussion by reading and typing at a computer—without ever leaving their seats, at times that were convenient to them.

Participants were recruited from among respondents to our national survey, and they were chosen to reflect a wide range of perspectives. Here are the panel members:

- **Dennis Bucholtz**, IT director of New Hope Academy Charter School of Pennsylvania, with a discount rate of less than 50 percent;
- **Jim Copley**, an internet specialist with Educational Service Unit No. 13 of Nebraska, a consortium of school districts with a discount rate of between 60 and 70 percent;
- **Cheryl Stepp**, instructional technology supervisor for Florida's Osceola County Schools, with a discount rate of between 70 and 80 percent;
- **Kathleen Talbot**, assistant principal of St. Josaphat School, a private religious school in Chicago with a discount rate of less than 50 percent;
- **Bonnie Tollefson**, director of Florida's Levi County Public Library System, with a discount rate of between 80 and 85 percent;
- **Laurie Walsh**, IT systems specialist for the Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland, with a discount rate of between 50 and 60 percent; and
- **Kathryn Wilson**, E-rate administrator for the North Carolina Office of IT Services, which applies for E-rate discounts on behalf of the state's school systems, with a discount rate of between 70 and 80 percent.

What follows is an excerpt from the discussion. To read the entire transcript, go to <http://www.eschoolnews.com/news/special-reports>.

Q: *What parts of the E-rate process do you manage exceptionally well? How do you manage these parts of the process, and what information would you share with other E-rate applicants to help them?*

Laurie: I manage the Form 471 exceptionally well, because I begin with the previous several years' applications and project changes from this base. It is very similar to budget preparation. ... [We've managed] document retention via the introduction of a scanner and database system. I checked with the SLD to make sure that electronic copies of bills and forms would be acceptable in the case of an audit or review and was assured that this was, indeed, the case.

Cheryl: I have been applying for and receiving E-rate funds since the [program's] inception and am comfortable with filing a Form 470 as needed for a specific purpose. I work closely with the director of information technology [and] monitor our free/reduced lunch carefully, [giving] him a heads-up on any schools that look like they



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will be 90-percent [discount] schools. Then we determine if their wiring closets need updating. We also carefully track the Two-in-Five Rule. We have been able to keep our closets in decent condition this way.

We download the new Eligible Services List each year, and I keep both an electronic copy and a hard copy on file. We read through the list to determine the changes. We also attend an annual meeting provided by our state E-rate office that makes sure we note changes in eligible services.

Our school district has a very high mobility rate, so I pick one day in October and lock in to that day. I request the food-service report for that day ... [and] prepare a spreadsheet. We also open one to four schools per year, and I always need to remember to get entity numbers for them ahead of time. I put in for the new schools at the lowest free/reduced lunch rate so that I won't have audit problems.

I always get audited, because our free/reduced rates are as volatile as our mobility rate. I have always been able to prove that the rates are as I claim, but [I've had] to get the director of food service and sometimes our superintendent involved.

Kathryn: Form 470/procurement process—as long as the procurement folks listen to us and understand that the 28-day posting period cannot be shortened, the procurement process goes fairly smoothly.

Service eligibility—we always try to match the service we are seeking as exactly as possible to the Eligible Services List. This is an area where “thinking outside the box” should never be done; it means you will receive many questions during PIA review [and] could be denied [funding].

Form 471—don't even attempt to file this until the signed contract is in your hand; be sure all the documents (contracts, lunch numbers, LOAs, etc.) are together in the same file. Before submitting online, we always do a “practice” copy.

Application review—if you can't give PIA [Program Integrity Assurance staff] what they have asked for right away, see how much time they will give you; don't wait until the day it is due! If you have a consortium, make sure the reviewer knows from the beginning that you might have to obtain information from other folks. Don't ever blame the reviewer when you get requests for the same information over and over, just fax or eMail it to

them (and pretend to smile).

Document retention—*save everything* and keep it in a file where, heaven forbid, if something happens to you, it can be located by someone else. Print out eMails, keep proof that faxes were received, [and] keep proof that documents were received by the SLD—send [them via] certified mail, [with] return receipt requested.

Appeals—consult an attorney; it is well worth the time and money.

Q: *What parts of the E-rate process do you not manage well or need more assistance with? What additional informational resources would you like from the FCC, USAC, or SLD to improve your ability to administer or manage these parts of the E-rate process?*

Laurie: I find that the most difficult part of the E-rate is meeting the deadlines and juggling three funding years at a time. I have notes all over my office with deadlines [and] funding year dates—including a translation to calendar year, fiscal year, and E-rate year. Meeting the deadlines is difficult, because I rely on responses from many different people during the preparation of the 471.

I would like the SLD to [request] repetitive requirements during the review [process]—such as signed enrollment and free and reduced lunch documentation—as part of the actual application. If we are always asked for the same documentation, why wait for the review to supply [it]?

