Universal Service Administrative Co.

Lifeline Glossary of Terms

Use this Lifeline Glossary to find commonly-used terms and definitions.

Terms	Programs	Definitions
497 OFFICER	Lifeline	A service provider officer responsible for filing and certifying Lifeline reimbursement claims. The 497 Officer is also responsible for creating and assigning an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (ETC) Administrator account in the National Lifeline Accountability Database (NLAD).
498 COMPANY OFFICER	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	The officer of a service provider company who is authorized to certify that data set forth in the FCC Form 498 is true, accurate, and complete. The 498 Company Officer has access to certify forms through USAC's E-File system and occupies a position specified in the company's corporate by-laws (or partnership agreement): typically, president, vice president of operations, vice president of finance, CFO, comptroller, treasurer, or a comparable position. If the reporting entity is a sole proprietorship, the owner must serve as the certifier.
498 ID/SERVICE PROVIDER IDENTIFICATION NUMBER (SPIN)	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	A unique nine-digit number that USAC assigns to a service provider once that service provider has submitted the FCC Form 498 to USAC. Every service provider is required to have a 498 ID/SPIN to participate in any of the four universal service programs and receive payments from USAC. E-Rate program applicants who select the Billed Entity Applicant Reimbursement (BEAR) invoicing process also need to complete an FCC Form 498 and will receive an applicant 498 ID.
ADMINISTRATOR'S DECISION LETTER (ADL)	Lifeline	See Appeal Decision Letter.

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AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM (ACP)	USAC General, Lifeline	An FCC program that made internet connectivity more affordable for eligible low-income households during the COVID-19 pandemic. The $14 billion program provided households with a monthly internet service discount and a one-time discount on internet-connected devices. The ACP, which supplanted the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBBP) in 2021, ended in June 2024 due to a lack of additional funding by Congress.
APPEAL	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	A request to reconsider a USAC decision. Any party that wishes to appeal must first do so with USAC before filing an appeal with the FCC. Once USAC has made a decision on an appeal, the party may appeal USAC's decision to the FCC. Parties seeking a waiver of FCC rules should file an appeal directly with the FCC because USAC cannot waive FCC rules. For more information, visit USAC's Appeals page.
APPEAL PACKET OF INFORMATION	Rural Health Care, Lifeline	The appeal and supporting documents submitted to USAC by the appellant.
APPEAL SUMMARY	Rural Health Care, Lifeline	A summary of the facts, logic and recommended decision about an appeal written by an Initial Reviewer at USAC. See also Initial Reviewer.
APPELLANT	Rural Health Care, Lifeline	The individual or entity filing an appeal of a USAC decision. To see where to send an appeal, visit USAC's Appeals page.
APPROVED	Rural Health Care, Lifeline	The status that USAC designates to an FCC form that has been reviewed and found to be compliant with FCC program rules and/or USAC standards.
AUDIT	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	An examination of documentation and resources that verify the state of compliance with program rules. USAC conducts audits through the Beneficiary and Contributor Audit (BCAP) and Supply Chain Audit Program (SCAP) programs in accordance with the Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards.

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BENEFICIARY AND CONTRIBUTOR AUDIT PROGRAM (BCAP)	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	An audit program through which USAC confirms program compliance and the amounts of recoverable funds among universal service beneficiaries and contributors. BCAP audits may be performed by USAC's internal audit staff or a firm under contract to USAC. For more details, visit USAC's BCAP webpage.
CODE OF FEDERAL REGULATIONS (CFR)	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	The general and permanent rules published in the Federal Register by federal government agencies and executive branch departments. Telecommunications rules are located in Title 47 of the CFR. For specific language, see a digital version of the CFR.
COLLECTIONS TEAM	Rural Health Care, Lifeline	The team within USAC's Accounting department responsible for recovering funds.
COMMISSION	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	A common abbreviation for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). See also FCC.
COMPANIES NEAR ME TOOL	Lifeline	A tool that allows consumers to find a list of participating Lifeline providers in their area using their zip code or city and state. Available at https://cnm.universalservice.org/.
CONSOLIDATED POST AUDIT TRACKING SYSTEM (CPATS)	Rural Health Care, Lifeline	A central repository used by USAC's audit teams to administer workflows across divisions.
DEMAND PAYMENT LETTER (DPL) [LIFELINE]	Lifeline	A request for payment sent to an applicant or responsible party for outstanding ACP overpayments. The DPL notifies the applicant that the outstanding balance detailed in the letter must be paid in CORES within 30 days of the date of the DPL.
DENIED	Rural Health Care, Lifeline	The status that USAC designates to an FCC form that has been reviewed and found not to be compliant with FCC program rules and/or USAC standards.

