



Policy Brief

The FCC Releases Report and Order for the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program March 4, 2021

Last week, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) unanimously voted to adopt [a Report and Order](#) that establishes and implements a \$3.2 billion federal digital inclusion program that provides qualifying households discounts on their internet service bills and an opportunity to receive a discount on a computer or tablet. The temporary Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) program is set to be launched in the spring of 2021 and expire when funds have been exhausted or six months after the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has declared the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Congress established and appropriated funding for the \$3.2 billion program in response to the COVID-19 pandemic via the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021. Efforts to slow down the pandemic resulted in dramatic changes and interruptions of many aspects of life, further exacerbating the persistent digital divide. As schools converted to virtual learning, businesses closed or limited operations, and millions of people lost their employment, many found themselves on the wrong side of the digital divide. The program is intended to provide relief to low-income households and those who became newly unemployed to help them overcome the cost barrier to broadband adoption as the country is on a path to recovery from the effects of the pandemic.

What is the Emergency Broadband Benefit?

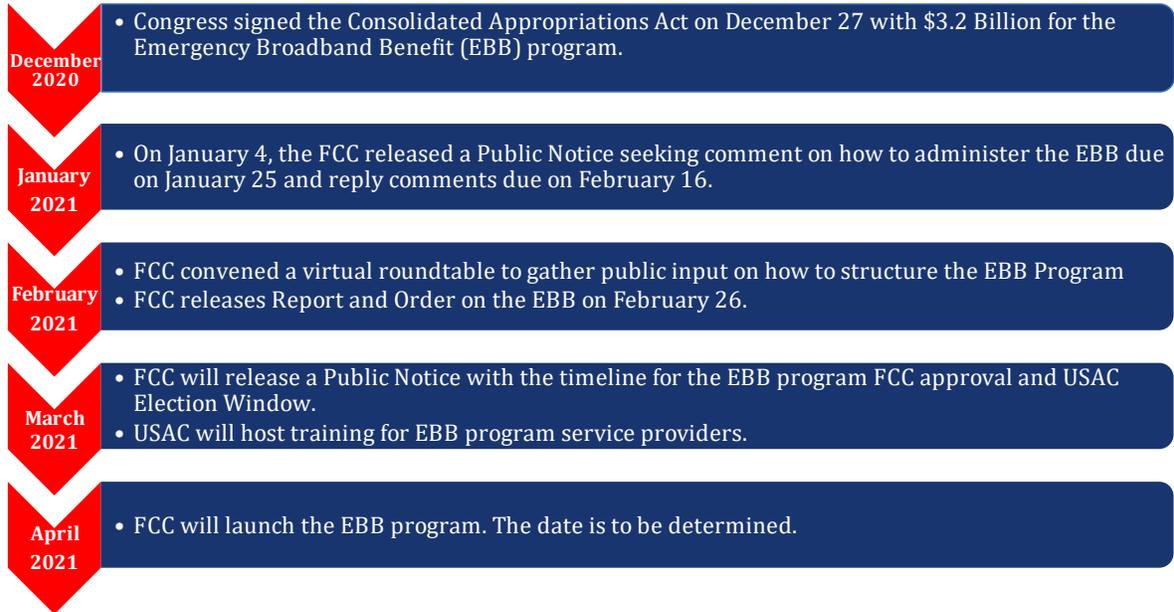
In accordance with the Report and Order the FCC released on February 26, 2021, the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program will provide reimbursement to a participating provider for providing a discount on the price of broadband internet access service (and associated equipment), a connected device, or both, to an eligible household during the emergency period. Below are further details of the reimbursements:

- Reimbursements of up to \$50 per month for broadband service
- Reimbursements of up to \$75 per month for broadband service for households on qualifying Tribal lands
- A one-time discount of up to \$100 for a laptop, desktop, or tablet supplied by the participating provider (consumers co-pay of more than \$10 and less than \$50 required)



The emergency broadband benefit is limited to one monthly service and one device per household. Additionally, as stated above, the program will begin April 2021 and end when funds are exhausted or six months after HHS has declared the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Emergency Broadband Benefit Timeline



Who is Eligible for the Emergency Broadband Benefit?

The program is intended to provide relief to those who have suffered the adverse effects of the pandemic. In order to qualify for the EBB program, households must meet one of the following criteria as outlined in the Report and Order:

- **Households that qualify or currently participate in the Lifeline program** are eligible. A household can get Lifeline if the household income is 135% below the [federal poverty guidelines](#) or if someone in the household participates in one of these federal assistance programs:
 - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as Food Stamps
 - Medicaid
 - Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
 - Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA)
 - Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefit
 - Tribal Programs (and live on federally recognized Tribal lands)

While households currently participating in Lifeline would not be required to submit a new application for EBB (they can just opt in), new eligible households will need to submit an application via the [Lifeline National Eligibility Verifier \(National Verifier\)](#) with supporting documentation.

- At least one member of the household has been approved for the **free and reduced-price lunch program** or the school breakfast program.
- At least one member of the household has experienced a **substantial loss of income since February 29, 2020**, that is documented by layoff or furlough notice, application for unemployment insurance benefits, or similar documentation or that is otherwise verifiable through the [National Verifier](#).
- At least one member of the household has **received a Federal Pell Grant**.

- At least one member of the household **meets the eligibility criteria for a participating provider's** existing low-income or COVID-19 program subject to the approval from the FCC of the provider's eligibility process.

Which Broadband Providers Can Participate?

All broadband providers, including those that are not designated as eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs), can participate in the program — though they are not required to do so. The non-ETCs will need seek and receive approval from the FCC and then file an Election Notice with the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) in order to participate.

Providers will use the National Verifier to check consumer eligibility and will use the National Lifeline Accountability Database (NLAD) and the Lifeline Claims System to enroll subscribers and submit reimbursement requests. Providers that have existing low income or COVID-19 programs can seek approval from the FCC to use an alternative eligibility verification process. Providers will only be reimbursed for broadband service plans that were available as of December 1, 2021. They can select which service plans to use in the EBB program.

What Next?

The FCC will be releasing a public notice within seven days of the order (dated February 26) with the FCC's window for provider approval request and the USAC Election Window. Additionally, USAC will be providing provider training throughout the month of March. Providers can receive regular notification of training by signing up at <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/6194379/Emergency-Broadband-Benefit-Program> or visit <https://www.usac.org/about/emergency-broadband-benefit-program/> to learn more about USAC's EBB support.

The FCC is also mobilizing people and organizations to help share important consumer information about the Emergency Broadband Benefit. Go to <https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit> to register to become an outreach partner and receive regular updates and information as the program is developed and launched in April 2021.

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