



February 2022 RHC Monthly Newsletter

February 3, 2022

Latest News

Application Status Report and Invoicing Deadline Tools

On December 20, 2021, USAC launched new [Application Status Report](#) and [Invoicing Deadline](#) tools that utilize USAC's Open Data platform. Through integration with USAC Open Data, the tools replace spreadsheets with a cleaner user experience and real-time data updates. **Note:** While the spreadsheets will remain on the USAC website, the data on the spreadsheets will not be updated.

Application Status Report

The new [Application Status Report](#) tool replaces the Application Status Report spreadsheet. Similar to the spreadsheet, the new tool allows users to view whether USAC has:

- Confirmed submission of FCC Form 466,
- Received all of the necessary information to complete a review, and
- Made a decision on the submitted form.

USAC will refresh the tool daily. Users who need the data in formats, such as .CSS, still have the option to export the data. If the data is not available five days after submission, users are encouraged to contact the [RHC Help Desk](#). The Application Status Report tool and all other RHC tools can be found on the [Tools webpage](#). In addition, users who need to look up data from Funding Year 2004 through Funding Year 2021 can access the [archived spreadsheets](#).

Invoicing Deadlines

The new [Invoicing Deadline](#) tool replaces the Invoicing Deadline spreadsheet. The tool allows service providers and health care providers (HCP) to look up the deadline to submit invoices for funding commitments. As an upgrade to the spreadsheet, the tool allows users to avoid having to set up specific Excel configurations to find their deadlines.

Note: The tool does not contain any additional information, such as form submissions, payment status, or funds remaining. Contact the [RHC Help Desk](#) for questions about those topics. The Invoicing Deadline tool and all other RHC tools can be found on the [Tools webpage](#).

Eligible Rural Areas Search Tool

The Eligible Rural Areas Search tool has been removed from the [Tools webpage](#) and the Healthcare Connect Fund (HCF) and Telecommunications (Telecom) Programs eligibility webpages. HCP's rurality and priority tiers can be searched using the [Rurality Tier Search Tool](#). For more information about how to use this tool, please use the [How to Use the Rurality Tier Search Tool](#) tip sheet on the USAC website.

Note: This tool is for information purposes only. Rurality tiers are formally assigned during the review and approval of the FCC Form 460 in the HCF Program and FCC Form 465 in the Telecom Program. Applicants should check approved forms for assigned rurality tiers.

My Portal Platform Update

The platform used to submit the FCC Form 462 (Funding Request Form) has been updated for Funding Year 2022 to improve user experience. The new platform—which is the web-based system that hosts the form—is easier to navigate and allows RHC program reviewers to approve funding requests faster and more efficiently. Although the platform is changing, the information requested on the FCC Form 462 will not change. **This update currently applies to the FCC Form 462 ONLY**, but over time it will apply to all other forms in both the HCF and Telecom Programs. Updates will be provided to program participants as the platform grows and all updates will be posted on the [My Portal Platform Update](#) webpage.

Note: FCC Form 462 drafts should not be created in the section of the My Portal landing page titled “RHC My Portal.” If a draft of the FCC Form 462 has been created or submitted in that section of My Portal, participants are strongly encouraged to download and save a copy to prevent loss of work. Any drafts in the system will not be migrated to the new platform. For directions on how to save a copy of a draft, view the [Step-by-Step Guide](#) posted on the USAC website.

The following resources have been posted to the [My Portal Platform Update](#) webpage:

- [My Portal Platform Update User Guide](#)
- [My Portal Platform Update](#) – Self-guided training module

Funding Year 2022 Filing Window Opened December 1, 2021

The Funding Year 2022 filing window takes place from December 1, 2021 to April 1, 2022. This means that participants can submit funding requests (FCC Forms 462 or 466) as early as December 1, 2021 and no later than 11:59 p.m. ET on April 1, 2022. Early submission, within the filing window, is highly encouraged. Other forms for Funding Year 2022 (FCC Forms 460, 461, or 465) were accepted prior to December 1. For more information about [filing windows](#), visit the USAC website.

