

[Back](#)



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# Schools and Libraries Program News Brief

— SPECIAL EDITION —

May 21, 2020

## Resources Available for Schools and Libraries Impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic

USAC and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) are committed to supporting schools and libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic. Below is a list of E-rate Program relief provided to date – be sure to monitor the USAC and E-rate COVID-19 webpages for the most up-to-date information. Schools and libraries may also be able to take advantage of emergency federal funding available through the U.S. Department of Education (DoED) and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

### USAC's Enhanced COVID-19 Web Pages

To provide a complete one-stop resource of the relief provided in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, USAC today launched an enhanced website detailing all of the relief available across all of the universal service programs. [USAC's COVID-19 Response](#) page provides a summary of resources and a link to the webpages of each of the universal service programs that contain more detailed information, including the [E-rate COVID-19 Resources](#) page.

These webpages also provide information regarding the FCC Chairman's Keep Americans Connected Initiative and emergency federal funding available through DoED and IMLS.

### FCC Orders and Public Notices

The FCC has released the following relief and guidance related to the E-rate Program:

**Application Filing Window Extension.** [Public Notice \(DA 20-273\)](#), released March 13, 2020, extended the close of the FCC Form 471 application filing window an additional 35 days, from March 25, 2020 to April 29, 2020. It also provided for an automatic 14-day extension for the deadline to respond to Program Integrity Assurance (PIA) review questions.

**Gift Rule Waiver.** [Order \(DA 20-290\)](#), released March 18, 2020, waived the FCC's gift rules applicable to the E-rate Program through September 30, 2020, to enable service providers to offer, and E-rate Program participants to solicit and accept, improved broadband connections or equipment for remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Wi-Fi Community Use Guidance.** [Public Notice \(DA 20-324\)](#), released March 23, 2020, reminded schools and libraries that are closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic that they are permitted to allow the general public to use E-rate-supported Wi-Fi networks while on the school's campus or library property, even if the schools or libraries are closed.

**E-rate Filing and Service Implementation Deadline Waiver and Extension.** [Order \(DA 20-364\)](#), released April 1, 2020, temporarily waived and extended several E-rate filing and service implementation deadlines and provided all program participants an automatic 30-day extension to respond to USAC information requests related to pending appeals, invoices, FCC Form 500 requests, audits, and PIA review.

For more details, please refer to the individual orders and public notices and to the information on [USAC's COVID-19 Response](#) page.

### **Keep Americans Connected Initiative**

On March 13, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, FCC Chairman Ajit Pai announced the [Keep Americans Connected Initiative](#). In order to ensure that Americans do not lose their broadband or telephone connectivity as a result of these exceptional circumstances, he asked broadband and telephone service providers and trade associations to take the Keep Americans Connected Pledge, which includes the commitment that, for 60 days, providers open their Wi-Fi hotspots to any American who needs them.

More than 750 companies and associations have signed the Pledge, and many have gone above and beyond it to provide connectivity and devices to students and teachers who need them for remote learning. For more information on providers who have gone above and beyond the Pledge and taken additional steps at no extra cost to consumers, please visit the FCC's [Companies Pledging to Keep Americans Connected During Pandemic Go Above and Beyond the Call](#) page. To see which providers in your state have taken the Pledge, you can refer to the FCC's [Keep Americans Connected Providers In Your State](#) page. With the initial Pledge expiring on May 12, 2020, Chairman Pai recently announced extension of the Pledge until June 30, 2020 and encouraged all providers to extend their commitments until that date.

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### **CARES Act Funding Available to Schools Through the U.S. Department of Education**

On April 23, 2020, the U.S. Department of Education (DoED) announced in a [Press Release](#) that more than \$13.2 billion in emergency relief funds, allocated through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, are now available. DoED will award grants to state educational agencies (SEAs) for the purpose of providing funding to local education agencies (LEAs) to support continued learning for K-12 students whose educations have been disrupted by COVID-19. Education leaders will have the flexibility to use funds from the Elementary and Secondary School Education Relief Fund (ESSER Fund) for immediate needs, including purchasing education technology (hardware, software, and connectivity).

Local leaders are empowered with the flexibility to determine how to use their ESSER funds, as long as they are used in ways that comply with applicable federal education laws. To see state allocations for the ESSER Fund, please visit the [ESSER Fund State Allocation Table](#) page.

