



Universal Service
Administrative Co.

Rural Health Care

December 2024 RHC Monthly Newsletter

December 5, 2024

Latest News

FY2025 Filing Window Opens December 1, 2024 – Register for Upcoming Trainings Today!

The funding year (FY) 2025 filing window will take place from December 1, 2024, to April 1, 2025. This means that you must submit your funding requests (FCC Forms 462 or 466) as early as December 1, 2024, and no later than 11:59 p.m. ET April 1, 2025. We highly encourage you to submit your funding requests as early as possible in the filing window. Other forms for FY2024 (FCC Forms 460, 461, or 465) are accepted prior to December 1. Learn more about [filing windows](#).

Upcoming Trainings

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:

- Consortium Best Practices Webinar – December 11, 2024, at 2 p.m. ET – [Register](#)
- FY2025 Healthcare Connect Fund (HCF) Program Office Hours – January 8, 2024, at 2 p.m. ET - [Register](#)
- FY2025 Telecommunications (Telecom) Program Office Hours – January 15, 2024, at 2 p.m. ET - [Register](#)

Rurality Changes Based on 2020 United States Census Data

On June 4, 2024, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued FCC Order [DA 24-526](#). In this Order, the Wireline Competition Bureau (WCB) of the FCC updated information used to determine eligibility in the RHC program to reflect results of the 2020 decennial United States census. The [Rurality Tier Search tool](#) has been updated to reflect the census data.

The RHC Outreach team will reach out directly to individual and consortia applicants affected by these changes within the next few months. For more information, please refer to the [Rurality Change Tip Sheet](#) on the USAC website.

Important Reminders

Consortium Rurality Percentage

All current and new HCF Program consortia must be “majority rural.” Majority rural means that more than 50 percent of participating health care providers (HCPs) in a consortium are rural. For example, if a consortium has five participating HCPs, at least three of those HCPs must be in a rural area for the consortium to be deemed majority rural. Funding requests filed by consortia that are not in compliance with this rule will be denied. Use the following steps to view your consortium rurality percent in RHC Connect

1. Log into RHC Connect and navigate to the “My Organizations” tab
2. Click to toggle to view your consortia
3. Select the consortium from the dropdown menu
4. Consortium Rurality percent is on the right center of the screen

Reminders for Account Holders

Per RHC program rules, a primary and secondary account holder for an individual HCP must be an officer, director, or authorized employee of the HCP. For consortium applicants in the HCF Program, the Project Coordinator must be an officer, director, or other authorized employee of the Consortium Leader. If you are an HCP participating in the HCF or Telecom Program and a consultant or other third party will file forms on your behalf, you must file a [third-party authorization \(TPA\)](#).

Note: The primary account holder is responsible for all activities associated with submitting and certifying forms, and for all activities in the RHC program for their HCP site.

Letter(s) of Agency and Third-Party Authorizations

Please be sure that all authorizations, including Letters of Agency (LOA) and Third Party Authorizations (TPAs), are current and up to date through the end of FY2025 and forward. For more information about LOAs, visit the [Letter of Agency](#) webpage. For more information about TPA requirements, visit the [Third Party Authorization \(TPA\)](#) webpage.

Duplicate Funding Prohibited

Please remember: FCC rules prohibit duplicate funding for the same service, for the same locations, during the same period, from more than one FCC program. This includes the RHC programs (HCF and Telecom) and the Connected Care Pilot Program (CCPP).

What To Do When You Receive an Information Request

As part of their review of any eligibility, requests for services, funding requests, and invoicing forms, RHC reviewers will contact all account holders (the primary and all secondary and tertiary account holders associated with the HCP) with a request for additional information (“Information Request”). This request will assist with the collection of any missing documentation, address deficiencies, or general information required to address questions of FCC form reviewers.

Information Request Tips for the Telecom Program

- For FY2024 and FY2025 FCC Forms 466, an auto-generated email will be sent directing HCPs to RHC Connect to respond. HCPs should respond through RHC Connect only. Please use the [Information Request Tip Sheet](#) to help you navigate Information Requests sent through RHC Connect.
- For prior years and all other Telecom Program forms, 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 the email message.
- Use only Chrome, Firefox, or Microsoft Edge Internet browsers when using My Portal and RHC Connect.
- When uploading a document as a response, the file must 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

- For FY2024 and FY2025 FCC Forms 462, an auto-generated email will be sent directing HCPs to RHC Connect to respond. HCPs should respond through RHC Connect only. Please use the [Information Request Tip Sheet](#) to help you navigate Information Requests sent through RHC Connect.
- HCPs that receive HCF Program Information Requests through email should “Reply All” to the email message.
- When uploading a document as a response, the file must be limited to 10MB and its file name should not contain any special characters, only letters and numbers.

