

Voqal & Mobile Citizen Technology Assistance Grant (TAG) FAQs Sarasota Area

What is Voqal?

Voqal is a collaboration of nonprofits dedicated to advancing social equity by building an educated, empowered and engaged public. The Voqal nonprofits hold a total of 11 Educational Broadband Service (EBS) licenses issued by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). One of these nonprofits, Voqal USA, is the organization issuing and administering the Technology Assistance Grant in the Sarasota area.

What is Mobile Citizen?

Mobile Citizen is a project of Voqal that provides mobile internet with unlimited data plans exclusively to nonprofit organizations, educational entities and social welfare agencies. Mobile Citizen's internet service is on the Sprint network and available nationwide.

What is TAG?

Mobile Citizen's Technology Assistance Grant (TAG) program is used by hundreds of educational institutions across the country to deliver educational services to teachers and students inside and outside the classroom. TAG offers cash grants of up to \$25,000 and free wireless modems ("hotspots") with unlimited broadband for three years.

How can my school apply?

Complete an application online at <https://www.grantinterface.com/Home/Logon?urlkey=ebs>. Only public schools or otherwise accredited educational institutions in the Sarasota, Fla. region are eligible to apply for TAG grants at this time.

What is the application deadline?

Friday, December 13, 2019 at 6:00 p.m. EST.

How Do Schools Use TAG?

The TAG grant includes free wireless modems with unlimited data plans. These modems connect to the internet through the Sprint 4G network. Simultaneously, the devices connect to laptops, tablets, handsets and other devices by Wi-Fi. Schools use this service for many purposes, for example bringing Wi-Fi to classrooms and cafeterias, providing Wi-Fi on buses, lending internet service to homebound students, bringing connectivity to away sporting events, taking Wi-Fi on field trips and connecting remote security cameras.

Schools are free to use the funding for capital purchases such as Chromebooks, tablets or any other technology needs. Operating expenses are also eligible, but please be advised that this is expected to be a one-time grant. A requirement of the grant is that the devices and internet service be used in support of the school's educational mission.

How Can You Offer Unlimited Internet to Schools?

Voqal holds 11 EBS spectrum licenses. Aside from public radio and TV, EBS is the only frequency band of spectrum that is licensed solely to nonprofit organizations and educational institutions. It is used to deliver 4G and 5G wireless broadband service. Most commonly, EBS licensee holders enter into contracts with a commercial wireless operator so that the commercial entity is allowed to use EBS spectrum in its network. In exchange, the EBS licensee receives

the right to use the commercial network for free and is paid cash royalties. Voqal and other EBS licensees have entered into agreements of this type with Sprint. Consequently, we are able to offer unlimited wireless broadband service to educational institutions and nonprofit organizations. Hundreds of educational institutions across the country use Voqal's wireless broadband service – some for free and others at highly subsidized rates. We named our wireless broadband project Mobile Citizen.

What's the Catch?

TAG-related free devices and wireless internet service must be used by the school to support its educational mission. Devices and TAG internet service may not be sold to third parties and must be reserved for official educational use. Internet service may not be “warehoused” or abandoned. We monitor data usage levels periodically and reserve the right to give unused devices to other institutions if they remain idle over a substantial period of time.

Voqal will assume the responsibility to repair or replace internet devices through the end of the 2022 school year.

Are there other circumstances regarding this program that I should understand?

There are unique local circumstances in the case of Sarasota's TAG program, though we do not expect them to affect you. In 2009, Voqal entered into an agreement with the University of Sarasota, a division of Argosy University. The University held an EBS license and Voqal helped it obtain a more favorable spectrum agreement with Sprint, including the same generous educational service provisions we have in our own contracts. Because Argosy University grew financially unstable it transferred its assets to an entity known as Dream Center Education Holdings, LLC (DCEH) in 2017. DCEH is now in receivership. The University of Sarasota is closed and thus cannot use the educational data services it earns under its Sprint contract.

A Voqal-owned affiliate has contracted to buy the University's EBS license. We are seeking to revitalize the local educational broadband program by recruiting a whole new group of users.

The FCC must approve all EBS license transfers, and that will take time. At the beginning of the grant period DCEH's receiver, who now holds the University of Sarasota's license, will provide the wireless broadband service and free devices. Voqal will provide the cash grant. Following FCC approval of the EBS license transfer, Voqal, through its Mobile Citizen program, will take over providing free internet service to schools in your area under the same terms and conditions. This transition will be seamless to schools because the same Sprint network and the same devices will be used. Though we do not know how long FCC approval will take, this type of application is usually granted within a few months.

If I have further questions about this grant program, whom do I contact?

Molly Fohn, Mobile Citizen's Anchor Institutions Program Manager, mfohn@mobilecitizen.org, 720-210-9039.