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Telecom Program – Competitive Bidding for FY2025

Submitting the FCC Form 465 in RHC Connect

October 16, 2024

Universal Service Administrative Co.

DISCLAIMER:

To accommodate all attendees, real-time closed captions will be present during this presentation. This is a new feature we are testing out to improve webinar accessibility for all. We understand it is a significant change and appreciate your patience. We apologize in advance for any transcription errors or distractions. Thank you for your support.

Please be aware that this webinar will be recorded.

Housekeeping

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  - Turn on your computer's speakers, or
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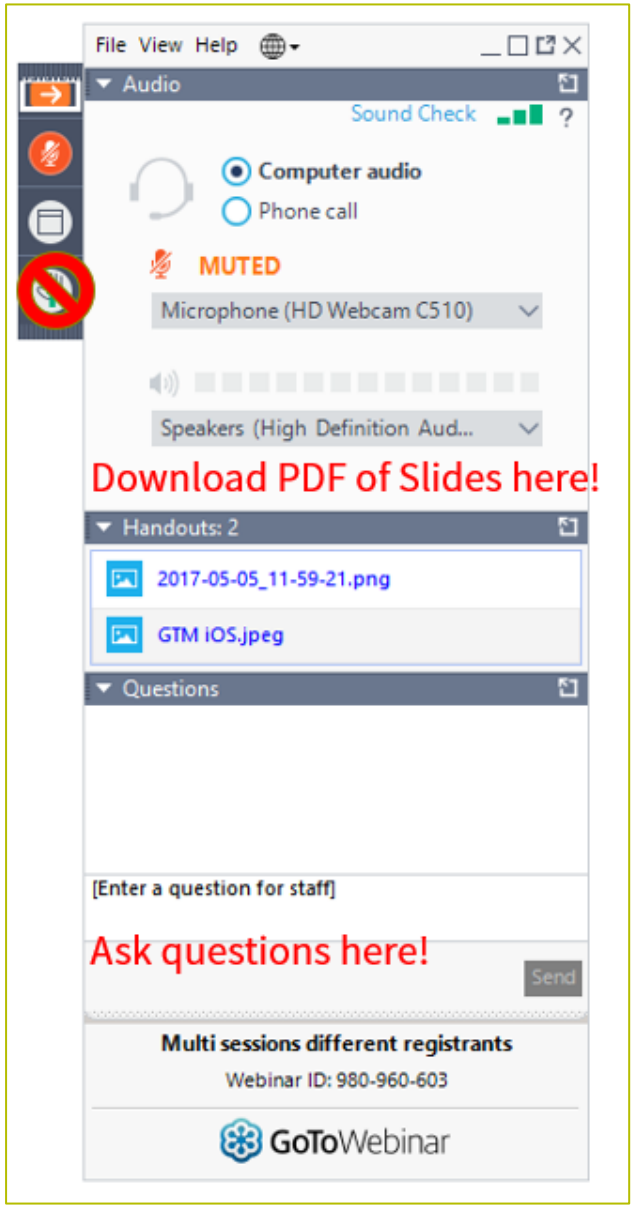
- All participants are on mute.
- Submit questions at any time using the **Questions** box.



Meet Our Team

Simone Andrews

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Blythe Albert

Advisor of Program Management | RHC Outreach

Agenda

- Overview
- Competitive Bidding
  - Evaluation Criteria
  - Competitive Bidding Exemptions
  - Requests for Proposal
- Search Posted Services
- Submitting the FCC Form 465
- Best Practices and Resources

