ALAAmericanLibraryAssociation

May 11, 2018

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary
445 12th Street, SW,
Washington, DC 20554

Radha Sekar
Chief Executive Officer
Universal Service Administrative Company
700 12th St. NW, Suite 900
Washington, DC 20005

> Re: *Ex Parte Submission Regarding Observations and Recommendations Related to USAC's E-rate workshops.* (Modernizing the E-rate Program for Schools and Libraries, WC Docket No. 13-184.)

Dear Secretary Dortch and Ms. Sekar:

The American Library Association (ALA) has several observations and recommendations related to USAC's fall E-rate training workshops. As the fall 2018 workshops are on the horizon, we hope the issues from last fall's workshops—which we articulate below—will be addressed.

The E-rate workshops are a critical part of helping ensure a successful E-rate application process. They educate new participants on program basics; they provide valuable refresher training for returning participants; and they inform all attendees of changes for the upcoming funding year.

The fall workshops are particularly valuable to state and regional library and school E-rate coordinators who then use the knowledge gained to hold workshops in their respective states and regions. A very high percentage of applicants do not attend a fall USAC workshop thus state coordinators play a critical role in holding more localized workshops which reach far more applicants. Coordinators also tailor these workshops to the needs of the libraries and schools they support.

Considering the importance of the E-rate workshops, ALA offers the following observations and recommendations for your consideration. We are certain that if USAC addresses these issues it will help ensure a more productive fall 2018 workshop experience for both attendees and USAC staff.

- **Focus the Washington D.C. workshop on the needs of state and regional E-rate coordinators**. The library and school communities were told in July 2017 that the fall 2017

Washington D.C. workshop would focus on their needs, but unfortunately that did not occur. For the first fall workshop we still strongly encourage USAC to designate it as a "train the trainer" workshop specifically intended for state and regional E-rate coordinators. The format and content of the workshop would then reflect the needs of this particular group.

- **Have two program tracks—one for those new to the program and one for veterans**. Consider having more breakout sessions targeted at particular levels of knowledge (*e.g.*, beginners) or particular topics (*e.g.*, fiber, State Master Contracts, etc.). Breakouts were done at the fall 2017 Portland and Minneapolis trainings and were well received.

- **Select easily accessible locations.** It is best to have workshops near airports and public transportation. The location of the fall 2017 Washington D.C. workshop (the National 4H Conference Center) was particularly problematic. There were very few nearby hotels and the location was not near a Metro stop or the area's airports adding both time and expense for the attendees.

- **Do not change a location and date of a workshop once it is announced**. One of the fall 2017 workshop locations was initially announced as San Diego but then the location was changed to Portland. Changing locations or dates creates problems for people as they make flight and lodging reservations—especially for those who ultimately need their travel re-approved, sometimes many weeks before the workshop date.

- **Hold more workshops**. Last fall there were only four workshops nationwide. This was simply inadequate as they did not offer adequate geographical options for attendees. In past years there were often 10-12 sessions nationwide. While we value the webinars USAC has available, these are not a substitute for face-to-face workshops where attendees can talk among themselves and with USAC staff. Attendees' most pressing questions are often addressed through these sidebar conversations, making them invaluable. The Schools and Libraries Division's $68 million budget certainly provides sufficient funding to offer an adequate number of workshops at various locations. We are certain doing more workshops will result in applicants submitting more successful applications and enable them to address application review issues with more confidence. These benefits will also help USAC.

- **Have workshop materials available at least 2-4 days before the workshop**. For the 2017 Washington D.C. workshop the materials (print/electronic copies of slides) were not available until the morning of the workshop. Delays like this result in less informed participant questions and more repetition of information that could have been reviewed ahead of time.

- **Provide basic amenities for attendees**. At the fall 2017 workshops USAC did not even provide morning coffee. And while this may seem a minor issue, it forced scores of participants to start the workshop experience in search of coffee, rather than starting prepared for a full day of training.

- **Seek out local public libraries or schools for training locations**. In addressing costs, we acknowledge that workshops, especially outside of Washington D.C., can be expensive for USAC. Public libraries and school districts often have public meeting room facilities that are usually free and open to the public for meetings.

Thank you for listening to our observations and recommendations. We stand ready to provide further elaboration about the E-rate workshops and we can meet with you if desired.

Sincerely,

/s/

Marijke Visser
Associate Director, Public Policy and Senior Policy Advocate
American Library Association (ALA)

/s/

Ellen Satterwhite
Policy Fellow, ALA and Vice President, Glen Echo Group

/s/

Alan S. Inouye
Director, Public Policy, ALA

CC: Catriona Ayer, Acting Vice President
Schools and Libraries Division
Universal Service Administrative Company

Kris Anne Monteith, Chief
Wireline Competition Bureau
Federal Communications Commission

Ryan Palmer, Division Chief
Telecommunications Access Policy Division
Federal Communications Commission

Mark Stephens, Director
Office of Managing Director
Federal Communications Commission