



Department of  
**Education**

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for

# Connecting Households & Places Students Live

Version 0.1

## Overview

The Information Technology Division is committed to working with all areas of the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) to address what has come to be known as the *Homework Gap*. Achieving universal access to high-capacity broadband and sufficiently powerful instructional devices are key contributors to this gap. We are committed to ensuring equitable education opportunities for all students and that includes closing these gaps, especially among our most vulnerable student populations.

*Now is the time to act.* Federal pandemic emergency resources, non-emergency connectivity programs, and growing public demand for connectivity offer the opportunity to address local communities’ needs. Use this FAQ to discover how to use the available resources to connect households and other places where students live throughout a local school district.

After using these questions and answers to learn about the available funds, programs, loans, and grants, scan the sections for helpful tips on how to prepare for the application process, as well as some next steps and action items. In addition, this FAQ offers some related links and suggestions for additional reading.




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**Note:** This tool is one of three FAQs designed to help address and close the *Homework Gap*. To learn more, please refer to the following two FAQs: 1) Equipping Students & Educators with Devices and 2) Connecting Schools & Classrooms. Please reach out to the District Technology helpdesk ([dt.support@tn.gov](mailto:dt.support@tn.gov)) for assistance with acquiring these additional FAQs.

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## 1 Introduction



Technology offers many benefits for students, educators, and families—including the following: 1) enabling remote access to learning; 2) offering new and effective collaboration opportunities; and 3) expanding access to powerful supplemental learning tools, resources, and informative data.

The hurdles preventing ubiquitous access to high-capacity broadband and related devices often vary across communities, but the most significant obstacles include telecommunications infrastructure gaps (especially in the most remote rural areas); persistent poverty; and lack of household awareness regarding the benefits of online connectivity. Overcoming these hurdles require close collaboration among local, state, and federal leaders, as well as with the telecommunications and technology providers responsible for delivering the innovative technology and tools that digital education demands.

Use this FAQ to understand and evaluate key Federal funds, programs, loans, and grants as potential tools for meeting your district's connectivity needs. These include both emergency and non-emergency programs and resources. Some programs highlighted in this FAQ provide connectivity funding to schools and other education entities, while others direct funding to qualified households, telecommunications providers, or other community institutions, such as libraries.

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**Note:** Sections 1.1 and 1.2 list the available connectivity resources by emergency and non-emergency. Please be aware that these are the programs best suited for connecting households and other places where students live. Additional resources exist if the goal is to equip students and educators with devices OR to connect schools and classrooms. Please refer to those FAQs for that information and reach out to the District Technology helpdesk ([dt.support@tn.gov](mailto:dt.support@tn.gov)) for assistance with acquiring these additional FAQs.

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### 1.1 Federal Emergency Connectivity Programs

The following emergency federal connectivity programs are available when connecting households and other places where students live:

- The Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF)
- The Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBBP)
- The Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund
- The Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEERF)

## 1.2 Federal Non-Emergency Connectivity Programs

The following non-emergency federal connectivity programs are available when connecting households and other places where students live:

- Lifeline, a component of the Universal Service Fund
- The High Cost Program, a component of the Universal Service Fund
- The ReConnect Loan and Grant Program

## 2 Prerequisite Tips

Yes! Please use the guidance and direction in this FAQ to understand the various available federal funds, programs, loans, and grants. But do not stop with the initial application process. Many *to-do* items need to be completed on the front end...*now!* This section lists some of these prerequisites.

### 2.1 A System Award Management (SAM) Number: New Number

Applicants and service providers seeking funds and/or reimbursements MUST be registered with SAM. Essentially, any entity seeing to do any business with the U.S. Government must be registered. Many of these programs are Congressional appropriations, requiring a SAM number. It can take up to twenty (20) days to acquire a SAM number, so check now. If you are unsure if your organization is registered or if you cannot locate the number, contact your business office.

### 2.2 A System Award Management (SAM) Number: Number Renewal

Knowing that you have a SAM number is not the only question that needs answering. SAM registrations expire. A registration is good for one year. Contact your local business office to verify how long your SAM number will remain valid and usable. It may be time to renew.

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**Note:** To register for a new SAM number or renew a current number, visit the SAM Web site at: <https://sam.gov/content/home>

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### 2.3 FCC Competitive Bidding Rules

For some programs, like the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) Program, the FCC has waived their competitive bidding rules. But, every district must be in compliance with state and local rules. Review Board purchasing policies to determine if formal competitive bidding is required or if Board authorization is required for purchases using state master and piggyback contracts. In short, review your local policies, regardless of the FCC's guidance on this matter.

