

Universal Service: Connecting Millions to Broadband Services

April 11, 2023

Housekeeping

- Audio is available through your computer's speakers
- The audience will remain on mute during the presentation
- Enter questions at any time using the "Questions" box
- If your audio or slides freeze, restart the webinar
- A copy of the slide deck is in the "Handouts" section of webinar panel

Meet Our Team



Gem Labarta

Tribal Liaison | Shared Services

<u>TribalLiaison@usac.org</u>



Jaymie Gustafson

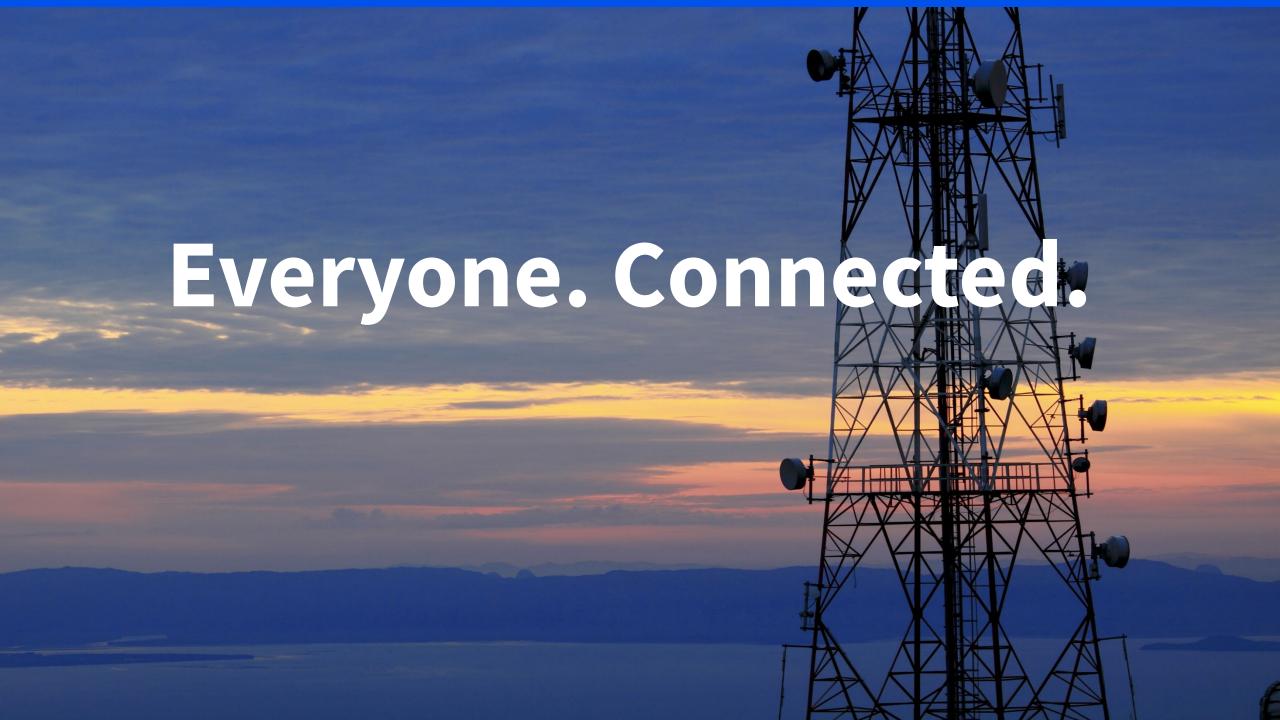
Director | Shared Services

Agenda

- Introduction to USAC
- One USAC: Four Programs
 - High Cost Program
 - Rural Health Care Program
 - Lifeline Program
 - E-Rate Program
- Congressional Response Program: ACP
- Questions
- Service Provider Information

Purpose

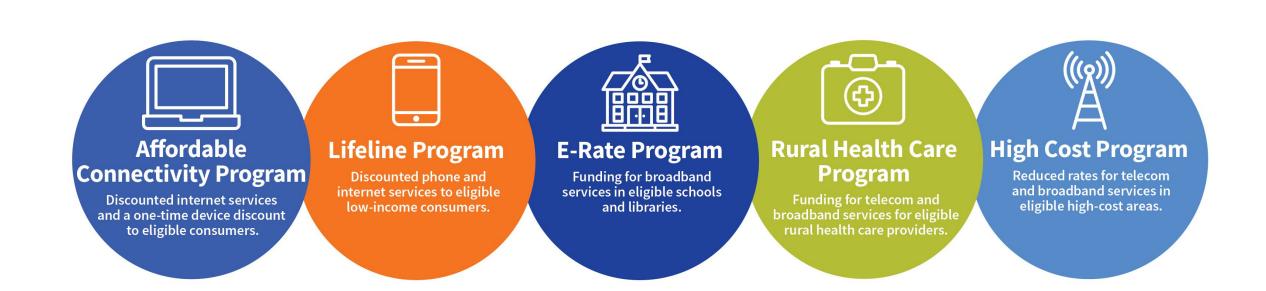
- Working at the infrastructure, community and individual level, Universal Service Fund programs help connect Tribal communities to phone and broadband services.
- This session will introduce you to opportunities to further connect your community through USF programs.