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ELIGIBLE TELECOMMUNICATIONS CARRIER (ETC)	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	A designation given to telecommunications service providers by their state public utility commissions or the FCC, enabling them to participate in universal service programs.
ELIGIBLE TELECOMMUNICATIONS CARRIER (ETC) ADMINISTRATOR	Lifeline	An NLAD user account type that is responsible for creating and managing subaccounts (these do not include the 497 Officer) for all users within their company. The ETC Administrator can perform subscriber transactions, query subscriber data, and view reports in NLAD. This account type also has access to the National Verifier to check consumer eligibility.
ELIGIBLE TELECOMMUNICATIONS CARRIER (ETC) AGENT	Lifeline	A National Verifier user account type that can check consumer eligibility but does not have NLAD access.
ELIGIBLE TELECOMMUNICATIONS CARRIER (ETC) ANALYST	Lifeline	An NLAD user account type that can perform subscriber transactions, query subscriber data, and view reports in NLAD. This account type also has access to the National Verifier to check consumer eligibility.
ELIGIBLE TELECOMMUNICATIONS CARRIER (ETC) OPERATIONS	Lifeline	An NLAD user account type that can query subscriber data, submit resolution requests, and create and view reports. This account type also has access to the National Verifier to check consumer eligibility.
EMERGENCY BROADBAND BENEFIT PROGRAM (EBBP)	USAC General, Lifeline	A 2021 FCC program that provided eligible low-income households with a monthly internet service discount and a one-time connected-device discount. The $3.2 billion program, which aimed to help Americans stay connected to work, learning, and healthcare opportunities in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, was replaced by the larger Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP).

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FCC FORM 555 (ANNUAL LIFELINE ELIGIBLE TELECOMMUNICATIONS CARRIER CERTIFICATION FORM)	Lifeline	An annual certification that all Lifeline service providers complete to report the results of the annual subscriber recertification process and de-enrollments. All ETCs that have a SAC assignment from USAC must file an FCC Form 555 with USAC, the FCC, and relevant state and Tribal governments.
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (FCC)	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	An independent agency of the U.S. government established in 1934. The FCC is charged with regulating interstate and international communications by radio, television, wire, satellite, and cable in all U.S. states and territories. In 1997, the FCC designated USAC to be the independent not-for-profit corporation to administer the universal service fund, in accordance with its rules. The Commission oversees USAC's administration of the USF.
HOUSEHOLD	Lifeline	An individual or group of individuals who live together at the same address as one economic unit by contributing to and sharing income and expenses, whether or not they are related. Only one Lifeline discount is allowed per household.
IMPROPER PAYMENT	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	Any payment that should not have been made, or that was made in an incorrect amount under statutory, contractual, administrative, or other legally applicable requirements. Improper payments are subject to IPIA and IPERA rules. USAC calculates estimates of improper payment rates via the PQA program and provides this information to the FCC.
INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDER (ISP)	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	An organization that provides services for connecting to the public internet. For the purposes of universal service support, ISPs may be referred to as service providers. See also Service Provider.

