Connections for Classrooms
ROUND 2

An education technology grant facilitated by
the Governor's Office of Student Achievement

Funding for E-rate FY 2015 & 2016

Grant Program Overview & Procedures

THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE
of STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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1.0 Executive Summary

Connections for Classrooms (CFC) originated in 2014 as a $37 million grant program joining multiple state agencies around the common goal of ensuring Georgia schools and classrooms have the high-speed broadband access required for digital and blended learning. In 2015, additional funding has been appropriated to the program to continue the progress towards meeting the advanced technology goals for Georgia students. A second round of funding is being provided to K-12 schools around the state as a bridged continuation of the initial Connections for Classrooms grant, referenced as "Connections for Classrooms – Round 2."

There is no application process for Round 2. Rather, an LEA is eligible for Round 2 funding if it applied to the 2014 Connections for Classrooms grant with a request for Tier 2 and/or Tier 3 expenditures that was not funded fully, either through CFC funds or if combined with E-rate funds. Round 2 awards can only be used to support the LEA's local matching funds for its application through Category 2 of the FCC's schools and libraries universal service support program, commonly known as "E-rate." Together, these funds work to build and enhance broadband Internet connectivity throughout Georgia schools.

Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 is managed by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), and this document provides procedural guidelines to LEA representatives for identifying and securing this funding. Additional information on the grant may be found online at GOSA's website (http://gosa.georgia.gov/2015-cfc-program-information), and questions may be directed to the grant's program manager, Steve Korwan (skorwan@georgia.gov, 404-463-2399).

Thank you for your interest and support for Georgia education!

1.1 Definitions and References

2014 Connections for Classrooms – A $37 million dollar state-sponsored grant program that originated in 2014 with the purpose of building and enhancing broadband systems in the state's K-12 schools. This program included funds managed by the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) and the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA).

Applicant – An entity that has submitted an application for the original 2014 Connections for Classrooms grant program.

Award Recipient / Recipient – An Applicant that has been approved for full or partial funding of a request made to the Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 program.

Category Two Eligible Services – The Universal Service Program for Schools and Libraries (E-rate) defines an Eligible Services List with qualifying Category One and Category Two items, where Category Two Eligible Services includes internal connections needed to enable high-speed broadband connectivity within schools and libraries, specifically LAN/WLAN-focused components (local area networks/wireless local area networks), basic maintenance of eligible broadband internal connections components, and managed internal broadband services. Visit http://usac.org/sl for more information on Category Two Eligible Services. E-rate Category Two services are essentially equivalent to Connections for Classrooms Tier 2 and Tier 3 equipment, services and materials.

Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 / Round 2 – A second phase of grant funding under the Connections for Classrooms grant, which provides up to an additional $30 million to Georgia educators to fund the local portion of Category Two E-rate allocations for the purpose of building and enhancing broadband systems in the state's K-12 schools.

Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 Website / CFC Website – A publicly accessible online area containing information related to the Connections for Classroom – Round 2 grant program, found at http://gosa.georgia.gov/2015-cfc-program-information.

E-rate Funding Year 2015 / E-rate FY 2015 – The Universal Service Program for Schools and Libraries (E-rate) defines funding year 2015 as the period beginning July 1, 2015 and ending June 30, 2016.

E-rate Funding Year 2016 / E-rate FY 2016 - The Universal Service Program for Schools and Libraries (E-rate) defines funding year 2016 as the period beginning July 1, 2016 and ending June 30, 2017.

Funding Commitment Decision Letter (FCDL) - A letter that contains USAC's funding decisions on an applicant's funding requests. This is a key piece of documentation needed to receive a Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 award.

Local Educational Agency / LEA – A public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within the State of Georgia for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of the State *(Adapted from the U.S. Department of Education).*

Universal Service Administrative Company / USAC – An independent, not-for-profit corporation created by the FCC in 1997 to administer the four universal service programs which help provide communities across the country with access to affordable telecommunications services.

Universal Service Program for Schools and Libraries / E-Rate – Commonly known as the E-rate Program, this program helps ensure that schools and libraries can obtain telecommunications and Internet access at affordable rates.

