Universal Service Administrative Co.

Service Providers/USF Contributor Glossary of Terms

Use this Service Providers/USF Contributor Glossary to find commonly-used terms and definitions.

Terms	Programs	Definitions
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.

Terms	Programs	Definitions
499 COMPANY OFFICER	E-Rate, High Cost, Service Providers	The officer of a service provider company who is authorized to certify that data set forth in the FCC Forms 499-A/Q is true, accurate, and complete. The 499 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.
499 FILER ID	Service Providers	Six-digit identification number assigned to each entity filing the FCC Forms 499-A/Q. USAC automatically issues a company a new 499 Filer ID upon filing their first FCC Form 499-A.
499 FILER ID DEACTIVATION REQUEST	Service Providers	Request that a company would make to USAC to deactivate a 499 Filer ID due to a company sale, merger, consolidation, bankruptcy, termination of business, or because the company no longer provides services that are subject to USF contributions. Those requesting a deactivation of their 499 Filer ID must also update their company information in the FCC CORES database. Visit USAC's Manage Your 499 ID page for additional information.
ANNUAL A/Q TRUE-UP	Service Providers	A reconciliation between a service provider's actual end-user revenue (as reported annually by April 1 on the FCC Form 499-A) and earlier projections from the provider's FCC Forms 499-Q. USAC conducts the annual true-up each July.

Terms	Programs	Definitions
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.
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.
AUTHORIZED USERS	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, High Cost, Service Providers	The employee(s) of a service provider company, established by the Company Officer or General Contact, authorized to enter and modify company information on FCC Forms 498 and 499 through the E-File application. For more information, visit USAC's Entitlements Guide.
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.
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER (CFO)	High Cost, Service Providers	Corporate officer responsible for financial operations. Service provider company CFOs may serve as official certifiers of the accuracy of forms submitted to USAC. See also 497 Company Officer, 498 Company Officer, and 499 Company Officer.
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.

Terms	Programs	Definitions
COMMISSION	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	A common abbreviation for the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). See also FCC.
COMMON CARRIER	E-Rate, High Cost, Service Providers	An organization recognized by a regulatory authority (such as a state public utility commission) as providing telecommunications services to all requesting parties, or an organization that offers such services generally to the public for a fee.
CONTRIBUTOR	Service Providers	A telecommunications company that is required to make contributions to the USF based on the revenue it reports on the FCC Forms 499-A/Q. Companies that generate some or all of their revenue from interstate or international voice service, and that meet minimum revenue thresholds, are obligated to contribute to the USF.
CREDIT BALANCE REFUND	Service Providers	A disbursement made to a USF contributor that overpaid USAC.
DATA COLLECTION AGENT (DCA)	Service Providers	A term describing USAC's role as the FCC's agent responsible for the administration, processing, filing, and distribution of carrier revenue data for the Telecommunications Relay Services fund, which compensates TRS providers for the costs of providing interstate telephone transmission services to those with hearing or speech disabilities; the cost recovery mechanisms for numbering administration and local number portability; and the universal service programs.
DE MINIMIS EXCEPTION	Service Providers	A status for which a service provider qualifies for a given calendar year when the revenue reported on its corresponding FCC Form 499-A is such that the calculated annual contribution to the USF is less than $10,000. Service providers that are de minimis are still required to file FCC Form 499-A by April 1 each year, but are not obligated to file the quarterly FCC Form 499-Q.

Terms	Programs	Definitions
DEBT COLLECTION IMPROVEMENT ACT (DCIA)	Service Providers	A law that requires federal agencies to transfer delinquent debts or claims to the Secretary of the Treasury for further collection action. Unpaid obligations to the USF more than 90 days past due are transferred to the Treasury for collection and enforcement.
DELINQUENCY NOTICES	Service Providers	Monthly letters that companies receive if they have fallen behind on payments owed to the USF. USAC may send more than one notice in one month if the contributor is behind on more than one invoice.
DELINQUENT DEBT	Service Providers	Any portion of an amount owed to the USF that is not paid by the stated due date. Amounts remaining unpaid 30 days after the due date are subject to interest at an annual rate of prime plus 3.5 percent. Amounts remaining unpaid 90 days after the due date are subject to an additional penalty at an annual rate of 6 percent.
E-CERTIFICATION (E-CERT)	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, High Cost, Service Providers	A process that allows universal service support applicants to certify and submit forms online, eliminating the need for paper copies of forms (and original signatures) and facilitating simpler record-keeping.
E-FILE	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, High Cost, Service Providers	USAC's online forms submission tool. Allows universal service support applicants, contributors, and service providers to register with USAC, submit forms, view invoices, add or remove authorized users, update account information, and more. Accessible at https://forms.universalservice.org/.
ELIGIBLE SERVICES	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, High Cost, Service Providers	Equipment and services that are eligible for universal service support. In the E-Rate program, eligible services include data transmission services and/or internet access, internal connections, the maintenance of internal connections, and managed internal broadband services. In the High Cost program, eligible services include the costs of deploying rural voice service (legacy funds) or rural broadband service (modernized funds). In the RHC program, eligible services include broadband connectivity and telecommunications services.

