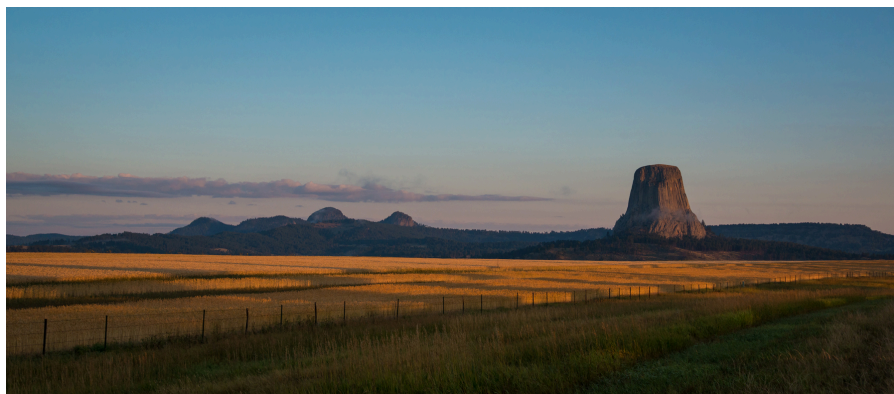


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December 2024 Tribal Nation Newsletter

December 31, 2024 | Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC)



Tribal Nation News

USAC's January Tribal Teleconference, held in collaboration with the E-Rate team, will provide an overview of the Competitive Bidding (FCC Form 470) process with time for Q&A. Please join us on **Tuesday, January 14, 2025, at 4 p.m. ET** – [Register](#).

Upcoming USAC Customer Service Center Closure

USAC and the E-Rate, Emergency Connectivity Fund, High Cost, Rural Health Care, Contributors, Lifeline and Affordable Connectivity Program, and Service Providers Customer Service Centers (CSCs) will be closed on **Wednesday, January 1, 2025**.

Tribal Library E-Rate Advocacy Program (T-LEAP)

Application Assistance for Tribal Libraries

With the establishment of the permanent T-LEAP, Tribal and TCU libraries can now receive direct support in navigating the E-Rate application process, including one-on-one assistance when preparing applications, applying to the program, and receiving E-Rate support.

To learn more please visit the [T-LEAP page](#) or contact the USAC [Tribal Liaison](#). Interested Tribal libraries can sign up [here](#) year-round.

E-Rate

Updates to the E-Rate Tools Page

USAC has streamlined its [E-Rate Tools](#) page and categorized the tools and datasets by function (e.g., funding tools, entity tools, invoicing tools, etc.) to explain the differences between the available resources. USAC also added example use cases for each tool so you can learn which resource would be best to answer your E-Rate questions.

Funding Year (FY) 2025 FCC Form 471 Application Filing Window Opens January 15, 2025

The FY2025 FCC Form 471 application filing window will open on **Wednesday, January 15, 2025, at noon E.T.** and will close on **Wednesday, March 26, 2025, at 11:59 p.m. E.T.** In addition, the E-Rate Productivity Center (EPC) Administrative Window will close on Thursday, January 9, 2025.

Wednesday, February 26, 2025, is the last date that you can submit and certify an FY2025 FCC Form 470 and still wait the required minimum 28-day period. As a reminder, you must submit and certify your FY2025 FCC Form 471 by March 26, 2025, which is the last date of the FY2025 application filing window.

All applicants can now review their EPC profiles and make additional updates for changes that occurred after USAC's review of their FY2024 FCC Forms 471. The [EPC Administrative Window](#) will close and applicant profiles will be locked on **January 9, 2025**, and the FY2025 application filing window will open on January 15, 2025. View the [EPC Administrative Window webinar slides](#) to learn more.

Winter Deferral Period Starts December 20, 2024

USAC recognizes that many participants are unavailable during the winter holiday season and may need more time to respond to requests.

During our annual winter deferral period beginning Friday, December 20, 2024, through Friday, January 3, 2025, USAC will only continue reviews of forms and requests where documentation was received or where participants responded to information requests sent in EPC.

If USAC does not receive a response during this period, the form or request will be placed in a deferred status until January 6, 2025. For those of you who can respond to our

questions during this timeframe, please do so, as we will continue to review applications during the winter deferral period. Answering our questions as soon as possible allows us to continue reviewing applications and issue funding decisions more quickly.

FY2023 Invoicing Reminders

There are two important invoice deadlines for FY2023 recurring and non-recurring services coming up in early 2025. Please take the necessary steps to file and certify your invoices (for non-recurring services) on or before these deadlines or request a one-time, 120-day invoicing deadline extension (for recurring services).

The deadlines are generally:

- **January 28, 2025**, for FY2023 non-recurring services. Applicants and service providers must certify their invoices or ask for an [invoice deadline extension](#) by this date.
- **February 25, 2025**, for FY2023 recurring services (if the applicant or service provider requested and received an invoice deadline extension of the original October 28, 2024, invoice deadline). Applicants and service providers must certify their invoices by this date, as USAC cannot grant a second invoice deadline extension.