Introduction to USAC

- The Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) is an independent, not-for-profit corporation designated by the FCC as the permanent administrator of the Universal Service Fund and the Congressional Response programs.
- Works at the direction of the FCC to protect the integrity of universal service through:
 - Informing and educating program audiences
 - Collecting and distributing contributions
 - Promoting program compliance

FCC Broadband Programs Administered by USAC



Universal Service Fund Programs



High Cost Program

- The federal universal service High Cost program (including the Connect America Fund) is designed to ensure that consumers in rural, insular, and high-cost areas have access to modern communications networks capable of providing voice and broadband service, both fixed and mobile, at rates that are reasonably comparable to those in urban areas.
- The program fulfills this universal service goal by allowing eligible carriers who serve these areas to recover some of their costs from the federal Universal Service Fund.

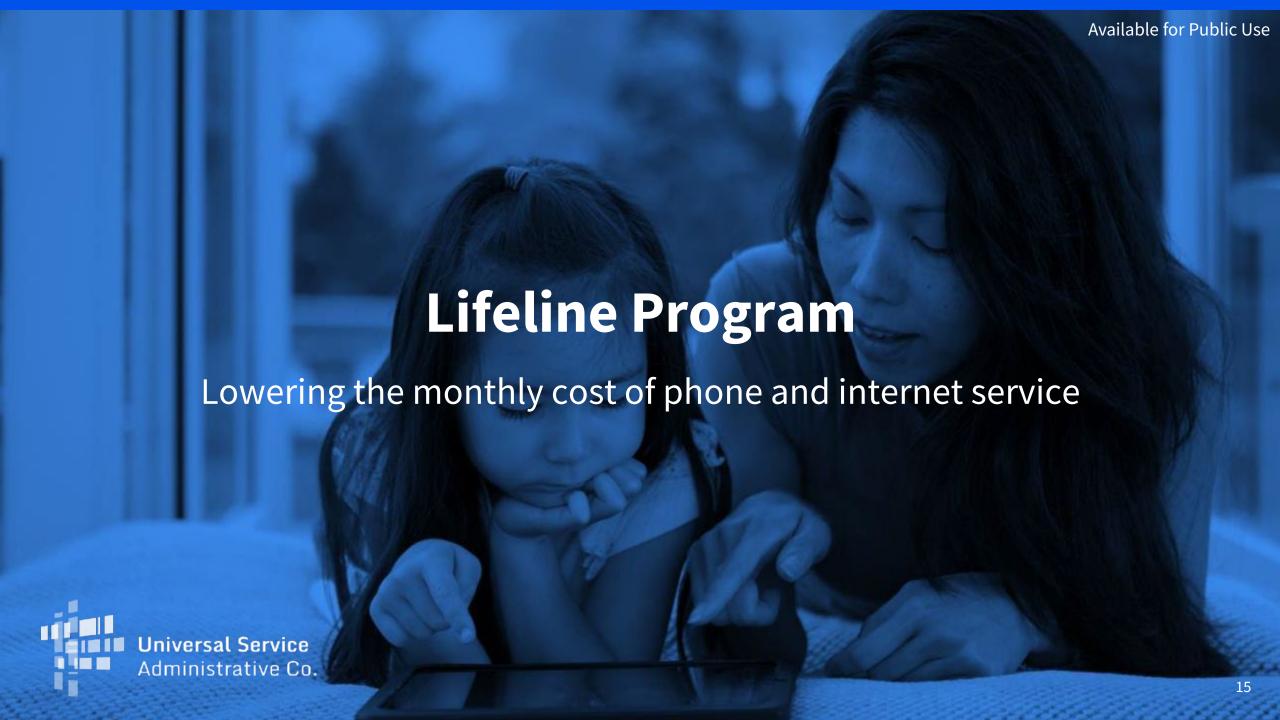
High Cost Program: How It Works

- The FCC determines areas of the country that are eligible for funding.
- Through different support processes, eligible service providers are authorized for support in deploying network infrastructure in those areas and providing service.
- Service providers report progress on deployment.
- USAC monitors compliance with build-out obligations.



