

RFP #22-010: Technical Assistance Center for the Universal Service Discount (E-Rate), Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) and the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) Programs

Questions and Answers

I. Deliverables and Project Description

Q 1: Can you please provide the specifications documents for this bid, "Technical Assistance Center for the Universal Service Discount (E-Rate), Emergency Connectivity (ECF) and the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)"?

A: All specifications for bids for this program are provided in the RFP available at <https://www.p12.nysed.gov/comcontracts/comcontracts.html#22010>

Q 2: Can you please confirm that submitting applications on behalf of the schools (and associated functions such as vendor selection, posting forms, etc.) are out of scope?

A: There is the expectation that the Contractor will provide guidance and advisement available to schools and other eligible NYS applicants, and respond to inquiries related to submitting applications, and associated functions such as vendor selection and the posting of forms. However, it is out of scope of this RFP that the Consultant performs these actions on behalf of schools or other eligible agencies.

Q 3: "The Contractor will provide technical assistance in creating a complete and satisfactory response" (regarding PIA reviews). Can you please elaborate on the responsibility of the Contractor? Will the Contractor answer process and E-Rate related questions for the schools to help them craft an accurate response to the PIA reviewers?

A: Yes. The Contractor will respond to inquiries and provide guidance on responses to PIA reviews and assist NYS eligible entities, upon request, in crafting accurate responses to PIA reviews

Q 4: Will the Contractor be expected to craft the response and send the response to the USAC PIA reviewers directly on behalf of the school?

A: The expectation is that the Contractor will provide sufficient guidance to lead eligible applicants to successful PIA reviews and review inquiry responses. While generally the Contractor will not be expected to craft the response and send it to the PIA reviewer, there is the expectation that the Contractor will engage sufficiently and intervene in potentially unique or particularly problematic cases to the extent that the PIA review can be completed successfully on behalf of the NYS entity.

Q 5: "In addition, the Contractor shall be available by telephone, e-mail and/or other such electronic media to assist individual applicants with questions concerning all aspects of E-Rate." Is there an SLA (Service Level Agreement) expected for response time to school inquiries (email, phone, etc.?)

A: While there is no formal SLA for this RFP, the expectation is that the Contractor will provide responses within 2 business days of receipt of inquiries from eligible NYS entities.

Q 6: Is there an estimate of how many requests will be made to the Contractor per day and the type of request?

A: This is not a data point specifically tracked at present within this program. These inquiries are often related to eligibility, timeframes, student counts, square footage, other aspects of maximization of discount rates, consortium applications, and assistance with unique PIA review problems that sometimes arise. These might be related to changes to the program, Notices of Public Rule Making (NPRM), deadlines, validation inquiries or requests.

Q 7: What is the expected scope of the responses? For example, are they limited to process, compliance, timeframes, best practices, etc.?

A: The scope of responses to inquiries from eligible New York State entities would include process, compliance, timeframe, and best practices, yes, but it is the expectation that the Contractor will be highly expert in all aspects of E-Rate, ECF, ACP – or willing and able to become expert – and be able to sufficiently advise all NYS applicants to lead to successful resolution of their application process, short of conducting the application for the applicant. The Contractor should respond within a scope whereby the applicant is able to complete the application.

Q 8: Is the expectation to recommend vendors to ensure a fair and complete bid process?

A: There is every expectation that the Contractor will assist and support NYSED in maintaining the highest standards, developing and promoting best practices, and requiring ethical conduct for all parties with whom they are in contact in E-Rate, ECF, and ACP programs. It would not be beyond the scope of this RFP for the Contractor to be able to provide, upon request, vendors capable of supporting applicants in a fair and complete bid process or providing eligible applicants with a list of competent professionals capable of, for example, completing any outstanding work on an application or contract.

II. Monitoring the E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC)/Assisting and Troubleshooting E-rate and ECF Applications

Q 9: Re “Monitor the State E-Rate Coordinator RPC environment/Assist Troubleshooting E-rate and ECF Applications.” Is the expectation that the Contractor will provide training on the USAC managed E-rate Productivity Center?

A: Yes. The expectation is that the Contractor can provide training on use of the USAC EPC as needed, be able to respond to any inquiries regarding use of EPC, point to, refer to, and be knowledgeable about any USAC offered training materials re the EPC, and be available to assist and troubleshoot specific inquiries regarding usage of the EPC.

Q 10: Is the expectation that the Contractor will provide technical support for schools of the USAC managed E-rate Productivity Center (i.e. help with password resets, 404 errors)?

A: The expectation is that the Contractor can guide applicants to finding technical support for the USAC managed E-rate Productivity Center, so they can successfully seek and find USAC help with things like password resets, 404 errors, etc.

