

**UNIVERSAL SERVICE PROGRAM  
TECHNOLOGY PLAN – QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS  
JANUARY 5, 1998**

**WHAT IS A TECHNOLOGY PLAN?**

The technology plan documents the library service strategy or the school improvement purpose of requested telecommunications services or Internet access under the Universal Service Program. Under the Universal Service program, technology planning must not be treated as a separate exercise dealing primarily with networks and telecommunications infrastructure. The hardware alone is not enough. Approved technology plans must establish strong connections between the information technology and the professional development strategies, curriculum initiatives, and library objectives that will lead to improved education and library services.

**WHAT ARE THE CRITERIA FOR AN APPROVED TECHNOLOGY PLAN?**

To qualify as an approved Technology Plan for a Universal Service discount, the plan must meet the following five criteria that are core elements of successful school and library technology initiatives:

- (1) the plan must establish the goals and a realistic strategy for using telecommunications and information technology to improve education or library services;
- (2) the plan must have a professional development strategy to ensure that staff know how to use these new technologies to improve education or library services;
- (3) the plan must include an assessment of the telecommunication services, hardware, software, and other services that will be needed to improve education or library services.
- (4) the plan must provide for a sufficient budget to acquire and maintain the hardware, software, professional development, and other services that will be needed to implement the strategy; and
- (5) the plan must include an evaluation process that enables the school or library to monitor progress toward the specified goals and make mid-course corrections in response to new developments and opportunities as they arise.

**HOW MANY YEARS SHOULD BE COVERED BY A TECHNOLOGY PLAN?**

Approved Technology Plans should cover a period of **three years**. In view of the rapid development cycle of new technologies and services, schools and libraries should approach long-term commitments with caution, and a three year planning cycle is appropriate under these circumstances. All approved plans should include provisions for evaluating progress toward the plan's goals, and ideally these assessments should occur on an annual basis. In the case of the State Education Agency plans, State Library plans, and some other plans that may be longer than three years to conform to federal or state requirements, there should be a significant review of progress during the third year.

## **HOW DETAILED DOES THE PLAN HAVE TO BE?**

The approved plan should include sufficient level of information to justify and validate the purpose of a Universal Service Program request. But, it does not have to include the specific details and information called for on FCC Forms 470, 471, and 486. The information provided on those forms should build on the foundation provided by the approved Technology Plan, by documenting specific implementation details and operational steps that are being taken under the plan. That information will be considered a refinement of the plan, as long as the requested services can be supported by the plan. In general, there is no need to write or develop a specific Universal Service Program or “E-Rate” technology plan. The approved Technology Plan should provide the overarching framework for the use of telecommunications and information technologies in a school or library, and in most cases this will include services and computer applications that go beyond the Universal Service request.

## **ONCE I HAVE AN APPROVED PLAN, AM I LOCKED IN TO WHAT HAS BEEN APPROVED?**

No. In view of the rapidly developing nature of this field, technology plans should undergo periodic revision to take advantage of new hardware, software, and telecommunication opportunities. As school or library staff become more proficient in the use of these information technologies, new education and library service improvement possibilities are also likely to emerge. A technology plan should be responsive to these opportunities; open to revision, and not a static document. For many schools and libraries, the Universal Service Program itself may be one of these new opportunities. It is important that the approved plan include a sufficient level of information to justify and validate the purpose of a Universal Service Program request. But the plan does not have to include the specific details and information called for on FCC Forms 470, 471, and 486. The information provided on those forms should build on the foundation provided by the approved Technology Plan, by documenting specific implementation details and operational plan, as long as the requested services can be supported by the plan.

## **HOW DO I GET MY PLAN APPROVED? --- WHO APPROVES MY PLAN?**

Because the schools and libraries community is diverse, there are a number of different approval entities. The Schools and Libraries Corporation will certify approvers, and all approvers will use the same criteria and standards (see five criteria above). The SLC Web site will include a list of certified Technology Plan approvers.

### **A. Approval of State Education Agency and Public Schools Plans.**

The sole approver for State Education Agency (SEA) technology plans is the U.S. Department of Education. An SEA with an approved plan under the “Technology Literacy Challenge,” or the “Goals 2000” Program, has an approved plan for purposes of the Universal Service Program.

State Education Agencies are the preferred approvers for K-12 public school plans. A school, school district, or education service agency that has developed a plan approved under a Technology Literacy Challenge Fund initiative, or under a Goals 2000 initiative has an

approved plan for purposes of the Universal Service Program. School districts that have received U.S. Department of Education Technology Innovation Challenge Grants have approved plans. Many states also have established their own state-wide technology planning initiatives, and schools, school districts, or education service agencies may develop technology plans for state approval by participating in such initiatives, if those initiatives include the five criteria for technology plan approval. School districts that have not developed approved technology plans under one of these national or state initiatives may have their own district-level plans approved by their SEA.

It is important to note that any school within a district that has an approved technology plan is considered to have an approved plan in its own right, if that district-wide plan supports and validates the use of the contracted telecommunications services for educational purposes that school in a manner consistent with the five criteria for an approved plan.

If an individual public school develops its own site-based, or building level technology plan, it should seek approval for that plan at the district level, following the criteria and standards in Sections I and II. Charter schools may use those criteria and standards to have their technology plans approved through the same procedure that led to approval of their charter.

Public schools should work through their districts and state education agencies for technology plan approval. Schools that are subject to a state review process by state or local law may not circumvent the state process by submitting plans directly to the Schools and Libraries Corporation (SLC), and the SLC may not be used to appeal any state approval process.