Terms	Programs	Definitions
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.
ESTIMATION FACTOR	Service Providers	A percentage value provided in the FCC Form 499-A and FCC Form 499-Q instructions that help companies calculate possible future thresholds of contribution requirements and determine whether they are likely to be eligible for a de minimis exception.
FCC CIRCULARITY FACTOR	Service Providers	A percentage value applied to revenue of FCC Forms 499-A/Q filers to prevent their being assessed universal service fees on pass-through charges that they bill to their customers. The FCC sets this value quarterly. Visit USAC's Contribution Factors page to see the current circularity factor.
FCC CONTRIBUTION FACTOR	Service Providers	A percentage value applied to revenue of FCC Forms 499-A/Q filers that indicates what portion of their interstate and international end-user revenue they must contribute to the USF. The FCC sets this value quarterly. Visit USAC's Contribution Factors page to see the current contribution factor.
FCC FORM 498	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, High Cost, Service Providers	The FCC form that telecommunications service providers must submit to participate in any of the universal service programs. The form collects contact, remittance, and payment information. Upon completion, the service provider is assigned a nine-digit unique identifier referred to as a 498 ID/Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN). Note: Applicants to the E-Rate program who choose the FCC Form 472 (Billed Entity Applicant Reimbursement (BEAR) Form) payment method must also have filed the FCC Form 498.
FCC FORM 498 COMPANY OFFICER	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, High Cost, Service Providers	See 498 Company Officer.

Terms	Programs	Definitions
FCC FORM 498 DELEGATED USERS	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, High Cost, Service Providers	See Authorized Users.
FCC FORM 498 GENERAL CONTACT	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, High Cost, Service Providers	See General Contact.
FCC FORM 499 COMPANY OFFICER	Service Providers	See 499 Company Officer.
FCC FORM 499 DELEGATED USERS	Service Providers	See Authorized Users.
FCC FORM 499 ESTIMATION FACTOR	Service Providers	A percentage value provided in the FCC Form 499-A and FCC Form 499-Q instructions that helps filers calculate possible future thresholds of contribution requirements and determine whether they are likely to be eligible for a de minimis exception.
FCC FORM 499 PREPARER	Service Providers	See Preparer.
FCC FORM 499-A (ANNUAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS REPORTING WORKSHEET FORM)	Service Providers	An FCC form, also known as the Telecommunications Reporting Worksheet, that telecommunications services and/or Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) carriers must file annually with USAC to report their gross billed revenues. All intrastate, interstate, and international providers of telecommunications (including VoIP providers) within the United States, with limited exceptions, are legally obligated to file the FCC Forms 499 by Apr. 1 of each year.
FCC FORM 499-Q (QUARTERLY TELECOMMUNICATIONS REPORTING WORKSHEET FORM)	Service Providers	An FCC form that non-de minimis telecommunications companies are required to submit quarterly to USAC to calculate their USF contributions. The forms are due to USAC on Feb. 1, May 1, Aug. 1, and Nov. 1 of each year.

Terms	Programs	Definitions
FCC REGISTRATION NUMBER (FCC RN)	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, High Cost, Service Providers	A 10-digit number assigned by the FCC to a business or individual that registers with the commission. It is associated with an entity's Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) and is required before filing FCC Forms 499-A/Q. Originally called CORES ID.
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.
FEDERAL FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT ACT 1996 (FFMIA)	High Cost, Service Providers	A law defining the financial operations and reporting requirements for government entities, including USAC.
FEDERAL GENERALLY ACCEPTED ACCOUNTING PRINCIPLES (FEDERAL GAAP)	High Cost, Service Providers	Accounting standards issued by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) and applicable to all U.S. government agencies. USAC, while legally organized as a not-for-profit organization, operates under the authorization and oversight of the FCC and must comply with these standards.
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT (FOIA)	High Cost, Service Providers	The federal statute that requires U.S. government, state, and other public authorities to disclose previously unreleased or uncirculated information and documents upon request. As an agent of the FCC, USAC is required to respond to FOIA requests. Further information regarding FOIAs, including how to file a request, may be obtained from the FCC's FOIA page.
GENERAL CONTACT	E-Rate, High Cost, Service Providers	The service provider or applicant employee responsible for filling out the FCC Form 498. The General Contact has a unique level of permission in USAC's E-File system, with the ability to submit forms, modify data, and add or remove authorized users.

Terms	Programs	Definitions
GENERALLY ACCEPTED ACCOUNTING PRINCIPLES (GAAP)	High Cost, Service Providers	Uniform minimum standards of and guidelines for financial accounting and reporting in the U.S., issued by the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB).
GENERALLY ACCEPTED AUDITING STANDARDS (GAAS)	High Cost, Service Providers	Standards against which audits are performed for non-public companies in the U.S. GAAS are promulgated by the Auditing Standards Board (ASB) of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA).
GENERALLY ACCEPTED GOVERNMENT AUDITING STANDARDS (GAGAS)	High Cost, Service Providers	Standards for performance and financial audits of U.S. government agencies, developed by the GAO. GAGAS apply to audits of both the USF and universal support recipients.
GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE (GAO)	E-Rate, High Cost, Service Providers	An independent, nonpartisan government agency within the legislative branch that reports on the programs and expenditures of the federal government. As the supreme audit authority of the government, it studies how taxpayer dollars are spent, evaluates program outcomes, audits expenditures, and issues legal opinions.
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.
IMPROPER PAYMENTS ELIMINATION AND RECOVERY ACT (IPERA)	High Cost, Service Providers	A law passed in 2010 to amend IPIA and enhance the federal government’s practices for measuring and recovering improper payments.

