

Bandwidth Options and the 2012 E-rate Application Cycle (November 29, 2011)

Many schools and libraries are finding that they have insufficient bandwidth to meet the needs of their staff, students, or library patrons. In relation to the 2012 E-rate application process, the following information provides guidance on options schools and libraries have to increase their bandwidth.

Bandwidth: The 2012 E-rate application timeframe

The 2012 E-rate funding year is from July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013. But as experienced applicants know, the application process always closes 3-4 months before July 1.¹ The E-rate Form 471 application filing window will open January 9, 2012, and close at 10:59 pm CDT on March 20. With this timeframe the last day to file the initial Form 470—and have it open for the required 28 days—will be February 21. However, waiting to file the 470 until the last day means you have just that one day to review and evaluate any bids for broadband services, negotiate with a provider, sign a contract, and file the 471 and required attachments (e.g. contract). To avoid this situation, a more realistic deadline to file the Form 470 is February 1 or even somewhat sooner.² This will then give you sufficient time to complete all the necessary tasks prior to filing the 471.

Bandwidth: BadgerNet and TEACH

Approximately 85% of the state's school districts and public libraries now get some or all of their bandwidth via the BadgerNet Converged Network (BCN). In February 2011, the state Department of Administration (DOA) declined a federal broadband grant to bring fiber connectivity to 467 schools and libraries on the BCN that have copper circuits. In addition, the grant was to provide most schools and libraries with significant increases in bandwidth. When the grant was declined, DOA opened negotiations with AT&T—the BCN prime vendor—to accomplish two basic purposes: (1) extend the BCN contract beyond its current November 2012 expiration date, and (2) reduce bandwidth costs. The extension was finalized in early November and it includes provisions to extend it to November 2016 and it provides significant reductions in bandwidth costs. Because of budget constraints, last March TEACH placed a moratorium on granting bandwidth increases pending the successful conclusion of the contract extension negotiations. With the negotiations now done, TEACH is again accepting applications from schools and libraries for increased bandwidth and it has issued updated guidelines on the application process. Note the following:

- Review the updated information and timeline on the [TEACH website](#).
- Before filing a request for increased bandwidth, carefully review the [process and guidelines](#) TEACH has for making such requests.
- If possible, file any bandwidth increase requests with TEACH by December 9.
- If you have filed a bandwidth increase request with TEACH prior to the contract extension, TEACH requests that you file it again so that it has an updated and accurate application.
- All requests for bandwidth increases, decreases, termination of service, etc., can be done via a new [TEACH web portal](#). (The portal will allow schools and libraries to see exactly what services they have on the BCN.)

¹ Those not familiar with the E-rate application process should go to the [Schools and Libraries Division website](#).

² On the form 470 and in any RFP, be certain to list the maximum bandwidth you anticipate needing through at least June 30, 2013. If you want to consider a multi-year contract, list the maximum bandwidth you anticipate needing over the life of the contract. Be certain to also check the 470 #8, Telecommunications Services and #9, Internet Access. Checking both will allow the service to be provided by either a telecommunications provider or a non-telecommunications provider, like a municipality or community area network (CAN).

Bandwidth: Points to consider

Note the following in relation to the bandwidth options described below:

- Libraries on the BCN with bandwidth issues should first contact their library system network manager. (Library BCN circuits are part of larger wide area networks managed by the regional library systems.)
- TEACH does not have the financial resources to provide discounted BCN bandwidth to all school buildings in a district. In this case, options 2 and 3 below will be of most interest.
- TEACH subsidized circuits may not be used as a redundant (i.e., backup) service. (Redundant services are also not allowed under the E-rate program.)
- The options below pertain only to procuring bandwidth—they are not related to the provision of Internet service. Increasing bandwidth may increase a school or library's cost for Internet service. Check with your ISP on this issue.
- There may be other (non-BCN) providers in your area offering bandwidth at attractive prices and DPI always encourages schools and libraries to explore all their bandwidth options. Ultimately, the bandwidth provider(s) selected is a local school or library decision.

Bandwidth option 1: TEACH discount on BadgerNet

This is the traditional TEACH school/library BCN bandwidth subsidy program that has been available since 1996. There are several benefits to this option. For example, the BCN provides 24x7 support and a very high degree of reliability and scalability. In addition, this option does not require you to file any E-rate forms. TEACH will charge schools and libraries \$100/month for bandwidth at or below 3Mbps, and \$250/month for bandwidth between 5Mbps and 100Mbps. Requests for bandwidth increases must meet the new TEACH guidelines referenced above. Only after all requests for bandwidth increases have been submitted and reviewed will TEACH know if it has sufficient funding to grant all requests. If a bandwidth increase cannot be granted, TEACH will make reasonable efforts to notify applicants of this as soon as possible to allow them sufficient time to file for E-rate on one of the other options described below.

E-RATE FILING: For this option, TEACH files all E-rate forms.

Bandwidth option 2: BadgerNet contract rate (no TEACH discount)

All schools and libraries can get more bandwidth on BadgerNet and pay the contract rates which are listed on the [TEACH website](#). AT&T will bill the school/library directly for any BCN bandwidth not subsidized by TEACH. An E-rate application can be filed on this bandwidth to further reduce the cost. One benefit of this option is that the bandwidth can be seamlessly added to any TEACH discounted BCN bandwidth.

E-RATE FILING: For this option, schools/libraries must file Form 471 and any follow-up E-rate forms. On the Form 471, cite the DOA's Form 470 (#449990000499944) which was used to establish the BCN contract.

Bandwidth option 3: Other provider

This option is procuring bandwidth from another provider, outside of the TEACH program and BadgerNet. If bandwidth from another provider will be in addition to a BCN circuit, the school/library will be responsible for managing bandwidth from different providers. This option may be of particular interest to school districts that cannot get TEACH BCN discounts to all schools in the district.

E-RATE FILING: For this option, schools/libraries must file all E-rate forms. File a Form 470 to get bandwidth cost quote(s) from providers. Using cost as a primary factor (an E-rate requirement), evaluate any bids, select a provider, and then file Form 471. As noted above, the Form 471 filing deadline is March 20, 2012.

Contacts

If you have questions on bandwidth options and the timing of the 2012 E-rate application process, contact Bob Bocher (608-266-2127, robert.bocher@dpi.wi.gov) or Steve Sanders (608-266-3856, stephen.sanders@dpi.wi.gov) on the DPI staff. If you have questions about the TEACH program, contact Tara Baxter (608-261-5054, teach@wisconsin.gov).