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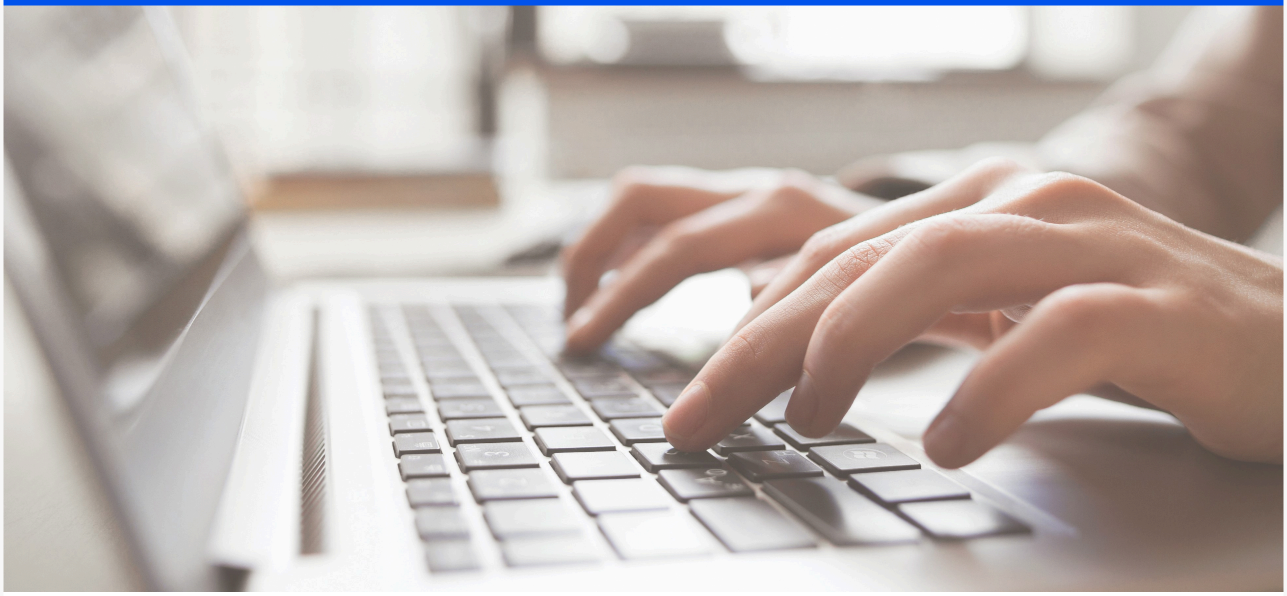
Lifeline

Lifeline Newsletter - February 2026

February 26th, 2026



SAM.gov UEI Requirement

Beginning August 2026, USAC will begin using SAM.gov banking information to remit payment for all Universal Service Fund (USF) invoices. All service providers must have an active SAM.gov Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) on their FCC Form 498 and must have a valid bank account associated with their UEI. For more information, see the SAM.gov UEI Requirement webpage.

FCC Form 481 Filing Window Opens April 1

The 2026 annual FCC Form 481 filing window will open on April 1, 2026, and close on July 1, 2026. The FCC Form 481 collects financial and operations information. Eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs) participating in the High Cost and/or Lifeline programs must annually file the FCC Form 481 in accordance with 47 C.F.R. § 54.313 (High Cost) and 47 C.F.R. § 54.422 (Lifeline/High Cost and Lifeline-only). **For the 2026 filing, all ETCs participating in Lifeline must file and certify the form, even if the provider is not seeking Lifeline support.**

USAC will share additional information and host a training session outlining the filing process and updates to FCC Form 481.

Updated Lifeline Income Qualifications for 2026

USAC has updated its forms, systems, and resources to reflect the 2026 Federal Poverty Guidelines which were released by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in

January 2026. These guidelines are used to determine if a consumer can qualify for Lifeline based on their income. Consumers qualify for the Lifeline benefit if their income is at or below 135 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

Service providers should update their forms and systems as soon as possible to reflect the new income requirements. For additional information, refer to USAC's **February 25, 2026** bulletin.