Terms	Programs	Definitions
IMPROPER PAYMENTS INFORMATION ACT (IPIA)	High Cost, Service Providers	A 2002 law that requires USAC to provide the FCC with accurate, timely information about improper payments to program beneficiaries. To comply, USAC created its Payment Quality Assurance (PQA) Program, which assesses specific payments made to beneficiaries in all four programs to determine if these payments were made in accordance with FCC rules. Using results of these assessments, USAC calculates estimates of improper payment rates 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.
INTERSTATE TELECOMMUNICATIONS	Service Providers	Telecommunications services that cross state or international borders. All intrastate, interstate, and international U.S. telecommunications providers are legally required to file the FCC Forms 499-A/Q.
LOCAL NUMBER PORTABILITY (LNP)	Service Providers	The ability granted to consumers to retain their telephone number when switching telecommunications companies. USAC is statutorily responsible for calculating carrier contributions to the Local Number Portability Administration (LNPA) database.
MEMORANDUM OPINION AND ORDER (MO&O)	High Cost, Service Providers	Order issued by the FCC to deny a petition for rulemaking, modify a decision, grant or deny a petition for reconsideration, or grant or deny an application for review of a decision. A second or third Memorandum Opinion and Order (2nd MO&O/3rd MO&O) may also be issued.
NATIONAL EXCHANGE CARRIER ASSOCIATION (NECA)	High Cost, Service Providers	A rural carrier association that collects and validates cost and revenue data for member companies, distributes revenue from access charges among pool members, and helps members file access charge tariffs with the FCC and comply with FCC rules.

Terms	Programs	Definitions
NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION (NTIA)	High Cost, Service Providers	Part of the Department of Commerce, the NTIA sets federal telecommunications policy and provides telecommunications grants to various entities. It differs from the FCC in two key respects: 1) the FCC is an independent agency, while the NTIA falls under the executive branch; and 2) the NTIA has jurisdiction over federal government communications, while state and local government communications are within the purview of the FCC.
NORTH AMERICAN NUMBERING PLAN (NANP)	Service Providers	The integrated telephone numbering plan serving 20 North American countries. Information collected on the FCC Form 499-A is also used to calculate contributions to the North American Numbering Plan Administrator (NANPA).
NOTICE OF APPARENT LIABILITY (NAL)	High Cost, Service Providers	An order issued by the FCC advising a party that it has violated an FCC rule or procedure and proposing a penalty. The party has an opportunity to file a response, which the FCC will evaluate.
NOTICE OF INQUIRY (NOI)	High Cost, Service Providers	A request made by the FCC to the public to comment on specific questions about an issue. The public's responses help the FCC to determine if further action by the FCC is warranted.
NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING (NPRM)	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, High Cost, Service Providers	An FCC proposal for new rules or changes to existing rules. Following the issuance of an NPRM, the FCC will seek public comments on the proposal.
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL (OIG)	High Cost, Service Providers	A division of the FCC that provides independent and objective audits and investigations relating to agency programs and operations. May conduct audits or investigations of universal service support recipients, contributors, or service providers.
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET (OMB)	E-Rate, High Cost, Service Providers	Part of the Executive Office of the President, OMB reviews and approves FCC forms that are used by USF contributors and universal service program participants, contributors, and service providers.

Terms	Programs	Definitions
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/.
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.
PREPARER	E-Rate, High Cost, Service Providers	The employee of a telecommunications company that filed FCC Form 499-A/Q who has access to submit and modify data in USAC's E-File system.
PUBLIC NOTICE (PN)	E-Rate, High Cost, Service Providers	A notice issued by the FCC alerting the public of an action taken, a change made, or an upcoming event. PNs are used to announce NOIs, NPRMs, and FNPRMs (Further Notices of Proposed Rulemaking).
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.

Terms	Programs	Definitions
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.
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.
SERVICE PROVIDER IDENTIFICATION NUMBER (SPIN)	E-Rate, Rural Health Care, Lifeline, High Cost, Service Providers	See 498 ID/Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN).
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.

Terms	Programs	Definitions
TELECOMMUNICATIONS RELAY SERVICES (TRS)	Service Providers	A type of telephone service that allows persons with hearing or speech disabilities to place and receive telephone calls. Information collected on the FCC Form 499-A is also used to calculate contributions to the Telecommunications Relay Service administrator.
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.
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.
VOICE OVER INTERNET PROTOCOL (VOIP)	High Cost, Service Providers	A technology that digitizes analog voice signals and transmits them over the internet. VoIP calls may be placed between VoIP users or sent over the public switched telephone network (PSTN) to dial conventional phone numbers.

Terms	Programs	Definitions
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