

EdTechnologyFunds Keeps Libraries on Track to Meet Their Technology Goals

by [Brandi Scardilli](#)

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Beverly Sutherland is president and CEO of **EdTechnologyFunds**, a California-based consulting services firm that helps schools and libraries obtain funding from the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) **E-rate program**. It **recently expanded its services** to cover urban and rural organizations nationwide. Sutherland told NewsBreaks about the company's origins, its objectives, and how it is helping to bridge the digital divide. Our conversation has been condensed and edited.

How and when did you get the idea for EdTechnologyFunds? The website says that technology had been a game-changer for your family. How so?

I used to work for a Fortune 100 technology company that developed data communications chipsets. As a product marketing manager, I was responsible for getting high-speed modems and Wi-Fi chipsets designed into laptop computers. I truly felt that Wi-Fi could be a game-changer for schools, knowing that many schools did not have the resources to deploy fully wired technology infrastructures. With that in mind, I started a corporation with the initial goal of extending local area network (LAN) capabilities to classrooms using Wi-Fi technology. After several years of managing Wi-Fi installations for schools and other government agencies, I founded EdTechnologyFunds based on the need to help schools and libraries obtain funding for LAN and wireless local area network (WLAN) technologies through the E-rate program.

As the first of my siblings to complete a 4-year college degree, I was very fortunate to have been exposed to technology during the early stages of the personal computer revolution and the shift to a more information-based economy. My experiences through the cognitive science program at the University of California–San Diego and working as a software-engineering intern included writing machine language code, developing expert systems, designing user interfaces based on human behaviors, and completing neural network projects. These early involvements really shaped my understanding of the impact that technology will have on society. The opportunities that technology has created for me, my family, and my community have been tremendous. It has not only removed barriers to information and services but has been a source of employment for many.

Did you already have a background in consulting? What were some challenges you faced in getting EdTechnologyFunds off the ground?

I transitioned into consulting after many years in software engineering, product development, and business management. I had a strong desire to leverage my background to help communities transition to a digital-based economy.

After the initial focus of Wi-Fi deployment in schools, I learned that many of these organizations as well as libraries were challenged to understand the total cost of technology

ownership. We overcame the traditional hurdles of starting a new business at EdTechnologyFunds by educating our existing and prospective clients on how technology can reduce operational expenses while at the same time offering students and community members access to best-in-class technology.

Your staffers have experience with the E-rate program as well as K-12 technologies. What do you look for when hiring? How would you characterize your current team?

EdTechnologyFunds comprises individuals who really understand the transformative power that technology can have on students and communities. Hence, in addition to having great skills in whatever area of need that we have, I look for people who have a passion for applying what they know to help society in general and our clients in particular.

EdTechnologyFunds has expanded its services across the U.S. What enabled this?

Expanding our knowledge of how to maximize E-rate funding to urban and rural libraries nationwide was a natural progression for us. Based on our experiences and successes with libraries in California, we learned how well-designed technology infrastructures can positively impact patron programming and services. For the past 3 years, we have been a leading E-rate consultancy for LAN/WLAN equipment funding for libraries, enabling them to upgrade their network infrastructures to support technologies such as virtual/augmented reality, Internet of Things devices, radio frequency identification (RFID), automated checkout systems, and more. We've also been working as a technical consultant to the California Broadband Grant, where we've helped almost half of the state's 1,119 library branches upgrade to 1Gbps broadband. These experiences have given us a deep understanding of the challenges libraries face, as well as the knowledge to overcome them.

How do schools and libraries know when it's time to hire you? What is the process like to bring your expertise into their organization?

Many schools and libraries know there is funding through the E-rate program to help them support new technologies. The process to obtain the funding, however, can be long, difficult, and overwhelming, especially for schools and libraries with limited personnel resources. Hence, many organizations hire us to manage the entire process and to help them maximize the E-rate program benefits.

Our process is simple. The first step is to understand their operational and programming needs. Once we have that, we develop a multiyear strategy to help them obtain and maximize their funding resources.

EdTechnologyFunds' website says that the company "differentiates itself by offering comprehensive support services. Our goal is not just to manage the process of getting funds but to help schools efficiently deploy and utilize technology resources." Can you talk about why being a full-service organization

was important, and in general, what steps you take to help libraries get funding for their technology goals?

We work with our clients to identify their technology-based programming and operational goals over the next few years. With that understanding, we develop a strategy to help them leverage E-rate as well as any matching funding. We then manage the E-rate application process from start to finish, including advising on Children’s Internet Protection Act and safety compliance, FCC form filings, managing the competitive bidding process, providing support for reviews and audits, reconciling payments and invoices, and retaining documentation per the FCC 10-year document retention policy. Our services also include E-rate project management to help clients deploy technology on time and ensure that installations are in compliance with USAC (Universal Service Administrative Co.) guidelines.

The website lists three areas of services: E-rate consulting services, E-rate RFP development, and E-rate project management. Can you talk about why each one is important to offer?

- E-rate consulting services: We offer E-rate consulting services to help schools and libraries secure the funding they need to upgrade their network infrastructures and upgrade their Wi-Fi capabilities. Many of our clients have limited resources to deal with the E-rate process, so we manage it on their behalf. This way, they don’t miss their opportunity to secure the funding necessary to address their students’ or patrons’ needs.
- RFP development: RFP development is oftentimes a part of the E-rate application process. Since we work with a wide range of schools and libraries, we are able to integrate best-in-class specifications into the RFPs that we prepare to ensure a fair and efficient competitive bidding process.
- E-rate project management: Obtaining the E-rate funding is only half of the battle. Once the funding is available, schools and libraries need to allocate that funding to help them meet their goals while making sure they are in compliance with USAC guidelines. Many schools and libraries have limited staffing resources, so we offer project management to make sure libraries and schools are able to upgrade their network infrastructures and support new technologies for their patrons.

How different is EdTechnologyFunds’ approach to helping school versus public libraries?

Schools and libraries will have different programming needs, so their infrastructure upgrades have to be planned with that in mind. For example, a school district looking to deploy thousands of notebook laptops to students will require a different infrastructure than a library looking to install automated checkout kiosks. Schools and libraries may also differ in their onboarding and approval processes. For example, many libraries may have to go through a lengthy board approval process.

What are your customers most concerned about when it comes to their broadband planning initiatives and the E-rate program?

Broadband planning can be a difficult and frustrating process. Getting broadband connectivity at a cost that is within their budget is important to most of our customers. Some of the organizations in rural locations have difficulty getting any type of service, so finding vendors that can support their needs can be a challenge. Once viable service options are identified, determining the total costs is critical. In addition to affordable monthly costs, clients also have to plan for construction or non-recurring costs.

Once costs for the broadband services are clearly identified, our clients will then want to determine if there are any infrastructure upgrade costs. Replacing routers, switches, and Wi-Fi equipment can be very costly. Our customers are also concerned about the timeline for installation. Many fiber-based broadband services can take 90 days to more than a year to be constructed.

What is your level of engagement with the FCC when it comes to helping libraries become part of the E-rate program?

Most of our engagement on the E-rate program is with USAC. However, interface with the FCC is required to file appeals. We also track FCC orders, comments, and press announcements in order to proactively support our clients.

Where do you hope to take EdTechnologyFunds in the future?

We want to continue to help schools and libraries build infrastructures that enable them to prepare their students and communities for a digital-based economy.

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