



Universal Service
Administrative Co.

February 2026 Tribal Nation Newsletter

February 27, 2026 | [Universal Service Administrative Company \(USAC\)](#)



Tribal Nation News

Join USAC for the March 2026 Tribal Teleconference, in collaboration with the Lifeline program, to learn about how to apply for and manage the Lifeline benefit. There will be time for Q&A. Please join us on **Tuesday, March 10, 2026, at 4 p.m. ET** – [Register](#).

Notes from USAC's Tribal Liaison

Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina

On January 30, 2026, the [Bureau of Indian Affairs](#) added the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina to the official list of federally recognized Tribes and updated the [Federal Register](#). USAC is working with the FCC to incorporate this addition in all four USAC programs.

In the E-Rate program, any federally recognized Tribe participating in E-Rate that meets the program's [definition of Tribal](#), should designate their entity as "Tribal" and select their Tribal affiliation.

The [E-Rate Productivity Center](#) (EPC) administrative window, which allows entities to make updates to their profile, including selecting Tribal and adding Tribal affiliation, is closed. To make these changes when the administrative window is closed, you can use the [Receipt of Acknowledgement Letter](#) (RAL) modification process to make changes to your profile. More information is below on the RAL modification process. You can also review the [RAL Modification Guide](#) for step-by-step instructions.

If you need additional assistance, you can also contact the Customer Service Center at (888) 203-8100 (Monday – Friday 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET) or create a customer service case in EPC by logging into EPC and selecting the "Contact Us" link.

For the Rural Health Care program, applicants may self-identify as a Tribal entity on the FCC Form 460 (for the HCF Program) or the FCC Form 465 (for the Telecom Program) if the site location is located on Tribal lands, operated by the Indian Health Service (IHS), or otherwise affiliated with a Tribe.

SAM.gov UEI Requirement for Service Providers and E-Rate BEAR Filers

Beginning August 2026, USAC will begin using SAM.gov banking information to remit payment for all Universal Service Fund (USF) invoices and requests for reimbursement.

All service providers and E-Rate applicants who use the Billed Entity Applicant Reimbursement (BEAR) invoicing method must have an active SAM.gov registration attached to a valid bank account.

Once registered, service providers and BEAR filers must also add their SAM.gov Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) to their FCC Form 498. To prepare for this transition, USAC will be sending an email to service providers and BEAR applicants with additional information. Once the transition has occurred, service providers and BEAR applicants must renew their SAM.gov registration annually receive disbursements

For more information, see USAC's [SAM.gov UEI Requirement](#) webpage.

E-Rate

FCC Form 470 Deadline is Approaching

The last date to submit and certify your FCC Form 470, wait the required 28-day period, and timely file your FCC Form 471 is Wednesday, March 4, 2026. The FCC Form 471 filing window closes at 11:59 pm E.T. on April 1, 2026.

To learn more about the competitive bidding process, please review the [competitive bidding infographic](#), the [How to File an FCC Form 470](#) learning module, or the [How to File the FCC Form 471](#) learning module, which guides users through all aspects of preparing, submitting, and certifying your forms.

Reminders for Filing an FY2026 FCC Form 471

Below are some reminders of the actions you should take before the FY2026 application filing window closes on April 1, 2026.

You must wait the required, minimum 28-day period after your [FCC Form 470](#) is certified and posted before choosing a service provider, and submitting and certifying your FCC Form 471.

The earliest date you can enter into a contract is listed on your FCC Form 470 Receipt Notification Letter (RNL) in your EPC News Feed as the "Allowable Contract Date." Changes to the FCC Form 470 beyond certain [allowable changes](#) require applicants to restart the minimum 28-day waiting period from the date of the change before selecting a service provider, signing a contract, or submitting and certifying an FCC Form 471.

Additionally, if you make any substantial changes to your posted FCC Form 470, uploaded RFP (request for proposal), or RFP documents after you certified and submitted your FCC Form 470, you are required to wait a minimum 28-day period from the date you uploaded your updated FCC Form 470, RFP, or RFP document. The required, minimum 28-day waiting period is based on the date of your certified and posted FCC Form 470 or uploaded RFP/RFP document, whichever date is later, if they are not posted together on the same date.

