Universal Service: Connecting Millions to Broadband Services

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Meet Our Team

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

- Identify program challenges for Tribal participants and service providers

- Enhance educational material and trainings to ensure eligible Tribal participants have the right tools

Purpose

Working at the infrastructure, community, and individual level, Universal Service Fund (USF) programs help connect Tribal communities to phone and broadband services.

Introduction to USAC

- The Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) is an independent, not-for-profit corporation designated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as the permanent administrator of the USF and the Congressional Response Programs.

- We work 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.

Affordable Connectivity Program

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

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Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)

ACP is an FCC benefit program that helps qualified low-income households pay for broadband service and connected internet devices.

Eligible households can receive:

$30 Standard Discount
Up to $30/month discount for broadband services

$75 Tribal Discount
Up to $75/month discount for broadband services for households on qualifying Tribal lands

Device Discount
A one-time discount of up to $100 for a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet (consumer co-pay of $10.01-$49.99 required)

ACP benefit is limited to one monthly service discount and one device discount per household.

ACP Eligibility

- 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% 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 or is enrolled in a Community Eligibility Provision school, or participates in WIC.

- Eligible households can receive both Lifeline and the ACP.

- Tribal Benefit:

  - Eligible ACP households located on qualifying Tribal lands can receive a discount of up to $75 per month on their internet bill.

How to Apply for ACP

Option 1:
Apply Online

- The consumer visits GetInternet.gov to complete the electronic application and upload any required documentation.

- If approved, the consumer contacts a participating service provider to enroll in ACP.

Scan the QR code to access the online application

Option 2:
Apply by Mail

- The consumer fills out and signs the ACP Application Form.

- The consumer mails the application and supporting documentation to the ACP Support Center.

- Service providers may assist consumers with the paper application and mail it on their behalf.

Option 3:
Apply with a Service Provider

- The consumer may apply with the assistance of a service provider.

- Service providers would submit an online application on their behalf from the National Verifier service provider portal.

  - This is an in-person interaction, where the service provider asks questions interview-style.
  - The consumer must sign and certify the application.

- Consumers may also apply through the service provider's website, if the service provider has elected to use the National Verifier Application Programming Interface (API).

Lifeline Program

Lowering the monthly cost of phone and internet service

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Lifeline Program

- Eligible low-income households receive a discount on their monthly broadband or telephone bill of 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% 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 Pension or Survivors Benefit

Scan the QR code to access the online application

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 (up to $34.25 per month total).
  - Up to $100 "Link Up" benefit to connect telecommunications services from a carrier receiving High Cost support on qualifying Tribal lands. Available once per residential address.
- Additional eligibility options for consumers living on Tribal lands who also participate in:
  - 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 in obtaining affordable, high-speed broadband services (or internal connections) that can increase learning opportunities and services for students and library patrons

- Eligible applicants: Public or private schools (K-12), libraries, and groups of schools and libraries (e.g., consortia, districts, systems)

- Eligible services: Schools and libraries are eligible for funding for 20% to 90% of the costs of eligible equipment and services

E-Rate Program: Tribal Libraries

- In 2022, the FCC amended its E-Rate rules to include Tribal libraries in its definition of library and clarify that Tribal libraries are eligible for support.

- In 2023, the FCC further amended its E-Rate rules to make Tribal College or University libraries eligible for support.

- A library may be designated as a Tribal library by a Tribal Government (e.g., pursuant to a Tribal Resolution).

- A Tribal library may also work with the state library administrative agency where it is located.

- Tribal libraries should demonstrate 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.

E-Rate Program: Improving E-Rate for Tribal Applicants

New [Report and Order](#) adopted on July 20, 2023 amends program rules to enhance Tribal applicants' access to the E-Rate program to encourage wider program participation.

- Granted E-Rate eligibility to Tribal higher education libraries that also serve as the local public library

- Created a new competitive bidding exemption for libraries seeking Category Two services and equipment that costs $3,600 or less per year, per library

- Increased the maximum Category Two discount rate to from 85% to 90% and the Category Two funding floor from $25,000 to $55,000 for Tribal libraries

- Provided guidance on cost allocation issues experienced by applicants

- Adopted a formal definition of "Tribal" for the E-Rate program

- Expanded USAC Board of Directors to add a Tribal community representative

- Increased USAC outreach and training on E-Rate and the USF programs for Tribal applicants

- Sought comments on simplification of other program rules for all E-Rate applicants

Tribal Libraries Pilot Program Extended

- FCC Chairwoman Rosenworcel has announced the extension of the Tribal Libraries Pilot Program for Funding Year (FY) 2024.

