

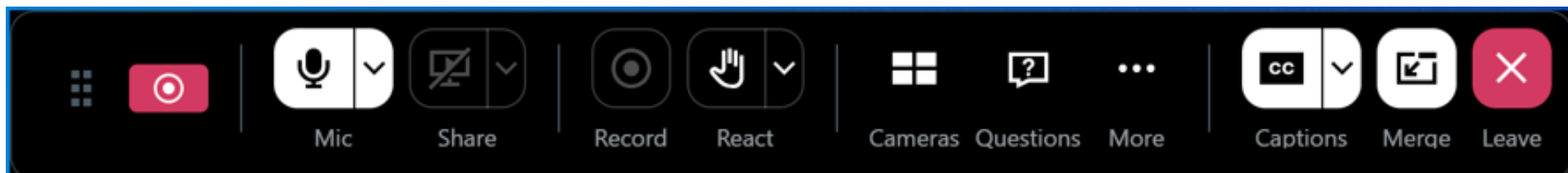


# Universal Service: Connecting Millions to Broadband

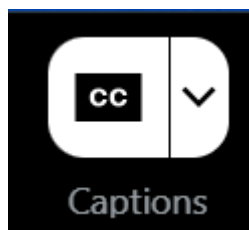
May 12, 2026

# Housekeeping – Closed Captioning (CC)

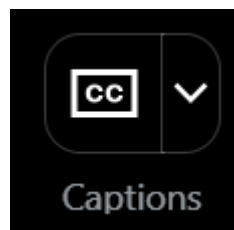
- Attendees control their own captioning.



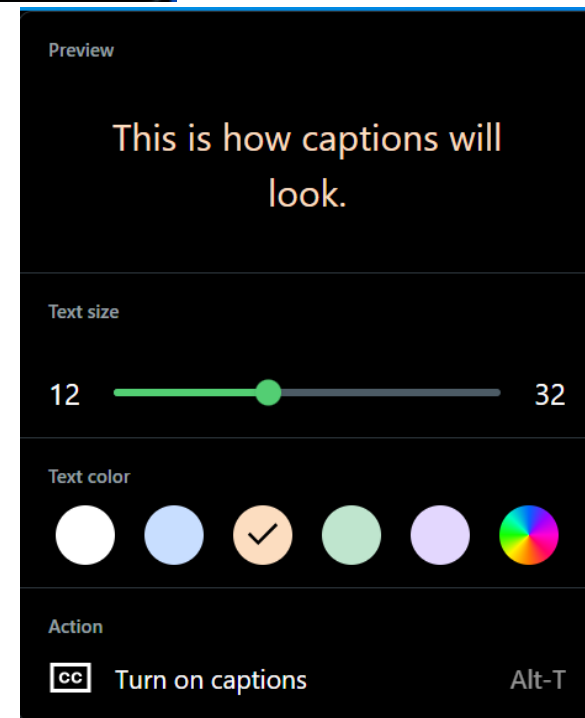
- You can change the caption font size and color.
- Toggle CC off and on at your preference.



Captions ON




Captions OFF



# Housekeeping – Materials & Questions


- A copy of the slide deck is in the **Materials** section of the webinar panel.



 Materials

- Enter questions at any time using the **Questions** box.

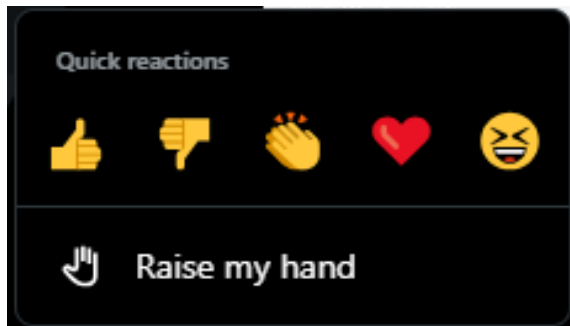
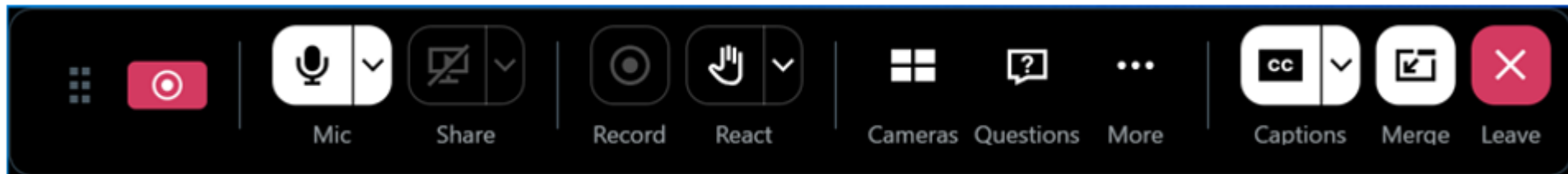


 Questions

- If the slides freeze, restart the webinar.

