In early 2015, we began hearing more and more success stories about the federal E-rate program, overseen by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and managed by the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC). These were in no small part due to major revisions to the program and a large funding injection with a five-year plan.

Historically, a combination of factors acted as roadblocks to library participation in E-rate. Telephone services were eligible, and some libraries with enough telephony services costs to justify the effort of process would apply for discounts there. Funding eligibility for most other technology infrastructure, network, and/or internet services required compliance with the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA), which required employing content filtering technologies on public and staff resources used to access the internet. This was generally antithetical to the "spirit" of open access in Wisconsin's public libraries. Another barrier to participation was the simple fact that a low percentage of applications for the formerly named "Priority 2" funding projects, internal technology equipment and services, were fully (or even partially) funded.

Basically, it wasn't desired. And even in libraries where filtering was less of an issue (or funding constraints were much larger issues), pursuit risked wasting time on applications and revisions processes that were often (expected to be, at least) fruitless. Cases where projects were committed and implemented then unfunded scared people generally, and cases where projects got tied up waiting for E-rate funding when local or other funds could have been leveraged put longer-vision strategists off.

In the fall of 2015, we polled for filtering sentiment from the WVLS membership (see "Content Filtering Sentiment" results included on the last page of this document). We'd already sensed a slight change in tone from a few member library administrators, but we did not expect to see such an open interest in content filtering. Of twenty-four (24) network connected members, thirteen (13) responded. All respondents but one (1) indicated some level of support for content filtering under various conditions. Even assuming all non-respondents would not support content filtering at all, that meant half of our network connected membership had some level of interest. Of the respondents, five (5) - approximately 38% - indicated that their interest was related more so to increased options and local control than to any promise of funding. There was enough evidence of interest to warrant prioritization of additional research, determination of feasibility, and the testing of some filtering equipment and services.

As we learned more, the 2016 application window was narrowing. Vicki Teal Lovely, the Technology Services Coordinator for South Central Library System (SCLS) had engaged in the E-rate process with several SCLS member libraries and was discovering that there were still many "shakedown" issues remaining in the new E-rate services online portal, and the migration from paper forms submissions and management to online-only support. We determined that it would be best for us to wait to engage in the E-rate process until the next (2017) cycle, leveraging the experience of and working with Vicki to accelerate our own ramp up. Vicki shared several resources which were quite helpful in that acceleration this season.

During 2016, the LEAN WI technology services sharing partnership grew and eventually formalized between Indianhead Federated Library System (IFLS) and WVLS. This shifted various priorities, including E-rate Management Service exploration, until later in the year when a concrete project materialized which could directly benefit some libraries, without the added complexity of CIPA compliance requirements. The Wisconsin Dept. of Administration (DOA) finalized a new managed State network contract with the winner of its Request for Proposal (RFP), AT&T. Under this contract, the State network, BadgerNet (formerly BadgerNet Converged Network - BCN), allowed for access to increased bandwidth at same costs. One caveat though was that "construction costs" - the cost to bring fiber to a building (covered up to $35,000 under the previous BCN contract) - would now be passed on to the site (in our case, library).

Actual construction costs for libraries with no current fiber to the premises is still unknown. AT&T is working to schedule out site surveys to begin generating estimates for any non-BadgerNet libraries that were listed as potentially desiring to connect in to BadgerNet. Many of the libraries in that status were so because they'd moved off BCN previously to procure higher speed local cable or DSL internet services. Now that BadgerNet offers competitive speeds on its much higher quality network, it is worth investigating for most of the non-BadgerNet libraries. The removal of the $35,000 construction cost coverage in DOA's new contract was disheartening, but such costs are E-rate eligible under "Category 1" telecommunications services. Eligibility for fiber installation is not contingent upon compliance with CIPA.

WVLS has four non-BadgerNet libraries connected to the WVLS wide area network (WAN) and one moving to new facilities which were all interested in the free BadgerNet site surveys and construction cost estimates and which opted in to E-Rate Management Services (a technology consultant service which is a system membership benefit). WVLS has three other members which do not have fiber to all sites. Two did not respond to inquiries, and one chose not to opt in to E-rate Management Services and opted out of the BadgerNet site surveys and cost estimates for its sites.

