



## USAC Request for Information (RFI) IT-24-105 for Ransomware Protection Backup

### REQUEST INFORMATION:

Method of Solicitation:	Request for Information (“RFI”)
RFI Number:	IT-24-105
RFI Issue Date:	June 5, 2024
Question Due Date:	June 12, 2024
Response Due Date:	June 27, 2024

### RFI ISSUED BY:

Universal Service Administrative Co.  
700 12<sup>th</sup> Street NW, Suite 900  
Washington, D.C. 20005

### CONTACT INFORMATION:

USAC CONTACT INFORMATION	OFFEROR CONTACT INFORMATION
Anthony Smith Senior Procurement Specialist P: 202-916-3486 Email: <a href="mailto:Procurement@usac.org">Procurement@usac.org</a> & <a href="mailto:Anthony.Smith@usac.org">Anthony.Smith@usac.org</a>	(complete) Name: _____ POC: _____ POC Title: _____ POC Phone: _____ POC Email: _____ Address: _____

### OFFEROR SIGNATURE:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name and Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## 1. ABOUT US

Through its administration of the Universal Service Fund (“USF”) programs on behalf of the Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”), USAC works to promote the availability of quality telecommunications services at just, reasonable, and affordable rates, and to increase access to advanced telecommunications services throughout the nation. Specifically, the USF programs provide funding for the expansion of telecommunications and broadband access to rural communities and health care facilities, schools and libraries, and low-income households. Through program administration, auditing, and outreach, USAC works with contributors, service providers, and program beneficiaries to achieve the program goals articulated by the FCC for the High Cost Program, Lifeline Program, Rural Health Care Program, and Schools and Libraries Program.

USAC strives to provide efficient, responsible stewardship of the programs, each of which is a key national asset in making important telecommunications and Internet services available to consumers, health care providers, schools, and libraries throughout the United States. The program divisions are supported by additional USAC personnel in other divisions, including Finance, Office of General Counsel (“OGC”), Information Systems, Audit and Assurance, Enterprise Process Improvement (“EPI”), and Human Resources (“HR”).

Consistent with FCC rules, USAC does not make policy nor interpret unclear provisions of statutes or the FCC’s rules. The USF is funded by contributions from telecommunications carriers, including wireline and wireless companies, and contributions from interconnected voice over internet protocol (“VoIP”) providers, including cable companies that provide voice service, based on an assessment of their interstate and international end-user revenues. These contributions are typically passed through to consumers through a universal service fee line item on their telephone bills.

### **High Cost Program**

The High Cost Program 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 (“High Cost”). High Cost fulfills this universal service goal by allowing eligible carriers who serve these areas to recover some of their costs from the USF. Like all USF programs, the administration of High Cost has undergone significant modernization in the last several years to increase innovation and ensure beneficiaries have access to updated technology. USAC developed and now leverages the High Cost Universal Broadband Portal (“HUBB”), which allows participating carriers to file deployment data showing where they are building out mass-market, high-speed internet service by precise location. This information includes latitude and longitude coordinates for every location where service is available, and USAC displays this information on a public-facing map to show the impact of high-cost funding on broadband expansion throughout the United States.

### **Lifeline Program**

The Lifeline Program provides support for discounts on broadband and voice services to eligible low-income households (“Lifeline”). USAC uses its centralized application system, the Lifeline National Eligibility Verifier (“National Verifier”), to verify consumer eligibility through proof of income or the consumer’s participation in a qualifying federal benefit program, such as Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (“SNAP”), Federal Public Housing Assistance, or Veterans and Survivors

Pension Benefit. USAC focuses on metrics and data analytics for Lifeline improvement and provides outreach efforts to eligible households to increase participation in and the effectiveness of Lifeline. USAC also works to ensure program integrity by supporting the needs of Lifeline stakeholders, reducing program inefficiencies, and combating waste, fraud, and abuse. USAC reviews processes regularly to increase compliance, identify avenues for operational improvements, and refine program controls, such as audit processes.

### **Rural Health Care Program**

The Rural Health Care Program supports health care facilities in bringing medical care to rural areas through increased connectivity (“RHC”). RHC consists of two main component programs: (1) the Telecommunications Program (“Telecom”) and (2) the Healthcare Connect Fund Program (“HCF”). The FCC established Telecom in 1997 to subsidize the difference between urban and rural rates for telecommunications services. Under Telecom, eligible rural health care providers can obtain rates on telecommunications services in rural areas that are reasonably comparable to rates charged for similar services in corresponding urban areas. In 2012, the FCC established HCF to promote the use of broadband services and facilitate the formation of health care provider consortia that include both rural and urban health care providers. HCF provides a discount on an array of advanced telecommunications and information services such as Internet access, dark fiber, business data, traditional DSL, and private carriage services. These telecommunications and broadband services support telemedicine by ensuring that health care providers can deliver cutting edge solutions and treatments to Americans residing in rural areas.