2.0 Program Overview

2.1 Program Intent

Despite the periodic availability of federal funding programs for education-based technology, some schools and LEAs are not able to access these funds because they often require supporting or matching dollars that the school or LEA does not have allocated to this purpose. The Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 program intends to help schools and LEAs secure FCC E-rate funds by providing its dollars to cover the cost of non-discounted products and/or services (i.e., local matching funds) for remaining Tier 2 and 3 needs from 2014 Connections for Classrooms Grant Program. This minimizes or frees many LEAs from having to pledge local money in order to receive federal money.

At its root, the Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 program is intended to continue progress toward the goal to fund economically self-sustainable broadband facilities that:

- Serve LEAs around the State of Georgia,

- Leverage technology to transform our educational system by providing students, parents, and educators more flexibility over the time, place, path, and pace of learning,

- Increase statewide broadband capacity to schools, ensuring that Georgia's schools are able to utilize 21st century technology in classrooms, and

- Increase the LEA's ability to expand wireless connectivity and device availability within schools, allowing them to fully leverage increased broadband capacity.

By removing obstacles to collecting E-rate funds, Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 helps LEAs build the infrastructure needed to provide advanced learning capabilities to Georgia K-12 students.

2.2 Eligible LEAs

Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 is a continuation of the 2014 Connection for Classrooms grant, and its eligibility requirements and applicants are related to the original program.

An LEA is eligible for Round 2 funding if it applied to the 2014 Connections for Classrooms grant with a request for Tier 2 and/or Tier 3 expenditures that was not funded fully, either through CFC funds or if combined with E-rate funds. Put differently, those scoring 87 or higher in Round 1 are not eligible. Eligible LEAs must then request, be granted, and expend FCC E-rate awards for Category Two Eligible Services for E-rate FY 2015 and/or E-rate FY 2016. As another option, if an eligible LEA currently has a Priority 2 E-rate commitment letter for a previous funding year for which it has been unable to provide the required local match, it may elect to use Round 2 funds toward that match. However, those funds will still count toward the cap of available funds for the district's E-rate match.

A list of eligible LEAs was published on May 5, 2015 on the GOSA website located at http://gosa.georgia.gov/2015-cfc-program-information, and a notice was sent to eligible LEAs via the email address of the contact listed for the 2014 grant program.

LEAs that do not satisfy these criteria will not be considered for Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 funding. However, GOSA will hold a competitive Round 3 with remaining funds for LEAs that did not apply in 2014 or who did not receive funds to support their maximum Category Two E-Rate eligibility. Round 3 details will be announced in July 2015.

2.3 Funding Considerations

A key purpose of Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 is to alleviate the pressure schools have of raising local supporting funds required by FCC E-rate grant awards. As such, the funding considerations stem from the 2014 Connections for Classrooms program and are also tied to the federal E-rate program. Round 2 provides local matching funds for the LEA's unfunded 2014 Connections for Classrooms Tier 2 and Tier 3 funding up to the LEA's maximum E-rate Category 2 funding.

GOSA used the following steps to determine the Round 2 LEA eligible funding amounts:

1. GOSA calculated the amount that each LEA requested for Tier 2 and Tier 3 [including rescinded funds] LESS the amount that the LEA was awarded for those Tiers 2 and 3 requests. Funds rescinded due to misclassification of tiers (e.g., when an LEA classified Tier 3 needs as Tier 2) were included in this calculation.
2. GOSA calculated the projected E-Rate local match of the amount determined in Step 1. The match percentage was determined using E-rate guidelines and was verified with the University System of Georgia's (USG) E-rate support team.
3. Using the match percentage used in Step 2 and FY2015 FTE-1 Student Enrollment Counts, GOSA calculated each LEA's maximum local match funding eligibility for E-rate Category 2 funding using E-rate guidelines. GOSA also verified this calculation with USG's E-rate support team.
4. If the local match amount calculated in Step 2 based on unawarded funds was less than the maximum local match calculated in Step 3, the LEA's Round 2 eligible funding was the amount calculated in Step 2. If the local match amount calculated in Step 2 based on unawarded funds was higher than the maximum local match calculated in Step 3, the LEA's Round 2 eligible funding was the amount calculated in Step 3.

As stated in Section 2.2, LEAs that did not request Tier 2 or Tier 3 funding from the 2014 Connections for Classrooms grant are not eligible for Round 2 funding, nor are LEAs that requested Tier 2 or Tier 3 funding from this program and were awarded the entire amount of its requested funds when combined with E-rate funding (those scoring 87 or higher).