IFLS had nineteen (19) non-BadgerNet member libraries listed for site surveys and cost estimates. Of those, five (5) opted in to the E-rate Management Services, one expressly opted out, and thirteen (13) did not respond. Between IFLS and WVLS, there are ten (10) libraries which initially opted in to E-rate Management, a new, as yet fully defined service under the Libraries Win shared services model (see 2018 Technology Planning Guide for more on Libraries Win).

The 2017 E-rate application process is still underway. We are currently working with several E-rate experts to determine best strategies for various application approaches. While a large focus in this report has been on the new BadgerNet contract and services as catalyst, BadgerNet has some major backbone networking revision work underway, and may not be able to fully service all new installation requests in a timely fashion. Also, we've been advised (and it's just diligent regardless) to investigate costs of similar quality options from alternative providers. There are other non-BadgerNet network service providers that can offer similar quality network services, and may be able to deliver them before AT&T can perform new installations on BadgerNet. If they can do so for similar, or even lower costs than BadgerNet, then that is, of course, even better for libraries.

Once the E-rate application process is complete, we'll learn from AT&T and other providers what options are available to member libraries, what their costs (front loaded capital/construction as well as monthly or annual subscription fees) will be for the various members. Except for the library which expressly opted out of the BadgerNet site surveys and cost estimates for its sites, we'll learn costs for BadgerNet fiber construction and third party fiber construction to non-BadgerNet members that did not opt in to E-rate Management services this year. Knowing approximate costs and discount amounts may encourage participation for the 2018 cycle.

Q2 My library would support content filtering ...

Answered: 13 Skipped: 0
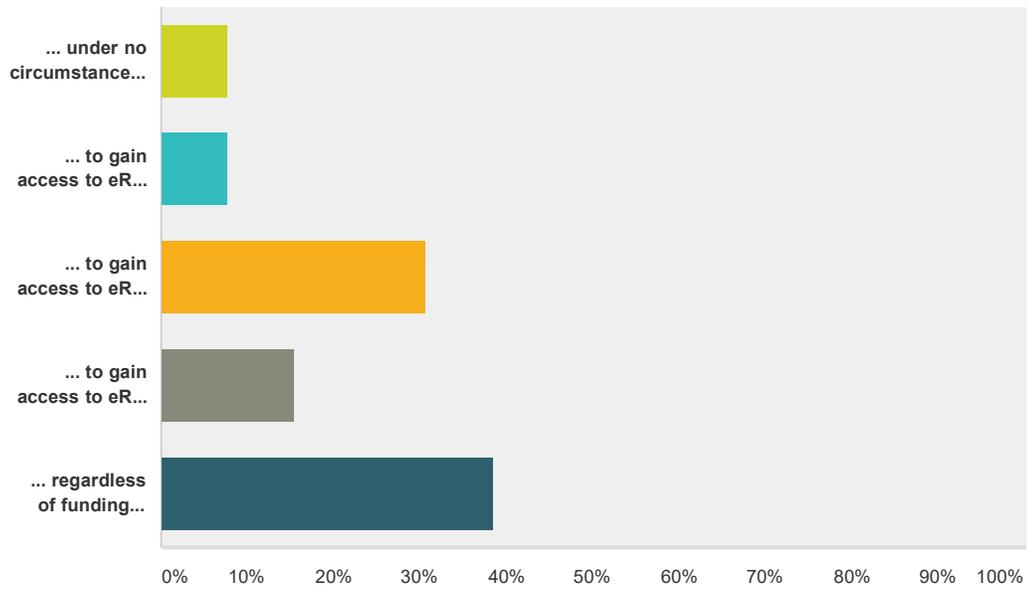
Answer Choices	Responses	
... under no circumstance whatsoever.	**7.69%**	1
... to gain access to eRate funding for internal networking expenses regardless of filtering service quality.	**7.69%**	1
... to gain access to eRate funding for internal networking expenses, but only if filtering service quality is extremely good.	**30.77%**	4
... to gain access to eRate funding for internal networking expenses, but we'd rather try to budget for such expenses without filtering and eRate subsidies first.	**15.38%**	2
... regardless of funding opportunities. We may never use a filtering application, but having access to it increases local control at our discretion.	**38.46%**	5
Total		**13**