### 2.4 Review All Current Contracts

Check all of your contracts and the vehicles that the district will use to purchase services starting on July 1, 2021. Verify everything is up to date.

### 2.5 Review All Current Documentation

Look at any documentation that you have on file to help you determine unmet needs, to see what you've collected during the pandemic, and to help you get started with any new application process.

## 2.6 Inventory Physical Equipment and Assets

Do an inventory. Document what devices your district owns and where these assets are located. The district may want to use a federal program to finance a new WIFI hotspot to service these devices. And some devices will not meet the federal minimum broadband standards and need to be replaced because they are now obsolete.

## 2.7 Register for Application Training Sessions

Training on how to apply for the ECF Program will soon be available. Use the following link to stay informed on that fund and sign up for training:

- <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/6296809/Emergency-Connectivity-Fund>

## 2.8 Create a Document-As-You-Go Game Plan

Regardless of the fund, program, loan, or grant a district applies for, on-going documentation will be required for several years. The types of broadband service documentation can include: (a) type of service; (b) upload/download speeds and monthly data cap; (c) person receiving service; and for fixed broadband service; (d) the service address, (e) date(s) service received.

Equipment documentation can include: (a) device type; (b) make/model; (c) serial number; (d) person receiving device; and (e) the dates the device was loaned out and returned to the school or library.

While the FCC requires districts to create and maintain documentation records, how that is done and what the record look like is up to each individual district. The lesson here is to create a documentation system that works and follow it. If asked to produce these records, be able to do with so minimum delay.

### 3 Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF)

#### 3.1 What is the Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF)?

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has implemented the Emergency Connectivity Fund Program to address the *Homework Gap*. This \$7B grant funded program will allow eligible school districts and libraries to seek funding for purchases during the upcoming school year for Wi-Fi hotspots, modems, routers, combination modem/routers, Wi-Fi on school buses, connected devices (laptops, tablet computers, wireless cards, and similar devices), and home Internet connections (bulk broadband).

#### 3.2 How will the ECF work?

The short-term program will reimburse 100% of the costs associated with schools' purchase of eligible equipment (Wi-Fi hotspots, modems, routers, devices that combine modems and routers, and connected devices) and advanced telecommunications and information services (encompassing the range of technologies required to deliver broadband connections to the home).

#### 3.3 How is the program administered?

The Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) administers the ECF, done through the E-rate Productivity Center (EPC). Districts are required to submit requests through a modified 471 application process. Reimbursements are submitted via Form 472 (schools or libraries) or Form 474 (SPI), for service providers. Form 500 is used for changes. Schools, libraries, and consortia that are eligible for the E-rate program...even if they don't currently participate in E-rate.

#### 3.4 When is the first application window?

Anticipated new expenditures from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022. The 45-day application window opening as early as this month (June). If funds are not exhausted in first application window, a second window will open.

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**Note:** Subsequent windows will be for retroactive reimbursement for purchases made at start of pandemic (March 2020 – June 30, 2021).

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#### 3.5 What's included in the eligible connecting equipment?

Equipment necessary for a broadband Internet service to operate:

- Wi-Fi Hotspots (capped at \$250 per device).
- Modems, Routers.
- Satellite dish or fixed wireless receiver.

### **3.6 What's included in the eligible devices?**

Connected end-user devices:

- Laptops & tablets (capped at \$400 per device).
- Operating software & licenses included in cost of device.
- Manufacturer's 3-year warranty included in cost of device.

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**Note:** Districts may spend over the WIFI hotspot and laptops/tables caps, but the fund will NOT reimburse the additional amounts.

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### **3.7 Is the \$250 per Wi-Fi hotspot both subscription and equipment cost?**

The \$250 is the cap per device (equipment). The separate monthly recurring Internet service cost is uncapped.

### **3.8 Can districts be reimbursed for costs after July 1 on items previously purchased?**

Yes. The first application window is for anticipated eligible expenditures from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022.

### **3.9 If laptops ordered before 7/1 but not yet received, covered by ECF?**

If the district does not receive or pay for the laptops until on or after July 1, 2021, then yes, the district may apply for ECF for them in the first application window - for services to be received between July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022.

### **3.10 How does a district demonstrate "unmet need"?**

The FCC leaves this up to the school. However, the method must be reasonable and supported by documentation.