Lifeline Program Compliance Reminder: Non-Usage

If a service provider does not assess or collect a monthly fee from a subscriber, the service provider cannot claim reimbursement for the subscriber if the subscriber does not use their Lifeline service at least once every 30 days. If an ETC assesses and collects an end-user fee but does not do so on a monthly basis or directly from the subscriber (including through "digital wallets"), the usage requirement applies. Usage activity by the subscriber includes:

- Sending a text message
- Completing an outbound call or using data
- Buying minutes or data to add to the subscriber's service plan
- Answering an incoming call (calls from the subscriber's Lifeline service provider or the Lifeline service provider's agent or representative are not considered usage)
- Responding to direct contact from the subscriber's Lifeline service provider to confirm the subscriber wants to continue receiving Lifeline service

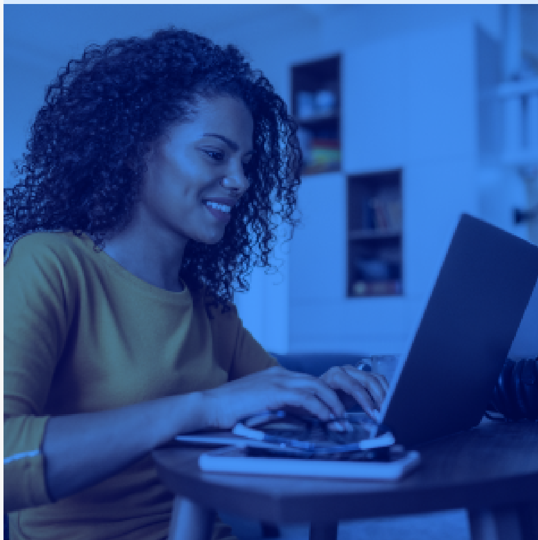
If the subscriber does not use their service within 30 consecutive days (non-usage), the service provider must give the subscriber notice that, if they do not use the service in the next 15 days, their service will be terminated. Service providers must de-enroll subscribers who do not cure their non-usage (i.e., subscribers who do not use their Lifeline service in the 15-day cure period). Service providers are unable to claim reimbursement for subscribers who are in the cure period and do not cure their non-usage. Service providers should properly indicate non-usage as the reason for the de-enrollment in USAC's systems.

Consumers de-enrolled from the Lifeline program for non-usage may reapply by submitting an online application on LifelineSupport.org, applying with the assistance of a Lifeline service provider, or mailing in a completed paper application.

Lifeline providers are reminded that they must comply with the Lifeline Program usage rules (47 C.F.R. §§ 54.405(e)(3), 54.407(c), 54.417(a)).

USAC conducts program integrity reviews to help ensure compliance with the non-usage rules. During these efforts, service providers will receive requests to provide documentation (e.g., types of plans offered to consumers, Call Detail Records (CDRs), etc.) to demonstrate compliance with the non-usage requirements.

The best way to prepare for any data request is to ensure that you are following Lifeline document retention requirements. Lifeline service providers are required to maintain records of their compliance with all FCC rules (47 C.F.R. § 54.417). Service providers must maintain the required documentation for no less than the three full preceding calendar years, and with certain documentation, for as long as the subscriber receives Lifeline service from that service provider, even if the subscriber has been in the Lifeline program for more than three years.



March 2026 Webinar: How to Apply for Lifeline

Join us on Wednesday, March 11, 2026 at 3 p.m. ET for our next Lifeline program webinar where we will provide consumers and consumer advocates with step-by-step guidance on how to apply for the Lifeline benefit online.

Register for the March 2026 monthly webinar. Recordings of previous webinars are available on our Webinars page.

Register

March Maintenance Schedule

As part of continual system improvements, USAC conducts regular system maintenance. Scheduled maintenance dates are available on the National Lifeline Accountability Database (NLAD) Maintenance Schedule and the National Verifier Maintenance Schedule pages.

System Maintenance, March 20, 2026

National Verifier, NLAD, Lifeline Claims System (LCS), and Representative Accountability Database (RAD) will be unavailable due to scheduled monthly maintenance from **Friday, March 20, 2026, at 10 p.m. until 3 a.m. ET on Saturday, March 21, 2026**.

Need Help? Contact Us!

For questions about Lifeline, including technical issues and program resources or rules, email LifelineProgram@usac.org. Review all appropriate program contacts on USAC's Lifeline Contact Us webpage.

USAC | 700 12th Street NW, Suite 900 | Washington, DC 20005