# Housekeeping – Raise Your Hand

- Raise your hand at any time using the **React** box.



# Disclaimer

To accommodate all attendees, real-time closed captions will be present during this presentation. We apologize in advance for any transcription errors or distractions and appreciate your understanding.

**Please be aware that this webinar is being recorded.**

# Meet Our Team – Tribal Liaison



## **Gem Labarta**

Tribal Liaison | Shared Services

Provide clear, accurate, real-time support to Tribal stakeholders.

[TribalLiaison@usac.org](mailto:TribalLiaison@usac.org)

# Upcoming Dates

- Lifeline
  - Understanding and Resolving National Lifeline Accountability Database (NLAD) Error Codes – May 13, 2026, at 3 p.m. ET – [Register](#).
  - Lifeline and Tribal Teleconference – May 12, 2026, at 4 p.m. ET – [Register](#).
- Rural Health Care
  - Post Commitment Change Requests Webinar (Telecom) – May 22, 2026, at 2 p.m. ET – [Register](#).
- High Cost
  - FCC Form 481 and Walkthrough – May 19, 2026, at 2 p.m. ET – [Register](#).
- Service Providers
  - Office Hours: Post 499-A Processing – May 14, 2025, at 2 p.m. ET – [Register](#).
- E-Rate
  - No upcoming webinars at this time. To view prior webinars, please visit the [E-Rate Webinars](#) page.

# Agenda

- Introduction to USAC
- One USAC: Four Programs
  - Lifeline Program
    - Tribal Lands Verification Tool
  - E-Rate Program
    - Tribal Library E-Rate Advocacy Program (T-LEAP)
  - Rural Health Care Program
  - High Cost Program
- Questions
- Service Provider Information

# Who We Are: The Universal Service Administrative Company

- The **Universal Service Administrative Company** (USAC) is an independent, not-for-profit organization designated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).
- USAC is responsible for administering the Universal Service Fund (USF) and its four programs.
- The USF exists to ensure that all people in the United States have access to quality and affordable connectivity services.



## Lifeline Program

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



## E-Rate Program

Funding for broadband services to eligible schools and libraries.