### **3.11 Does a low-income student fill the unmet need requirement?**

Districts cannot assume that any students meeting low-income eligibility requirements for Free/Reduced lunch or other assistance programs will demonstrate that there is an unmet need. The FCC does not agree that there should be a presumption of unmet need when a school pays for a device or broadband connection for a low-income student.

### 3.12 Is replacement of obsolete devices allowed?

The replacement of a previously-purchased obsolete device may be eligible **IF** the single device per student or *school staff member* with an unmet need requirement is adhered to.

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**Note:** It is important to note that in this context, the term school staff member means teachers, para professionals, or special education teachers. The person using the replaced, new device **MUST** be involved in student instruction. As a result, personnel such as principals and secretaries are not eligible.

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### 3.13 Will this be restricted to students in eligible schools?

Yes. ECF purchases are restricted to students, school staff, and library patrons of E-rate eligible schools, libraries, and consortia.

### 3.14 If a district purchases WIFI hotspots, is it only one per address?

No. The per address limitation is for fixed broadband Internet service. For mobile devices, the limitation is one per individual student/school staff member/library patron.

### 3.15 Is duplication of resources allowed?

No. ECF may not be used if services/devices are purchased with other federal, state, or other specific earmarked funding for remote learning initiatives (e.g. ESSER, EBB, CTF, etc.).

### 3.16 Is a district restricted where it can set up a WIFI hotspot?

Technically, there are restrictions, but districts are restricted to a variety of locations. Authorized locations include the following:

- Locations other than a school or on-campus library;
- Homes;
- School Buses; and
- Community centers, churches, or other locations where remote learning is occurring.

### 3.17 What are some examples of approved broadband services?

Eligible services are completely **OFF CAMPUS** and include such items as:

- Commercially available wired and wireless broadband Internet services;
- Fixed broadband service (cable, DSL, fiber, wireless);

- Mobile broadband service (cellular, wireless);
- Satellite broadband service; and
- Installation, taxes & surcharges.

### **3.18 Are there limits associated with the access or devices?**

Yes. Limits include the following:

- Single fixed broadband connection per address except for multi-tenant housing;
- Single device and/or wireless connection per student or staff member; and
- Access must be restricted to students and school staff.

### **3.19 Can ECF dollars buy teachers laptops for their homes?**

Even if teachers have desktop computers at school, ECF funds may be used to buy them all laptops to use at home for remote learning purposes **IF** the laptop device is necessary for the teacher to participate in remote learning **AND** there is a demonstrated **unmet** need.

### **3.20 Can a district apply NOW for a need that MIGHT exist next year?**

A common scenario could be as follows: a district starts off the year with in person learning, but it might go remote. The district may apply for devices and services it anticipates needing based upon its needs assessment at the time of filing the application. However, it is important that actual reimbursements be based on tangible factors that demonstrate compliance with the rules of the program.

### **3.21 What is an eligible location for remote learning?**

Someone might ask will students only qualify if "at home" rather than being at a relative's home participating in remote learning? Eligible locations are any place off campus where remote learning occurs. In this scenario, a mobile hotspot service would be a better option rather than a fixed broadband service which would be limited to one address/student.

### **3.22 Are there any limitations to the fund?**

Funding is limited to the purchase of eligible equipment and services for students and school staff who would otherwise lack access to Internet connectivity and devices sufficient to engage in remote learning. (Schools will need to report how they determined unmet needs on application.)

### **3.23 What services and products does the fund NOT cover?**

ECF ineligible services and products include:

- Full 1:1 devices and Internet where no unmet need exists;

- Private networks if commercially available Internet service exists;
- Desktop computers, smartphones, peripherals, and accessories beyond a power cord;
- Cybersecurity and filtering;
- Device and network monitoring and management;
- Replacement of lost, stolen, or damaged devices;
- Administrative costs;
- Software & user licenses;
- Firewall; and
- Warranties and maintenance.

### **3.24 When participating in this fund, are there any special considerations?**

School districts should be careful not to acquire instructional devices that are underequipped (e.g., insufficient antennas) or underpowered for their home-based remote learning environments. Districts should review device specification requirements for the schools' major video platforms' (e.g., Zoom, Teams, or Cisco Webex) before purchasing devices using ECF program funds.

In addition, School districts should equip participating households with sufficiently powerful, current-model modems/routers to ensure that students can access and use high-capacity broadband, without being stymied by outdated Wi-Fi equipment.