Commitments for FY2024

To deliver funding decisions quicker, the RHC team began reviewing funding requests before the filing window closed. The first FY2024 funding commitments were issued on June 20, 2024, six weeks after the close of the filing window. To date, RHC’s processing status is as follows:

- HCF Program: 88.20 percent of FCC Forms 462 are committed (Approved, Denied or Withdrawn)
- Telecom Program: 67.73 percent of FCC Forms 466 are committed (Approved, Denied or Withdrawn)

As of November 22, 2024, RHC has processed 85.80 percent of applications received and 63.30 percent of total funds requested for both the Telecom and HCF programs.

FY2025 Competitive Bidding

Beginning on July 1, 2024, applicants could start the competitive bidding process for FY2025. For the HCF Program, the FCC Form 461 (Request for Services Form) along with any other competitive bidding documents such as a Request for Proposal (RFP) may be submitted in RHC Connect. For the Telecom Program, the FCC Form 465 (Request for Services Form) also may be submitted in RHC Connect. 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

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 waives the 60-day deadlines for requests for review or waiver of decisions by USAC or the FCC and provides 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 waives 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 will apply 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 waives 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 waives 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 waives the 60-day deadlines for requests for review or waiver of decisions by USAC or the FCC and provides 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 waives 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 will apply 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 waives 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 waives 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 waives 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.

RHC Program Inflation-Based Cap Announced for FY2024

The RHC program funding cap for FY2024 is \$706,926,603. The internal cap for upfront payments and multi-year commitments under the HCF Program is \$178,496,951. The internal cap for upfront payments and multi-year commitments will apply only if RHC program demand exceeds available funding. These new caps represent a 3.6 percent inflation-adjusted increase to the \$682,361,586 RHC program funding cap and the \$172,294,354 internal cap on multi-year commitments and upfront payments from FY2023. The FCC has announced that all eligible FY2024 funding request can be funded without prioritization. Read the FCC [announcement](#) regarding FY2024 caps and the FCC [announcement](#) regarding fully funding eligible funding requests.

FCC Released Order FCC 23-110: Continuing Improvements to Rural Health Care Program Procedures

On December 14, 2023, the FCC released Third Report and Order, [FCC 23-110](#). This order improves RHC program administration and facilitates participation in the program by allowing HCPs that expect to become eligible during a funding year to complete the processes required to request funding, aligns program deadlines, simplifies rules for calculating urban rates, streamlines administrative processes, and frees up unused funding for other purposes.

Rule Changes

This Third Report and Order:

- Permits HCPs to be granted conditional eligibility, thus allowing them to initiate competitive bidding and request funding before they meet all eligibility requirements. An HCP must meet all eligibility requirements before it receives a funding commitment.
- Provides HCPs more time to complete Service Provider Identification Number (SPIN) changes by moving the SPIN change deadline to align with the invoice filing deadline.
- Simplifies urban rate calculations by eliminating the seldom-used “standard urban distance” component of the RHC program rule for determining urban rates in the Telecom Program.
- Allows HCPs to request changes to the dates covered by an evergreen contract.
- Adopts the FCC Form 460 for eligibility determinations in the Telecom Program, which will eliminate the need for Telecom Program participants to seek an eligibility determine every time they engage in competitive bidding.

For more information, read Order [FCC 23-110](#).

RHC Connect Updates

RHC Connect Updates – FCC Forms 460, 465, and 469

The FCC Forms 460, 465, and 469 are now available in RHC Connect. The changes to these forms are as follows:

- Per [FCC Order 23-110](#), the FCC Form 460 will now be used to determine eligibility of HCP sites in the HCF Program and the Telecom Program. In addition, applicants may be granted conditional eligibility, thus allowing them to initiate competitive bidding and request funding before their full eligibility has been established. An HCP must be fully eligible before a funding commitment will be released.
- The FCC Form 465 will be used to request services for the Telecom Program, the same way the FCC Form 461 is used in the HCF Program. It is now available for use in RHC Connect.
- The FCC Form 469 is the new Telecom Program invoice. Per [FCC Order 23-6](#), new Telecom Program invoicing process is similar to the invoicing process in the HCF Program. One key difference is that the service provider will submit the FCC Form 469 in RHC Connect, the applicant will receive an email alerting them of the submission, and the applicant will officially submit the form to USAC by certifying and signing the form.
- For FY2024, the FCC Form 467, the Healthcare Provider Support Schedule (HSS), and the previous Telecom Program Invoice will be eliminated in the Telecom Program.

Status of Migration to RHC Connect

RHC Connect migration is still underway. Here is an update for the relevant forms and funding years.

