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FCC Defers Changes to Bid Solicitation Process for Schools and Libraries Program

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The Federal Communications Commission has announced that, in light of the COVID-19 emergency, it will defer substantive changes in the form used by schools and libraries to solicit bids for services under the federal universal service program, known as Form 470. As a result, the form and process for funding year 2021 will be substantively identical to the form and process schools and libraries have been using for the current funding year.

Last October, the FCC announced plans to revise Form 470 to address a formatting issue that confused some applicants, to reduce administrative burdens on applicants and to address other issues. The FCC concluded that, in light of "ongoing disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic," it was prudent to defer those changes "to allow schools and libraries to continue to focus their time and resources on responding" to the pandemic.

Separately, the FCC sent a letter to the Universal Service Administrative Company to provide guidance on how to address the formatting issue, which resulted in some schools and libraries requesting bids for certain internet access services that were different from the services they wanted to purchase. The FCC told USAC to continue to allow schools and libraries to accept bids for the services they actually wanted, rather than limiting bids to the services erroneously specified on the form.

Although the FCC is deferring substantive changes to the form, schools and libraries still have to wait until July 1 to begin the funding process for the next funding year by soliciting bids. USAC will be releasing a new version of Form 470, with no substantive changes, before that date.

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