### **3.25 Is this *first-come, first-serve*, or it is by discount rate?**

There is no discount rate, as it relates to ECF...unless or until there's not enough money to go around based upon the applications submitted. At that point, the available funding will be prioritized based upon the E-rate discount rate with a 5% bump for rural applications.

### **3.26 If schools reopen to 100% in-person instruction, can schools still apply for ECF?**

The FCC does not predicate funding on whether schools are reopened for in-person instruction. The underlying principle is resolving unmet needs in order to enable students and school staff to participate in remote learning, whenever and wherever it occurs. The FCC refers to this program as closing the "Homework Gap," which indicates that ECF can be used to connect unserved students and staff for the purpose of after school-hours learning activities away from school.

## 4 Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) Program

### 4.1 What is the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) Program?

The Emergency Broadband Benefit Program is a [Federal Communications Commission \(FCC\) program](#) that provides a temporary discount on monthly broadband bills for qualifying low-income households. If a household is [eligible](#), it can receive:

- Up to a \$50/month discount on its broadband service and associated equipment rentals;
- Up to a \$75/month discount if the household is on qualifying Tribal lands; and
- A one-time discount of up to \$100 for a laptop, tablet, or desktop computer (with a co-payment of more than \$10 but less than \$50).

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**Note:** Only one monthly service discount and one device discount is allowed per household.

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### 4.2 How does a family know it qualifies for the EBB Program?

A household qualifies for the Emergency Broadband Benefit if it has an income at or below 135% of the [federal poverty guidelines](#) **OR** any member of the household:

- Qualifies for Lifeline benefits through participation in SNAP, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income, Federal Public Housing Assistance, or Veterans and Survivors Pension Benefit;
- Participates in one of several Tribal specific programs: Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribal Head Start (only households meeting the relevant income qualifying standard), Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (Tribal TANF), Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations;
- Experienced a substantial loss of income since February 29, 2020 with a total household income in 2020 at or below \$99,000 for single filers and \$198,000 for joint filers;
- Received a federal Pell Grant in the current award year;
- Received approval for benefits under the free and reduced-price school lunch program or the school breakfast program, including through the USDA Community Eligibility Provision, in the 2019-2020 or 2020-2021 school year; or
- Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating provider's existing low-income or COVID-19 program, and that provider received FCC approval for its eligibility verification process.

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**Note:** Only one monthly service discount and one device discount is allowed per household. Program rules acknowledge there may be more than one eligible household residing at the same address.

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### **4.3 When does the program begin and end?**

The FCC has announced that consumers can begin applying for and enrolling in the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program on May 12, 2021. The program will end when the funds run out of money, or six months after the Department of Health and Human Services declares an end to the COVID-19 health emergency, whichever is sooner.

### **4.4 How can a recipient apply for the benefit?**

Go to the FCC website for the [Emergency Broadband Benefit Program](#). Scroll down to Receive Your Benefit-portion of the screen. Follow steps 1-3 to check for qualification, apply for the Emergency Broadband Benefit, and find a near-by broadband provider.

### **4.5 How does this affect carryover?**

Households are able to use their current status at the time of application to FCC. This means if a household is still in carryover status; that is the most current status and should be used.

### **4.6 Which broadband providers will be offering the EBB Program?**

Many types of broadband providers can qualify to provide service in this program. Please visit the following page to see program vendors: [Companies Near Me](#).

### **4.7 Where can I find marketing resources for the EBB Program?**

The FCC has created a variety of marketing resources to help school districts advertise this new program. These include logos, press release templates, videos, social media images and announcements, and so on. Materials are available in several different languages, as well. Access the following Web site to download these resources: <https://www.fcc.gov/emergency-broadband-benefit-outreach-toolkit>

### **4.8 Where is additional information about the EBB Program?**

The FCC is excited to partner with those who want to help get the word out about this critical program. Please visit <https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit> to sign up to receive important updates and information about the Emergency Broadband Benefit program. In addition, use the following link to access a more extensive FCC-provided FAQ: <https://www.fcc.gov/consumer-faq-emergency-broadband-benefit>

## 5 Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund

### 5.1 What is the ESSER?

ARP provided \$122.8 billion in additional funding for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund, which Congress established and funded first through the CARES Act (\$13 billion in March 2020) and later through the CRRSA (\$54 billion in December 2020).