Form	Current Platform	RHC Connect Migration
FCC Forms 460 & 465	RHC Connect	RHC Connect
- Letters of Agency (LOA)	RHC Connect	RHC Connect
- Third Party Authorization (TPA)	TBD	TBD
FCC Form 461	RHC Connect	FY2023 and forward
FCC Form 462	My Portal	FY2021 and prior - multi-year commitments

Form	Current Platform	RHC Connect Migration
FCC Form 462	RHC Connect	FY2022 and forward
FCC Form 463	My Portal	FY2021 and prior - multi-year commitments
FCC Form 463	RHC Connect	FY2022 and forward
Post-commitment Change Requests	RHC Connect	FY2022 and forward
FCC Form 466	RHC Connect	FY2024 and forward
Telecom Invoice	My Portal	FY2023
FCC Form 469	RHC Connect	FY2024 and forward

Submit Your Post-Commitment Change Requests in RHC Connect

The following post-commitment change requests are now available in RHC Connect for HCF Program applicants:

- SPIN changes (corrective and operational)
- Site and service substitutions
- Service delivery deadline extensions for non-recurring charges
- Invoice filing deadline extensions

A webpage for [Post-Commitment Actions](#) is available on the USAC website as well as specific webpages for [SPIN Changes](#) and [Site and Service Substitutions](#). A step-by-step [Post-Commitments Change Request](#) user guide is available to help you submit these requests correctly.

A user guide for [Invoice Filing Deadline Extension Requests](#) specifically for service providers is posted under the Additional Resources section of the [Invoice USAC](#) webpage in the [Service Providers](#) section of the USAC website.

Submit the FCC Form 463 in the RHC Connect

The FCC Form 463 is submitted in RHC Connect. HCF Program applicants submitting an FCC Form 463 for funding years prior to FY2022 will continue to do so in My Portal. CCPP applications will continue to be submitted in My Portal. To learn more, please visit the [Welcome to RHC Connect – FCC Form 463](#) webpage.

RHC Connect for Service Providers

As you submit the FCC Form 463, please keep in mind that the General Contact on the FCC Form 498 is the only user for the company who can create additional logins for other users in that company.

If you have trouble accessing RHC Connect, it may be a result of outdated information on the FCC Form 498 (Service Provider and Billed Entity Identification Number and General Contact Information Form). To correct the issue, please update your FCC Form 498 as soon as possible and, if applicable, your Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) on the [SAM.gov](#) webpage. For more information, please visit the [Manage Your 498 ID](#) webpage on the USAC website.

A [user guide for the FCC Form 463](#) specifically for service providers is now available on the [Step 5: Invoice USAC](#) webpage in the RHC service provider section of the USAC website.

Online Tools

Invoice Filing Deadlines

The [Invoicing Deadline tool](#) replaced the Invoicing Deadline spreadsheet. The tool allows service providers and HCPs to look up the deadline to submit invoices for funding commitments. The tool allows users to avoid having to set up specific Excel configurations to find their deadlines.

Open Data Platform

As part of USAC's Open Data initiative, we make RHC program data open and accessible to the general public. Anyone is free to use, re-use, and redistribute the data in our data sets to access all of the raw data submitted by universal service program participants. The following data sets are available on the Open Data platform for the RHC program:

- [Rural Health Care Commitments and Disbursements \(FCC Form 462/466/466A\)](#) - This dataset contains data about funding decisions, total committed amounts, and total disbursement amounts for the RHC program.
- [RHC Posted Services Tool](#) – This tool allows service providers to view service request information by individual HCPs and consortia applying for funding through the RHC program.
- [Rural Health Care Posted Services \(FCC Form 461/465\)](#) - This dataset allows service providers to view service request information provided by the RHC program. The data is collected from the FCC Forms 461 and 465, which includes the service request information.

News You Can Use

Certifications Requirements for National Supply Chain

As a reminder, when service providers log in to My Portal, two Supply Chain certifications included in the FCC Form 463 and Telecom Program invoice will be displayed. The first certification affirms compliance with the [Section 54.9](#) prohibition on specified transactions with companies deemed to pose a national security threat. The second certification affirms compliance with [Section 54.10](#), which prohibits the use of any federal subsidies on any communications equipment and services on the [Covered List](#).

Please note: If you requested services or equipment that provide or contain components of products produced by any company on the [Covered List](#), or any of their parents, affiliates, and subsidiaries you cannot invoice for these funds. Instead, you should immediately request a service substitution prior to invoicing to ensure complete program compliance. In addition, as you proceed with competitive bidding, please ensure you are not requesting funding for services or equipment from listed covered companies 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](#).