Jim: Document retention can be a real problem. Last year, the SLD made available on its web site a “Guide to E-Rate Binder Table of Contents,” which lists the documents that applicants might need to keep. It lists 66 documents. ... Any help or resources to make documentation retention [easier] would be most appreciated.

Q: *What rule changes to the E-rate process would you like to see that would make the program easier for applicants—but would still ensure that the process guards against waste, fraud, and abuse?*

Laurie: I would like to see the deadlines for the 471 moved closer to the start of the fiscal year in which the products will be purchased. Our vendors have a difficult

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time making bids so far in advance, and our larger vendors have problems getting new contracts prepared in time for us. The good news is that we now only have to have one signature by the close date. Our common carrier has all kinds of legislative hoops to jump through before they can counter-sign contracts.

I would like to go back to the original concept of a straight discount for schools. It would eliminate the SLD and all of the rules and all of the paperwork. I met one of the original developers of the program, and it is his greatest regret that this seemingly simple discount program has become such a behemoth of government.

This isn't exactly a rule change, but I would like to see more technical or school people join the ranks of the reviewers. I seem to spend a lot of time explaining how technology works or what the various components of a phone bill mean ... to reviewers who seem to be in place with the sole purpose of getting applicants to concede money.

There are too many forms, too many signatures, and too many rules.

Kathleen: I agree with Laurie about the dates and paperwork. The deadlines really do not coincide with when schools need to negotiate contracts. ... The amount of paperwork and the terminology with which the average teacher, technology or otherwise, is unfamiliar, makes the simple job of applying for E-rate funds cost a lot in man-hours. I suspect that if [the program] were better or more easily understood, more schools would apply for more funds. The cumbersomeness of the process must certainly leave some students out, by virtue of the fact that their administration just doesn't have the time and money to complete the process.

Kathryn: I think the SLD should consider whether a Form 470 is needed for certain services, such as telephone service. The vast majority of applicants do not have a choice as to whom they will buy local telephone service from and, in many places, the choice of long-distance service also is limited.

If applicants are going to use a contract established by another entity (municipal, county, state, or federal), I think the SLD should consider that they don't have to file a Form 470. I realize that the posting of the Form 470 for purposes of procurement is one of the "must dos" of the E-rate program, but the world of 1996 is not the world of 2008 in terms of multiple telecom service providers.

Cheryl: I am concerned that not all PIA auditors seem to be trained the same. I always have new schools and usually must have a letter from our superintendent verifying that they are schools as identified by blah, blah, blah and so forth. We had one auditor who would not accept that letter as verification; I had to dig through school board minutes and supply minutes that gave the administrators permission to spend money in the school's name.

Some of these auditors accept straightforward proof, and others just keep digging and digging and digging. When the E-rate is only one of your hats, that takes up too much of your time.

Jim: Many smaller schools apply only for discounts on plain old telephone service (POTS). Without thinking through the implications of the SLD needing to estimate total requests received through the application process, it sure would be nice if smaller applicants could be pre-approved up to some funding amount and just send a copy of their phone bills to the SLD for reimbursement.

Q: *Are you satisfied with the types of products and services that are eligible for E-rate? If not, what changes would you make to the types that are eligible?*

Laurie: I would like to see [voice over IP] and video conferencing more generally eligible. The difference between a router, a PBX, and a VoIP controller is beyond me. We are not encouraged to try leading-edge technologies, because they have not made appearances on the Eligible Services List.

Jim: Since content filtering is required in order to be

eligible for discounts on internet access services, it would be nice if content filtering services, hardware, or software were eligible. I'd also like to see scheduling services for distance learning or video conferencing applications become E-rate eligible.

Q: *As you might know, the "Two-in-Five Rule" limits internal connections funding (excluding basic maintenance) for any given entity to two out of any five consecutive years—with the goal of providing discounts to more applicants at lower discount rates. From your experience, do you have any sense whether this rule is meeting its goal? Do you have any alternative recommendations for sharing internal-connections discounts with a greater number of applicants?*

Bonnie: My impression is that the Two-in-Five Rule adds just one more layer of confusion and reason for denial.

Kathryn: I think the SLD thought this rule would lead to funding for internal connections reaching "middle class" schools, and this is not happening. ... Some folks have talked about doing away with funding for internal connections ("Aren't all the poor schools already wired?"), but I think [Hurricane] Katrina has shown that disasters may require schools to be built or rebuilt. Perhaps

statewide, district-wide, consortium-wide attempts at internal connections should be considered in a different category, with a different level of discount applied.

Jim: It seems like much of the fraud, waste, and abuse of the E-rate program involves equipment purchases. If entities were required to contribute a greater percentage toward equipment purchases, there might be less abuse of internal connections applications.

Q: *What impact would there be to your district or library system if the E-rate program were to be terminated in 2009? Would the goals of your technology plan be attainable?*

Bonnie: Oh my gosh—devastating. We are a small library system that relies on taxes for our county and state funding. We were asked to reduce our county budget by 5 percent, and our state funding was reduced by 20 percent last year. I am anticipating a decrease to both sources again this year. To suddenly need a 10-percent increase [owing] to increased communication costs could mean not keeping the doors open at one of our remote library branches.