Upcoming Webinars

The RHC program Outreach team will host office hours webinars throughout the filing window. Additional dates will be announced for both Telecom and HCF office hours as they are scheduled. During these webinars, subject matter experts will be available to answer questions live during the webinar. Register below for the February RHC Office Hours webinars:

- HCF Office Hours Webinar – February 10, 2022 at 2 p.m. ET – [Register](#)
- Telecom Office Hours Webinar – February 16, 2022 at 2 p.m. ET - [Register](#)

Let’s Plan a Virtual Site Visit!

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, RHC will not be on the road during calendar year 2022. In prior years, USAC has gone to conferences and visited sites to connect with program participants to see first-hand how HCPs benefit from the RHC programs. RHC would like to continue to learn more about the people and communities who benefit from RHC program support by holding a virtual event. This is a great opportunity to introduce RHC staff to participating HCPs and to deepen the relationship between RHC staff and applicants. Interested participants should send a request to RHC-Assist@usac.org with “Virtual Site Visit” in the subject line. Once the request has been received, RHC will reach out with more information.

USAC Releases Funding Year 2021 Funding Decisions Beginning in July

USAC began delivering decisions on Funding Year 2021 funding requests in July, five weeks after the close of the Funding Year 2021 filing window. RHC will continue to deliver funding decisions on a rolling basis until all funding requests are reviewed. Due to the demand for RHC program funds, there will not be a second filing window for Funding Year 2021. The RHC program will not accept additional funding requests beyond those submitted in the filing window.

Common Audit Findings

In an effort to help HCPs and service providers, a list of common audit findings in the Telecom Program is provided below. The following information is provided to help program participants continue to be compliant with RHC program rules throughout the funding request process and for all post-commitment activity, particularly given the FCC’s waiver of use of the rural and urban rate databases for Funding Year 2021 and Funding Year 2022 in [FCC Order DA 21-394](#). Per RHC program rules, HCPs and service providers are required to retain records documenting compliance with program rules for at least five years.

Common Audit Findings – Telecom Program:

Rural Rates Not Properly Determined

Potential Errors:

- Rural rate is not calculated in accordance with FCC rules. Funding Year 2021 applicants were required to use the most recently approved rate from Funding Year 2018, Funding Year 2019, or Funding Year 2020 under Method 1, 2, or 3 (47 C.F.R. §54.607 (2019)). Rural rates for funding years prior to Funding Year 2021 were determined using either Method 1, 2, or 3 without regard to previously approved rates.

Rural Rates Not Substantiated

Potential Errors:

- Failure to provide documentation or inadequate documentation provided to support the rural rate. HCPs or service providers that sought Funding Year 2021 support should submit documentation showing that the rural rate used was previously approved. The rural rate substantiation requirements for prior funding years remained the same.

Service Provider's Urban Rate Not Substantiated

Potential Errors:

- Failure to provide documentation or inadequate documentation provided to support the urban rate. HCPs that sought Funding Year 2021 support were required to use an urban rate approved for the same service at the same facility within the previous three funding years. The means of determining and substantiating urban rates for prior funding years remained unchanged.

Best Practices For All Three Items Listed Above:

- Maintain adequate documentation to support that the urban and rural rates were previously approved or, in the absence of such rates, how the rates were determined.
- For Funding Year 2021 and Funding Year 2022 use the [Telecom Program Urban and Rural Rates](#) tip sheet.

The Service Provider Charged the Beneficiary a Rate Higher Than the Urban Rate

Best Practices:

- Ensure any policies and procedures that govern the billing of Telecom Program applicants include a requirement that the applicant is charged no higher than the urban rate.

Telecom Program is Invoiced for Ineligible Services or Equipment

Best Practices:

- Examples of services that may be eligible for support can be found on the [Telecom Program Examples of Common Services](#) tip sheet on the USAC website.
- Identify any ineligible services and remove them from funding requests.