2.4 Applicable Award Expenditures

Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 funds are intended for the exclusive use towards non-discounted costs for E-rate awards granted for Category Two Eligible Services, approved and expended in E-rate FY 2015 and 2016, or if an eligible LEA currently has a Priority 2 E-rate commitment letter for a previous funding year for which it has been unable to provide the required local match, it may elect to use Round 2 funds toward that match. LEAs may apply for these programs at their sole discretion, based upon the program requirements set and awarded through the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC). Information on the program can be found on the organization's web site (http://usac.org/sl).

USAC sets the parameters for the E-rate program and oversees all of its award decisions. Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 administrators have used the E-rate program guidelines and awards to establish award amounts provided to Round 2 program applicants. Other than those set by USAC for the E-rate program and those outlined in this document, there are no additional requirements regarding Category Two Eligible expenses for Round 2 award eligibility. Any funds not used to support the E-rate local matching funds as outlined in this document will be rescinded.

2.5 Program Application

Because Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 is a continuation of the 2014 grant program, there is no additional application for LEAs to receive funds. Rather, GOSA announce the grant awards on May 5, 2015 through the Grant Notice described in Section 3.0 Program Procedures, available at http://gosa.georgia.gov/2015-cfc-program-information. To receive funds, LEAs must follow the steps outlined in this section.

2.6 Important Dates

The Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 program extends from mid-2015 through the completion of E-rate FY 2016 awards. Schools that plan to participate should note the following key dates in the grant program:

- **May 5, 2015:** The date when GOSA will publish a Grant Notice on http://gosa.georgia.gov/2015-cfc-program-information indicating the LEAs eligible for Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 awards.

- **June 26, 2015:** The last date to submit the LEA's Notice of Intent to GOSA for Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 funding. Notices of Intent for any E-rate funding year will not be accepted after this date, and funds will be reallocated for other purposes.

- **July 1, 2015:** The beginning of the E-rate federal funding year 2015.

When available, dates for activity related to E-rate FY 2016 will be posted on the E-rate web site at http://usac.org/sl.

3.0 Program Procedures
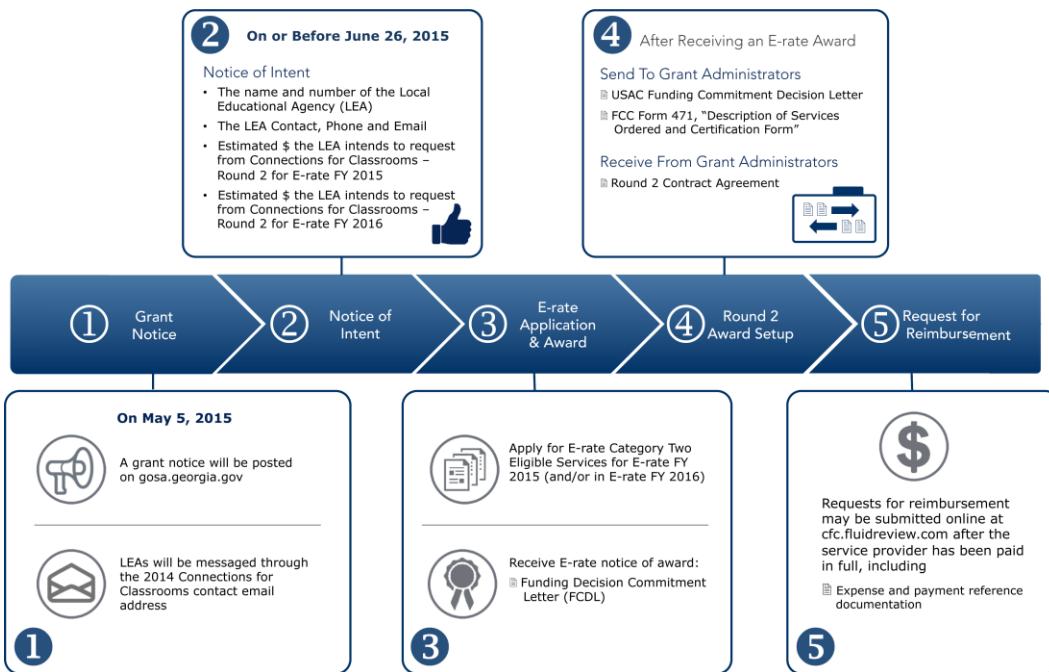
The steps required for initiating an award and gaining access to funds are described in this area. Further questions about the program or this material may be directed to Steve Korwan, Connections for Classrooms program manager (skorwan@georgia.gov, 404-463-2399). The primary steps within the process include the following:

❶ Grant Notice
❷ Notice of Intent
❸ E-rate Application & Award
❹ Round 2 Award Setup
❺ Request for Reimbursement
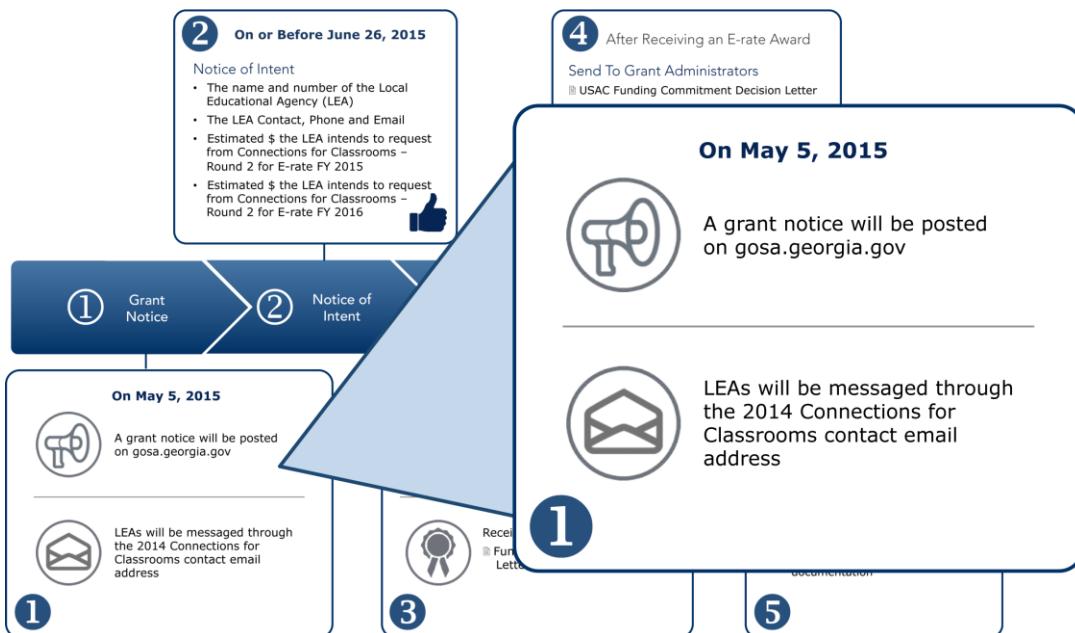
3.1 Grant Notice

On May 5, 2015, Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 administrators provided a grant notice indicating the LEAs eligible for Round 2 awards. The grant notice is published on http://gosa.georgia.gov/2015-cfc-program-information and contains a listing of 2014 Connections for Classrooms applicants, their unawarded Tier 2 and Tier 3 funding amounts, and their grant award under the Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 program.

LEAs also received an email notice of the Round 2 grants. These notices were provided to LEA superintendents and the email address of the current contacts on record for the 2014 Connections for Classrooms program.

