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Schools and Libraries News Brief

October 6, 2006

TIP OF THE WEEK: **Gather the documents that contain the information you need to finish invoicing USAC for FY2006 recurring services.** Applicants and service providers can refer to the **Successful Invoicing** presentation on the USAC website for a discussion of these documents and the information they contain.

Commitments for Funding Year 2006

Funding Year 2006. USAC will release FY2006 Wave 25 Funding Commitment Decision Letters (FCDLs) October 10. As of October 6, FY2006 commitments total just under $942 million for approved Priority 1 requests (Telecommunications Services and Internet Access).

USAC will continue to issue weekly funding commitment waves. After noon on the date that the FCDLs are mailed, you can check to see if you have a commitment by using USAC's Automated Search of Commitments tool.

Update on BEAR PINs

Next week, USAC will begin issuing PINs to individuals who authorized Billed Entity Applicant Reimbursement (BEAR) Forms 472 from October 2004 to September 2006. These PINs can be used to file BEAR Forms online when the new online BEAR Form is available in a few weeks.

Applicants who have received a PIN based on a paper Form 470, 471, or 486 will be able to file BEAR Forms using that PIN. They do not need a separate BEAR-only PIN.

Because of the system changes involved, all PIN users – whether of the regular PIN or the BEAR-only PIN – will have to acknowledge their acceptance of the Applicant Terms and Conditions for PIN usage the next time they certify any program form. This acknowledgment is only required once.

When the BEAR Form is available online, service providers will not need a PIN to certify BEAR Forms filed by applicants. They will use the E-cert ID generated when they file or update their Form 498 on paper.

Watch the USAC website and the News Briefs during the next few weeks for the exact date that the new online BEAR Form will go live.

Technology Planning and Form 470

Applicants often ask about the relationship between the technology plan and the Form 470. Following are several points that you should consider once your technology plan is created ("written") and you begin to prepare a Form 470.

Encyclopedic Form 470

An "encyclopedic" Form 470 is a form that provides a laundry list of products and services. Rather than being project driven, an encyclopedic Form 470 covers a wide and unconnected range of services that, while they may be eligible for discounts, do not truly advance or support the specific goals and strategies articulated in the technology plan. The FCC's Ysleta Order (FCC 03-313) specifically cautions against filing an overly broad Form 470.

How can you avoid an encyclopedic Form 470? Simply put, prepare a Form 470 with a level of detail appropriate to the size and complexity of your plan. Your entries in the "Service or Function" and "Quantity and/or Capacity" fields in Items 8, 9, 10, and 11 of the Form 470 should be consistent with both the overall goals and the specific details included in your plan.

Degree of specificity

When drafting your technology plan, you can consider different technological solutions to your goals for using technology to provide educational or library services. In some cases, it may be necessary to write specific technologies into your technology plan if you are constrained by geographic, staff, or other considerations. However, technologies other than the ones you are currently considering may be capable of providing services that would meet your needs.

For example, you may have written your technology plan so that service providers could only provide wired Internet access to be consistent with your plan. You might broaden your plan so that you could also consider wireless Internet services as an option. If so, your Form 470 should encourage bids on both wired and wireless options for Internet service.

Needs assessment

The needs assessment element of your technology plan should address more than just the number of computers or other hardware you intend to acquire in order to make use of discounted services. For example, if your building was built in 1920, its current electrical capacity may not be able to support your requests for services without substantial changes. In that case, upgrading your infrastructure may have to precede a request for all the discounted services you have included in your plan, and your Form 470 should take this into account. Or, your infrastructure may support your request but your staff may lack the necessary training to take full advantage of the discounted services. Again, you may have to plan your Form 470 requests in stages to make sure all necessary training has occurred.

Keep in mind that by the time you file your Form 471, you must be prepared to certify that you have the necessary resources to implement your technology. That is why it is especially important that you perform your needs assessment and begin taking the appropriate steps to secure resources prior to completing your Form 470.

Recipients of service

When completing your Form 470 and/or Request for Proposals (RFP), you should give service providers an accurate understanding of the scope of your project. For example, if your library system has ten branches and your plan is for all of them to receive Internal Connections in FY2007, make that fact clear in your Form 470.

That does not mean, however, that you have to be overly specific in the "Quantity or Capacity" field on the Form 470. For example, if your school district is comprised of three elementary schools and one junior/senior high school and the local student population has not changed much in the last several years, you can enter "For my entire school district" in this field. Service providers who are not familiar with your area could easily get a clear idea of the scope of your project. However, if your school district is either growing rapidly or shrinking and consolidating, you might include information along these lines:

1. Growing: "For three elementary schools with a fourth opening in January 2007 and for one junior/senior high school that will be setting up mobile classrooms in a nearby parking lot while a new building is constructed with a planned opening date of May 15, 2007."
2. Consolidating: "For three elementary schools that will be consolidated into one school building during the year, with telephone service provided to all three buildings in the first half of the year but only one building in the second."

As you can see, the Quantity or Capacity field could be short or detailed, depending on the information you want to convey to give potential bidders a clear idea of your project's scope.

Revisions to your technology plan

Some technology plans are revised before they expire. Even though your technology plan is approved for three years, your situation could change. For example, you may accomplish all of the goals and strategies included in your plan in the first two years of the plan. Alternatively, a reduction in funding may have prevented you from accomplishing your goals according to your original schedule.

Minor revisions, while not requiring re-approval of your plan, must still be taken into account. And certainly, major revisions – those that had to be submitted for approval to your Technology

Plan Approver – must also be reflected.

As you get ready to file your Form 470, you should review any revisions that you have made to your plan and consider any other revisions that may be necessary. If you have revised your plan, don't just copy the Form 470 you filed last year. Think first if those revisions should cause differences in the Form 470 you file for the upcoming funding year.

Reminder: Deadlines Approaching for Certain Forms

Invoice forms. In general, the deadline for invoicing USAC for FY2005 recurring services is October 30, 2006. (The calculated deadline of 120 days after the last date to receive these services – June 30, 2006 – falls on October 28, which is a Saturday.) If the date on your Form 486 Notification Letter is on or before June 30, 2006, you must postmark your invoice or file it online on or before this date. This includes both BEAR Forms and Service Provider Invoice (SPI) Forms 474.

Applicants that are submitting BEAR Forms should allow sufficient time for their service providers to review and sign the forms. This is especially important if applicants are requesting reimbursement for an entire year of service on a single form.

If you miss this deadline, you must apply for and receive an Invoice Deadline Extension Request before you can submit an invoice.

Form 486. For many applicants, the deadline for filing and certifying Forms 486 for FY2006 is October 30, 2006. (The calculated deadline of 120 days after a July 1, 2006 service start date falls on October 29, which is a Sunday.) If the date on your FCDL is on or before July 1, 2006 and the service start date reported on your Form 486 is July 1, 2006, you must postmark your Form 486 or file it online on or before October 30, 2006.

Going forward, USAC will provide notification to applicants that have missed this deadline and allow them an opportunity to submit their forms and/or certifications following the guidance in FCC Order DA 06-1871. However, applicants are advised to file their Forms 486 promptly rather than waiting for a notification from USAC.

Remember that you can calculate deadlines for program forms, requests, and other activities by using the Deadlines Tool on the USAC website.

You may download and print copies of Schools and Libraries News Briefs on USAC's 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, or call us toll-free at 1-888-203-8100. Feel free to forward this news brief to any interested parties.

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