



# Universal Service: Connecting Millions to Broadband Services

May 14, 2024

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# Meet Our Team – Tribal Liaison



## Gem Labarta

Tribal Liaison | Shared Services

Provide clear, accurate, real-time support to Tribal stakeholders.

[TribalLiaison@usac.org](mailto:TribalLiaison@usac.org)

# Upcoming Dates

- Rural Health Care
  - Wednesday, May 22, 2024, at 2 p.m. ET – [Register](#).
- High Cost
  - Thursday, May 23, 2024, at 2 p.m. ET – Filing FCC Form 481 – [Register](#).
- Lifeline and Tribal Teleconference
  - Tuesday, June 11, 2024, at 4 p.m. ET – Lifeline – [Register](#).

# Agenda

- Introduction to USAC
- One USAC: Four Programs
  - Lifeline Program
  - E-Rate Program
  - Rural Health Care Program
  - High Cost Program
- Questions
- Service Provider Information

# Purpose

- Working at the infrastructure, community and individual level, Universal Service Fund (USF) programs help connect Tribal communities to phone and broadband services.
- This session will introduce you to opportunities to further connect your community through USF programs.



**Everyone. Connected.**



# Who We Are: The Universal Service Administrative Company

- The **Universal Service Administrative Company** (USAC) is an independent, not-for-profit organization designated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).
- USAC is responsible for administering the **USF** and its four programs.
- The USF exists to ensure that all people in the United States have access to quality and affordable connectivity services.



## Lifeline Program

Discounted phone and internet service to eligible low-income consumers.



## E-Rate Program

Funding for broadband services to eligible schools and libraries.



## Rural Health Care Program

Funding for telecom and broadband services for eligible rural health care providers.

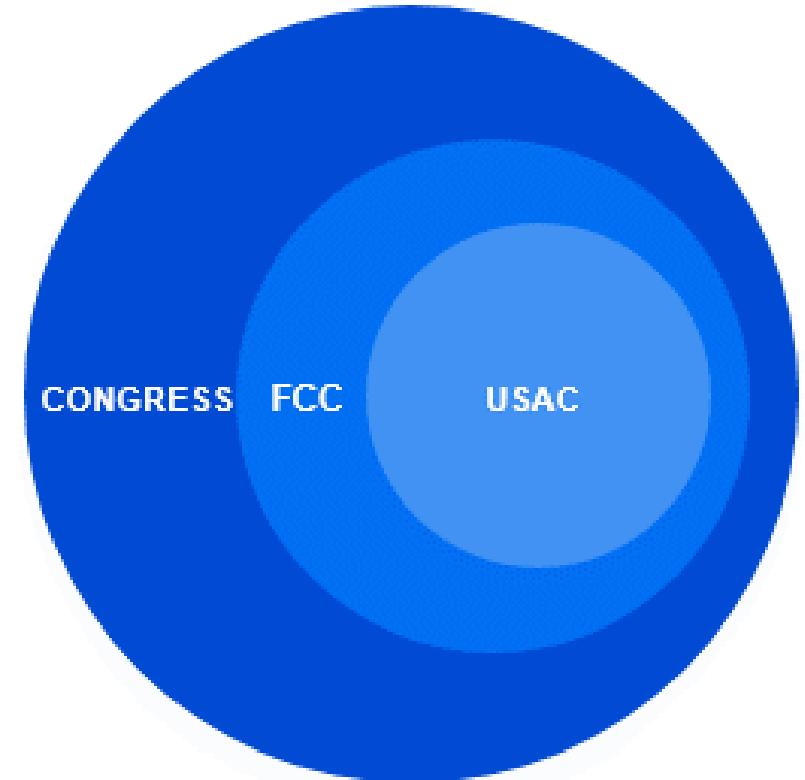


## High Cost Program

Reduced rates for telecom and broadband services in eligible high-cost areas.

# Overview: Who Makes the Rules?

- By enacting the Telecommunications Act of 1996, Congress tasked the FCC with ongoing management of the Lifeline program and other universal service efforts.
- The FCC sets rules and policies for the USF programs and gives direction to USAC.
- USAC is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the USF in accordance with FCC requirements.