State education agencies have until July 1, 2020, to apply for ESSER funds by submitting a simple signed [ESSER Certification and Agreement Form](#) to [ESSERF@ed.gov](mailto:ESSERF@ed.gov). The Department intends to process each submitted form within three business days of receipt. For more information, please visit the [ESSER Fund](#) page.

On April 14, 2020, the Department announced in a [Press Release](#) that nearly \$3 billion will quickly be made available to governors to ensure education continues for students of all ages impacted by the COVID-19 national emergency. The Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund, also authorized by the CARES Act, is an extraordinarily flexible "emergency block grant" designed to enable governors to

decide how best to meet the needs of students, and governors may use these funds to support remote learning.

In an effort to get GEER funds to states as quickly as possible, DoED has streamlined the application process; all that is required is the completion of a brief application, which can be digitally signed and submitted in PDF to the email address [GEERF@ed.gov](mailto:GEERF@ed.gov). The [GEER Certification and Agreement Form](#) application includes the instructions. Once states have submitted the signed PDF, DoED expects to obligate the funds within three business days. To see state allocations for the GEER Fund, please visit the [GEER Fund State Allocations Table](#).

More information about these funding opportunities, as well as flexibilities available to grantees with open awards, is available on the DoED website. For more information about DoED's COVID-19 response and related resources, please visit the [COVID-19 \("Coronavirus"\) Information and Resources for Schools and School Personnel](#) page.

For information on service providers that may be able to provide connectivity and devices to states and school districts seeking to use ESSER and GEER funds for remote learning, please visit the FCC's [Keep Americans Connected Providers In Your State](#) page.

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### **CARES Act Funding Available to Libraries Through the Institute of Museum and Library Services**

On April 13, 2020, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) announced in a [Press Release](#) that \$30 million appropriated to IMLS in the CARES Act will be distributed to all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. territories, and the Freely Associated States based on population. IMLS is allocating these grants through its most significant in-place funding vehicle for all states and territories, the State Library Administrative Agencies (SLAAs). The SLAAs are encouraged to use all available mechanisms to reach museum and tribal partners, as well as traditionally eligible libraries.

States and territories will be able to use the funds to expand digital network access, purchase internet accessible devices, and provide technical support services to citizens to address digital inclusion efforts and related technical support using the following types of data to prioritize efforts: poverty/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), unemployment, and broadband availability. You can see the state-by-state allotments on the [IMLS State Allotment Table](#). IMLS will provide additional details and anticipated timelines of this funding availability directly to SLAAs. More information is available on the IMLS [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Updates](#) page.

On May 8, 2020, IMLS announced two additional funding opportunities to support museums, libraries, federally recognized tribes, and organizations that primarily serve Native Hawaiians. The combined \$15 million federal investment will provide direct support to these institutions, equipping them to respond to community needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

[IMLS CARES Act Grants for Museums and Libraries](#) support museums and libraries in addressing their communities' immediate and future needs caused by the pandemic. Projects may focus on addressing the digital divide, capacity building for digital inclusion and engagement, preserving jobs, training staff, planning for reopening, or providing technical support. Applicants are encouraged to prioritize services for high-need communities.

[IMLS CARES Act Grants for Native American/Native Hawaiian Museum and Library Services](#) assist tribes and organizations that primarily serve and represent Native Hawaiians in responding to the urgent and

future needs of their communities. Applications focused on digital inclusion, technical support, rehiring or retraining staff, reopening planning, and other pandemic-related priorities are welcomed.

More information about these funding opportunities, as well as flexibilities available to grantees with open awards, is available on the IMLS website. For more information about the IMLS COVID-19 response and related resources, please visit the IMLS [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Updates](#) page.

For information on service providers that have signed the Keep Americans Connected pledge and may be able to provide connectivity and devices to libraries and Tribal organizations seeking to use CARES Act funding, please visit the FCC's [Keep Americans Connected Providers In Your State](#) page.

In addition to these funding opportunities, Toward Gigabit Libraries, an IMLS-funded project, created the Broadband Toolkit and Broadband Improvement Plan to support public and tribal librarians in developing the knowledge, and skills required to improve broadband access and infrastructure in their communities. The Broadband Toolkit and Improvement Plan are available on the Internet2 [Toward Gigabit Libraries](#) page.

**We will continue to update the COVID-19 pages on the USAC website as new or updated information becomes available.**

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[Back](#)