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LIFELINE ANNUAL RECERTIFICATION FORM	Lifeline	The form enrolled Lifeline subscribers that are not automatically recertified by the National Verifier submit to complete the annual Lifeline recertification process and show they still qualify for the benefit. Every year, USAC will check to confirm that a consumer still qualifies to receive the Lifeline benefit. If their eligibility cannot automatically be confirmed, they will receive a letter in the mail asking them to recertify using this form and additional documentation within 60 days.
LIFELINE APPLICATION FORM	Lifeline	The application consumers complete to apply for the Lifeline benefit. Consumers can apply online at lifelinesupport.org, by mailing a completed paper application, or with the assistance of a participating service provider.
LIFELINE CLAIMS SYSTEM (LCS)	Lifeline	The online filing system that service providers use to submit claims for reimbursement for offering Lifeline-supported services to Lifeline subscribers.
LIFELINE CONSUMER	Lifeline	Any individual may qualify to receive the Lifeline benefit if their household income is at or below 135% of the federal poverty guidelines, or if they participate in SNAP, Medicaid, or other government assistance programs. Consumers need to apply to receive the benefit. For more information on the application process, visit lifelinesupport.org.
LIFELINE CONSUMER ADVOCATES	Lifeline	Individuals or organizations such as case workers, digital navigators, housing assistance staff, or shelter staff that partner with Lifeline to generate awareness about the program and support Lifeline consumers in receiving the Lifeline benefit.
LIFELINE PROGRAM	Lifeline	One of the four universal service programs administered by USAC. The program offers a monthly benefit of up to $9.25 towards qualifying phone or internet services for eligible subscribers, or up to $34.25 for those living on qualifying Tribal lands.

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LIFELINE PROGRAM ONE-PER-HOUSEHOLD WORKSHEET	Lifeline	The worksheet consumers complete to ensure that no more than one household receives Lifeline at their address. More than one person at an address may receive the Lifeline benefit, but only one benefit may be received per household. See also Household.
LIFELINE SUPPORT CENTER	Lifeline	Helps consumers with applying for Lifeline, understanding eligibility requirements, and the annual recertification process. The Lifeline Support Center is open every day from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. ET and may be reached by calling (800) 234-9473 or emailing LifelineSupport@usac.org.
LIFELINESUPPORT.ORG	Lifeline	USAC's official consumer-facing Lifeline website that provides information about the Lifeline benefit, how to apply, manage the benefit once enrolled, and access support resources. The site includes downloadable handouts for consumer advocates and providers to support outreach and awareness efforts.
NATIONAL LIFELINE ACCOUNTABILITY DATABASE (NLAD)	Lifeline	A system used by service providers to enroll qualifying consumers in the Lifeline program and to manage their Lifeline subscribers, including the detection and elimination of duplicative support.
NATIONAL VERIFIER	Lifeline	An online application system that facilitates the determination of consumer eligibility for the Lifeline benefit and is also used to complete annual recertification for existing subscribers.
NOTICE OF RESOLVED ISSUE (NORI)	Rural Health Care, Lifeline	A sub-category of ADL that is issued if USAC's Appeals team identifies that the USAC decision made during operational review was not compliant with FCC rules and requirements.

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ONE PORTAL	USAC General, E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	USAC's single sign-on online dashboard for accessing systems such as EPC, the National Verifier, NLAD, LCS, and RAD, as well as the E-File forms submission tool and many invoicing functions. Certain payment processes are also handled through One Portal. Accessible at https://forms.universalservice.org/portal/login.
OPEN DATA	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	A web portal with datasets and tools available for universal service program data. Users can view, search, filter, and manipulate the data in each dataset and extract that data in a variety of formats. Users can also extract data via API calls. Accessible at https://opendata.usac.org/.
PAST DUE LETTER (PDL)	Rural Health Care, Lifeline	A letter USAC sends to a universal service support applicant who has received a DPL but has not returned the funds owed within the stipulated 30 days. The PDL notifies the applicant that they are past due and that failure to pay the outstanding funds will be reported to Treasury if payment is not made within 30 days of the date on the PDL.
PAYMENT QUALITY ASSURANCE (PQA) PROGRAM	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	A USAC program that assesses payments made to universal service support recipients to determine if the payments were made in accordance with FCC rules. Following these assessments, USAC estimates improper payment rates and provides this information to the FCC.
RED LIGHT RULE	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	A requirement that the FCC withhold action on a universal service support application, payment, and/or other requests for benefits when the universal service program participant is delinquent in non-tax debts owed to the FCC or other federal agencies. This rule requires that USAC suspend support to any entity that shares a Tax Identification Number with a company that has a delinquent debt. See also Red Light Status.