Applicants and service providers who have not completed the invoicing process for their FY2023 recurring services should gather the customer bills and other documents that they will need to accurately invoice USAC now.

To learn more about E-Rate program updates and deadlines, please review the [December 2024 E-Rate News Brief](#).

Rural Health Care (RHC)

FY2025 Filing Window Opened December 1, 2024

The FY2025 filing window is **open from December 1, 2024, to April 1, 2025**. You must submit your funding requests (FCC Forms 462 or 466) no later than 11:59 p.m. ET, April 1, 2025. We strongly recommend that you submit your funding requests as early as possible. In particular, for Form 460 (Eligibility) approvals, we recommend submission in early January, as noted in the table below. Forms 461 and 465 are also being accepted now. Learn more about [filing windows](#). Please use the following resources to submit these forms:

HCF Program:

- [Develop Bid Evaluation Criteria & Select Services](#) – webpage
- [Welcome to RHC Connect – FCC Form 461](#) – webpage
- [Competitive Bidding Exemptions](#) – webpage
- [RHC Connect FCC Form 461](#) – User Guide

Telecom Program:

- [Prepare For Competitive Bidding and Request Services](#) – webpage
- [Competitive Bidding Exemptions](#) – webpage
- [Welcome to RHC Connect – FCC Form 465](#) webpage
- [RHC Connect FCC Form 465](#) – User Guide

Upcoming Office Hours

To assist you with filing your FY2025 funding requests (FCC Forms 426 and 466), the Rural Health Care (RHC) outreach team will be hosting the following webinars:

- FY2025 HCF Program Office Hours – **January 8, 2025, at 2 p.m. ET** - [Register](#).
- FY2025 Telecom Program Office Hours – **January 15, 2025, at 2 p.m. ET** - [Register](#).

Important Deadlines and Reminders

The following are recommended dates to submit the FCC Forms 460, 461, and 465 with enough time to file funding requests (FCC Forms 462 and 466) before the end of the FY2025 filing window.

HCF & Telecom Program Form	Last Day to Submit for Individual HCPs using a Request for Proposal (RFP)
FCC Form 460 (Eligibility)	January 4, 2025 Recommended Date
FCC Form 461 & 465 (Request for Services)	February 1, 2025 Recommended Date
FCC Form 462 & 466 (Funding Request)	April 1, 2025 Deadline to Submit
HCF & Telecom Program Form	Last Day to Submit for Individual HCPs NOT using a Request for Proposal (RFP)
FCC Form 460 (Eligibility)	January 8, 2025 Recommended Date
FCC Form 461 & 465 (Request for Services)	February 10, 2025 Recommended Date
FCC Form 462 & 466 (Funding Request)	April 1, 2025 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 an RFP, allow at least an additional 10 days for review.

Some users may have experienced technical issues posting FCC Forms 465 from December 27, 2023, through January 23, 2023. These technical issues have been resolved. Please contact the [RHC Customer Service Center](#) if you experience any technical issues.

FCC News

FCC Waives Certain RHC Program Rules in Response to Hurricane Milton

On October 9, 2024, the FCC released order [DA 24-1059](#) waiving the following RHC rules for participants and service providers located in areas affected by Hurricane Milton within the state of Florida:

- **Deadline for Appeals and Requests for Waiver** – The FCC waived the 60-day deadlines for requests for review or waiver of decisions by USAC or the FCC and provided an additional 60 days to file appeals and waivers. This waiver is in effect for all deadlines of appeals and waiver requests from October 5, 2024, through March 8, 2025.
- **Information Requests** – The FCC waived the 14-day deadline for applicants in the affected areas to respond to Information Requests from USAC related to funding requests, appeals and waivers, invoices, audits, and other documentation submitted by program participants. This waiver applies to all Information Requests issued on or after October 5, 2024, regardless of the related funding year. The new deadline for responding to Information requests is March 8, 2025.
- **Documentation Retention and Production** – Due to possible lost records, the FCC waived the rule that applicants and service providers must retain all documents for at least five years after the last day of the supported services in a given funding year. If lost records are later requested by USAC or the FCC, program participants will not be penalized, but applicants and service providers will be held responsible for obtaining such records, where available, from a third party. Program participants that are affected also must certify that the records were destroyed in the hurricane. Current rules apply to all records that were not destroyed.
- **Invoice Filing Deadline** – The FCC waived the invoicing deadline for FY2023 funding requests and granted the automatic 120-day extension. Thus, for single-year funding commitments that previously had a deadline of October 28, 2024, the new deadline will be February 25, 2025.