## Rural Health Care Program

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

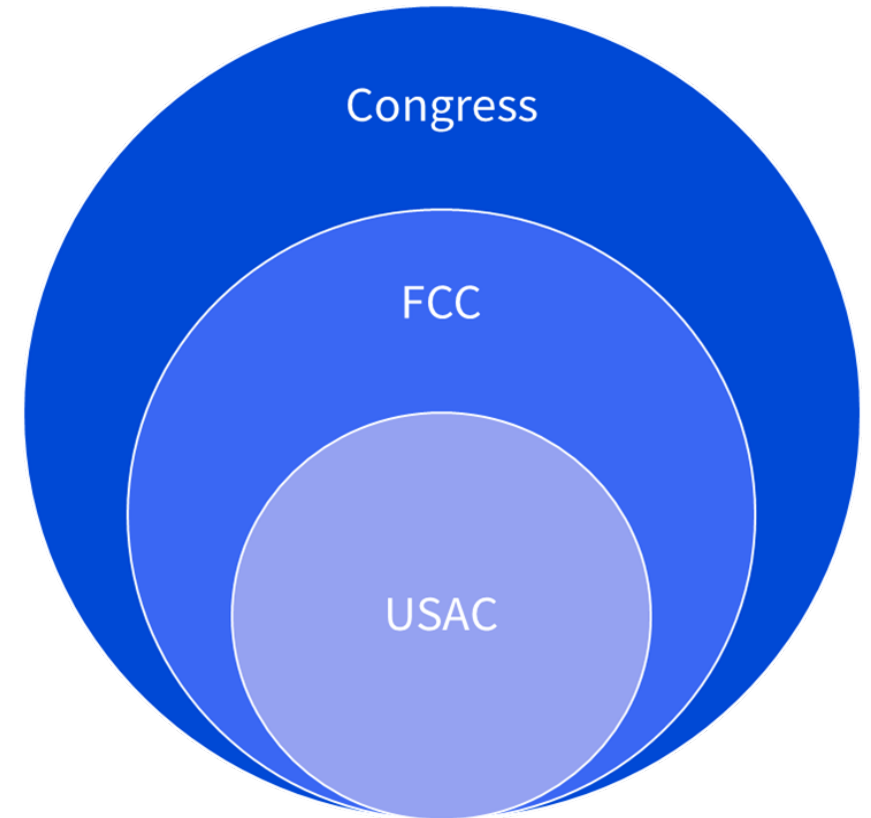


## High Cost Program

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

# Overview: Who Makes the Rules?

- In the Telecommunications Act of 1996, Congress directed the FCC to establish the universal service programs.
- The FCC sets rules and policies for the USF programs and gives direction to USAC.
- USAC is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the USF in accordance with FCC requirements.



# SAM.gov Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) Requirement

- Beginning August 2026, USAC will use SAM.gov banking information to remit payment for all Universal Service Fund (USF) invoices and requests for reimbursement.
- **All** service providers and **all E-Rate participants that use the BEAR invoicing method** to receive USF disbursements must have:
  - A Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) on their FCC Form 498
  - An active SAM.gov account
  - A valid bank account associated with the SAM.gov account

# SAM.gov UEI Requirement (cont.)

- If you are a Service Provider or E-Rate participant who receives funding from USAC:
  - Confirm that your FCC Form 498 includes a UEI and active SAM.gov account and that it is connected to the correct bank account—specifically, the bank account that is designated to accept USF disbursements.
  - To prepare for this change, USAC will contact service providers and E-Rate applicants by email to ensure they met these requirements.
- If you are a Service Provider or E-Rate applicant that does **not** have a UEI, or if you have a SAM.gov generated UEI but **not** an active SAM.gov account connected with a bank account:
  - Visit SAM.gov and complete the registration process.
  - This process can take up to six weeks, so USAC recommends starting **as soon as possible**.
- Service Providers and BEAR applicants will have to annually register with SAM.gov to keep their account active. USAC will not be able to process disbursements if the payee's SAM.gov account is inactive.
- For more information, visit USAC's [SAM.gov UEI Requirement webpage](#).

# Universal Service Fund Programs



# Lifeline Program

# Lifeline Program

- Eligible low-income households receive a discount off their monthly broadband or telephone bill of up to \$5.25 or \$9.25 (depending on service type), with an enhanced support amount of up to \$25 available for services to residents of Tribal lands.
- 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 Guidelines
  - 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 Enhanced Tribal Benefit

- Lifeline offers enhanced benefits to consumers who live on qualifying Tribal lands:
  - Up to \$25/month extra for subscribers on qualifying Tribal lands (up to \$34.25 total)
  - A one-time “Link Up” benefit of up to \$100 to connect telecommunications services from carriers receiving High Cost support on qualifying Tribal lands
- 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)

# Lifeline Survivor Benefit

## Overview

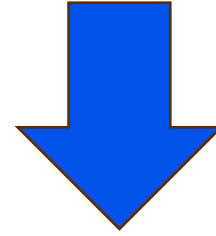
- Under the [Safe Connections Act](#) (SCA), survivors of domestic violence, human trafficking, and related crimes, as well as individuals caring for those against whom such acts were committed, can receive discounted phone, internet, or bundled services through the Lifeline program.
- On August 29, 2024, the FCC issued a [Public Notice](#) announcing that service providers must comply with the rules allowing survivors to receive emergency Lifeline support.

# Lifeline Survivor Benefit

## Emergency Lifeline Support for Survivors

- As of September 4, 2024, survivors who attempt a line separation request and are experiencing financial hardship may qualify for and receive emergency Lifeline support for up to six months.
  - Qualifying survivors can receive a discount of up to \$9.25 on phone, internet, or bundled services.
  - Qualifying survivors residing on qualifying Tribal lands can receive a discount of up to \$34.25 on phone, internet, or bundled services.
  - After six months, qualifying survivors may apply for the standard Lifeline benefit, or Tribal enhancement, if applicable.

