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The Lifeline Program: Service Provider Toolkit

A Federal Discount for Eligible Consumers’ Phone or Internet Service

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Background

Lifeline Discount

Lifeline is a federal program dedicated to making phone and internet service more affordable for low-income households. This benefit provides eligible consumers with a monthly discount of up to $9.25 on their home or mobile phone and/or broadband internet service. Eligible consumers living on Tribal lands[1] are eligible for an enhanced discount of up to $34.25 per month.

How to Use the Service Provider Toolkit

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide service providers with the resources they need to join the Lifeline program and obtain access to Lifeline's systems.

Audience

If your company is new to Lifeline, use this toolkit to get set up in Lifeline systems.

Get Started

To participate in the Lifeline program and offer Lifeline-supported services, a service provider must:

1. Become an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (ETC)
   To participate in the Lifeline program, service providers must be designated as an ETC by their respective state regulatory commission or by the FCC. After receiving the designation, ETCs must meet all Lifeline requirements.

2. Create and Submit a Compliance Plan
   Providers Responsible for Compliance Plan
   Service providers who are resellers rather than facilities-based providers and, thus, are availing themselves of the blanket facilities forbearance granted by the FCC, must submit a compliance plan(s) to the FCC for approval and provide USAC with a summary of their Lifeline compliance plan(s).

   Service providers who are designated as an ETC by the state must also provide USAC with a summary of their Lifeline program compliance plan(s).

3. Obtain a Study Area Code (SAC)
   A SAC is a number that USAC assigns to ETCs that uniquely identifies that company based on its service area. Companies must have at least one SAC per state in which they operate but can have more than one SAC within a state if they have more than one service area.

4. Obtain a 498 ID

[1] The FCC's rules define "Tribal lands" in 47 CFR § 54.400(e).

A 498 ID (also known as SPIN—the Service Provider Identification Number) is required for all parties that participate in any of the four universal service programs and receive payment directly from USAC. This ID is a unique number assigned to each service provider by USAC and serves as USAC's tool to ensure that approved support is directed to the correct service provider.

Service Provider Responsibilities

Lifeline service providers are responsible for complying with program rules, including:

- Registering for Representative IDs in the Representative Accountability Database (RAD) to perform applicable transactions,
- Ensuring Lifeline eligible consumers have qualified through the National Verifier (NV),
- Enrolling Lifeline qualified consumers in the National Lifeline Accountability Database (NLAD), ensuring the enrolled subscribers were not previously enrolled by another service provider, and keeping NLAD up to date,
- Providing Lifeline subscribers with Lifeline-supported services that meet Lifeline's minimum service standards,
- Submitting claims to receive reimbursement in the Lifeline Claims System (LCS),
- Advertising Lifeline to their consumers,
- Preparing annual filings (FCC Form 555 and FCC Form 481),
- Tracking their Lifeline subscriber's usage,
    - If the service provider does not assess or collect a monthly fee, the subscriber must use the Lifeline-supported service at least once every 30 days.
    - Usage includes making outbound calls, answering incoming calls (excluding calls from their Lifeline service provider), using data, buying minutes, responding to their service provider, and sending a text message.
    - If the subscriber does not use their service for 30 consecutive days (non-usage), the service provider must give the subscriber a 15-day notice that if they do not use the service in the next 15 days, their service will be terminated.
- De-enrolling ineligible subscribers, and
- Documenting their compliance with FCC and state requirements.

Lifeline service providers are also responsible for assisting with consumer questions about their device, service, and billing.

System Resources

The Lifeline program leverages the Representative Accountability Database (RAD), the Lifeline National Eligibility Verifier (National Verifier or NV), the National Lifeline Accountability Database (NLAD), and the Lifeline Claims System (LCS) for representative registration, consumer eligibility verification, subscriber enrollment, and service provider reimbursement, respectively.

Access USAC's single sign-on dashboard, One Portal, to log into the NV, NLAD, and LCS. Access to these systems requires the proper user entitlements. To get started, your company's 498 Officer must assign a 497 Officer in One Portal (E-file). The 498 Officer is the company officer assigned during the submission of Form 498.

The 497 Officer is responsible for filing and certifying Lifeline reimbursement claims for your company. The 497 Officer is also responsible for creating and assigning an ETC Administrator account in NLAD. See the How to Create/Assign an ETC Administrator section of this toolkit for more information.

Service Provider User Accounts

The chart below outlines the account types available in the LCS, NLAD, and NV for service providers and the functionalities a user may perform with the account.

Except for the 497 Officer, all other user accounts below must be linked to a Representative ID to perform transactions. Representatives register for this ID through the RAD. More information is available in the RAD section of this toolkit.