## **B. Approval of Nonpublic Schools Plans.**

In states where nonpublic schools are not required by applicable law to obtain state approval for technology plans and telecommunications expenditures, or where state education agencies have indicated that they will not be able to establish a technology plan approval procedure for nonpublic schools, the SLC will authorize an alternative approval process administered by appropriate entities.

The SLC will certify approval entities for nonpublic school plans. These entities may include: (1) regional accreditation associations; (2) national, state, regional, and local private school associations; and (3) national, state, and regional parochial school associations. In some states, the State Education Agency, or an education service agency, may also work with nonpublic schools to establish an appropriate third party approval process for nonpublic school technology plans. In the absence of any of these alternatives, the SLC may consult directly with a State Education Agency and the nonpublic schools in a state or region to certify appropriate approval procedures. The SLC will maintain a directory of entities that it has certified to approve nonpublic school plans, and it will facilitate nonpublic school access to these entities when necessary. **All certified approvers will be listed in the SLC web site.** It is important to note, however, that the SLC, and SLC certified entities, may not be used to appeal the review of any other entity.

A school within a Diocesan school district, or a comparable entity, with an approved plan is considered to have an approved plan in its own right, if that approved district-wide technology plan supports and validates the use of the contracted telecommunications services for educational purposes in that school in a manner consistent with the five criteria for technology plan approval. If an individual school within a district develops its own site-based, or building level technology plan, it should seek approval for that plan at the district level.

### **C. Approval of Bureau of Indian Affairs Plans.**

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) had its plans approved under the U.S. Department of Education's Technology Literacy Challenge and the Goals 2000 program. The BIA is the preferred approver for BIA school plans. Any BIA school with an approved Technology Plan under the Technology Literacy Challenge, or the Goals 2000 program, has an approved Technology Plan.

The individual BIA school, or a school system, with a BIA approved plan has an approved plan in its own right. Such a school may choose to participate in the Universal Service program independently of the BIA in its own right, if that the BIA approved plan supports and validates the use of the contracted telecommunications services for educational purposes in that school in a manner consistent with the five criteria for plan approval.

### **D. Approval of State Library Agency and Library Plans.**

State Library Agencies may have their plans approved through several mechanisms. The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) has approved a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Plan for every state. These plans are similar in purpose and scope to Technology Literacy Challenge plans for SEAs, and they constitute approved technology plans for the purposes of the Universal Service Program. Alternatively, a State Library Agency may choose to use a technology plan approved by an appropriate body within the state (e.g. the legislature, state department of telecommunications, state department of information technology, etc.).

State Library Agencies are the preferred approvers for the technology plans of library systems and libraries in their states. An individual library within a system that has an approved plan is considered to have an approved plan in its own right, if that approved system-wide technology plan supports and validates the use of the contracted telecommunications services in that library in a manner consistent with the five criteria for an approved plan. If an individual library chooses to develop its own technology plan, it should seek approval for that plan at the local system level.

### **DO I HAVE TO HAVE MY PLAN APPROVED BEFORE I CAN APPLY?**

**No, the Technology Plan approval process does not have to be completed to file forms 470 and 471.** In the "Status of Technology Plans" boxes on those forms (item 23 on FCC 470, and item 24 on FCC 471) the applicant can indicate that the Technology Plan will be approved by an authorized body by the time that services are received. **To receive services, the school or library must file an FCC form 486, and by the time of that filing the Technology plan must**

**be approved.** The approving entity is required to provide the applicant with a Certification of Technology Plan Approval that is similar to Attachment A, and Form 486 will require certification that the approval has been obtained. **The only schools or libraries that do not have to comply with the Technology Plan requirement are those requesting support for voice services only (i.e., telephone service).**

#### **HOW WILL THE SLC KNOW THAT I HAVE AN APPROVED PLAN?**

In the “Status of Technology Plans” boxes on forms 470 and 471 (item 23 on FCC 470, and item 24 on FCC 471) the applicant must indicate either that the Technology Plan is approved, or that it will be approved by an authorized body by the time that services are received. To receive services, the school or library must file an FCC form 486, and by the time of that filing the Technology plan must be approved. The approving entity is required to provide the applicant with a Certification of Technology Plan Approval and Form 486 will require certification that the approval has been obtained. The Schools and Libraries Corporation is establishing a system of audits for Universal service discount applications. In the event of an audit, applicants to the Schools and Libraries Universal Service Program will be asked to use their technology plan to justify the telecommunications services they are receiving under the Program. The technology plan should provide sufficient information about the school’s education objectives, or the library’s service strategy, to validate the purpose of the services. Copies of plans, certifications, and other documentation to demonstrate fulfillment of audit requirements should be retained by participants in the Universal Service program.

#### **SHOULD I SEND MY TECHNOLOGY PLAN TO THE SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES CORPORATION?**

**No. Please Do Not Send Your Technology Plan to the SLC. To obtain a Technology approval, contact the SLC Client Service Help Desk. You will be referred to the certified approval entity in your state or region. Over the next few weeks you will also find a list of certified approvers on the Web site. Technology Plans will be reviewed and approved by local, regional, or state education and library organizations, and sending your plan to the Schools and Libraries Corporation will only delay your approval process.**

#### **SHOULD I ATTACH MY TECHNOLOGY PLAN TO FORM 470 OR FORM 471?**

**NO. PLEASE DO NOT ATTACH YOUR TECHNOLOGY PLAN TO FORM 470 OR 471. Your plan will be approved by local, regional, or state level education or library organizations. There is no provision for plan approval through the form 470/471 application process. On those forms you must certify that you have, or will have, an approved plan, but you should not attach that plan to the forms.**