



## January 2022 RHC Monthly Newsletter

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January 6, 2022

### Latest News

#### **New! Application Status Report and Invoicing Deadline Tools**

On December 20, 2021, USAC launched new [Application Status Report](#) and [RHC Program 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 the provider's FCC Form 466,
- Received all of the necessary information to complete a review, and
- Made a decision on the submitted forms.

USAC will refresh the tool's dataset daily, allowing users much more up-to-date information than the spreadsheet. Users who need the data in formats such as .CSS still have the option to export the data. If you do not see your information five days after submission, please contact the [RHC Help Desk](#). You can find this and all other RHC tools on our [Tools webpage](#). In addition, users who need to look up old data can access [archived spreadsheets back to Funding Year 2004](#).

#### **Invoicing Deadlines**

The new [RHC Program Invoicing Deadline Tool](#) replaces the RHC Program Invoicing Deadline spreadsheet. The tool allows service providers and health care providers to look up the deadline to submit invoices for specific funding commitments. As an upgrade to the spreadsheet, users no longer have 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. You can find this and all other RHC tools on our [Tools webpage](#).

#### **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 Healthcare Connect Fund (HCF) and Telecommunications (Telecom) Programs. We will reach out to program participants as the platform grows and post all updates on the [My Portal Platform Update](#) webpage.

**Note:** Please do not create a draft FCC Form 462 in the section of the My Portal landing page titled "RHC My

**Portal.”** If you have already created or submitted a draft of your FCC Form 462 in that section of My Portal, we strongly encourage you to download and save a copy so you do not lose your work, as any drafts in the system will not be migrated to the new platform. View the [Step-by-Step Guide](#) to learn how to save your draft.

**New!** We have posted the following resources 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 you can submit your 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. We highly encourage you to submit your funding requests as early as possible in the filing window. Other forms for Funding Year 2022 (FCC Forms 460, 461, or 465) were accepted prior to December 1. Learn more about [filing windows](#).

### **Upcoming Webinars**

The RHC program Outreach team will host office hours webinars throughout the filing window. We will announce more dates for both Telecom and HCF office hours as they are scheduled. During these webinars, subject matter experts will be available to answer your questions live during the webinar. You can register below for the January HCF Office Hours webinar:

- HCF Office Hours Webinar – January 13, 2022 at 2 p.m. ET - [Register](#)

### **New! 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, we have gone to conferences and visited sites to connect with program participants and see first-hand how HCPs benefit from the RHC programs. Since we can’t come to you, we’d like 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. If you are interested in participating in this project, please send your request to [RHC-Assist@usac.org](mailto:RHC-Assist@usac.org) with “Virtual Site Visit” in the subject line. Once we receive your request, we’ll reach out to you with more information.

### **All Funding Year 2021 FRNs Can Be Fully Funded**

There will be no prioritization or pro-ration of funding for Funding Year 2021 funding requests. All Funding Year 2021 funding requests, including those that have upfront and multi-year costs, can be fully funded. There will not be a second filing window opened to submit funding requests for Funding Year 2021.

### **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 our continuing efforts 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 you 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](#). Please keep in mind that 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 your funding request.

### **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.

## **FCC News**

### **FCC Releases Order 21-1107 Granting Relief to RHC Participants Affected by Hurricane Ida**

On September 3, 2021, the FCC released [Order DA 21-1107](#) waiving certain RHC rules and deadlines to assist participants and providers located in the areas affected by Hurricane Ida. This Order applies to HCPs and service providers located in all parishes and counties in Louisiana and Mississippi as of the date of release of this Order

(September 3, 2021).

This Order grants the following waivers and extensions for all affected RHC program participants:

- Grants a 60-day extension to the deadline for appeals and requests for a waiver for all USAC decisions dated August 30, 2021 through January 31, 2022.
- Waives the 14-day Information Request response deadline for Information Requests related to funding requests, appeals and waivers, invoices, audits, and other documentation, and applies to all funding years for which those requests relate. Information Request responses subject to the waiver are now due on or before January 31, 2022.
- Waives the September 30, 2021 deadline for HCF Program consortia annual reports, which are due on or before January 31, 2022.
- Waives the requirement that HCPs and service providers retain for five years documentation relating to RHC program participation, but only to the extent such documentation was destroyed by Hurricane Ida.

### **FCC Announces Increase in RHC Program Cap for Funding Year 2021**

On June 23, 2021, the FCC Wireline Competition Bureau directed USAC to carry forward up to \$379.97 million in unused funds from prior funding years to the extent necessary to satisfy Funding Year 2021 demand for the RHC program. For additional details, read [Public Notice DA 21-742](#).

## **Important Reminders**

### **Funding Year 2020 Invoicing Deadline Reminder**

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

July 1, 2021 was the first day that RHC HCPs could submit their 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](#). We highly encourage you to submit your 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.

### **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 You Receive an Information Request**

When any eligibility, request for services, funding request, and invoicing form is submitted with incomplete or missing documentation, it cannot be processed or completed. 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"). Information Requests are sent to collect any missing documentation, address deficiencies, or to ask clarifying questions about the FCC form.

Due to [FCC Order DA 21-394](#), HCPs who 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.

#### **Do You Need to Make Changes to a Commitment After Your Funding is Approved?**

If you receive a Funding Commitment Letter (FCL), please keep in mind that it is your responsibility to confirm that the information contained therein is accurate. You may need to contact USAC to request changes to your site or services if you encounter any of the below circumstances:

- If the address of your site changes, or the primary account holder no longer works for the HCP, you must submit an FCC Form 460 revision for HCF or a new FCC Form 465 for Telecom within 30 days of the change. The 30-day requirement applies at all points during the funding lifecycle including all post-commitment activities.
- If you will not be using all of your approved funds, you can request a decrease in your funding request by sending an email to [RHC-Invoicing@usac.org](mailto:RHC-Invoicing@usac.org). Please be sure to include your HCP name and number, the affected FRN, and the amount by which you would like to reduce the commitment. USAC will complete a partial de-commitment for the FRN in that amount.
  - In the Telecom Program, you can revise your approved FRN prior to invoicing using the [FCC Form 467](#). If you have already submitted the FCC Form 467 and you need to make another change, you can submit another FCC Form 467 revision prior to invoicing.
- If you’d like to re-allocate funds within your FRN, you can submit a site and service substitution. Learn more about [site and service substitutions](#).
- If you will not be using any of the funds in your approved or disbursed funding commitment, you can return the approved and disbursed funds 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 they will see two new Supply Chain certifications included in the FCC Form 463 and Telecom Program invoice.

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 you requested 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, you cannot invoice for these funds. Instead, you should immediately submit a [service substitution](#) prior to invoicing to ensure complete program compliance.
- Funding Year 2021 Applicants: If you identify the use of covered equipment/services on your submitted funding request form, please email [RHC-Assist@usac.org](mailto:RHC-Assist@usac.org) with your FRN number. We will work with you to take corrective action to ensure compliance.
- Funding Year 2022 Applicants: As you proceed with competitive bidding, please ensure you are not requesting funding for services or equipment from any company on the [Covered List](#), or any of their parents, affiliates, and subsidiaries.

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](mailto: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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