- EPC will not allow you to create a contract record if the FCC Form 470 you try to cite for the contract was not posted for at least 28 days.
- Once the minimum 28-day waiting period has ended and a service provider is selected, the applicant must have a contract or other legally binding agreement prior to the submission of the FCC Form 471. Note that a verbal agreement is not considered a contract or legally [binding agreement](#) under E-Rate program rules.
- For services provided under tariff or on a month-to-month basis, EPC will not allow you to finish entering a funding request for those services if the cited FCC Form 470 was not posted for at least 28 days.

Ensure Your FCC Form 471 User Rights

Your Account Administrator must grant you user rights to complete and/or certify the FCC Form 471. Note that new users must first accept the terms and conditions for EPC by clicking the **Tasks** tab from the menu at the top of the landing page and choosing the appropriate task.

After your rights have been assigned, click the **FCC Form 471** link at the top of your organization's landing page to start your form.

If you have access to the form but cannot enter information or take other actions, call the Customer Service Center (CSC) at (888) 203-8100 for assistance.

Resume an Existing FCC Form 471 from the 'Tasks' Tab

After you start your form, you can see your progress through the form by referring to the progress bar at the top of each page. If you need to stop before you have finished, the system will create a task for you under the **Tasks** tab to allow you to resume your work at the point you left. Be sure to review the following as you work through your form:

- Your organization's information (e.g., name, address, telephone number, attributes).
- Your related entities' information (e.g., name, address, urban/rural status, Tribal affiliation, attributes, student counts for schools, library square footage, and library main branch designation for libraries).
- Your organization's urban/rural designation and discount calculation.
- Because entity profiles are locked, you will not be able to make any entity changes at this point. However, by making a note of any necessary updates, you will be ready to submit a **RAL Modification Request** (see article below) to inform us of those updates.

Create a Contract Record for Each New Contract or Legally Binding Agreement

You must have a contract record in your profile for each contract or legally binding agreement you intend to use on your FY2026 FCC Form 471. You then cite the contract record for the services that will be provided under that contract when you are creating a funding request on your form.

- If you created a contract record in an earlier year for a multi-year contract that covers your services for FY2026, cite that contract record for this year.
- If you created a contract record in an earlier year for a contract with voluntary extensions, you do not need to create a new contract record if the extension will cover services for all of FY2026. First, work with your service provider to exercise the extension for your FY2026 services. Then, when you cite that contract record for the funding request for these services, enter the last date of service for all of FY2026 (i.e., June 30, 2027) in the contract end date field for that request. You do not have to create a new contract record simply because you exercised an option to extend the contract.
- Learn How to Create a Contract Record:
 - [How to Create a Contract Record](#) video.

- [How to Create a Contract Record for Commercially Available Broadband/Low-Cost High-Speed Internet Access](#) (which is exempt from competitive bidding) video.

You are encouraged – but not required – to upload a copy of your contract into your contract record in EPC. If you do not upload your contract, be sure to keep a copy handy in case USAC requests it during the review of your application.

Do not wait until the end of the application filing window to contact us with questions or issues, we are available to help now.

You can open a customer service case in EPC or call CSC at (888) 203-8100, if you need assistance. If you choose to open a customer service case, you will also be able to upload one or more documents that provide additional information we need to process your request.

Use a RAL Modification Request to Update a Certified FCC Form 471

USAC issues an FCC Form 471 Receipt Acknowledgment Letter (RAL) to both the applicant and service provider(s) in EPC after an FCC Form 471 application is certified. The letter contains many of the details submitted on the FCC Form 471 and provides a means to correct any errors or mistakes. If you were not able to make all the appropriate updates to your profile in EPC before the close of the EPC FCC Form 471 administrative window, **you can provide updated profile information by filing a RAL Modification Request** after submitting and certifying your FCC Form 471 application(s), but before you receive funding commitment decision letter(s).