### 5.2 Are there restrictions on ESSER funds?

SEAs and LEAs have significant discretion regarding how to best use ESSER funds, including for broadband connections, hardware, and software. Each state receives a portion of ESSER resources based on its proportional share of ESEA Title I-A funding. SEAs may set aside up to 9.5% of their total allocation for statewide emergency relief activities, including to support digital learning.

### 5.3 How may ESSER funds be used?

These flexible funds also may be used by states and school districts to acquire devices for students and teachers for both remote learning and for classroom-based learning. States and school districts also may use the funds to build school-based network capacity and purchase or upgrade other technology required to support students during the pandemic, including enhanced connectivity for remote learning.

### 5.4 May an organization use ESSER funds to purchase devices?

Yes! School districts may use ESSER funding for a range of activities, including broadband connectivity, devices & software. In addition, other programs listed in the FAQ do, as well. Please review all of this document's FAQs for additional information.

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**Note:** It will be key for chiefs to develop strategies for using ESSER funds and the more targeted ECF funds in a complementary way to close their communities' connectivity gaps

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### 5.5 How is the ESSER funding different than the ECF funding?

ESSER funding, unlike ECF funding, may be used for on-campus device needs, i.e.: for devices to support learning recovery or for school-based equipment to support remote learning. Districts can be strategic about which emergency funds to use for which specific needs. In addition, ESSER funding could be used to cover any unmet needs for remote learning devices if a district's ECF funds are not sufficient.

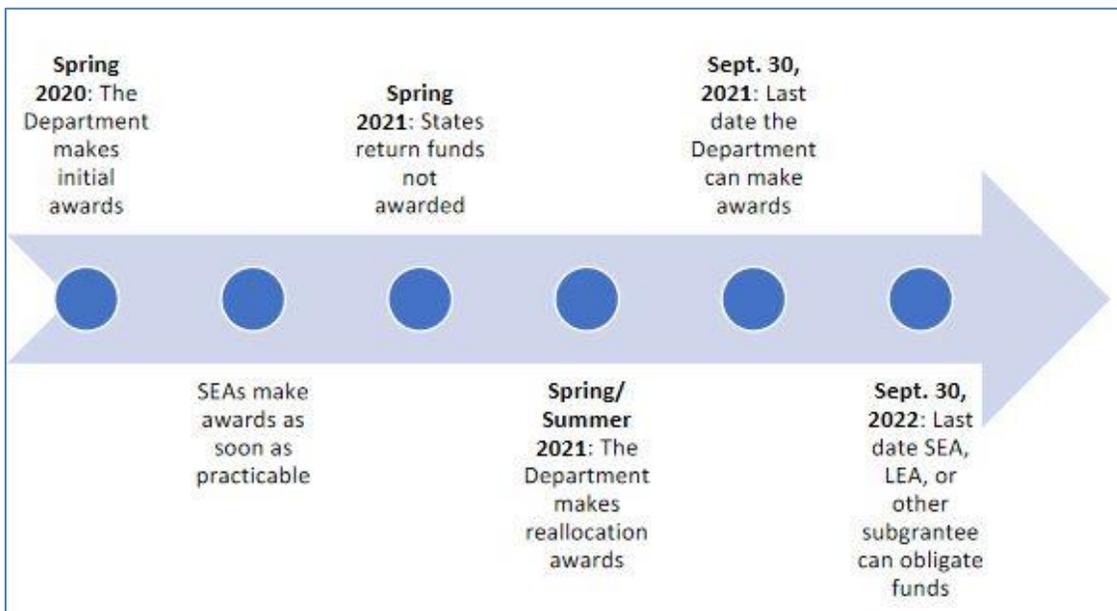
### 5.6 Who applies to the Department for ESSER formula funds?

Only SEAs in the 50 States, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia apply directly to the Department for ESSER Funds. An SEA is the agency primarily responsible for the state supervision of public elementary schools and secondary schools. The Bureau of Indian Education and the Outlying Areas are not eligible to receive ESSER formula funds. Congress provided a separate set aside in the Education Stabilization Fund to provide funds to those entities.

### 5.7 How do school districts or other entities access Esser formula funds?

School districts (LEAs) must apply to the relevant SEA. Every SEA must use at least 90 percent of its ESSER Fund grant to make subgrants to LEAs by formula based on FY 2019 Title I, Part A allocations.