FCC Waives Certain RHC Program Rules in Response to Hurricane Helene

On October 1, 2024, the FCC released order [DA 24-1025](#) waiving the following RHC program rules for participants and service providers located in areas affected by Hurricane Helene within the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia:

- **Deadline for Appeals and Requests for Waiver** – The FCC waived the 60-day deadlines for requests for review or waiver of decisions by USAC or the FCC and provided an additional 60 days to file appeals and waivers. This waiver is in effect for all deadlines of appeals and waiver requests from September 23, 2024, through February 28, 2025.
- **Information Requests** – The FCC waived the 14-day deadline for applicants in the affected areas to respond to Information Requests from USAC related to funding requests, appeals and waivers, invoices, audits, and other documentation submitted by program participants. This waiver applies to all Information Requests issued on or after September 23, 2024, regardless of the related funding year. The new deadline for responding to Information requests is February 28, 2025.
- **HCF Program Annual Report** – The FCC waived the September 30, 2024, deadline for the affected HCF participants to file their annual reports for FY2023. Affected program participants have until February 28, 2025, to file annual reports for FY2023.
- **Documentation Retention and Production** – Due to possible lost records, the FCC waived the rule that applicants and service providers must retain all documents for at least five years after the last day of the supported services in a given funding year. If lost records are later requested by USAC or the FCC, program participants will not be penalized, but applicants and service providers will be held responsible for obtaining such records, where available, from a third party. Program participants that are affected also must certify that the records were destroyed in the hurricane. Current rules apply to all records that were not destroyed.
- **Invoice Filing Deadline** – The FCC waived the invoicing deadline for FY2023 funding requests and granted the automatic 120-day extension. Thus, for single-year funding commitments that previously had a deadline of October 28, 2024, the new deadline will be February 25, 2025.

High Cost

USAC Launches New CAF State Map

USAC has launched a new online map that provides a big-picture, state-level view of the impact of the Connect America Fund (CAF) on broadband expansion in rural America, as well as a new online search tool that displays details about CAF-supported broadband deployment by speed tier.

The new [Connect America Fund State Map \(CAF State Map\)](#) displays total broadband deployment obligations by location count, total cumulative deployment reported so far by location count, and total cumulative funding paid out to date – all on a state-by-state basis – by aggregating data for all carriers participating in the Connect America Fund in each state.

To learn more about the new CAF State Map, please review the [High Cost Announcements](#) page.

Lifeline

Reminder: Minimum Service Standards Effective December 1, 2024

On July 3, 2024, the Wireline Competition Bureau (WCB) released an [Order](#) pausing the phase-out of Lifeline support for voice-only services for an additional year. The basic Lifeline support of \$5.25 remains available to eligible consumers who subscribe to voice-only service until **at least December 1, 2025**. Additionally, the minimum mobile broadband data standard will also remain at 4.5 GB per month until December 1, 2025.

On July 30, 2024, the WCB released a [Public Notice](#) announcing that, effective **December 1, 2024**, the fixed broadband usage allowance for Lifeline-supported service was updated to **1,230 GB per month**. Service providers must notify their Lifeline subscribers of this change.

The minimum service standard for mobile broadband speed will remain at 3G, while the fixed broadband speed standard will remain at 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload. Additionally, the Lifeline minimum service standard for mobile voice service will continue at 1,000 minutes per month.

Survivor Benefit: Helping Survivors Stay Connected

The [Lifeline Survivor Benefit](#) is available to survivors who have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault, or related crimes by helping them stay connected to family and friends through discounted phone or internet services. Service providers and consumer advocates are encouraged to actively inform and assist affected individuals in accessing this vital resource.

USAC has several resources to assist survivors, and advocates helping survivors, understand and apply for the Lifeline Survivor Benefit, including:

- [Survivor Benefit Page](#)
- [Survivor Benefit Flyer](#)
- [Online Application Instructions](#) (available in English and 9 other languages)

For the latest Lifeline news and information, be sure to check out [Lifeline's Announcements](#) page.

Upcoming Training and Resources

Consumer advocacy groups are encouraged to attend the January webinar on **Wednesday, January 8 at 3 p.m. ET**, for a live training session on how consumers can apply online for the Survivor Benefit - [Register](#).

Recordings of previous webinars are available on the [Lifeline Webinars](#) page.

Key Dates and Trainings

E-Rate & Tribal | Competitive Bidding Overview

Tuesday, January 14, 2025, at 4 p.m. ET [Register >](#)

RHC | FY2025 Health Care Connect Fund Program Office Hours

Wednesday, January 8, 2025, at 2 p.m. ET [Register >](#)

RHC | FY2025 Telecom Program Office Hours Webinar

Wednesday, January 15, 2025, at 2 p.m. ET [Register >](#)

Lifeline | How to Apply for Lifeline as a Survivor Webinar

Wednesday, January 8, 2025, at 3 p.m. ET [Register >](#)

Questions or Suggestions?

If you have questions or suggestions about Tribal universal service support, you may contact USAC's Tribal Liaison, Gem Labarta, at TribalLiaison@usac.org.

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