Rural Health Care Program

- The Rural Health Care (RHC) program provides funding to eligible health care providers for telecommunications and broadband services needed to deliver health care.
 - The Telecommunications (Telecom) Program funds voice and other telecommunications services.
 - The Healthcare Connect Fund (HCF) Program funds broadband services, network equipment and related costs.
- Eligible applicants: Must be a non-profit or public health care provider located in a rural area as defined by the FCC. Eligible health care providers must meet <u>program</u> <u>requirements</u>.

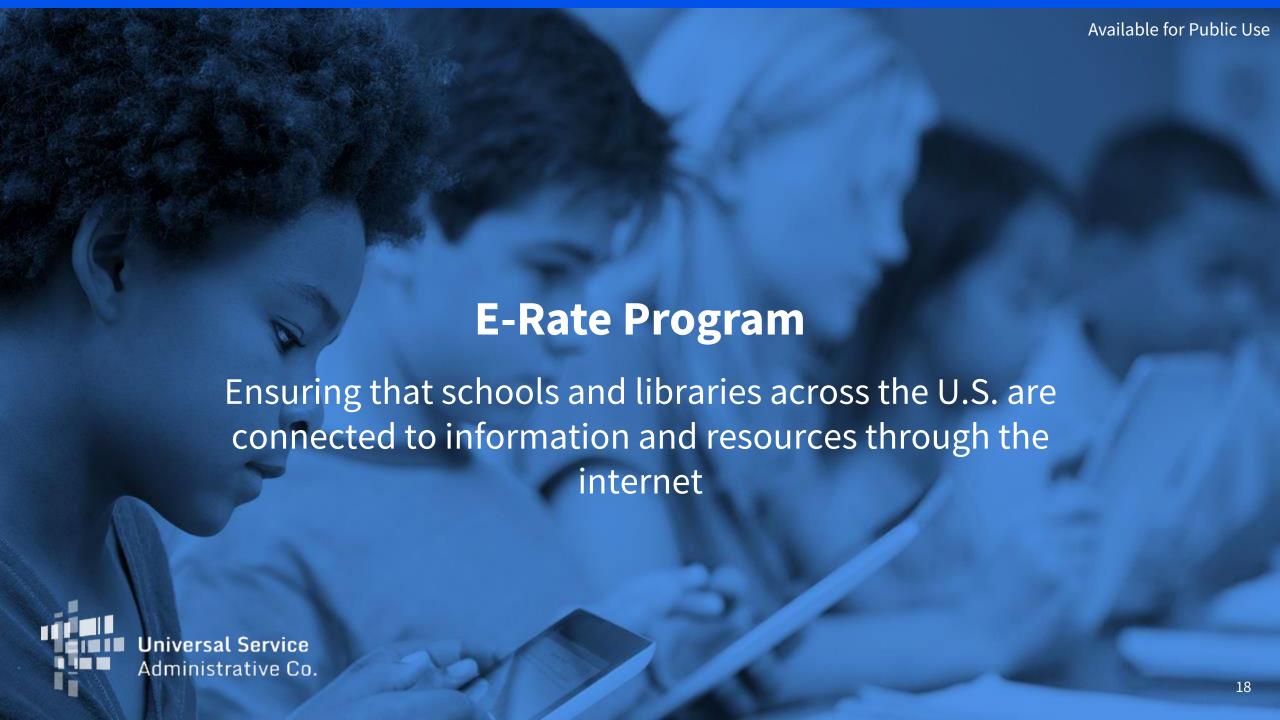


Lifeline Program

- Eligible low-income households receive a discount off their monthly broadband or telephone bill between \$5.25 and \$9.25 (depending on service type).
- Each eligible household can receive one Lifeline benefit.
- Consumers must meet one eligibility criterion described below and apply through the Lifeline National Verifier:
 - Income at or below 135 percent of the federal poverty limit
 - Participate in Medicaid
 - Participate in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
 - Participate in Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
 - Participate in Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA)
 - Participate in Veterans and Survivors Pension Benefit

Lifeline Program Enhanced Tribal Benefit

- Lifeline offers an enhanced benefit to consumers who live on qualifying Tribal lands:
 - Up to \$25/month extra is available for subscribers on qualifying Tribal lands (\$34.25 total).
 - Up to \$100 "Link Up" benefit to connect telecommunications services from a carrier receiving high-cost support on qualifying Tribal lands once per residential address.
- Additional eligibility options for consumers living on Tribal lands:
 - Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance (BIA-GA)
 - Tribally Administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
 - Tribal Head Start (must meet qualifying income standard)
 - Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)



E-Rate Program

- Provides support to schools and libraries across the nation to obtain affordable, highspeed broadband services and internal connections to connect students and library patrons with learning opportunities and services.
- Eligible applicants: Public or private schools (K-12), libraries, and groups of schools and libraries (e.g., consortia, districts, systems).
- Eligible services: Internet access, telecommunications services, and related equipment (<u>Full list available</u>).