Competitive Bidding Process is Not Fair and Open; Inadequate Competitive Bidding Process

Best Practices:

- Avoid conflicts of interest by ensuring service providers that plan to bid are not involved in the submission of forms to request service and are not involved in the bid evaluation process.
- FCC Forms 465 must be posted on the USAC public website for a minimum of 28 days before selecting a service provider and signing a contract.
- Documents relating to the competitive bidding process must be retained by the applicant and the service provider for a minimum of five years. Examples include:
 - Copies of all bids received (winning, losing, and disqualified) in response to the applicant's request for services;
 - Documentation concerning the applicant's service provider selection criteria and bid evaluation analysis, including documentation showing that the applicant considered all bids submitted and selected the most cost-effective option; and
 - Documentation of communications with all service providers, both bidding and potentially bidding, during the competitive bidding process.

Important Reminders

Funding Year 2020 Invoicing Deadline Reminder

As a reminder, [FCC Order DA 21-394](#) granted a 120-day extension of the HCF and Telecom Program invoice deadline for Funding Year 2020 funding decisions. The 120-day extension applies only to Funding Year 2020 funding decisions with an original invoice deadline of October 28, 2021. This extension applies to all Funding Year 2020 Funding Request Numbers (FRN). With this extension, the new invoice deadline for HCF and Telecom Program Funding Year 2020 commitments is **February 25, 2022**.

Please check the [HCF](#) and [Telecom](#) Program invoicing webpages for additional information or use the [RHC Invoicing Deadline Tool](#) on the USAC [Open Data](#) platform to search by FRN.

Submit Funding Year 2022 Requests for Services

July 1, 2021 was the first day that RHC HCPs could submit the FCC Forms 461 and 465 to initiate competitive bidding for Funding Year 2022, five months before the opening of the Funding Year 2022 funding request filing window. The Funding Year 2022 funding request filing window opened on December 1, 2021 and closes on April 1, 2022. Find additional program dates and deadlines on the [Funding Year 2022 Program Calendar](#). It is highly recommended to submit forms as early as possible during the Funding Year 2022 filing window.

Learn about best practices for Funding Year 2022, as well as the FCC Forms 461 and 465 competitive bidding process, on the [RHC Webinars](#) webpage.

Important Dates and Deadlines

The following are recommended dates to submit the FCC Forms 461 and 465 with enough time to file funding requests before the end of the Funding Year 2022 filing window.

HCF and Telecom Program Forms	Last Day to Submit without using a Request for Proposal (RFP)
FCC Form 461 and 465 - Request for Services	February 10, 2022 - Recommended Date
FCC Form 462 and 466 - Funding Request	April 1, 2022 - Deadline to Submit*

Please note that the FCC Forms 460, 461 and 465 submission dates are not mandatory deadlines per the program rules, but rather recommended key dates to ensure that the FCC Forms 461 and 465 are posted to USAC's website early enough for a 28-day competitive bidding period before the deadline to submit FCC Forms 462 and 466. If FCC Forms 461 and 465 are submitted with a RFP, allow at least an additional 10 days for review.

Duplicate Funding Prohibited

Please remember, FCC rules prohibit duplicative funding for the same service for the same sites during the same time period from more than one FCC program. This includes the RHC programs (HCF and Telecom), the COVID-19 Telehealth Program, and the Connected Care Pilot Program (CCPP).

What To Do If An Information Request is Received?

When any eligibility, request for services, funding request, and invoicing form is submitted with incomplete or missing documentation, it cannot be processed. In such cases, RHC reviewers will contact all account holders (the primary and all secondary and tertiary account holders associated with that HCP) with a request for additional information ("Information Request") to collect any missing documentation, address deficiencies, or to ask clarifying questions about the FCC form.