- Pilot Program Goals:
    - Help new Tribal Libraries and Tribal College and Universities (TCU) Libraries that also serve as public libraries in their community to participate in E-Rate
    - Learn what training and support is most useful to new Tribal library applicants
    - Seek to gain an understanding of the application experience to increase participation and streamline the E-Rate program requirements

- What We Provide:
    - One-on-one assistance in preparing, applying, and receiving E-Rate support
    - Support to participants during invoicing, other post-commitment process

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Tribal Libraries Pilot Extended (Continued)

- Eligibility:
  - Meet [E-Rate eligibility](#) requirements for a Tribal Library
  - New to E-Rate or experienced challenges while applying to the E-Rate program in the past and were unsuccessful

- Expectations:
  - USAC will provide one-on-one support, group training sessions specifically for participants, and E-Rate program trainings covering the program basics and processes
  - Participants will complete the E-Rate program cycle and provide feedback about the E-Rate application and post-commitment processes

- Apply for the Tribal Libraries Pilot Program
  - USAC and the FCC will begin accepting applications to participate in the Tribal Libraries Pilot Program soon
  - Libraries must complete a brief questionnaire detailing information about your library, your IT needs, and your readiness to participate in the E-Rate program
  - Contact TribalLiaison@usac.org to join the Tribal Outreach email list and get an email when applications open

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.

  - Telecommunications Program funds voice and other telecommunications services.

  - 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.

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 and the Rural Digital Opportunity 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 USF.

High Cost Program: How It Works

- The FCC determines which areas of the country are eligible for funding under the standards for each new program.

- Through different support processes, eligible service providers are authorized for support in deploying and maintaining network infrastructure in those areas and providing service meeting required performance standards.

- Service providers report progress on deployment and required service quality.

- USAC monitors compliance with build-out obligations.

FCC Form 481

- All eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs) participating in High Cost and/or Lifeline programs must file Form 481 annually.

- Form 481 collects financial and operational information used to validate carrier support.

- Tribal Officials can download and view FCC Form 481 data submitted by carriers that serve their lands using the 54.314 System in E-File.

- New! Tribal Access to [FCC Form 481 User Guide](#)

# FCC Form 481 – Tribal Engagement Requirements

- Carriers are required to certify that they have addressed the following items in annual discussions with the Tribes they serve:

  - A needs assessment and deployment planning with a focus on Tribal community anchor institutions

  - Feasibility and sustainability planning

  - Marketing services in a culturally sensitive manner

  - Rights of way processes, land use permitting, facilities siting, environmental and cultural preservation review processes

  - Compliance with Tribal business and licensing requirements

Enhanced A-CAM Tribal Requirements

- Enhanced A-CAM program will provide universal service high-cost support to participating carriers for deployment of 100/20 Mbps or faster broadband service to all locations served by the program, including some of the most difficult-to-reach areas of the country

- Enhanced A-CAM support offers are expected to be made and accepted by October 2023

- Within 90 days of the offer of Enhanced A-CAM support, a carrier that accepted an Enhanced A-CAM offer must initiate engagement with all Tribal governments in its service area

- The Commission expects Enhanced A-CAM carriers to take reasonable steps necessary to obtain Tribal consent that meets the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program (BEAD) requirements

- If a state awards BEAD funding to another service provider to serve locations subject to an Enhanced A-CAM authorization, the Enhanced A-CAM provider and Tribal government can notify the FCC that they mutually forego the Enhanced A-CAM deployment obligations for those locations

  - If such a notification is made, an Enhanced A-CAM recipient's support and deployment obligations will be adjusted accordingly
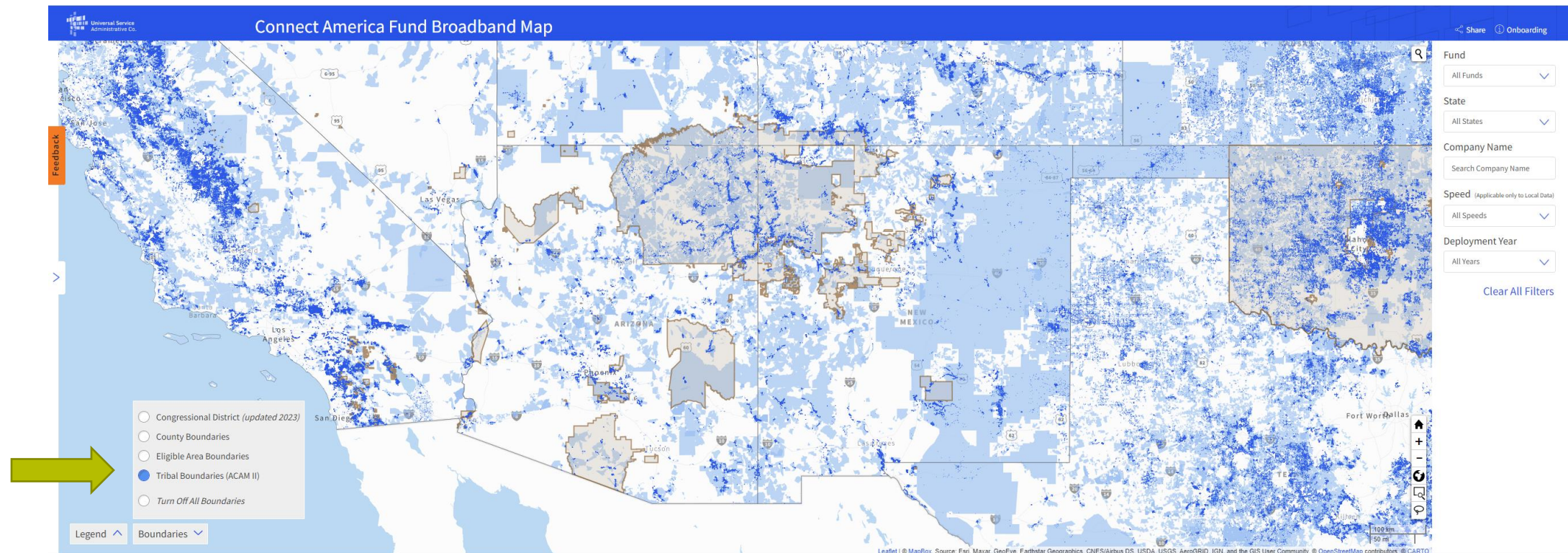
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High Cost Program Connect America Fund (CAF) Map