E-Rate Program: Tribal Libraries

- In 2022, the FCC clarified E-Rate rules to confirm that Tribal libraries are eligible for E-Rate funding.
- A library may be designated as a Tribal library by a Tribal Council (e.g., pursuant to a Tribal Resolution).
- Tribal libraries designated by a Tribal Council should have three characteristics commonly associated with Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grants to Native American libraries:
 - Regularly scheduled hours,
 - Staff, and
 - Materials available for library users.

Congressional Response Programs



Affordable Connectivity Program

- Congress appropriated \$14.2B to create the Affordable Connectivity Program.
- Consumers are eligible for the ACP if they meet any Lifeline program eligibility criteria.
- Consumers also qualify if their household has an income at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, or if they or a member of their household receives a Pell grant in the current award year, participates in the National School Lunch or Breakfast Program, is enrolled in a Community Eligibility Provision School, or participates in WIC.
- ACP households can receive up to \$30/month discount for broadband services.
- ACP also provides a one-time discount of up to \$100 for a laptop, tablet or desktop computer (with a copayment of more than \$10 but less than \$50).
- Eligible households can receive both Lifeline and the ACP.
- Eligible ACP households located on qualifying Tribal lands can receive a discount of up to \$75 per month off of their internet bill.

Stay Informed About ACP

- For service providers:
 - Visit <u>usac.org</u> to follow ACP updates
 - Sign up for the USAC ACP Outreach List to receive ACP email updates and learn about ACP trainings
 - Visit the <u>FCC's ACP webpages</u> for information about the provider application process
 - Visit our **Community Resources** page for consumer outreach materials
- For consumers:
 - Visit <u>AffordableConnectivity.gov</u> to find consumer information and resources

Questions?

Service Providers

Rural Health Care Program: Service Providers

- Request an FCC Registration Number from the FCC.
- Complete the FCC Form 498 through USAC.
- Review and respond to RHC service requests.
- If selected by the HCP, sign a service agreement with the HCP.
- Credit the HCP for costs covered by the RHC program funding request.
- Invoice USAC for the approved funding amount.

High Cost Program: Service Providers

- Eligibility criteria and fund processes vary from fund to fund.
- To participate, service providers must be a registered eligible telecommunications carrier (ETC).
- Participating ETC must file an FCC Form 481 annual detailing financial and operational information and engagement with Tribal governments.
- Providers file build-out data with the High Cost Universal Broadband (HUBB) portal each year.
- Participating providers must submit to performance testing and verification reviews.

Lifeline Program: Service Providers

- Must be an eligible telecommunications carrier (ETC).
- Non-facilities based providers must have an FCC-approved Compliance Plan before they can become an ETC.
- Obtain Study Area Code (SAC) and a Service Provider Identification Number (498 ID/SPIN).
- Set up Lifeline system access with USAC.
- Begin enrolling consumers and provide Lifeline discounted service.
- Claim reimbursement for discounts passed on to qualifying Lifeline consumers.

E-Rate Program: Service Providers

- Obtain a Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN/498 ID).
- Submit bids in response to applicants' requests for service.
- If selected by an applicant, sign a contract with the school or library.
- Provide agreed-upon services.
- Invoice USAC for the amount discounted from the applicant's bill OR invoice the applicant so they can invoice USAC for the discounted amount.

Affordable Connectivity Program: Service Providers

- Service providers that are not eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs) can submit an application to the FCC to provide ACP service.
- ETCs and other approved service providers (non-ETCs) submit an ACP election notice to USAC, which will allow the necessary system access to enroll and claim households for reimbursement.
- ACP providers must submit an ACP device information form if they intend to offer devices.
- Set up access to ACP systems, including API and NLAD.
- Enroll eligible consumers.
- Provide ACP discounted service and devices to eligible consumers.
- Submit claim to USAC for reimbursement of ACP discount passed through to consumer.

Questions?

USAC Contact Information

- For program information, visit <u>www.USAC.org</u>
- Consumers interested in Lifeline and ACP can visit <u>www.LifelineSupport.org</u> and <u>www.AffordableConnectivity.gov</u>
- For general USAC Tribal information, visit www.usac.org/about/tribal-nations/
- USAC's Tribal Liaison can answer questions and connect you to resources. Contact Gem Shandiin Labarta at TribalLiaison@USAC.org.

Thank You!