### **Schools and Libraries Program (E-Rate)**

The Schools and Libraries Program helps schools and libraries obtain high-speed Internet access and telecommunications services and equipment at affordable rates (“E-Rate”). E-Rate provides a discount for the cost of broadband and telecommunications services to and within schools and libraries in order to support a modern and dynamic learning environment. Applicants and service providers submit FCC Forms (e.g. requests for services or funding) and other compliance-related documentation to the E-Rate Productivity Center (“EPC”), an electronic platform that enables participation in the program. USAC frequently invests in new tools and data analytics capabilities to support the success of the program in alignment with the FCC’s goals.

Additional information on USF programs can be found at: <https://www.usac.org/about/universal-service/>.

## **2. COMPANY PROFILE**

USAC is a not-for-profit Delaware corporation operating under the oversight of the FCC. USAC is not a federal agency, a government corporation, a government controlled corporation or other establishment in the Executive Branch of the United States Government. USAC is not a contractor to the federal government. Any Contract to be awarded as a result of a subsequent RFP from this RFI will not be a subcontract under a federal prime contract. USAC does, however, conduct its procurements in accordance with the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding with the FCC, which requires USAC to adhere to the following provisions from the Code of Federal Regulations: 2 C.F.R. §§ 200.318-321; 200.324; 200.326-327 and App. II to C.F.R. Part 200 (collectively “Procurement Regulations”). Further, USAC IT Systems that are used to administer the USF programs and USAC vendors that handle and manage USF data must be compliant with FISMA and NIST requirements as applicable to federal agencies.

### 3. PURPOSE

Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) is issuing this Request for Information (RFI) seeking information from U.S.-based companies that provide an enterprise ransomware protection backup solution to strengthen USAC's data security and strength against ransomware threats through the implementation of comprehensive backup measures. By leveraging advanced techniques such as access control, redundant storage, data encryption, and advanced protection mechanisms like air gap backups and immutable storage, the project seeks to safeguard critical data assets from potential ransomware attacks. Additionally, regular testing and validation procedures ensure the effectiveness and integrity of backup policies, facilitating timely data recovery and minimizing the impact of cyber incidents on USAC's operations. Also, for budget purpose, USAC would like to know an estimation of the cost and the license schema. ***Please note that this is not a solicitation for products and/or services and this inquiry will not result in an award or contract.***

The specifications and information gathered from responses to this RFI will be used to evaluate the offerings of the current marketplace and may lead to the development and preparation of a formal Request for Proposal (RFP).

USAC is soliciting information from commercial vendors, application service providers, associated integration service providers, and other interested parties capable of assisting USAC in meeting its objectives to secure its publicly facing systems. Information submitted by any interested party will be done so voluntarily and with the understanding that this RFI is for information gathering purposes only and is not a formal solicitation. Similarly, cost ranges will be used solely for budgetary analysis and establishing a target budget. Information presented during this information gathering process will not be considered as a response to any solicitation subsequently issued by USAC.

Respondents may be asked to provide a demonstration of their products and services. This would include a guided tour of their product, business capabilities and technology. Demonstrations may be presented through Internet web conferencing. No compensation will be made by USAC for demonstrations.

### 4. TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

#### A. Functionalities/Capabilities:

Deploy air gap backups and immutable storage solutions to isolate backup data from potential ransomware attacks, ensuring data integrity and recoverability in case of breaches. The solution should offer the following functionalities/capabilities:

- **Air Gap**

The solution to implement air gap backups should serve two primary purposes. First, they should prevent at least one copy of a backup from being manipulated or destroyed. Second, they should help ensure quick restores because the integrity of an isolated, air-gapped backup can be trusted.

1. Air gap backups shall be stored in a secure location that is not accessible to unauthorized user. *By physically separating the air-gapped system from other*



*networks, it becomes extremely difficult for malware, hackers, or other external threats to access the system.*

2. Air gap backups shall be updated regularly, typically daily, or weekly.
  3. Air gap backups shall be tested periodically to ensure that they can be used to restore data in the event of a disaster.
  4. Air gap backups shall be encrypted to protect sensitive data from being accessed by unauthorized personnel.
  5. Air-gapped systems shall be immune to remote cyberattacks, such as those conducted over the internet or other networks.
  6. Data transfer to or from an air-gapped system shall be done manually using physical media (e.g., USB drives, CDs). Admin shall be able apply updates, patches, and configurations manually.
  7. The air-gapped system shall remain operational and secure even if the broader network infrastructure experiences failures or security breaches.
- **Immutable Storage**
    1. Storage hardware or software must support WORM (Write Once, Read Many) technology to ensure that data, once written, cannot be modified, or deleted.
    2. System shall allow admins to define data retention policies, specifying how long data must remain immutable. System shall also meet regulatory requirements for data retention and immutability.
    3. System shall have a detailed logging and auditing capabilities to track all access and changes to the storage environment.
    4. System shall consist of APIs for integrating immutable storage capabilities into existing workflows and applications.
    5. Storage system shall be able to accommodate growing data volumes while maintaining immutability.