Applicants receive the RAL in their EPC News Feed after certifying an FCC Form 471. The RAL modification function in EPC allows you to provide specific information in an organized format, which makes it easier for Program Integrity Assurance (PIA) reviewers to locate and understand the changes you want to make. Go to the [Ministerial & Clerical Errors](#) page to see the types of changes that are allowed and not allowed for the FCC Form 471.

To learn how to submit modification requests for your FCC Form(s) 471, you can also view the [FCC Form 471 Receipt Acknowledgment Letter Modification Guide](#).

To learn more about the E-Rate program, review the [February 2026 E-Rate News Brief](#). If you are Tribal library or TCU library, consider joining [T-LEAP](#).

[Lifeline](#)

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.

Prior to the opening of the filing window, USAC will share additional information via email and host a training session outlining the filing process and updates to FCC Form 481.

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, 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](https://www.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 Monthly Webinar: How to Apply for Lifeline

Join us on **Wednesday, March 11, 2026**, 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.

[Rural Health Care \(RHC\)](#)

Upcoming Trainings

The filing deadline for FY2026 is April 1 – about 1 month away. To assist you with filing your FY2026 funding requests (FCC Forms 426 and 466), the Rural Health Care (RHC) outreach team will be hosting the following webinars:

- FY2026 HCF Program Office Hours – March 11, 2026, at 2 pm. ET – [Register](#)
- FY2026 Telecom Program Office Hours – March 18, 2026, at 2 p.m. ET – [Register](#)

Open Data Platform

As part of USAC’s Open Data initiative, RHC program data is open and accessible to the public. Anyone is free to access and utilize the raw data submitted by Universal Service participants. Please note, per USAC policies, data sets are regularly updated to include 10 years of information. The following data sets are available on the Open Data platform:

- [RHC Commitments and Disbursements \(FCC Form 462/466/466A\)](#) – This dataset contains data about funding decisions, total committed amounts, and total disbursement amounts for the RHC program.
- [RHC Posted Services Tool](#) – This tool allows service providers to view service request information by individual HCPs and consortia applying for funding through the RHC program.
- [RHC Posted Services \(FCC Form 461/465\)](#) – This dataset allows service providers to view service request information provided by the RHC program. The data is collected from FCC Forms 461 and 465.
- [SPIN Lookup Tool](#) – This tool can be used to view and export service provider profile data found in RHC Connect. This data includes important information regarding the service provider, such as contact information and details regarding the FCC Forms 498 and 499.

Note: Some users have reported issues with downloading or opening some documents in Open Data. If you experience such issues with Open Data, copy and paste the document URL into a new tab in your browser. If you continue to experience problems, reach out to the [RHC Customer Service Center](#).

Invoice Filing Deadlines

The [RHC Invoice Filing Deadline Tool](#) allows service providers and health care providers (HCPs) to look up the deadline to submit invoices for funding commitments. The tool allows users to avoid having to set up specific Excel configurations to find their deadlines.

Key Dates and Trainings

E-Rate | Program Integrity Assurance (PIA) Review Process

Thursday, March 26, 2026, at 2 p.m. ET – [Register >](#)

E-Rate | Service Providers

Tuesday, March 31, 2026, at 2 p.m. ET – [Register >](#)

Lifeline | How to Apply for Lifeline

Wednesday, March 11, 2026, at 3 p.m. ET – [Register >](#)

RHC | FY2026 HCF Program Funding Request Office Hours #3

Wednesday, March 11, 2026, at 2 p.m. ET – [Register >](#)

RHC | FY2026 Telecom Program Funding Request Office Hours #3

Wednesday, March 18, 2026, at 2 p.m. ET – [Register >](#)

Service Providers | New Form 499 ID Basics

Thursday, March 5, 2026, at 2 p.m. ET – [Register >](#)

Tribal Teleconference with Lifeline

How to Apply for and Manage the Lifeine Benefit

Tuesday, January 13, 2026, at 4 p.m. ET - [Register >](#)

USF Program Technical Assistance

The USAC Customer Service Center (CSC) provides customer service for all USF programs. Visit the Contact USAC page to get in touch with specialized agents trained in the specifics of each program.

Questions or suggestions? Contact USAC's Tribal Liaison at TribalLiaison@usac.org.

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