

FAQ - Giving your community the Internet and Infrastructure, it deserves

Yeah, you may have heard about E-Rate. The odds are that some of what you heard is true and some probably not so true. The reality is the E-Rate program can provide funding to address the Internet service, network equipment, and support services in your library. It does require some time investment on your part. Also, Nebraska is unique in that the Public Service Commission provides matching funds for libraries that want to upgrade to offer fiber optic Internet in the library (more on that below).

What Is E-Rate?

Generally speaking, E-Rate helps public libraries and schools connect users to the Internet. E-Rate is a federally-funded program offering 20-90% discounts on high-speed broadband, and the equipment and support services that make that connectivity work.

What is CIPA?

Acronym for the Children's Internet Protection Act, federal legislation that must be complied with in order to receive E-Rate funding. While this could be a significant barrier for many public libraries, good news! The Nebraska Library Commission provides **free filtering** to comply with that portion of CIPA. This meets the CIPA requirement that you provide a *technology protection measure*, for all library computers. Discounts on Internet, equipment, managed Wi-Fi, and basic network maintenance all require CIPA compliance. The filters must block visual depictions online that are obscene, child pornography, or harmful to minors (with respect to the use of computers with Internet access by minors).

You must also have an Internet Safety Policy that addresses the following issues:

- Access by minors to inappropriate matter on the Internet and World Wide Web
- The safety and security of minors when using electronic mail, chat rooms, and other forms of direct electronic communications
- Unauthorized access including "hacking" and other unlawful activities by minors online
- Unauthorized disclosure, use, and dissemination of personal information regarding minors
- Measures designed to restrict minors' access to materials harmful to minors

And, you must publish a public notice and hold a public meeting or hearing on the Internet safety policy, and provide reasonable public notice of the hearing. Finally, the documentation of the public notice (e.g. flyer or newspaper notice) and the hearing or meeting (e.g. agenda and minutes) must be retained for at least 10 years after the funding year in which it was relied on to obtain E-Rate funding.

Sounds like a lot, but likely, these are policies and procedures that your library would want in place regardless of receiving E-Rate funding.

Data Transmission

Transport circuits connect your library to your automated network or your Internet service provider. E-Rate considers these circuits separate from full-blown Internet service.

The cost of the data transmission alone does not trigger the need for CIPA compliance. It is only when combined with Internet service that CIPA kicks in.

Internet

Connectivity to the web and all the services that you and your library customers use daily. Internet service should not be confused with *data transmission*. E-Rate discounts for Internet service requires CIPA compliance.

Managed Wi-Fi

Managed internal broadband services. Your library can pay a 3rd party to manage robust wireless Internet service inside your buildings.

Equipment and Maintenance Services

Routers, switches and other equipment necessary to deliver Internet to your users, and maintenance contracts on that equipment.

Nebraska Special Construction Matching Fund Program

For libraries wanting to offer fiber connections to the library that do not currently have such service, you are eligible for the initial E-Rate discount for such projects *plus matching funds*. These special construction funds can be used for the construction of network facilities, design and engineering costs, and project management costs.

<https://psc.nebraska.gov/telecommunications/nebraska-E-Rate-special-construction-matching-fund-program-nusf-117>

Should You Apply?

Libraries users and staff need fast, reliable Internet access. Way back in 2014, the FCC adopted their first measurable Internet bandwidth targets for libraries ([WC Docket No. 13-184 Para 3](#)):

- Libraries serving less than 50,000 people: **100Mbps**
- Libraries serving 50,000 people or more: **1Gbps**

E-Rate Bureaucracy

The E-Rate process is rigorous and can take time, though applicants get better and faster with experience. E-Rate means multi-step applications and procurements, understanding what all the certifications mean, working with service providers to make the discount billing and reimbursement work, and good record keeping. In most cases, however, the discounts make it worth the effort.

Assistance with E-rate Is Available at the Nebraska Library Commission

Staff at the Nebraska Library Commission are available to assist you with every step of the E-Rate process. The Nebraska Library Commission staff offers training workshops for E-rate Category One services that provide Internet to the library, and Category Two services needed to enable high-speed broadband connectivity and broadband internal connections inside the library. The Commission also offers one-on-one assistance with completing individual steps of the process that are required for E-Rate and one-on-one assistance with processing E-Rate forms in the E-Rate Productivity Center.

Interested in a program that offers a substantial savings for the library's technology budget and offering fast reliable Internet at the library at a discount contact the Nebraska Library Commission.

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