## **B. Platform Requirements:**

1. Provide a secure and user-friendly platform for external stakeholders to report potential vulnerabilities in USAC systems, applications, and infrastructure.
2. Facilitate the intake, validation, and triage of reported vulnerabilities in accordance with established procedures and timelines.
3. Support communication channels between reporters, USAC's security team, and relevant stakeholders throughout the disclosure process.
4. Ensure compliance with legal and regulatory requirements, including but not limited to data privacy and protection laws.

## **C. Services and Training Requirements:**

1. Deliver comprehensive documentation, training materials, and ongoing technical support to USAC's personnel.

2. USAC may require support for initial installation and configuration.

**D. System Architecture:**

USAC is requesting an overview of the Offeror’s proposed systems or solution’s capabilities and the Offeror’s implementation approach. The overview should address the questions below, indicating whether available “out of the box” with limited to no customization.

1. Is the product offered on premise, hosted, or SaaS?
2. Is the product FedRAMP certified?
3. For Cloud and SaaS: does the product reside on a FedRAMP certified environment or in the process of being certified?
4. For Cloud and SaaS product model, USAC requires that data centers be located in the U.S.
5. How is user access managed? Can the product support integration with Active Directory and Okta?
6. Are there features/functionality the tool provides that are not listed above?
7. Are there any recommendations regarding the tool and/or the implementation you would like to suggest?

**5. PROPOSED RFI TIMELINE**

<b>Event</b>	<b>Date</b>
RFI Released	June 5, 2024
Questions Due to USAC	June 12, 2024 by 11:00 a.m. ET
Answers to Questions Released	June 19, 2024 by 5:00 p.m. ET
Responses Due	June 27, 2024 by 11:00 a.m. ET

**6. RFI SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS**

All responses to this RFI are due no later than **June 27, 2024 by 11:00 a.m. ET**. Responses received after this date and time may not be considered for review.

Responses should be prepared simply and economically and provide a straightforward and concise explanation of the information requested. Emphasis should be on completeness and clarity.

Please submit one (1) electronic copy (PDF) of your response to USAC at [Procurement@usac.org](mailto:Procurement@usac.org), with a copy to [Anthony.Smith@usac.org](mailto:Anthony.Smith@usac.org). All submissions must include “Response to RFI IT-24-105 – Ransomware Protection Backup” in the subject line. Please note: all electronic submissions must be limited to a maximum size of 25 MB.

## 7. RFI RESPONSE FORMAT

The response must include the following sections and must have numbered pages and include an index or table of contents referencing the appropriate page numbers.

### SECTION 1 – ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

#### Maximum: Three (3) Pages

Please provide a response that includes the following:

- Years of experience in providing Ransomware Protection Backup and/or other relevant areas.
- Your company's core competencies.
- What differentiates your organization and existing solutions in the market.
- Number of clients you serve with similar solutions.

### SECTION 2 – PROPOSED TECHNICAL SOLUTION

#### Maximum: Eight (8) Pages

Please provide a solution response to the associated Ransomware Protection Backup requirements in RFI **Section 4: TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS** that are related to the proposed software solution and product. Solution descriptions must be concise and directly address the requirements.

### SECTION 3 – EXPERIENCE

#### Maximum: Two (2) Pages

Proposals shall provide a response that addresses the following question:

- What relevant corporate experience does the company have with supporting organizations like USAC?

In addition, proposals shall provide client references that demonstrate similar provided solutions for those organizations.

### SECTION 4 – PRICING ESTIMATE

#### Maximum: One (1) Page

*(Note: Any prices provided as part of this RFI are intended solely for budgetary analysis and to establish a reasonable target budget).*

Responses shall include a cost estimate for the following:

- Include an estimate for all relevant software components, such as software purchases, licenses and ongoing software support.

- Include an estimate for platform setup, develop business processes that include recommendations on incorporating numerous processes, workflows, and requirements in an integrated platform and provide training.

## 8. OFFEROR INQUIRIES AND QUESTIONS

Questions and inquiries regarding this RFI must be submitted in writing by **June 12, 2024, by 11:00 a.m. ET**. Please submit all questions to USAC at [Procurement@usac.org](mailto:Procurement@usac.org), with a copy to [Anthony.Smith@usac.org](mailto:Anthony.Smith@usac.org), and include “Questions to RFI IT-24-105 – Ransomware Protection Backup” in the subject line.