Back

header

Schools and Libraries News Brief

October 31, 2008

TIP OF THE WEEK: If you are preparing to file a Form 470 for Funding Year 2009 (FY2009), be sure that you have a written technology plan that covers FY2009. This can be an approved technology plan written in an earlier funding year that covers FY2009 or a new technology plan that you are working on now.

Commitments for Funding Years 2008 and 2007

Funding Year 2008. USAC will release two FY2008 waves of Funding Commitment Decision Letters (FCDLs) next week. Wave 29 on November 5 will include commitments for approved Internal Connections and Basic Maintenance requests at 90% and denials at 79% and below. Wave 30 on November 6 will include commitments for approved Internal Connections and Basic Maintenance requests at 90% and denials at 80% and below. As of October 31, FY2008 commitments total over $1.52 billion.

Funding Year 2007. USAC will release FY2007 Wave 70 FCDLs November 5. This wave will include commitments for approved Internal Connections and Basic Maintenance requests at 81% and above and denials at 80% and below. As of October 31, FY2007 commitments total just under $2.5 billion.

On the day the FCDLs are mailed, you can check to see if you have a commitment by using USAC's Automated Search of Commitments tool.

Technology Planning and Form 470

We discussed the first two steps in the application process, writing a technology plan and filing a Form 470, in the September 26, 2008 SL News Brief and the October 17, 2008 SL News Brief, respectively. However, it is also important to keep in mind the relationship between these two steps. Below are several questions that you should consider as you write (create) your technology plan and prepare to file a Form 470.

What is the relationship between the technology plan and the Form 470?

Your technology plan, if properly done, forms the basis for the acquisition and use of the services featured on your Form 470. By describing your current and future needs, your goals and strategies for using technology, and a budget that includes both your non-discount share and the resources you need to effectively use discounted services, you can prepare reasonable funding requests and evaluate and monitor your progress toward reaching your technology goals.

The services you request on your Form 470 should follow from your goals and strategies and your current and future needs as described in your technology plan. This helps to ensure that the products and services for which E-rate provides discounts will be put to good and effective use.

How do I avoid an overly broad Form 470?

An overly broad or "encyclopedic" Form 470, instead of being tailored to your technology plan, covers a wide and unconnected range of services that may be eligible for discounts but that do not truly advance or support the specific goals and strategies articulated in that technology plan.

To avoid this pitfall, prepare a Form 470 with a level of detail appropriate to the size and complexity of your technology plan that features services that you actually plan to use. 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.

How long and how detailed should my technology plan and Form 470 be?

There is not a minimum or maximum requirement for the length or complexity of a technology plan. We suggest that you keep the following general guidelines in mind:

- A small entity will probably have a smaller, less complex technology plan than a large entity. The technology plan for a one-room elementary school with dial-up Internet access will be smaller and simpler than the technology plan for a school district with 20 school buildings that have broadband Internet access and are connected by a wide area network.
- An entity with limited technology needs will probably have a smaller, simpler technology plan than an entity with more complex needs. For example, consider two single-site libraries of approximately the same size. One is planning to build an addition in two years with greatly expanded telephone and Internet services, while the other has limited telephone and Internet access in place and is expecting to maintain the status quo for the next three years. The technology plan of the second entity will likely be smaller and/or simpler than that of the first entity.
- Your current situation may affect the detail and the degree of complexity in your technology plan and your Form 470. For example, a school with no infrastructure in place to support Internet access could explore a variety of technological solutions to supply Internet access, while a school planning a buildout of an existing infrastructure might have more limited options because any new equipment would have to be compatible with existing equipment.
- Technology Plan Approvers (TPAs) can set requirements of their own for the technology plans that they approve. They may ask for a level of detail beyond that required by the E-rate program.

You should also make sure your technology plan is not overly narrow. For example, you may have written your technology plan to allow for only wired Internet access. If appropriate, you might broaden your plan so that you could also consider wireless Internet services as an option. If both options could work for you, your Form 470 should encourage bids on both.

What effect should my needs assessment have on my Form 470?

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:

- An old building with limited electrical capacity may not be able to support your requests for services unless you first make substantial modifications to its electrical system. If this is the case, upgrading your infrastructure may precede your request for all of the services you have included in your technology plan and your Form 470 should take this into account.
- 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 in time to make effective use of the services.

Keep in mind that by the time you file your Form 471, you must be prepared to certify that you have acquired the necessary resources to implement your technology. That is why it is especially important that you make an accurate and complete needs assessment and begin taking the appropriate steps to secure resources in a timely manner.

How specific should I be about the scope of my project?

When completing your Form 470, you should give service providers an accurate understanding of the scope of your project. For example, if your library system has nine branches and your plan is for all of them to receive Internal Connections in FY2009, 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 or shrinking rapidly, you should make that clear as well.

The Quantity or Capacity field in Items 8, 9, 10, and/or 11 on the Form 470 could therefore be short or very detailed, depending on the information you want to convey to give potential bidders a clear idea of your project's scope.

What effects could minor or major changes to my technology plan have on my Form 470?

Some technology plans are revised or updated before they expire. Although technology plans are usually approved for three years, situations can 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 or updates are those that remain within the scope of the original version of the technology plan and any related Forms 470. USAC does not require such revisions or updates to be re-approved, but you should check with your TPA for any processing requirements.
- Major revisions or updates are those outside of the scope of the original version of the technology plan and/or the Form 470. A major revision would require the issuance of a new Form 470 because the provision of the new or expanded services is significant enough to require a new competitive bidding process. If you make a major revision or update to your technology plan, you can have the revised technology plan approved for the period of time remaining on your original technology plan or you can ask for it to be approved for up to three years as a new technology plan. Again, if you are in this situation, talk to your TPA.

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

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.

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

Back