3.2 Notice of Intent
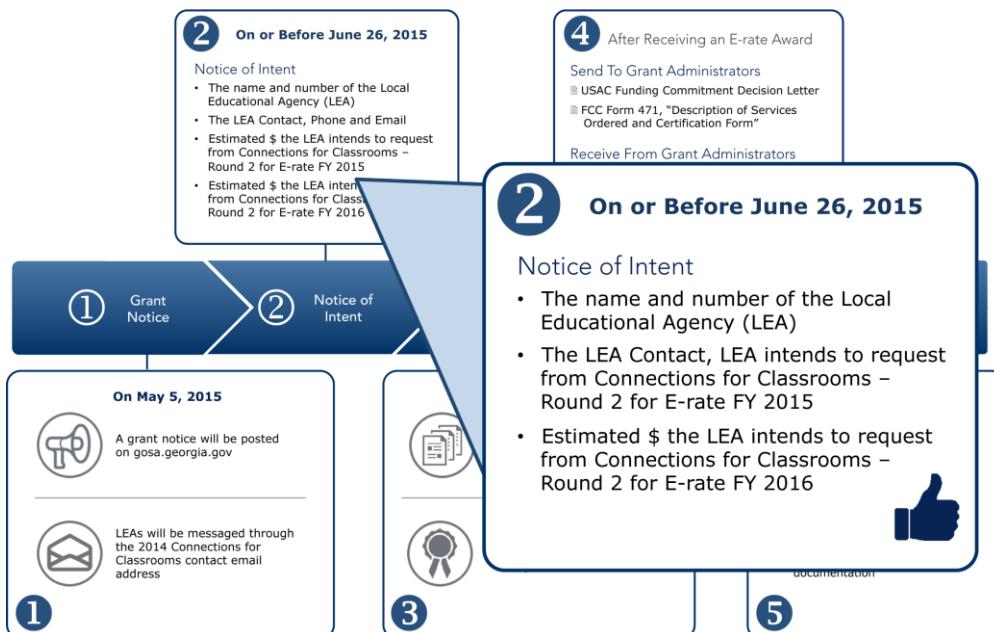
On or before **June 26, 2015**, LEAs that plan to request funding from Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 must submit a Notice of Intent stating their intention to Steve Korwan at skorwan@georgia.gov. The Notice of Intent should contain several pieces of information related to the grant request:

- The name of the Local Educational Agency (LEA)
- The LEA Number
- The LEA Contact
- The LEA Contact Phone
- The LEA Contact Email
- The estimated dollar amount the LEA intends to request from Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 for E-rate FY 2015
- The estimated dollar amount the LEA intends to request from Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 for E-rate FY 2016
- If applicable, the estimated dollar amount the LEA intends to request from Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 for Priority 2 E-rate expenditures for a previous funding year for which it has been unable to provide the required local match

This procedure reserves funds in advance for the LEA for these years, thus **Notices of Intent will not be accepted after this date**. The dollar amounts estimated for use in each E-rate funding year are non-binding; however, the LEA will not receive more than the total amount requested in the Notice of Intent.

Please note that while this Notice of Intent reserves funds for local matching portion of Category Two E-rate funds, it should not be construed as an executed contract. GOSA will execute a contract once the LEA follows the procedures outlined Section 3.4 Round 2 Award Setup. Any reserved funds for which the requirements outlined in this section are not met will be rescinded.

A Connections for Classrooms administrator will reply to each Notice of Intent submission to confirm its receipt.

3.3 E-rate Application and Award
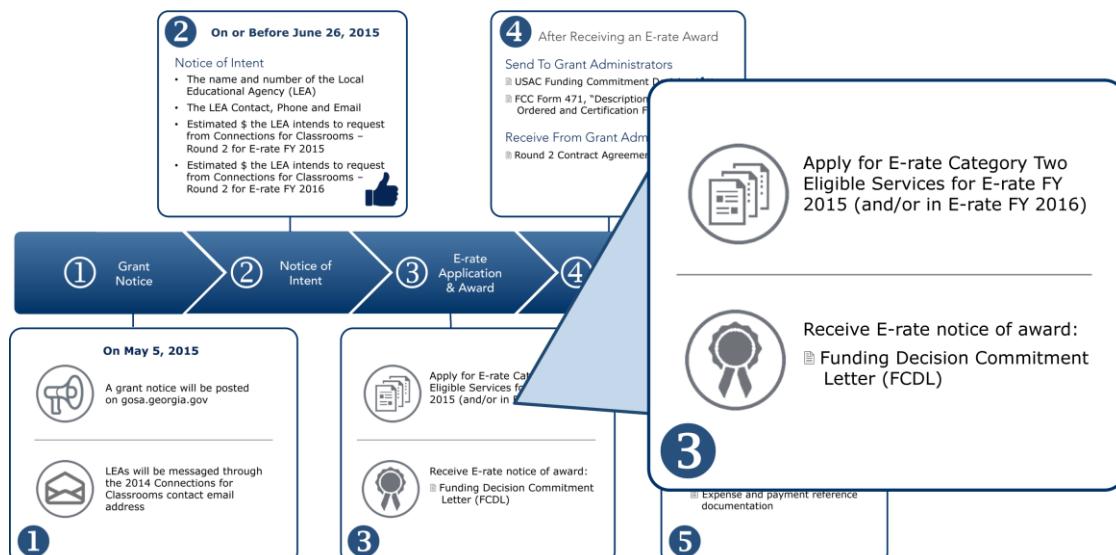
The Schools and Libraries Program of the Universal Service Fund, commonly known as E-Rate, is a program that provides discounts to assist schools and libraries in the United States to obtain affordable telecommunications and Internet access. The program is administered by the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) under the direction of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

USAC has procedures for the application, award and management of the E-rate program. Schools and libraries follow a prescribed process for applying for E-rate funds, such as the filing of FCC Form 471. Program Integrity Assurance (PIA) officials at USAC review E-rate applications and once complete, USAC issues a Funding Commitment Decision Letter (FCDL) containing its decisions on the funding request.