### 5.8 What is the overall timeline for using Esser funds?



### 5.9 When and how does a district apply for Esser funds?

Districts that plan to apply for this grant opportunity should complete this intent to apply form by June 7, 2021, by using the ESSER [Intent to Apply](#) online form.

## **6 Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEERF)**

### **6.1 What is the GEERF?**

Both the CRRSA and the CARES Act provided governors, through the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEERF), with flexible emergency resources to help the education entities in their states that are most impacted by the pandemic. Governors may award funds to any school district, higher education institution, or other education-related entity that the governor deems essential to carrying out emergency educational services—including the delivery of remote learning.

### **6.2 May an organization use the GEERF to purchase devices?**

Yes! GEERF provides a source of supplemental funding for both broadband connectivity and devices for students and educators. In addition, other programs listed in the FAQ do, as well. Please review all of this document’s FAQs for additional information.

### **6.3 What about the ARP and GEERF funding in 2021?**

Congress did not provide additional funding for the GEERF through ARP in March 2021, so any remaining 2020 GEERF funds may now be obligated for other purposes. State chiefs are encouraged to consult their governor’s office to determine whether any unspent GEERF funding is available for connectivity purposes in 2021.

### **6.4 Did the CRRSA provide additional GEERF funding in 2021?**

The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSA) was signed into law on December 27, 2020 and provides an additional \$4,053,060,000 for the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEERF). The CRRSA Act provides that \$1,303,060,000 of those funds be used to supplement the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER II Fund) awarded to each state with an approved GEERF application under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act enacted on March 27, 2020.

### **6.5 How does a governor apply for a state’s share of the GEERF?**

To apply for a state’s allocation from the GEERF, a governor must submit to the Department an executed Certification and Agreement that the secretary sent to the governor on April 14, 2020. The Certification and Agreement includes specific programmatic, fiscal, and accountability assurances, including those related to “Maintenance of Effort” (MOE), equitable services for students and teachers in nonpublic schools, and continued payments to employees and contractors. A governor must also provide information on the extent that the funds will be used for remote learning.

## **6.6 How long should a governor anticipate receiving funds?**

The Department expects to award funds within three business days of receiving a governor's completed Certification and Agreement.

## **6.7 Which entities can receive emergency grants from governors?**

Governors may provide subgrants to Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) and Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) within their jurisdiction that have been "most significantly impacted by coronavirus" to support their ability to continue providing educational services to their students and to support the "on-going functionality" of these entities. In addition, a governor may use these funds to provide support through a subgrant or a contract to other LEAs, IHEs, and education-related entities that the governor "deems essential" for carrying out emergency educational services, providing childcare and early childhood education, providing social and emotional support, and protecting education-related jobs.

## **6.8 Is a governor required to award the funds to each category of eligible entities?**

No. A governor has wide discretion in determining the entities in the state that will receive GEERF funding. A governor can choose to fund only LEAs, only IHEs, only education-related entities, or any combination of eligible entities.

## **6.9 How may an IHE use GEERF funds?**

Subject to any restrictions that a governor places on an IHE's use of GEERF funds, an IHE may use the funds, awarded under section 18002(c)(2) of the CARES act, to support a broad array of activities. For example, an IHE might use GEERF funds to provide:

- Staff, infrastructure, and technology to support distance education, or remote learning;
- Academic support for libraries, laboratories, and other academic facilities;
- Institutional support for activities related to personnel, payroll, security, environmental health and safety, and administrative offices;
- Student services that promote a student's emotional and physical well-being outside the context of the formal instructional program; and
- Student financial aid, such as IHE-sponsored grants and scholarships.

## **7 Lifeline**

### **7.1 What is Lifeline?**

Lifeline is a federal program that lowers the monthly cost of phone and internet. Lifeline, one component of the federal Universal Service Fund (which is administered by USAC), offers qualified households a monthly benefit of up to \$9.25 towards phone or internet services for eligible subscribers (up to \$34.25 for those living on Tribal/Native lands). Lifeline subscribers can apply their benefit to the cost of land line, mobile phone or high-speed broadband services.

### **7.2 Who qualifies for Lifeline?**

A consumer qualifies for Lifeline if their income is at least 135% less than the federal poverty guidelines, or if they participate in SNAP, Medicaid, or other federal programs.

### **7.3 May an organization use this program to purchase devices?**

Unfortunately, Lifeline does not support the purchase of devices. The good news is that other programs listed in the FAQ do. Please review all of this document's FAQs for additional information.