Q 11: Re "The contractor will serve as the NYS State-wide point of contact for schools, libraries, consortia, and all other eligible entities for all E-Rate and ECF reviews, audits, and appeals, answer all Program Integrity Assurance (PIA) questions, prepare, and respond to Selective Review Audits, and prepare and file SLD and FCC appeals." Is the expectation that the Contractor will provide advisement and assistance for reviews and audits vs. respond directly to the USAC acting as an agent of the school? Will the school or the contractor be the point of contact for these responses?

A: The expectation is that the Contractor will provide advisement and assistance to applicants or their consultants for reviews and audits. The expectation is that the school or eligible NYS agency is the initial point of contact, but it would be entirely normal, and not out of the ordinary for the NYS Consultant (the Contractor) to be copied or included on any non-confidential NYS agency audit information, as appropriate. It is not beyond the scope of this RFP that the Contractor responds directly to USAC if requested to do so by an eligible agency.

Q 12: Can you provide how many Selective Review Audits were performed for NYS schools, libraries, consortia, and all other eligible entities for the past 3 years?

A: We see evidence of 3 Selective Review Audits performed for NYS eligible entities over the past three years, or an average of 1 per year.

Q 13: Would the Contractor be responsible for preparing and filing SLD and FCC appeals as an agent of the school, or would the Contractor advise the schools and they would prepare, and file own the submission?

A: While more typical might be for eligible entities filing their own SLD and FCC appeals in consultation or monitoring by the Contractor, it would not be beyond the scope of this RFP for the Contractor to file on behalf of the eligible NYS entity if requested to do so.

Q 14: Can you provide how many SLD, and FCC appeals we prepared and filed by NYS schools, libraries, consortia, and all other eligible entities for the past 3 years?

A: We do not have nor track this information, no. We believe it would be publicly available by searching the Federal Communications Commission database. We do not believe it was very many; we were made aware of a couple of cases.

Q 15: "The Contractor will distribute a weekly E-rate program newsletter with updates on funding status, progress, and program changes of interest, including ECF, ACP, and other federal funding initiatives to NYS subscribers via email." Will NYS Education Department manage and provide updated e-mail addresses, or will the contractor be responsible for obtaining, managing, and cleaning this email list?

A: NYSED gladly collaborates in disseminating information to parties potentially interested in the E-Rate, ECF, and ACP programs, as deemed appropriate. The expectation is that the Contractor, manages and maintains any mailing lists, as well as use resources outside of NYSED to obtain and attract contacts who may benefit from guidance and support services.

Q 16: "The Contractor will respond to every direct request by USAC PIA reviewers for entity validation and other assistance requested with NY applications (eligibility of applicant, calculation of discount rate based on its F&RL enrollment rate or Community eligibility, a proper

process of bidding for contracted services and products, appropriate cost allocation of requested services" Can you provide how many entity validation direct requests were made by USAC PIA reviewers for NYSED entities for each of the past 3 years?

A: Entity validation direct requests are not necessarily infrequent, averaging around 1 per month, 30 for the previous three years. All were successfully resolved.

Q 17: Can you provide the same for the number of eligibility requests, calculation of discount rate requests, enrollment rate requests, etc.?

A: In our experience, calculations of discount rate, enrollment rate request, are often part of entity validation requests, or conflated and combined with them, not distinct from them. These often require some back and forth in sorting out specifics, obtaining additional information, and making final determinations, so there is multiple messaging. These average about the same, approximately 1 unique inquiry per month, or 30 over the last three years. All were believed to have been successfully resolved.

Q 18: "Contractor will proactively intervene and aid USAC PIA reviewers to successfully resolve issues involving all New York Applications." Is the expectation that the Contractor will work with the NYSED entities to resolve these issues or is the expectation that the Contractor will take ownership of these issues and be the direct respondent to USAC as an agent of the NYSED entity?

A: The expectation is that the Contractor will work with eligible NYS entities to resolve these issues, taking ownership and directly responding to USAC only when asked to do so, where and when appropriate.

Q 19: What is the approximate number of issues expected that the Contractor will need to proactively intervene and aid USAC PIA reviewer per year?

A: While there is an abundance of pro forma USAC PIA reviews concerning deadlines, more details required, missing forms, etc., intervention of substance by the Contractor is an infrequent occurrence to date, in our experience, averaging only a handful per application season.

III. Contractor Responsibilities and Website

Q 20: Re Contractor Responsibilities. "It is suggested that the work contemplated by this RFP can be achieved by 1FTE." Can you please clarify this statement? Is the expectation that the Program Director will be 1FTE dedicated to managing the contractor staff? or that the entire scope of the RFP should equate to 1FTE level of work.