Cheryl: Would it hurt? I agree with Bonnie—*devastating*. ... Without E-rate [funding], there would be nothing for technology for our schools. **eSN**

A closer look at the typical E-rate manager

The people who manage the E-rate program for their school, district, library, or consortium don't fit any single profile. According to our survey, most are administrators (43 percent) or IT coordinators (40 percent), although some are procurement officers (1 percent), accountants (7 percent), or even classroom educators (8 percent). This diversity among E-rate managers has important implications for schools, libraries, and the E-rate program itself.

E-rate managers who identified themselves as IT coordinators reported the most familiarity with various aspects of the program; overall, their self-reported familiarity with the E-rate process rated a 3.7 on a scale of 1 to 5. Educators and procurement officers reported the least familiarity with the E-rate process (rating 2.9 and 2.8, respectively)—most likely because the program's requirements are furthest removed from their core job responsibilities.

The survey data reveal a key opportunity for program officials to reach out to superintendents and senior-level staff members at eligible schools and libraries with guidance on how best to approach the E-rate, said John Harrington, CEO of E-rate consulting firm Funds For Learning LLC.

"One of the challenges of the E-rate is that it crosses many different aspects of a district," Harrington said. "But USAC doesn't provide any training to applicants on how to staff it." If the agency offered advice about the kinds of functions or roles that are best suited to managing various aspects of the program, he said, applicants might have an easier time with the E-rate process.

Our survey also revealed a high rate of turnover among E-rate managers at schools and libraries. Nearly 40 percent of respondents said they've been managing the E-rate process for three years or less—and 19 percent said it was their first year doing this.

"You've got a bunch of people for whom this is totally new, and it takes a while for these people to get up to speed," Harrington said. This represents another opportunity for the Universal Service Administrative Co. to provide special training or outreach—in this case, to applicants who are new to the program—to help improve the E-rate, he added.

Sixty-four percent of respondents said they are the only person who manages the E-rate process for their school, district, library, or consortium. Thirty-four percent said their organization manages the E-rate process with two to five people, and 2 percent said their organization uses more than five people.

Larger organizations and those with more complex applications reported using a greater number of people to manage the E-rate process.

In terms of the tools or resources that applicants use for help, 74 percent said they use a three-ring binder, 60 percent said they use internally developed spreadsheets, 35 percent said they use their state E-rate coordinator, and 18 percent said they use a professional consultant. There was virtually no difference between the percentage of smaller applicants (18 percent) and that of larger applicants (20 percent) who use consultants—or between the percentage of low-discount applicants (16 percent) and that of high-discount applicants (18 percent) who do so.

The average applicant spends 21 hours a month managing the E-rate process, though this varies widely depending on the type of applicant and the kinds of services requested. Here's a closer look at how much time applicants spend on the process:

Hours Per Month Committed by Organization

Overall Average of Respondents 21 hrs

By Requested Amount

Less than \$10,000	9 hrs
Between \$10,000 and \$100,000	12 hrs
Between \$100,000 and \$500,000	16 hrs
Between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000	28 hrs
More than \$1,000,000	47 hrs

By Type of Funding Requested

Telecomm/Internet only	9 hrs
Internal Connections	21 hrs

By Entity Type

Library	7 hrs
Private School	9 hrs
School District	17 hrs
Consortium	29 hrs

By Size of School or District

Less than 5,000 students	12 hrs
Between 5,000 and 15,000 students	20 hrs
More than 15,000 students	36 hrs

E-rate: **compliant**

Applicants that are audited are often cited for not having the necessary documentation to show that they are in compliance with E-rate rules and regulations. You have to maintain your E-rate documents for a long time. Do you know where your E-rate forms, procurement documents, invoices, check stubs, POs, and SLD correspondence are from the last five years?

With E-rate Manager for Applicants, you can store all your E-rate documents online in a single location so that you have access to them from any web browser with just the click of a mouse.

E-rate Manager for Applicants is perfect for people who care about E-rate compliance and want to have peace of mind about their E-rate documents.

E-rate: **streamlined**

No more complex spreadsheets to track your E-rate funding. With E-rate Manager for Applicants from Funds For Learning, you have to access to your E-rate funding information right from your web browser. It's updated every day so you'll see immediately when the SLD approves your funding requests or issues a disbursement.

And don't sweat making forms any longer! Imagine making a Form 486 for all of your new funding commitments in just seconds! With E-rate Manager for Applicants, it's just that easy.

E-rate: **simplified**

E-rate Manager was developed by Funds For Learning, one of the nation's most trusted names in E-rate since 1997. E-rate Manager can help you simplify the process and stay in compliance with the E-rate program's rules and regulations. Hundreds of other applicants have made their 'E-rate lives' easier by using E-rate Manager. Why are you waiting? Join today and discover how to simplify E-rate.

Annual subscriptions start at just \$249.

Visit www.FundsForLearning.com today.

