Universal Service: Connecting Millions to Broadband Services

April 11, 2023
Housekeeping

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Meet Our Team

Gem Labarta
Tribal Liaison | Shared Services
TribalLiaison@usac.org

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.
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
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
**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
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.
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
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](http://www.USAC.org)
- Consumers interested in Lifeline and ACP can visit [www.LifelineSupport.org](http://www.LifelineSupport.org) and [www.AffordableConnectivity.gov](http://www.AffordableConnectivity.gov)
- For general USAC Tribal information, visit [www.usac.org/about/tribal-nations/](http://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](mailto:TribalLiaison@USAC.org).
Thank You!