A: The expectation is that the Program Director required to successfully manage the contract resulting from this RFP would be approximately 1 FTE, with the assumption that staffing may be required to complete all details of all deliverables. There is no expectation that the entire scope of this RFP equates to a 1 FTE level of work.

Q 21: "The contractor will submit a detailed annual work plan as detailed in A.b.iii.3 above. The Contractor will assume, and not transfer, fiduciary responsibility for all funds awarded pursuant to the program." Does this mean that Contractor is responsible for ensuring all E-Rate

funds are spent on the exact models/services in the bids? or is it ensuring/being responsible for tracking and accounting for program expenditures on a NYSED entity by entity basis?

A: The funds “awarded pursuant to this program” refer to the allocation of the contract funds payable to the successful bidder for this contract, only. They do not refer to funding provided through USAC to eligible NYS entities. The Contractor has full fiduciary responsibility for the funds given to the Contractor by NYSED, and these shall not be transferred above and beyond the allowable 30% subcontracting limit. Fiduciary responsibility for funds awarded to NYS eligible entities through USAC are beyond the scope of this RFP.

Q 22: Will the Contractor be responsible for auditing NYS entities to ensure they are using the funds as stated (i.e., interviewing individual NYSED entities, travelling to the individual NYSED entity districts and doing server room audits to ensure the equipment listed is the actual equipment used?)

A: The Contractor has no responsibility for auditing NYS entities. However, there is the expectation that the Contractor will provide guidance and advise around USAC audits, auditing processes, successfully navigating or avoiding audit, and offering guidance and support upon request to potential NYS agencies being audited.

Q 23: Is the website located at <https://ny.e-ratecentral.com/>? If not, please provide the URL where the website is currently hosted. (RFP pages 8-9; item III: Create and maintain a website to communicate regularly with the E-Rate, ECF, and ACP Community).

A: Yes, that is the correct location of the current website for the program.

Q 24: Does the website require the use of log-in functionality requiring end users to provide a user name and password? Are there web pages that are hosted that are beyond informational that require the use of log-in through user name and password? If yes, what type of pages? (RFP pages 8-9; item III: Create and maintain a website to communicate regularly with the E-Rate, ECF, and ACP Community).

A: The website does not require the use of log-in functionality, username, or password, nor are there pages hosted beyond those available for purposes of this program.

IV. Coordinating State Master Contracts with NYS OGS

Q 25: Re “IX. Coordinate state master contracts with NYS OGS.” “the Contractor will work with the NYS Office of General Services (OGS) to make sure that OGS contracts are considered eligible and that NY applications know how to use those contracts for E-rate purposes.” Is the Contractor responsible for responding to vendor questions and working with NYS OGS vendors on how to make their products E-rate eligible.

A: Yes, the expectation would be that the Contractor respond with expertise to the best of their ability to any questions from vendors concerning E-Rate, ECF, and ACP, as well as responding to potential NYS OGS vendors re how to make products E-Rate, ECF, or ACP eligible, if received.

Q 26: Is this limited to training NYSED entities on how to incorporate those vendors/contractors into their bids?

A: Beyond responding to questions from vendors re E-Rate, ECF, and ACP programs, and/or responding to NYS OGS vendors re E-Rate, ECF, and ACP eligibilities, training NYS entities on incorporating vendors/contractors into bids, as appropriate, if an interested audience can be determined, would be the type of trainings the Contractor could provide within the provisions of this RFP.

Q 27: "...the Contractor may have to work with OGS to negotiate limited extensions for E-Rate applicants." Have the "rules of engagement" between the Contractor and OGS already been established on the process to negotiate limited extensions?

A: While we are not, at the time of this writing, aware of any "rules of engagement" re negotiating limited extensions with OGS, this would be the type of research appropriate to be taken up by the winning bidder for this RFP.

Q: 28: Is NYSED looking to purchase off of a GSA schedule? (RFP page 20; Section 2; Cost Proposal).

A: No, NYSED is not purchasing off a GSA schedule.

V. Technical Proposal

Q 29: Can the attestation statement be included only in the proposal's cover letter to satisfy this requirement? If not, please clarify where this statement should be provided in our proposal. (RFP page 2; Instructions for Submitting an Electronic Bid; Item 5).

A: The attestation may be included in the proposal's cover letter. The cover letter must be signed.

Q: 30: Can you confirm that SDVOB participation goal is not required for this proposal? (RFP pages 4-5; Section 1; SDVOB Participation Goals Pursuant to Article 17-B of New York State Executive Law).

A: Bidders are encouraged to utilize SDVOB as subcontractors and/or supplies at a suggested rate of 6%; it is not a requirement.