# Universal Service Fund Programs



# Lifeline

# Lifeline Program

- Eligible low-income households receive a discount off their monthly broadband or telephone bill between \$5.25 and \$9.25 (depending on service type).
- Each eligible household can receive one Lifeline benefit.
- Consumers must meet one eligibility criterion described below and apply through the Lifeline National Verifier:
  - Income at or below 135 percent of the federal poverty limit
  - Participate in Medicaid
  - Participate in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
  - Participate in Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
  - Participate in Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA)
  - Participate in Veterans and Survivors Pension Benefit

# Lifeline Program Enhanced Tribal Benefit

- Lifeline offers enhanced benefits to consumers who live on qualifying Tribal lands:
  - Up to \$25/month extra is available for subscribers on qualifying Tribal lands (\$34.25 total).
  - A one-time “Link Up” benefit of up to \$100 to connect telecommunications services from carriers receiving High Cost support on qualifying Tribal lands.
- Additional eligibility options for consumers living on Tribal lands:
  - Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance (BIA-GA)
  - Tribally Administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
  - Tribal Head Start (must meet qualifying income standard)
  - Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)



# E-Rate Program

# E-Rate Program

- Provides support to schools and libraries across the nation to obtain affordable, high-speed broadband services and internal connections to connect students and library patrons with learning opportunities and services
- Eligible applicants: Public or private schools (K-12), libraries, and groups of schools and libraries (e.g., consortia, districts, systems)
- Eligible services: internet access, telecommunications services, and related equipment ([see the full eligible service list](#))



# E-Rate Program: Tribal Libraries

- In 2022, the FCC clarified E-Rate rules to confirm that Tribal libraries are eligible for E-Rate funding.
- A library may be designated as a Tribal library by a Tribal Council (e.g., pursuant to a Tribal Resolution).
- Tribal libraries designated by a Tribal Council should have three characteristics commonly associated with Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grants to Native American libraries:
  - Regularly scheduled hours,
  - Staff, and
  - Materials available for library users.



# Rural Health Care Program

# Rural Health Care Program

- The Rural Health Care (RHC) program provides funding to eligible health care providers for telecommunications and broadband services needed to deliver health care.
  - The Telecommunications (Telecom) Program funds voice and other telecommunications services.
  - The Healthcare Connect Fund (HCF) Program funds broadband services, network equipment, and related costs.
- Eligible applicants: Must be a non-profit or public health care provider located in a rural area as defined by the FCC. Eligible health care providers must meet [program requirements](#).



## High Cost

Expanding access to modern communications networks across rural America

# High Cost Program

- The High Cost program (including the Connect America Fund) 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.
- The program fulfills this universal service goal by allowing eligible carriers who serve these areas to recover some of their costs from the USF.

# High Cost Program: How It Works

- The FCC determines which areas of the country are eligible for High Cost funding.
- Through different support processes, eligible service providers are authorized for support in deploying network infrastructure in those areas and providing service.
- Service providers regularly report their deployment progress.
- USAC monitors provider compliance with build-out obligations.

**Questions?**

# Service Providers



# Registering for a Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN) Checklist for New Tribal Service Providers

A Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN), also known as the service provider's 498 ID, is a unique nine-digit number assigned to service providers by USAC when a Service Provider and Billed Entity Identification Number and General Contact Information Form ([FCC Form 498](#)) is filed. This form collects contact, remittance, and banking information for service providers participating in the universal service programs (i.e., High Cost, Lifeline, Rural Health Care and E-Rate) administered by USAC.