### **7.4 How can someone apply to receive the Lifeline discount?**

Consumers may apply online, as well as mail in an application. Use the following Web page for application details: <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/how-to-get-lifeline/>

### **7.5 What happens after I apply?**

Once someone qualifies for Lifeline, the consumer can choose a phone or internet company that offers the Lifeline benefit to enroll in the program. Applicants may enroll by visiting a phone or internet company In-store, online, or via phone.

## **8 High Cost Fund**

### **8.1 What is the High Cost Fund?**

The High Cost program is designed to ensure that consumers in rural, insular, and high-cost areas have access to modern communications networks capable of providing voice and broadband service, both fixed and mobile, at rates that are reasonably comparable to those in urban areas. The program fulfills this universal service goal by allowing eligible carriers who serve these areas to recover some of their costs from the federal Universal Service Fund. It is a component of the federal Universal Service Fund, and it is also known as the Connect America Fund (CAF).

### **8.2 Who is eligible to apply?**

Telecommunications providers, not schools or SEAs, are the only entities eligible for the program. Although the program may not be a direct source of funding for education connectivity initiatives, chiefs can urge telecommunications providers in their states to target these resources to areas with large numbers of unconnected student households.

### **8.3 What is the CAP Map?**

The CAF Map displays the geographic areas that are eligible for CAF support, as well as the specific fixed locations where carriers participating in the program have built out broadband service. The dataset reflected in the map includes address, latitude and longitude coordinates, carrier name, deployment year and minimum speeds available. USAC has released version 4.0 of the Connect America Fund Broadband Map, located at <https://data.usac.org/publicreports/caf-map/>

### **8.4 What are the forms and what are the deadlines?**

Carriers participating in the High Cost program, including those receiving Connect America Fund (CAF) support, are required to meet certain filing deadlines, as detailed on the following Web page: <https://www.usac.org/high-cost/resources/forms-and-filing-deadlines/>

## **9 ReConnect Loan & Grant Program**

### **9.1 What is the ReConnect Loan & Grant Program?**

The USDA's Rural Utilities Service's (RUS) ReConnect Program is a broadband pilot program focused on rural communities. It provides loans, grants, and combinations of loans and grants to expand and improve broadband services in rural areas that lack sufficient access. The program's goal is to attract private investment for deploying broadband infrastructure to eligible rural areas, including homes, schools, libraries and more.

### **9.2 Who is eligible to apply for the program?**

Eligible entities include states, local governments, other political subdivisions, territories, tribes, non-profit entities, for-profit corporations, LLCs, and cooperative or mutual organizations.

### **9.3 Are there any broadband speed requirements associated with this program?**

Proposals must aim to deliver broadband speeds of at least 25/3 megabits per second, or faster, per household. The USDA notes that proposals should aim to serve as many rural customers as possible. Consistent with the Consortium for School Networking remote learning recommendations, we recommend projects that deliver at least 25 megabits per second for downloads and 12 megabits per second for uploads per student.

### **9.4 May an organization use this program to purchase devices?**

Unfortunately, ReConnect does not support the purchase of devices. The good news is that other programs listed in the FAQ do. Please review all of this document's FAQs for additional information.

### **9.5 Who can I contact for more information about USDA loan programs?**

Submit your ReConnect program questions by using the Contact Us Form located at <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect/contact-us>. USDA also encourages districts to reach out to their General Field Representative (GFR) or state office for more guidance related to a specific community. A list of GFRs, their service areas, and their contact information can be found here: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/contact-us/telecom-gfr/all>; State office contact information can be found here: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/about-rd/state-offices>.

## **9.6 Will USDA offer training or other resources to help with ReConnect applications?**

USDA will conduct a series of webinars addressing specific ReConnect topics once a FOA has been published. Register to receive updates about the program, including upcoming workshops and webinars, on the ReConnect website by clicking the "Stay up to date" link toward the bottom of the home page at [reconnect.usda.gov](https://reconnect.usda.gov)

## 10 Amendment History

Version #	Modified Date	Modified By	Section, Page(s) and Text Revised
0.1	06/09/2021	Roy Burkhead	Original

### Legal Information

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## Appendix A: Acronyms List