LEAs with eligible funds Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 program must apply for E-rate funds for Category Two Eligible Services for E-rate FY 2015 and/or E-rate FY 2016. If an LEA has USAC Priority 2 funding approved for years prior to FY 15 that it has not been able to access because of a lack of local funding, and those funds are still available from USAC, then it may use Connections for Classrooms — Round 2 funding for this purpose.

3.4 Round 2 Award Setup
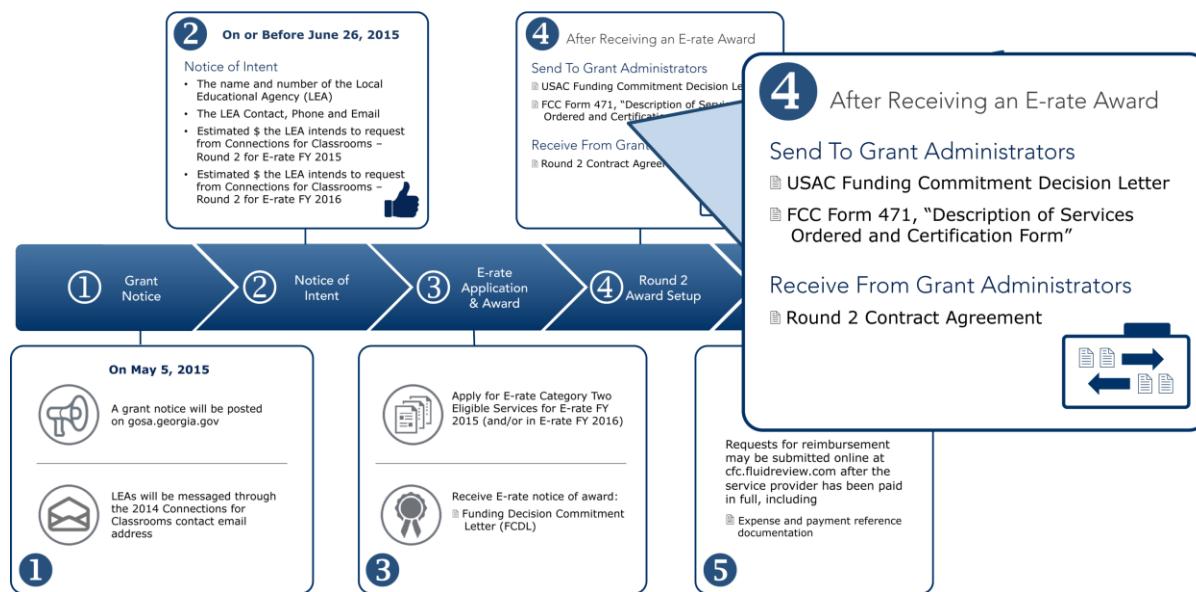
If an eligible Georgia LEA receives an E-rate award in an eligible funding year and wishes to receive funding from Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 to support the non-discounted portion of expenses, i.e., "matching funds," it must email Steve Korwan at skorwan@georgia.gov a request with the following attachments:

- FCC Form 471 ("Description of Services Ordered and Certification Form")
- USAC Funding Commitment Decision Letter (FCDL)

Round 2 administrators will confirm receipt of these materials and will review this information along with the school's previously submitted Notice of Intent. Once the information is considered, administrators will provide a Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 Contract Agreement, which must be executed before the LEA can request reimbursement for funds.

This documentation is necessary for any eligible funding year for which the LEA requests funds. It should be provided for the purpose of award setup within 30 days of receipt of the E-rate Funding Commitment Decision Letter, unless it is for a prior funding year Priority 2 local match as described in Section 2.2.

