Back

header

Schools and Libraries News Brief

April 14, 2006

Funding Year 2005 Waves

USAC will release Wave 44 letters on April 20. This wave will include commitments for approved Internal Connections and Basic Maintenance funding requests at 88% and above. As of April 14, Funding Year 2005 commitments total about $1.53 billion. See Automated Search of Commitments for more information.

More News from Site Visits

We covered preparing for a site visit in the March 3, 2006 News Brief. In this issue, we will highlight specific issues that often arise during site visits and provide information or specific guidance on those issues.

Outreach

USAC uses information gathered from site visits to guide outreach efforts and to develop new materials that can be of great help to applicants and service providers. We collect and post summary reports on site visits to the USAC website quarterly and continue to add guidance material based on feedback from applicants who have received a site visit.

- Focusing on Success is a collection of stories based on site visits that highlights schools and libraries that have successfully implemented innovative technology solutions or initiated other exemplary practices. USAC issued this report in September 2005 and then posted an update in January 2006. A second update will be posted later this month on USACs Site Visit Reports page.
- Quarterly site visit reports contain highlights and statistics on the site visits that occurred during the previous quarter as well as a summary of applicant concerns and feedback.
- Tip Sheets are one-page guidance documents on specific topics. Each Tip Sheet provides a high-level overview of the topic covered with links to detailed program information appearing at the bottom. We will continue to post new Tip Sheets to the website for the next several months, and site reviewers will have printed copies of Tip Sheets available as handouts during site visits.

Preparing for a site visit

Site reviewers have identified lack of proper documentation as the most consistent problem encountered during a site visit. Remember the FCC requires that documentation be retained for five years after the last date to receive service. Here are a few examples of documentation that should be available to assist site reviewers.

- **Technology plans.** Many applicants keep only their most recent approved technology plan and technology plan approval letter. However, often the invoice being reviewed involves a commitment made in a previous funding year. Applicants should keep copies of technology plans and approval letters from USAC-certified technology plan approvers long enough to meet the document retention requirements.
- **Competitive bidding documents.** Some applicants have difficulty establishing the open and fair character of their competitive bidding processes because they fail to retain certain documents such as copies of Requests for Proposals (RFPs), winning and losing bids, bid evaluation criteria, contracts, etc. Again, the five-year documentation requirement applies to competitive bidding documents for both tariffed and month-to-month services as well as contracted services. Applicants should not destroy these documents simply because a service provider was selected and a contract was signed.

- **Consulting agreements.** If you employ a consultant to help you through the application process, you must have a consulting agreement in place before the consultant provides any consulting services such as designing an RFP or signing a form on your behalf. The date of the agreement establishes the date that the consultant was authorized to provide services. Consulting agreements should be retained along with other program documentation.
- **Service substitutions.** Service substitutions are changes in the products and/or services specified on the Form 471, including changes in the technical components specified in the Item 21 attachment. Applicants must request service substitutions when necessary and should retain a copy of the request and USACs decision letter. Site reviewers have found instances where service substitutions were not requested when required and where the appropriate documentation was not retained.

Other issues

Site reviewers also frequently encounter the following issues:

- **Billed Entity Applicant Reimbursement (BEAR) payments.** Site reviewers note that some applicants are confused about the service providers responsibility to remit BEAR payments to them in a timely manner. The process is as follows:
  - An applicant submits a BEAR Form to USAC after both the applicant and service provider have signed and dated the form.
  - USAC reviews the BEAR Form and, if the form is approved, authorizes payment.
  - After two days, USAC's [Data Retrieval Tool](#) reflects this change in the field Total Authorized Disbursement.
  - After about three weeks, USAC cuts a check or sends an electronic payment to the service provider.
  - Within 20 days of **receiving** the check or the electronic payment, the service provider is required to remit the payment to the applicant.

  As you can see, the date that the Total Authorized Disbursement amount changes in the Data Retrieval Tool is **not** the date that the 20-day clock starts.

- **Choice of BEAR or SPI.** Some service providers request that applicants make up-front payments before work begins. Up-front payments are not in themselves a violation of program rules. However, applicants can choose whether to receive discounts on service provider bills or to pay bills in full and ask USAC for reimbursement. In the first case, the service provider discounts the bill sent to the applicant and the service provider files a Service Provider Invoice (SPI) Form 474 to request payment of the discount amount from USAC. In the second case, the applicant pays the service provider bill in full and then the applicant files a BEAR Form 472 to request reimbursement of the discount amount. Service providers should be aware that USAC may want to verify that the contract between the applicant and the service provider allows for up-front payments.

- **Block 4 worksheet corrections.** Site reviewers note that recipients of service are not always the same as shown on the Form 471 and that, in some cases, the Block 4 worksheet includes more entities than are actually receiving the services. Applicants can make corrections to one or more Form 471 Block 4 Worksheets using the [Receipt Acknowledgment Letter (RAL) correction process](#). This includes adding, editing, and deleting entities on the worksheet. (Remember, however, that USAC will not increase the total funding or the discount originally calculated on the worksheet.)

  If applicants act within three weeks, USAC will attempt to make the corrections in the application itself. However, even if changes are requested after the three-week period, those changes still become part of the record of the application and can be considered during the Program Integrity Assurance review process. If you are aware of edits that need to be made or changes that have occurred and your application is still undergoing review be sure to communicate those changes to your reviewer. Remember that having correct information in Block 4 is critically important for internal connections requests due to the [Two-in-Five Rule](#). Invoices cannot be paid for services delivered to entities not listed in the cited Block 4 worksheet.

Please remember to provide your constructive feedback when requested during a site visit. Much of the applicant feedback shared during site visits has allowed USAC to improve its outreach and application processes.

Service Providers: E-Notification File Details Available

Service providers can sign up for both e-invoicing and e-notifications. E-invoicing, or electronic invoicing, is most useful for service providers who invoice USAC frequently. E-notifications allow service providers to receive electronically information which is otherwise sent by certain decision or notification letters. E-notifications reduce the use of paper and speed processing.

USAC has posted descriptions of e-notification files, together with a list of field names and descriptions and a sample output file, linked to Service Provider Step 6 on the website. Service providers that have misplaced the original documentation for e-notifications or that would like updated versions now have the means to access them.

USAC Changes Its Web Address

USAC web pages can now be reached by typing usac where universalservice used to be. So the Schools and Libraries main page becomes http://www.usac.org/sl instead of http://www.universalservice.org/sl. The old universalservice domain will continue to work indefinitely, but you may want to update any bookmarks you have stored whenever it is convenient for you to do so.

There are three important exceptions to note:

- Addresses for web pages that contain sl or slforms **before** .universalservice.org have **not** changed. For example, the Apply Online webpage and the Submit a Question web page addresses will remain the same for the time being.
- Program Integrity Assurance (PIA) reviewers e-mail addresses which end in sl.universalservice.org have **not** changed.
- Active e-mail links in guidance documents have **not** changed. For example, if you click on the active link appeals in the Appeals Procedure guidance document to submit an appeal by e-mail, your e-mail program will show appeals@sl.universalservice.org in the TO: field.

You may download and print copies of Schools and Libraries News Briefs on USACs website. You may subscribe to or unsubscribe from this news brief. For program information, please visit the Schools and Libraries area of the USAC website, submit a question to USAC, or call us toll-free at 1-888-203-8100. Feel free to forward this news brief to any interested parties.

Please do not reply to this email directly, as it was sent from an unattended mailbox.

Back