- Displays the geographic locations where carriers that receive CAF support have built out mass-market, high-speed internet service
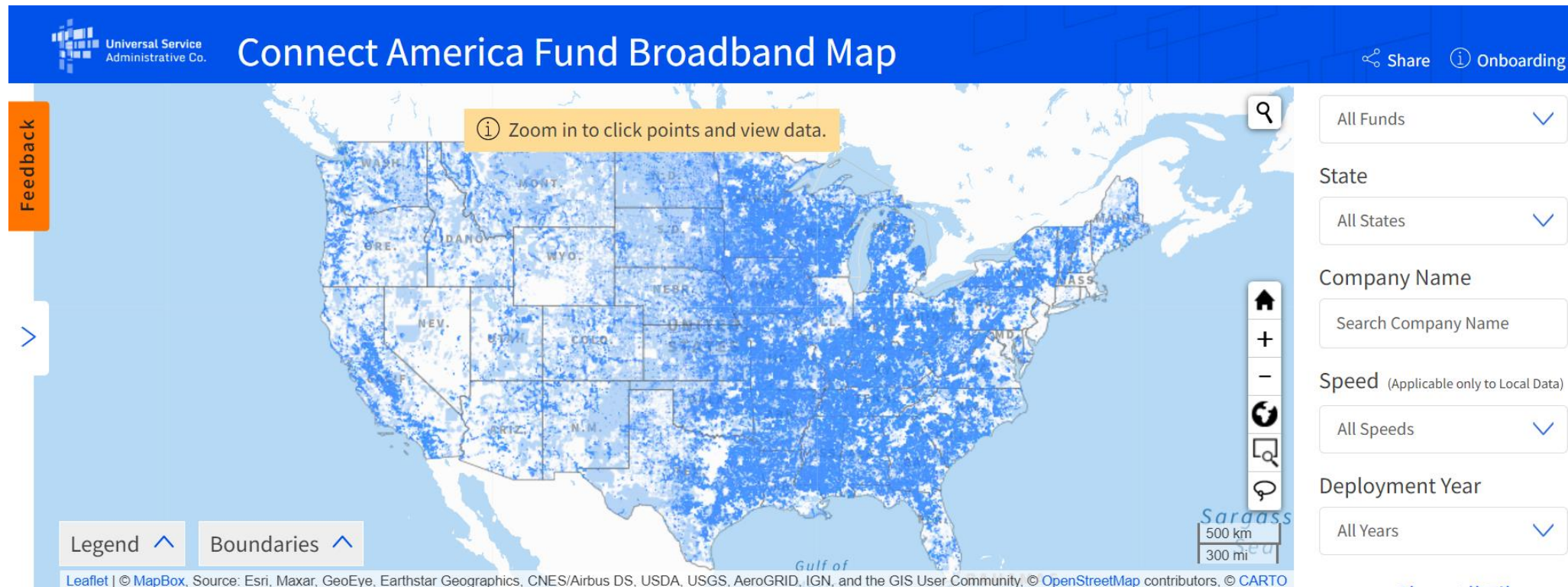
High Cost Program CAF Map – Tribal Lands

- The Tribal Boundaries reflect the definition of Tribal lands that the FCC adopted for the purpose of awarding ACAM II support.

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 USAC.org.

- Consumers interested in Lifeline and the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) can visit LifelineSupport.org and AffordableConnectivity.gov.

- For general USAC Tribal information, visit the Tribal Nations webpage.

- USAC's Tribal Liaison can answer questions and connect you to resources. Contact Gem Shandiin Labarta at TribalLiaison@USAC.org.

Thank You!