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RED LIGHT STATUS	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	The status of an entity deemed to have violated the Red Light Rule. USAC will not make any disbursements until the entity's delinquency is satisfied, payment arrangements are made, or the Red Light Status is otherwise resolved. See also Red Light Rule.
REPRESENTATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY DATABASE (RAD)	Lifeline	A registration system that validates the identities of Lifeline service provider representatives performing transactions in the National Lifeline Accountability Database (NLAD) and National Verifier. To create an account in RAD, visit USAC's How to Register page.
SAFE CONNECTIONS ACT (SCA)	Lifeline	A 2022 federal law that makes it easier for survivors of domestic violence, human trafficking, or related crimes to sever ties with their abusers by separating themselves from a shared wireless telephone plan. Under the SCA, survivors experiencing financial hardship may also receive up to six months of support from the Lifeline program. For more information about the Lifeline application process for survivors, visit the program's SCA page.
SERVICE PROVIDER	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	A telecommunications company that participates in at least one of the four universal service programs and provides voice or internet services, equipment, hardware, or software. Types of companies include but are not limited to: competitive access/competitive local exchange carriers (cellular, personal communications, or specialized mobile radio providers), incumbent local exchange carriers, interexchange carriers, internet service providers, interconnected VoIP providers, local resellers (coaxial cable, non-traditional, operator, paging, messaging, payphone, prepaid card, private, and satellite service providers), shared-tenant service providers or building local exchange carriers, SMR (dispatch), toll resellers, or wireless data providers.

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SERVICE PROVIDER IDENTIFICATION NUMBER (SPIN)	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	See 498 ID/Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN).
STATE AND FEDERAL PARTNERS	Lifeline	State and federal government agencies who partner with Lifeline to increase program awareness, build and maintain database connections to qualify consumers for the Lifeline program, and support consumers in completing program processes.
STUDY AREA CODE (SAC)	Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	A unique number that USAC assigns to ETCs identifying the company by its service area. Companies must have at least one SAC per state in which they operate, but can have more than one SAC within a state if they have more than one service area.
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	The transmission, between or among points specified by the user, of information of the user's choosing, without change in the form or content of the information as sent and received.
TELECOMMUNICATIONS CARRIER	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	See Common Carrier.
TRIBAL PARTNERS	Lifeline, Tribal Nations	Tribal governments, government agencies, advocates, and nonprofits serving Tribal communities who partner with Lifeline to generate awareness about the Lifeline program and support consumers with applying for and managing the Lifeline benefit.
UNIVERSAL SERVICE	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	The principle that all people in the United States should have access to telecommunications (voice and internet) services at reasonable rates. The USF, and later USAC, were established by the FCC to achieve this objective.

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UNIVERSAL SERVICE ADMINISTRATIVE COMPANY (USAC)	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	The independent not-for-profit organization designated by the FCC as the neutral, third-party administrator of the USF and its four programs. Collectively, the fund disbursed more than $8.5 billion in universal service support in 2024.
UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUND (USF)	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	Money collected from telecommunications companies and allocated to the objective of achieving universal service, per the 1996 Telecommunications Act. All interstate and international voice carriers operating in the U.S. must make contributions to the USF equal to a percentage of their interstate end-user revenues. The FCC updates this percentage, known as the contribution factor, quarterly. USAC's role is to collect and disburse the USF.
WHISTLEBLOWER ALERT	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	A hotline allowing members of the public to anonymously report suspected violations of universal service program rules to USAC. These reports can be made anonymously via the USAC Whistleblower Alert Form, by emailing WhistleblowerReports@usac.org, by calling (888) 203-8100, or by U.S. mail to: Attn: Fraud Risk GroupUniversal Service Administrative Co.700 12th Street, NW, Suite 900 Washington, DC 20005
WITHDRAWN	Rural Health Care, Lifeline	The status that USAC designates to an FCC form that has been removed or pulled out of the review queue at the request of the applicant.