By the end of this webinar you will be able to…

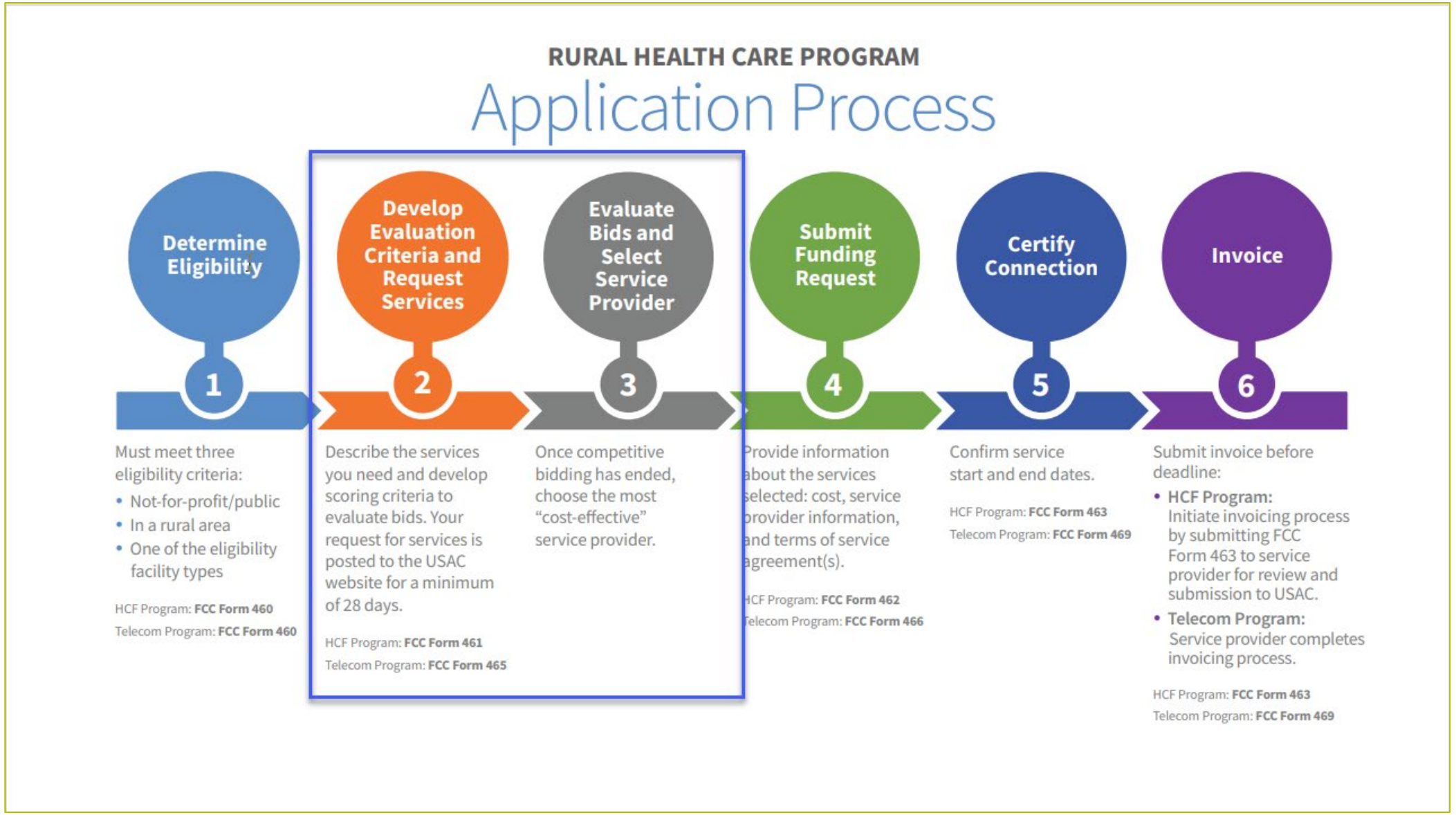
- *Complete and submit an FCC Form 465 in RHC Connect*
  - *Create bid evaluation criteria*
  - *Understand competitive bidding requirements*
  - *Identify applicable competitive bidding exemptions*
- *Locate current requests for services and other important resources on the USAC website*

RHC Program Glossary

Acronym	Meaning
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
HCP	Health Care Provider (your site)
HCP Number	Number associated with your site
PAH	Primary Account Holder
ACSD	Allowable Contract Selection Date

Overview

Submitting the FCC Form 465 in RHC Connect


RURAL HEALTH CARE PROGRAM
Application Process
Determine Eligibility
1
Must meet three eligibility criteria:
• Not-for-profit/public
• In a rural area
• One of the eligibility facility types
HCF Program: FCC Form 460
Telecom Program: FCC Form 460
Develop Evaluation Criteria and Request Services
2
Describe the services you need and develop scoring criteria to evaluate bids. Your request for services is posted to the USAC website for a minimum of 28 days.
HCF Program: FCC Form 461
Telecom Program: FCC Form 465
Evaluate Bids and Select Service Provider
3
Once competitive bidding has ended, choose the most "cost-effective" service provider.
Submit Funding Request
4
Provide information about the services selected: cost, service provider information, and terms of service agreement(s).
HCF Program: FCC Form 462
Telecom Program: FCC Form 466
Certify Connection
5
Confirm service start and end dates.
HCF Program: FCC Form 463
Telecom Program: FCC Form 469
Invoice
6
Submit invoice before deadline:
• HCF Program: Initiate invoicing process by submitting FCC Form 463 to service provider for review and submission to USAC.
• Telecom Program: Service provider completes invoicing process.
HCF Program: FCC Form 463
Telecom Program: FCC Form 469

What is a Request for Services?