Account Type	LCS Access	NLAD Access	NV Access*
497 Officer	The user can file and certify reimbursement claims.	The user can assign or create NLAD ETC Administrator accounts.	No access with this account.
ETC Administrator	No access with this account.	The user can perform subscriber transactions, query subscriber data, create and view reports, and submit resolution requests. The user can create and manage the three account types below.	The user can request eligibility checks, documentation uploads, and status checks of consumers.
ETC Analyst	No access with this account.	The user can perform subscriber transactions, query subscriber data, create and view reports, and submit resolution requests.	The user can request eligibility checks, documentation uploads, and status checks of consumers.
ETC Operations	No access with this account.	The user can query subscriber data, create and view reports, and submit resolution requests.	The user can request eligibility checks, documentation uploads, and status checks of consumers.
ETC Agent	No access with this account.	No access with this account.	The user can request eligibility checks, documentation uploads, and status checks of consumers.

*REMINDER: Consumers are required to independently review and agree to the Lifeline certifications in the Lifeline application. The users above cannot agree to any certifications (i.e., enter the applicant's or benefit qualifying person's initials or e-signature) on the consumer's behalf.

Application Programming Interface (API) User

Service providers may access NLAD and the NV through an API. API specifications are available inside the NLAD system. For an API account, contact your company's ETC Administrator.

Manage User Accounts

Service providers need to create NLAD user accounts to be able to access NLAD and the NV. For information on how to create the user accounts outlined above, see the instructions below and review the NLAD User Guide available in NLAD.

How to Create/Assign an ETC Administrator

When the 497 Officer signs into NLAD through One Portal, using their One Portal (E-File) credentials, they will see the 497 Officer homepage. On this page, they will assign an ETC Administrator. The ETC Administrator can be the 497 Officer or another person in the company.

How to Create/Assign NLAD Subaccounts (ETC Analyst, ETC Operations, ETC Agent, ETC API)

The ETC Administrator is responsible for creating and managing subaccounts for all users within the company. When the ETC Administrator signs into NLAD through One Portal, they will see the ETC Administrator homepage. On the Manage Subaccounts page under Account Management, they can create and manage the ETC Analyst, ETC Operations, ETC Agent, and ETC API accounts.

How to Reset Passwords

Users can reset passwords by following the "Forgot Password" workflow when signing into One Portal.

Representative Accountability Database (RAD)

The Representative Accountability Database (RAD) is a **registration system** that validates the identities of service provider representatives. The system allows USAC to track a representative's transactions in NLAD and the NV. Representatives that interact with these Lifeline systems and perform transactions such as eligibility checks and enrollments must have their Representative ID (Rep ID) linked to their user account or the company's API account.

The 497 Officer is responsible for linking ETC Administrator accounts. The ETC Administrator is responsible for linking NLAD subaccount users (ETC Analyst, ETC Operations, ETC Agent).

RAD Quick Links

- *For more information about RAD, visit Lifeline's RAD section of USAC's website.*
- *Register for a Representative ID in RAD.*

- *How to Link Representative IDs:*
    - Individual User Accounts Linking Guide
    - Batch Users Linking Guide
    - API Accounts Linking Guide

National Verifier (NV)

The National Verifier (NV) is a centralized **application system** that determines whether consumers are eligible for Lifeline. Consumers may apply for the Lifeline program on their own through the NV or with the assistance of a service provider user.

See the Service Provider User Accounts section of this toolkit for more information on users who have access to the NV.

NV Quick Links

- *For more information about the NV, visit* Lifeline's NV section *of USAC's website.*
- *Access the NV directly at* CheckLifeline.org *or through One Portal; NV paper forms are also available.*

National Lifeline Accountability Database (NLAD)

The National Lifeline Accountability Database (NLAD) allows service providers to **enroll consumers** in the Lifeline program and **manage** their Lifeline subscribers. It works in conjunction with the NV; consumers apply to the Lifeline program through the NV, and their service provider enrolls them in NLAD.

Enrolling subscribers is necessary in order for service providers to claim reimbursements.

NLAD Quick Links

- *For more information about NLAD, visit Lifeline's NLAD section of USAC's website.*
- *Access NLAD through One Portal, USAC's single sign-in dashboard for all USAC systems, including Lifeline systems.*

Lifeline Claims System (LCS)

The Lifeline Claims System (LCS) is the online filing system that service providers use to **submit claims for reimbursement** for offering Lifeline-supported services to Lifeline subscribers.

LCS Quick Links

- *For more information about LCS, visit Lifeline's* LCS section *of USAC's website.*
- *Access LCS through One Portal, USAC's single sign-in dashboard for all USAC systems, including Lifeline systems.*