3.5 Request for Reimbursement
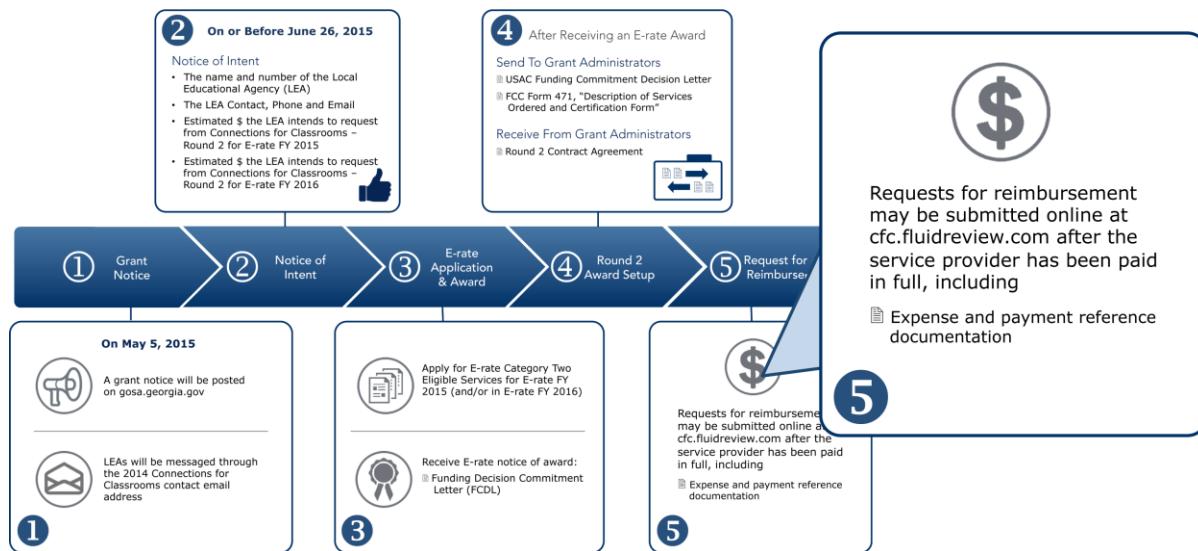
Connections for Classrooms – Round 2 is a reimbursement-based grant program. Requests for reimbursement may be submitted after the service has been performed or procurement has been made and paid for by the recipient. Expense and payment reference documentation should be included with each reimbursement request to support the requested funding amounts. Payment requests may be made no more than once every calendar month and can be submitted online at the Connections for Classrooms website located at http://cfc.fluidreview.com.

To submit a reimbursement request, an LEA representative should visit the FluidReview portal at http://cfc.fluidreview.com and complete the following:

1. Select the option "Round 2 Reimbursement Request Form."

2. Complete the first page of information with the reimbursement contact, the reimbursement request and the banking information. Be sure to enter the amount being requested. See the image below labeled "Reimbursement Request, Page 1."

    *   The Grant Project # can be found in the Grant Award Package materials.
    *   The Reimbursement Request # indicates which sequenced Round 2 reimbursement request this is for your LEA.

Reimbursement Request, Page 1

3. Proceed using the Next button to complete the second page of information with documentation related to the reimbursement request. See the image below labeled "Reimbursement Request, Page 2."

Reimbursement Request, Page 2

4. Upload documents that support the reimbursement request, including receipts, payment records, etc.
5. Indicate the approving authority.
6. Select Save & Exit to complete the request. You will return to the FluidReview portal main screen.
7. Important: To complete the reimbursement request you must click the option Round 2 Submit Reimbursement Request Form from the FluidReview portal main screen. See the image below labeled "Reimbursement Request, Submit."

Reimbursement Request, Submit

To support timely reimbursements, please make sure to submit proper documentation with each reimbursement request. Questions regarding Round 2 expense reimbursements should be directed to Steve Korwan at skorwan@georgia.gov or 404-463-2399.

Reimbursement requests are handled as quickly as possible from the time they are submitted. The process for funding reimbursements is as follows:

- The LEA makes a reimbursement request using the steps outlined above.
- The request is reviewed and validated by grant administrators.
- The LEA contact is sent an email message if the reimbursement request requires follow-up information to validate and approve the request.
- Once all necessary information is received and verified, the request is approved.
- Funds are then wired via ACH transfer to the LEA's bank.

Reimbursement payments are transferred directly into a designated banking account and are coordinated by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

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