- The HCP submits the **FCC Form 465** to let service providers know what types of services are being requested.
- Service providers use the information on the FCC Form 465 to create a bid to provide those services.
- Telecommunications (Telecom) Program FCC Form 465 is the “Description of Services Requested and Certification Form”.

What is a Request for Services? (continued)

- The HCP and service provider may not enter into an agreement to purchase services until 28 days after the Request for Services is posted.
  - The 28-day competitive bidding process begins the next full business day after the FCC Form 465 is publicly posted.
  - After the 28-day period is complete, the HCP and service provider are welcome to sign a contract.
    - This day is called the **Allowable Contract Selection Date (ACSD)**.

Rural Health Care Program: **Funding Year 2025**

Competitive Bidding

Submitting the FCC Form 465 in RHC Connect

Competitive Bidding

- The purpose of competitive bidding is to allow all service providers an equal opportunity to understand the HCP's service requirements and offer the most cost-effective solution to address those needs.
- RHC program rules and FCC Orders require a fair and open competitive bidding process.
- Service providers, who plan to bid, cannot assist with the preparation of the FCC Form 465, choose a winning bidder, or participate in the vendor selection process in any way.
- All potential bidders shall have access to the same information about the service needs and shall be treated in the same manner.
- All applicants and service providers shall comply with all applicable state, Tribal, or local procurement laws.

Bid Evaluation Criteria

- The bid evaluation criteria is a list of weighted standards, included in the Request for Services, that the HCP will use to determine the most cost-effective bid.
- Applicants must disclose minimum requirements for each criterion.
- Each criterion is given a specific weight. The sum of the weights must equal 100.
- The bid evaluation criteria should address the HCP’s needs as indicated on the FCC Form 465 and be based on the FCC's definition of cost-effective. (*47 CFR 54.622(c)).*

Example of Evaluation Criteria

Bid Evaluation

Select criteria (and weights assigned to each) that will be used to evaluate bids received as a result of this request for services.

Criteria	Description (if 'Other')	Minimum Requirement	Weight (%)
Cost			45%
Prior experience including past performance		Must have at least one current or have had at least one former circuit with carrier and 3 references from a healthcare facility in the same state for like services	35%
Leverage Existing Resources		Utilize existing facilities to minimize disturbance	20%

What is a Competitive Bidding Exemption?

- In some cases, the service needs or contract conditions allow the HCP to be exempt from competitive bidding.
- With a competitive bidding exemption, HCPs will not have to undergo competitive bidding, and do not need to create evaluation criteria or collect bids from service providers.
- A competitive bidding exemption allows the HCP to skip the FCC Form 465 (for the purposes of competitive bidding) entirely and proceed directly to submitting a funding request.

Competitive Bidding Exemptions

- HCPs must meet one of the following criteria to be exempt from submitting the FCC Form 465 and participating in the competitive bidding process:
  - Purchasing services or equipment from a master service agreement (MSA) negotiated by a federal, state, Tribal, or local governmental entity on behalf of the HCP and others, and which was awarded pursuant to applicable competitive bidding requirements;
  - Requesting support using contracts previously approved by USAC (MSA under the RHC Pilot Program or the HCF Program);
  - Using an active multi-year contract designated as evergreen for the RHC program (exemption applies for the life of the contract and up to five years of voluntary extensions); or
  - Using a contract approved under the Schools and Libraries (E-rate) program.
- If the HCP does not meet any of the competitive bidding exemptions, the FCC Form 465 must be submitted, and the HCP must go through competitive bidding.

Evergreen Contracts

- HCPs are not required to file an FCC Form 465 or competitively bid for the life of a multi-year contract if they are designated as evergreen under the HCF or Telecom Program.
- A contract may be designated as evergreen if the contract meets all of the following requirements:
  - Both parties are identified;
  - The contract specifies the service type, bandwidth, and quantity;
  - The contract is signed and dated by the HCP or consortium leader after the Allowable Contract Selection Date (ACSD);
  - The contract specifies the term and cost of service(s); and
  - The contract includes the physical addresses of the HCP(s) purchasing from the contract.
- USAC must have designated the contract evergreen **prior** to submission of the funding request.

