

Universal Service: Connecting Millions to Broadband Services

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Housekeeping

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Meet Our Team



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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.



Everyone. Connected.

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



Affordable Connectivity Program

Discounted internet services and a one-time device discount to eligible consumers.



Lifeline Program

Discounted phone and internet services to eligible low-income consumers.



E-Rate Program

Funding for broadband services in eligible schools and libraries.



Rural Health Care Program

Funding for telecom and broadband services for eligible rural health care providers.



High Cost Program

Reduced rates for telecom and broadband services in eligible high-cost areas.

Universal Service Fund Programs

High Cost and the Connect America Fund

Expanding access to modern communications networks across rural America



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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

Connecting health care facilities across America



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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 [program requirements](#).

Lifeline Program

Lowering the monthly cost of phone and internet service



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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

Ensuring that schools and libraries across the U.S. are connected to information and resources through the internet



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E-Rate Program

- Provides support to schools and libraries across the nation to obtain affordable, high-speed 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 ([Full list available](#)).

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

Helps low-income households pay for broadband service
and connected internet devices



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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 co-payment 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 usac.org to follow ACP updates
 - Sign up for the USAC ACP Outreach List to receive ACP email updates and learn about ACP trainings
 - Visit the [FCC's ACP webpages](#) for information about the provider application process
 - Visit our [Community Resources](#) page for consumer outreach materials
- For consumers:
 - Visit AffordableConnectivity.gov 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 www.USAC.org
- Consumers interested in Lifeline and ACP can visit www.LifelineSupport.org and www.AffordableConnectivity.gov
- 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!



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