

E-Rate Guide for K-12 Network Upgrades

E-Rate can help eligible schools and libraries reduce the cost of qualifying networking services and infrastructure. Omada can support planning for secure, scalable, and easy-to-manage school networks.

E-Rate at a Glance

The Schools and Libraries (E-Rate) program provides funding support for eligible services used by schools and libraries. For K-12 technology teams, E-Rate is most relevant when planning internet access and qualifying network infrastructure that supports modern digital learning environments.

- **Eligible applicants:** Public or private K-12 schools, libraries, districts, systems, and consortia may apply for discounts on eligible services.
- **Eligible services:** Internet access, telecommunications services, and related network equipment may qualify under current program rules.
- **Process-driven program:** Applicants follow a formal process that includes competitive bidding, funding requests, review, service confirmation, invoicing, and document retention.

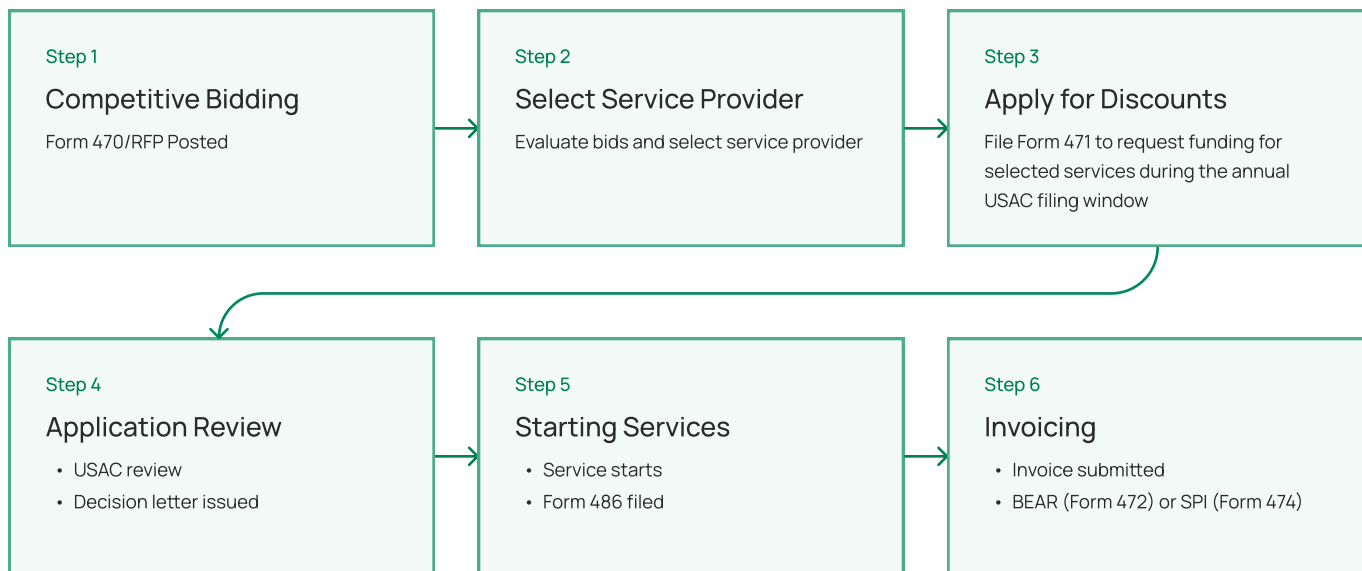
Why E-Rate Matters for School Network Modernization

Digital learning, 1:1 student devices, campus security systems, and connected operations all depend on reliable network infrastructure. E-Rate can help eligible schools reduce the cost of qualifying infrastructure, making it easier to plan upgrades in a budget-conscious way.

School Need	Typical Network Requirement	Planning Consideration
Connected classrooms	Reliable Wi-Fi coverage, access switching, cabling, and segmentation.	Validate classroom density, device counts, and roaming needs.
1:1 student devices	Scalable wireless capacity and centralized network management.	Estimate current and future device counts, including student, teacher, IoT, and guest devices.
Distributed campus connectivity	Outdoor connectivity, switching, PoE, network segmentation.	Separate security traffic where appropriate and confirm bandwidth and power requirements.
Cloud platforms and SaaS learning tools	Stable WAN/internet access and resilient LAN infrastructure.	Confirm internet bandwidth, firewall/routing needs, and failure-impact scenarios.
Multi-building campuses	Switching, fiber/cabling, and wireless backhaul where appropriate.	Map MDF/IDF locations, conduit constraints, and retrofit limitations.

Simple E-Rate Planning and Funding Flow

The E-Rate process is structured, so schools should plan early. The simplified flow below shows the major steps that are most relevant when planning a network upgrade. Visit USAC for full process details.



How Omada Can Support Network Planning

Omada can help schools translate education networking needs into practical network design areas. The examples below should be framed as planning support, not eligibility guarantees.

Planning Area	Typical Omada Discussion
Classroom Wi-Fi	Coverage, density, roaming, Wi-Fi 6/7 migration, SSID/VLAN design, and centralized management.
Switching and PoE	Access switching, aggregation, PoE budgets for APs and cameras, and uplink capacity.
Routing and networking edge	Internet handoff, VLAN routing, firewall policy, multi-WAN, VPN, and monitoring.
Outdoor connectivity	Outdoor APs, wireless backhaul at parking lots, gates, and remote buildings.
Managed network operations	Cloud-based management, monitoring, configuration, and support workflows.

Frequently Asked Questions

01 Does E-Rate cover every network product?

No. Eligibility depends on applicant eligibility, funding year rules, the Eligible Services List, project use, and cost allocation where eligible and ineligible functions are mixed.

02 Are Wi-Fi access points, switches, routers, and cabling eligible?

USAC describes Category Two internal connections as including equipment such as routers, switches, wireless access points, and cabling when necessary to transport or distribute broadband within eligible school or library areas.

03 When should schools apply for E-Rate funding?

Schools must submit FCC Form 471 during the annual USAC filing window. Since the exact dates change each funding year, applicants should check the latest USAC deadlines and plan ahead for the required competitive bidding period.

04 What kind of discount can my school get?

Eligible schools may receive E-Rate discounts ranging from 20% to 90% on eligible services. The actual discount depends on USAC rules.

05 How do I choose a service provider?

Schools must follow USAC's competitive bidding process to select a service provider. This typically includes posting FCC Form 470, waiting at least 28 days, reviewing all qualified bids, and choosing the most cost-effective solution based on price and other relevant evaluation factors.

06 How do I determine if Omada products are E-Rate eligible?

Check the latest USAC Eligible Services List or connect with an Omada expert to review product eligibility and support your E-Rate planning strategy.

Primary Sources

USAC E-Rate homepage:

<https://www.usac.org/e-rate/>

USAC Eligible Services overview and Eligible Services List:

<https://www.usac.org/e-rate/applicant-process/before-you-begin/eligible-services-overview/>

FCC E-Rate program information:

<https://www.fcc.gov/general/e-rate-schools-libraries-usf-program>

Disclaimer

E-Rate eligibility and funding are subject to USAC/FCC program rules and applicant circumstances. This guide is for general informational purposes only and does not constitute legal, financial, procurement, compliance, or E-Rate application advice. Schools should consult USAC, their E-Rate consultant, or their procurement/legal advisors to confirm eligibility and application requirements.