Term	Definition
ARP	American Rescue Plan Act of 2021
CAF	Connect America Fund
CARES Act	Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act
CCPF	Coronavirus Capital Projects Fund
CIPA	Children’s Internet Protection Act
CCSSO	Council of Chief State School Officers
CoSN	Consortium for School Networking
CRRSAA	Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021
EBB	Emergency Broadband Benefit
ECF	Emergency Connectivity Fund
E-rate	Schools and Libraries Universal Service Program
ESSER	Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund
FAQs	Frequently Asked Questions
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
GEERF	Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund
GFR	General Field Representative
IHE	Institutions of Higher Education
LEA	Local Educational Agencies
MOE	Maintenance of Effort
RUS	Rural Utilities Service
SAM	System Award Management
SSAE	Student Support & Academic Enrichment Program
USAC	Universal Service Administrative Company
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USF	Universal Service Fund

## Appendix B: Related Links and Additional Reading

Use the Internet and file links in this appendix to access information related to the funds, programs, loans, and grants referenced throughout this FAQ.

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**Note:** If you cannot access a link or unsure whether or not to open a destination file, always consult your local IT administrator first.

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### General Web Sites of Interest

- <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines> HHS Poverty Guidelines for 2021
- <https://eplan.tn.gov/default.aspx> ePlan is Tennessee's online platform that allows schools and districts the ability to access district and school plans, funding applications, and monitoring tools. ePlan has a dedicated TDOE Resource page, which has multiple resources available to help districts ensure that Tennessee succeeds when it comes to educating our students.
- <https://sam.gov/content/home> Applicants and service providers seeking reimbursements must be registered with System Award Management (SAM).

### The Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF)

- <https://www.fcc.gov/emergency-connectivity-fund-program-basics> FCC's official ECF site.
- <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-372311A1.pdf> Standard FCC ECF press release.
- <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-21-58A1.pdf> FCC's full Reports and Order document.
- [FCC Order with Rules for Program](#)
- [ECF e-mail Sign Up](#). Use this link to sign up and stay informed about the ECF and receive invitations for future training sessions.

### The Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) Program

- <https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit> FCC's official EEB site.
- <https://www.fcc.gov/emergency-broadband-benefit-providers> Participating Broadband Providers.
- <https://getemergencybroadband.org/> EBB Program online application.
- <https://getemergencybroadband.org/how-to-apply/> EBB paper application.
- <https://www.fcc.gov/emergency-broadband-benefit-outreach-toolkit> Ready-made EBB marketing materials for social media, press releases, fact sheets, audio/video, et cetera. (Numerous languages available.)

### **The Elementary & Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER)**

- [Additional ESSER Grant Reading](#)
- [Intent to Apply](#) online application link.
- <https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/05/ESSER-Fund-Frequently-Asked-Questions.pdf> Additional Q&A material.

### **The Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEERF)**

- [Office of Elementary & Secondary Education's official GEERF Page.](#) Additional GEERF information, including a sample template letter for any state governor.
- <https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/10/FAQs-GEER-Fund.pdf> Additional Q&A material.

### **The Lifeline, a Universal Service Fund**

- <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/> Universal Service Administration Company's Lifeline Page.
- <https://www.usac.org/> The Universal Service Fund's homepage. Lifeline is one component of the Universal Service Fund.
- <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/how-to-get-lifeline/> Use the steps listed on this Web site to apply for Lifeline.

### **The High Cost Program, a Universal Service Fund**

- <https://www.usac.org/high-cost/> Universal Service Administration Company's High Cost Program Page.
- <https://www.usac.org/> The Universal Service Fund's homepage. The High Cost program is one component of the Universal Service Fund.
- <https://data.usac.org/publicreports/caf-map/> The Connect America Fund Map.
- <https://www.usac.org/high-cost/resources/forms-and-filing-deadlines/> Forms and Filing Deadlines.

### **The ReConnect Program**

- <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect/program-overview> The ReConnect Program's homepage on the USDA site.
- <https://www.usda.gov/reconnect/contact-us> Submit program questions by using the Contact Us Form located at this Web site.
- <https://www.rd.usda.gov/contact-us/telecom-gfr/all> Use this Web address for a list of GFRs, their service areas, and their contact information.
- <https://www.rd.usda.gov/about-rd/agencies/rural-utilities-service> The Rural Utilities Service's (RUS) homepage on the USDA site. The RUS administers the ReConnect Program.

- The RUS also administers the [Telecommunications Infrastructure Loans and Loan Guarantees](#) program, an addition program for rural broadband connectivity.
- The RUS administers [Community Connect Grants](#), which state education leadership may align to help with their state's rural broadband needs.