

## **Texas Library E-rate Initiative: 2010**

Every telephone customer in Texas pays monthly fees for the federal universal service fund. This money funds the E-rate program, which offers reimbursement and subsidies to help schools and libraries obtain affordable telecommunications and Internet access.

Every Texas public library is eligible for Priority 1 E-rate funding, which pays up to 90% of libraries' telecom and Internet costs. These funds are non-competitive: all a library must do is correctly complete the application procedure. After a library has initially been approved for E-rate, annual renewal is normally fairly routine update and re-application.

But Texas libraries have lagged far behind national averages in E-rate support. In fiscal year 2008–2009, only 91 of 852 Texas libraries (just over 10%) received e-rate funds, for a statewide total that year of \$1.15 million library funding. Yet the same figures suggest Texas libraries were eligible for perhaps \$11 million more in federal e-rate funding.

We found that many libraries don't file for E-rate because the application process is too complex and difficult. Smaller libraries often do not feel they have time or information needed to complete all the unfamiliar and complicated application forms and procedures. And some are concerned that all E-rate support requires public library Internet filtering. (CIPA filter requirements apply only to ISP services, not to telecommunications funding)

In today's economy however city and county libraries need this financial support more than ever. The statewide Library E-rate Initiative was created to encourage and assist every public library in applying for funds during the annual e-rate application period now beginning. USAC-trained E-rate specialists from the 501c3 TeleCommunity Resource Center will work with state and regional library system E-rate coordinators to provide expert assistance for Texas libraries completing e-rate funding applications configured precisely for their needs.

This collaborative nonprofit initiative is made possible thanks to guidance and support of the Texas State Library, Texas Library Association, Texas Association of Counties, Central Texas Library System, the Governor's Office, and other public library advocates.

Upon completion of this one year 'stimulus' project state and regional library system staff will continue to help public libraries apply for or renew their e-rate in future years.

We urge every city and county-supported library in Texas to apply for federal E-rate funding this year. For more details please contact your regional system coordinator or:

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