Due to [FCC Order DA 21-394](#), HCPs that received Information Requests between April 8, 2021 and December 31, 2021 and requested a 28-day extension of the standard 14-calendar-day response deadline have a total of 42 calendar days to respond to the Information Request. Information Requests issued after December 31, 2021 require a response within **14 calendar days. Failure to respond within the 14 calendar days will result in a denial of funding, so be sure to meet that deadline.**

Information Request Tips for the Telecom Program

- HCPs can receive Telecom Program Information Requests through My Portal or by email.
 - For Information Requests received through My Portal, HCPs should respond through My Portal only.
 - For Information Requests received by email, HCPs should "Reply All" to respond to the Information Request by email.
- Use only Chrome or Firefox internet browsers when using My Portal.

- When uploading a document as a response, the document should be limited to 10MB and its file name should not contain any special characters, only letters and numbers.

Information Request Tips for the HCF Program

- HCPs that receive HCF Program Information Requests through email should “Reply All” to respond to an Information Request by email.

Changes to a Commitment After Funding has been Approved

If a Funding Commitment Letter (FCL) is received, it is the responsibility of the applicant to confirm that the information contained therein is accurate. Applicants should contact USAC to request changes to an HCP site or service for any of the circumstances listed:

- If the site address changes, or the primary account holder no longer works for the HCP, a FCC Form 460 revision for HCF or a new FCC Form 465 for Telecom must be submitted within 30 days of the change. The 30-day requirement applies at all points during the funding lifecycle including all post-commitment activities.
- If all approved funds will not be used, a request to decrease funding may be submitted by sending an email to RHC-Invoicing@usac.org. The HCP name and number, the affected FRN, and the amount reduced in the commitment must be included. USAC will complete a partial de-commitment for the FRN in that amount.
 - In the Telecom Program, the approved FRN can be revised prior to invoicing using the FCC Form 467.
 - If any additional changes are needed after submitting the FCC Form 467, a FCC Form 467 revision can be submitted prior to invoicing.
- If funds within an FRN need to be re-allocated, a site and service substitution must be submitted. Learn more about [site and service substitutions](#).
- If no funds will be used in the approved or disbursed funding commitment, the approved and disbursed funds can be returned to USAC. Learn more about voluntary return of funds by visiting the [Returning Program Funding](#) webpage.

Certifications Requirements for National Supply Chain

As a reminder, when service providers log in to My Portal, two new Supply Chain certifications included in the FCC Form 463 and Telecom Program invoice will be displayed. The first certification affirms compliance with the CFR 47 [Section 54.9](#) prohibition on USF support to purchase, obtain, maintain, improve, modify, operate, manage, or otherwise support equipment or services produced or provided by the covered companies deemed to pose a national security threat to the integrity of the communications network or communications supply chain. Huawei Technologies Company, ZTE Corporation, Hytera Communications Corporation, Hangzhou Hikvision Digital Technology Company, and Dahua Technology Company, and their parents, affiliates, and subsidiaries, are the five companies that have been officially designated as such threats by the FCC and placed on the Covered List. The second certification affirms compliance with CFR 47 [Section 54.10](#), which prohibits the use of any federal subsidies on any communications equipment and services on the [Covered List](#).

- Funding Year 2020 Applicants: If services or equipment that contain components of products produced by any company on the Covered List, or any of their parents, affiliates, and subsidiaries in Funding Year 2020, were requested, invoicing for the funds is prohibited. Instead, a [service substitution](#) should be submitted prior to invoicing to ensure complete program compliance.
- Funding Year 2021 Applicants: If the use of covered equipment/services are identified on the submitted funding request form, please email RHC-Assist@usac.org with the FRN. USAC will work to take corrective action to ensure compliance.
- Funding Year 2022 Applicants: During competitive bidding, requesting funding for services or equipment from any company on the [Covered List](#), or any of their parents, affiliates, and subsidiaries is prohibited.

USAC updated the Supply Chain webpages to include three new subpages: [COVID-19 Broadband Programs](#), [Audits](#), and [FAQs](#).

Need Help? Contact Us!

For questions about the Rural Health Care program, contact RHC-Assist@usac.org or the RHC Help Desk at (800) 453-1546 from 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. ET Monday through Friday for assistance. Use the [RHC Help Desk Tip Sheet](#) to learn about what the RHC Help Desk can and cannot help you with.

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