# Tribal Lands Verification Tool



- Use this [tool](#) to see if your address is on qualifying Tribal lands
- This is for information purposes only and **not** for eligibility
- You can still use the [Eligible Tribal Lands for the Lifeline program](#) PDF

A screenshot of the Tribal Lands Verification Tool interface. The interface is divided into two main sections: a search form on the left and a map of the United States on the right. The search form has two tabs: "Search by Address" (selected) and "Search by Location". Under "Search by Address", there are three input fields: "Street Address", "City", and "Zip Code". The "City" field is followed by a "State" dropdown menu. At the bottom of the search form are "Search" and "Clear" buttons. The map on the right shows the United States with state abbreviations and labels for "CANADA" and "MEXICO". The map is powered by Leaflet, MapBox, and OpenStreetMap, as indicated by the logo in the bottom right corner.



# E-Rate Program

# 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
  - Groups of schools and libraries (e.g., consortia, districts, systems)
- Eligible services:
  - Internet access
  - Telecommunications services
  - Related equipment ([see the full eligible service list](#))

# 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 must 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.

# **Tribal Library E-Rate Advocacy Program (T-LEAP)**

# Tribal Library E-Rate Advocacy Program (T-LEAP) Overview

- One-on-one assistance in all aspects of preparing, applying, and receiving E-Rate support during the upcoming funding year.
- Trainings designed to help you apply for funding, including:
  - How to use the E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC).
  - Walkthroughs of the competitive bidding and application processes, including timelines and information needed to complete competitive bidding and the application.
- Hands-on support while completing the different E-Rate forms and processes needed to apply for and receive E-Rate funding.
- [Applications](#) accepted year-round with three focused trainings yearly.



# Rural Health Care Program

# Rural Health Care Program

- The Rural Health Care (RHC) program provides funding to eligible health care providers (HCPs) 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 HCP located in a rural area. HCF also allows eligibility through a consortium that is majority rural.
- Eligible HCPs must meet [program requirements](#).



# High Cost Program

# High Cost Program

- The 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 USF.

# High Cost Program: How It Works

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

**Questions?**



# Service Providers

# Lifeline Program Service Provider Process

- 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 Provider Process

- Obtain a Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN/498 ID).
  - ETC designation is not required.
- Submit bids in response to applicants' requests for service.
- If selected by an applicant (school or library), sign a contract with them.
- 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.

# Rural Health Care Program Service Provider Process

- Obtain a Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN/498 ID).
  - ETC designation is not required.
- Submit bids in response to applicants' requests for service.
- If selected by an applicant (HCP), sign a service agreement with them.
- Credit the HCP for costs covered by the RHC program funding request.
- Invoice USAC for the approved funding amount.

# High Cost Program Service Provider Process

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

**Questions?**

# USAC and Program Resources

# USAC Contact Information

- For program information, visit [www.USAC.org](http://www.USAC.org).
- Consumers interested in Lifeline should visit [www.LifelineSupport.org](http://www.LifelineSupport.org).
- 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).
- Stay connected – [Subscribe](#) to USAC program newsletters.

# Lifeline Resources

- Visit [LifelineSupport.org](https://LifelineSupport.org) for general information on Lifeline and to apply.
- View the [Tribal Benefit](#) page for Tribal resources.
- View and use the [Tribal Lifeline Verification tool](#).
- View the following print and video resources:
  - [Application Instructions](#) (available in 10 languages)
  - [Tribal Info Flyer](#)
  - [Survivor Benefit Flyer](#)
  - [Manage Your Benefit Flyer](#)

# E-Rate Resources

- For program information, visit the [E-Rate](#) webpage.
- Schools and libraries interested in applying can visit the [E-Rate Applicant Process](#) page.
- For webinars, videos, and [Tribal FAQs](#), visit the [Learn](#) page.
- [Subscribe](#) to the Tribal and E-Rate Newsletters.
- For general USAC Tribal information, visit the [Tribal Nations webpage](#).
- Email the Tribal Liaison at [TribalLiaison@usac.org](mailto:TribalLiaison@usac.org).

# RHC Resources

- Visit the [RHC](#) website to learn about program rules and requirements.
- View the [Learn](#) page to review resources.
  - [Webinars](#)
  - [Videos](#)
  - [Newsletters](#)
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**Thank You!**



**Universal Service  
Administrative Co.**