Universal Service
Administrative Co.

High Cost

Form 481 and Broadband Deployment Data
Now Available to State Officials

July 20, 2023

State utility commissions may now access the most recent FCC Form 481 filings for carriers under their jurisdiction through the 54.314 certification filing system in E-File, and state-level deployment data for broadband service supported by the Connect America Fund (CAF) through the Connect America Fund Broadband Map, or CAF Map.

State utility commissions rely on Form 481 filings and broadband deployment data submitted to USAC to perform the annual certification of Eligible Telecommunications Carriers (ETCs) under their jurisdiction to be able to participate in the High Cost program, which provides funding to carriers to deliver service in rural areas where the market alone cannot support the high cost of deploying network infrastructure and supplying connectivity.

While High Cost historically has subsidized traditional voice service to ensure that rates in rural and urban areas are reasonably comparable, the FCC is reforming the program to support broadband with the Connect America Fund. The Connect America Fund consists of a series of modernized funds that rely mainly on competitive bidding and incentive-based models to give carriers a fixed amount of support to deploy and maintain broadband networks with certain speeds over a clear timeline—with interim and final deployment milestone deadlines—to a defined number of locations in unserved and underserved areas.

The annual ETC certification, mandated under 47 CFR Section 54.314, requires state utility commissions to certify that carriers under their jurisdiction are eligible to receive High Cost support in their states and used all support received in the proceeding calendar year only to provide, maintain and upgrade the facilities for which the support was intended and will do the same in the coming calendar year. This year's certification is due by Oct. 2, 2023.

To inform this certification process, state officials can view and download the most recent Form 481 data – filed and certified by carriers as of July 3, 2023 – though the 54.314 system in E-File.

FCC Form 481 collects financial and operations information used to validate carrier support. This includes information about a carrier's holding company, operating companies, affiliates and branding designations (doing-business-as or DBA); ability to function in emergency situations; terrestrial backhaul;

Tribal lands engagement; and comparability of voice and broadband service rates in rural and urban areas. Form 481 also includes a supply chain certification, which requires carriers to certify that no universal service support is being used to purchase, rent, lease, obtain or maintain any equipment or services produced or provided by any company designated by the FCC as posing a national security threat to the integrity of communications networks or the communications supply chain.

The most recent Form 481 filing is for Program Year 2024 because the information in the filing will be used for disbursements for 2024. The data filed is from 2022, which is the most recent full calendar year for which data is available.

The 54.314 system allows state officials to download a zip file containing a copy of the most recent certified Form 481 filing data and related attachments for carriers in their state by individual Study Area Code (SAC). Carriers are no longer required to submit separate copies of the Form 481 filing to the FCC, state utility commissions or Tribal communities that they serve.

In order to obtain access privileges to the 54.314 system in E-File – or change the representative who has access – state officials should contact the High Cost Division at HCCerts@usac.org to request an authorization form. USAC grants access to the 54.314 system to only one representative in each state. Please see USAC's Multifactor Authentication Troubleshooting Steps for help logging into E-File. (Note that USAC has decommissioned the USAC State Access Tool, which it used in previous years to provide state officials with access to Form 481 and carrier deployment data).

State officials may also access state-level deployment data for broadband service supported by the Connect America Fund through the CAF Map, an interactive online map that shows the impact of the program on broadband expansion to close the digital divide in rural America. The dataset that serves as the foundation for the map is available through the USAC Open Data platform.

The CAF Map displays the geographic areas that are eligible for CAF support, as well as the specific fixed locations where carriers participating in the program have built out broadband service. The dataset reflected in the map includes address, latitude and longitude coordinates, carrier name, deployment year and available speeds meeting FCC obligations. The information in this map comes directly from carriers, which submit broadband deployment data annually through USAC's High Cost Universal Broadband (HUBB) portal. The latest version of CAF Map is based on data certified in the HUBB as of March 10, 2023, to reflect broadband deployment as of Dec. 31, 2022. USAC independently verifies deployment to a random sample of locations reported in the HUBB each year to monitor carrier compliance with CAF build-out obligations.

Need Help? Contact Us!

For questions about the High Cost Program, call us at 844-357-0408 or email hcquestions@usac.org.