

Training Next-Generation State E-Rate Coordinators: Building Expertise & Improving Effectiveness

Introduction: The purpose of this project is to deliver a multi-day, onsite training event targeted to the specific needs of State E-Rate Coordinators for Libraries in pursuit of Goal 3, Objective 3.4 of the LB21 program and to work with state coordinators to find sustainable pathways for maximizing the effectiveness of their unique roles. COSLA will, with the ALA E-Rate Task Force as an advisory committee, identify and hire a consultant to develop the training event and subsequent development activities and resources. The main goal of the training will be improved participation rates in the E-Rate program among local libraries, as facilitated by the state coordinators who attend the training event and engage in development activities. A secondary goal will be to identify best practices among state library coordinators. This project is based on a re-imagining of the [training developed by the ALA Office for Information Technology Policy](#) in the mid-2000s. The amount requested for this implementation grant is \$249,999, without cost share, over a two-year period.

Project Partner Entities: Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA); COSLA E-Rate Community of Practice (COP); American Library Association E-Rate Task Force (ALA ERTF, or ERTF); State E-Rate Coordinators for Libraries (state coordinators)

Project Justification: No training is available for state coordinators for libraries that addresses their unique role. There has also been a great loss of institutional memory and state coordinator capacity since the beginning of the pandemic. In June 2022, the ALA ERTF surveyed current state coordinators and found that over one quarter of the respondents had less than one year of E-Rate experience, and over half cited less than five years of experience. Additional turnover among state coordinators has occurred since that time.

State library agencies are under increasing budgetary pressure. Many have greatly reduced their budget for staff training and travel. Some have eliminated out-of-state travel entirely. Without substantial travel support for state coordinators, it will be impossible to convene the majority of those coordinators for in-person training at this time. The current state coordinator community lacks the deep networking and mentorship ties that are most quickly established by in-person connection.

Meanwhile, the environment for digital equity is also in a great state of flux: states are grappling with the opportunities and challenges of NTIA's [Broadband, Equity, Access and Deployment Program](#) (BEAD) and [Digital Equity Act](#) (DEA) funding; the role of [Community Anchor Institutions](#) (CAIs)—including libraries—is up for debate; and new opportunities for libraries in FCC funding resources seem to be on the horizon with every speech that FCC Chairwoman Rosenworcel makes [1, 2]. [New, specific E-Rate opportunities for tribal and small libraries are in development as well](#). Without state agency staff who are adequately trained in E-Rate coordination and program administration, opportunities will be lost for libraries to make their greatest impact on the digital divide since the early days of public internet accessibility.

Project Work Plan: First-year activities conducted under this grant will include developing, organizing, and running a multi-day, in-person training session for state library E-Rate coordinators, based on quantitative and qualitative information gathered through the COSLA COP, ALA ERTF, state coordinators, and E-Rate program data. A consultant will be identified by an RFP process guided by the ALA ERTF and contracted by COSLA to develop and present the training. COSLA will administer the grant project, with AMR Management Services consulting on administrative support. Travel stipends for the in-person event will be provided by this grant.

Conference handouts and other supporting materials will be archived by the COSLA COP in the COSLA Stacks information sharing platform. The in-person convening will include a forum activity for participants to guide the work of the second year of the grant, including the development of best practices and the production of additional resources, such as self-paced instruction and videos, to be maintained in the COSLA Stacks.

The COSLA COP and ALA ERTF will work in conjunction with the training consultant to design and administer

pre- and post-event assessments for participants to establish the areas of strength for the program and areas for iterative improvement. This feedback, along with the forum session input, will be used by the COSLA COP and ALA ERTF to establish goals and outcomes for a longer-term training program.

Key Personnel: [Christine Morris](#), COSLA COP Administrator, ERTF Vice Chair, and Digital Resource Manager for the Ohio Public Library Information Network, will serve as the project director. Her responsibilities will include working with [Jeremy Johannesen](#), COSLA Executive Director, on grant administration activities, managing project details, and coordinating communications with COSLA, the ERTF, and the consultant. [Lauren Abner](#), ERTF Chair and Technology Consultant for the Kentucky Department of Library and Archives, and [Henry Stokes](#), COSLA COP Administrator, ERTF Member, and Broadband Technology Coordinator for the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, will coordinate the archiving of training materials on COSLA Stacks. Additional ERTF members, including [Robert Bocher](#), [Lauren Cardinal](#), [Cindy Church](#), [Christine Gauvreau](#), [Amber Gregory](#), [Sharmaine Frazier](#), [Jared Leadbetter](#), [Malavika Muralidharan](#), and [Valerie Oliver](#) will advise the development of training content. [COSLA staff](#), powered by [AMR Management Services](#), will be project consultants for administrative support of the project, as well as helping to promote the opportunity to state library agencies.

In addition to these personnel, [Megan Janicki](#), Deputy Director for Public Policy and Advocacy at ALA; [Linda Schatz](#), the consultant for the original ALA OITP training; her current partner [Aleck Johnson](#), of [EdTech Strategies, LLC](#); [Chris Jowaisas](#), Senior Research Scientist at the University of Washington's Information School's Technology & Social Change Group; and [Kristin Corra and John Windhausen from the Schools, Health, and Libraries Broadband Coalition \(SHLB\)](#) have provided pre-proposal guidance regarding the project. Project consultants will be identified through an RFP process upon IMLS acceptance of the preliminary proposal and invitation for a full proposal.

Diversity Plan: State E-Rate coordinators for libraries address equity, diversity, and inclusion in advancing digital access and connectivity across their states. This training further enables effective deployment of this vital support. First, this proposal will enable state coordinators to become more effective instruments of addressing digital equity by equipping them with knowledge, experience, and a network of support. Second, it will address the inequalities among state library agencies by supporting state coordinator attendance with travel stipends in states where there may not be sufficient budget for professional development. Finally, and most timely, this proposal will empower state coordinators to grasp the unique opportunity to build capacity for many first-time tribal applicants in alignment with changes to the E-Rate rules for tribal and small libraries.

Project Results and Impact: This implementation grant would provide a first step toward making state E-Rate coordinators more effective in their positions. The outputs will include the training event, handouts and supporting materials, and pre- and post- event assessment data from participants. The outcomes of the grant would be an increased confidence expressed by participants in their roles as measured by pre- and post- event assessments, as well as increased utilization of the E-Rate program in states whose coordinators participate in the program, measured by E-Rate program data. The impact will be longer-term, as the results of this initial event will be used to develop a path forward for staff development, and the increased effectiveness of state coordinator staff will enable state libraries to become more compelling partners in a variety of digital equity and inclusion opportunities. Dissemination of project information is also planned for publicly accessible areas of the COSLA website.

Estimated Budget: The estimated budget for this planning project proposal is \$249,999 over two years. Costs include subawards and contracts, currently estimated at \$74,999 in each year, to include venue contracts, consultant contracts, and a direct rate of 8% for COSLA administration. The budget also includes travel stipends estimated at \$100,000, based on a stipend of \$2000 for fifty travel stipends, which would be open to all states and territories. Special consideration would be given to ensure travel support for representatives of states and territories with tribal libraries.