Available for Public Use

## You will need the following items before you file the FCC Form 498:

- 1. Unique Entity Identifier (UEI).** Obtain a UEI by registering with SAM.gov. This may take up to six weeks, so be sure to register early. View [instructions](#) on how to obtain a UEI, [track the status](#) of your UEI in SAM.gov, and watch an [instructional video](#) on updating your UEI.
- 2. Dun & Bradstreet (DUNS) Number.** Register for a [DUNS Number](#). Learn how on the [DUNS website](#).
- 3. FCC Registration Number (FRN).** Obtain an FRN, also known as a CORES ID, through the [FCC CORES webpage](#).
- 4. Employer Identification Number (EIN) or Tax ID Number.**
- 5. Electronic Banking Information.** Have your routing number and banking account ready.
- 6. Company Officers and General Contacts.** A Company Officer is an officer of a service provider company who is authorized to certify that data in the FCC Form 498 is true, accurate and complete. The Company Officer would typically be president, vice president of operations, vice president of finance, comptroller, treasurer, or a comparable person. The **General Contact** must be authorized by your organization to **retrieve** its FCC Form 498 information and obtain access to USAC's online filing system. The General Contact will be able to complete **but not certify** updates to the FCC Form 498, unless the General Contact is also the Company Officer. (You can designate the same person to be both the Company Officer and the General Contact.) You can have up to five General Contacts who can access the form, and up to five Company Officers who can revise and certify the form. We recommend having **multiple** Company Officers assigned to your form for a smoother revision process.
- 7. 499 Filer ID.** Visit our [Who Must Contribute](#) webpage to determine if you are considered a carrier. If you provide telecommunications services and/or Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services, you are considered a carrier and must complete the Annual Telecommunications Reporting Worksheet (FCC Form 499-A). Once you file the FCC Form 499-A, you will receive a [499 Filer ID](#), which you need to complete the FCC Form 498.  
**Note:** If your principal communication types only include internet service provider, private service provider, non-traditional provider, and/or coaxial cable, **you do not need** a 499 Filer ID.

Once you have these items, you can proceed with obtaining a 498 ID/SPIN by [completing an FCC Form 498](#). After you complete the form, USAC will set up a username and password for you to access the [E-File system](#). E-File allows you to update your FCC Form 498 online, set up permissions for other users in your company, and view or approve certain applicant-filed forms and form attachments.

If you have any questions about obtaining a SPIN/498 ID, please contact the Customer Service Center at (888) 641-8722, Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. ET. For more information, visit our [FCC Form 498 webpage](#), watch our [FCC Form 498 video series](#), and sign up for or watch a recording of our [monthly New Filer webinars](#).



# Rural Health Care Program Service Provider Process

- Request an FCC Registration Number from the FCC.
- Complete the FCC Form 498 through USAC.
- Review and respond to RHC service requests.
- If selected by an HCP, sign a service agreement with the HCP.
- Credit the HCP for costs covered by the RHC program funding request.
- Invoice USAC for the approved funding amount.

# E-Rate Program Service Provider Process

- Obtain a Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN/498 ID).
- Submit bids in response to applicants' requests for service.
- If selected by an applicant, sign a contract with the school or library.
- Provide agreed-upon services.
- Invoice USAC for the amount discounted from the applicant's bill OR invoice the applicant so they can invoice USAC for the discounted amount.

# High Cost Program Service Provider Process

- Eligibility criteria and fund processes vary from fund to fund.
- To participate, service providers must be a registered eligible telecommunications carrier (ETC).
- Participating ETCs must file an FCC Form 481 annually, detailing their financial and operational information and engagement with Tribal governments.
- Providers file build-out data in the High Cost Universal Broadband (HUBB) portal each year.
- Participating providers must submit to performance testing and verification reviews.

# Lifeline Program Service Provider Process

- Must be an eligible telecommunications carrier (ETC).
- Non-facilities-based providers must have an FCC-approved compliance plan before they can become an ETC.
- Obtain Study Area Code (SAC) and a Service Provider Identification Number (498 ID/SPIN).
- Set up Lifeline system access with USAC.
- Begin enrolling consumers and provide Lifeline-discounted service.
- Claim reimbursement for discounts passed on to qualifying Lifeline consumers.

**Questions?**

# USAC Contact Information

- For program information, visit [www.USAC.org](http://www.USAC.org).
- Consumers interested in Lifeline can visit [www.LifelineSupport.org](http://www.LifelineSupport.org).
- For general USAC Tribal information, visit [www.usac.org/about/tribal-nations/](http://www.usac.org/about/tribal-nations/).
- USAC's Tribal Liaison can answer questions and connect you to resources. Contact Gem Shandiin Labarta at [TribalLiaison@USAC.org](mailto:TribalLiaison@USAC.org).

**Thank You!**





**Universal Service**  
Administrative Co.