Service Substitutions (47 CFR 54.624)

- Substitutions allow the flexibility, for an HCP with an approved funding commitment, to spend all of the committed funds, even though USAC-supported services may change over the course of the commitment.
- Service substitutions allow HCPs to reallocate un-invoiced, committed funds to substitute or modify the services.
- A service substitution may be requested if:
  - The substitution is provided for in the contract, within the change clause, or constitutes a minor modification;
  - The service is an eligible service under the Telecom Program;
  - The substitution does not violate any contract provision or state, Tribal, or local procurement laws; and
  - The requested change is within the scope of the controlling Request for Services, including any applicable RFP used in the competitive bidding process.
- HCPs with month-to-month approved funding commitments may not utilize service substitutions since a contract was not submitted with the original funding request.
- Service substitutions must be submitted by the service delivery deadline.
- Please use the information on the Site and Service Substitutions webpage as a resource.

Requests for Proposal

- A Request for Proposal (RFP) is a comprehensive bidding solicitation that describes the business priorities and functional requirements in sufficient detail to ensure an effective, fair, and open competitive bidding process.
  - An RFP must be submitted if it is required under applicable state, Tribal, or local procurement rules or regulations.
- If the HCP chooses to include an RFP, it must be submitted with the FCC Form 465, and include, at a minimum:
  - A description of the service needs and a defined scope for the project;
  - The number of days during which bids will be accepted (28 day minimum);
  - Clearly delineated deliverables; and
  - The bid evaluation criteria, including the weight assigned to each criterion.
- The RFP should align with everything entered into the FCC Form 465 and provide more details about the requested services.

Service Providers and Competitive Bidding

- Service providers are prohibited from preparing, signing, or submitting an applicant's FCC Form 465 or any other competitive bidding documents.
- Service providers are prohibited from being involved in developing the bid evaluation criteria or participating in the vendor selection process in any way.
- If it is determined that a service provider helped an HCP with its request for services and was subsequently chosen to provide services, the HCP will have committed a competitive bidding violation, and the funding request will be denied, and any funding payments will be subject to rescission.

FCC 23-6: Rule Changes

Rates determination in the Telecom Program:

- Eliminates rules requiring use of the Rates Database to determine urban and rural rates.
- Waivers allowing the use of previously approved rates for all urban and rural rates remained in place for FY2023.
- For FY2025, rules requiring rural rates to be calculated using Methods 1 through 3 and the pre-Rates Database calculation method for urban rates will be reinstated with the following minor changes:
  - For FY2024 and 2025, service providers will be permitted to use previously approved rates for rural rates that would otherwise be calculated under Method 3.
  - If there are no comparable rural rates within 30 percent of the speed of the requested service, service providers may use the rate for a higher bandwidth service that is otherwise similar to the requested service to justify a rural rate.
  - Similarly, if there are no comparable urban rates within 30 percent of the speed of the requested service, health care providers may use the rate for a higher bandwidth service that is otherwise similar to the requested service to justify an urban rate.
  - Affirms the decisions in FCC Order 19-78 that a non-telecommunications service that is functionally similar to a service requested in the Telecom Program should be considered similar to it when calculating rates and that services with advertised speeds 30 percent above or below the speed of the requested service be considered functionally similar to the requested service.

FCC Order 23-110 – Rule Changes

- FCC Order 23-110 improves RHC program administration and facilitates participation in the program by allowing health care providers that expect to become eligible during a funding year to complete the processes required to request funding.
- The order permits health care providers to be granted conditional eligibility, thus allowing them to initiate competitive bidding and request funding while awaiting a final eligibility determination (For purposes of competitive bidding in FY2025).
  - This functionality is currently available in the FCC Form 460.
  - If an HCP site with conditional eligibility approval will be participating in competitive bidding e.g. will be listed on an FCC Form 461 or 465, the applicant must provide written notification to potential bidders that their eligibility is approved as conditional and specify the estimated date they expect to be fully eligible.
- 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.

Supply Chain Order

- As a reminder, when service providers login to My Portal they will see two new supply chain certifications included in the FCC Form 463 and Telecom Program invoice.
- The first certification affirms compliance with the Section 54.9 prohibition on USF for 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.
- If you requested services or equipment provided or that contain components of products produced by any of the listed covered companies or any of their parents, affiliates and subsidiaries in prior funding years, you cannot invoice for these funds. Instead, you should immediately request a service substitution.
- 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.

Supply Chain Web Page

- Supply Chain webpage

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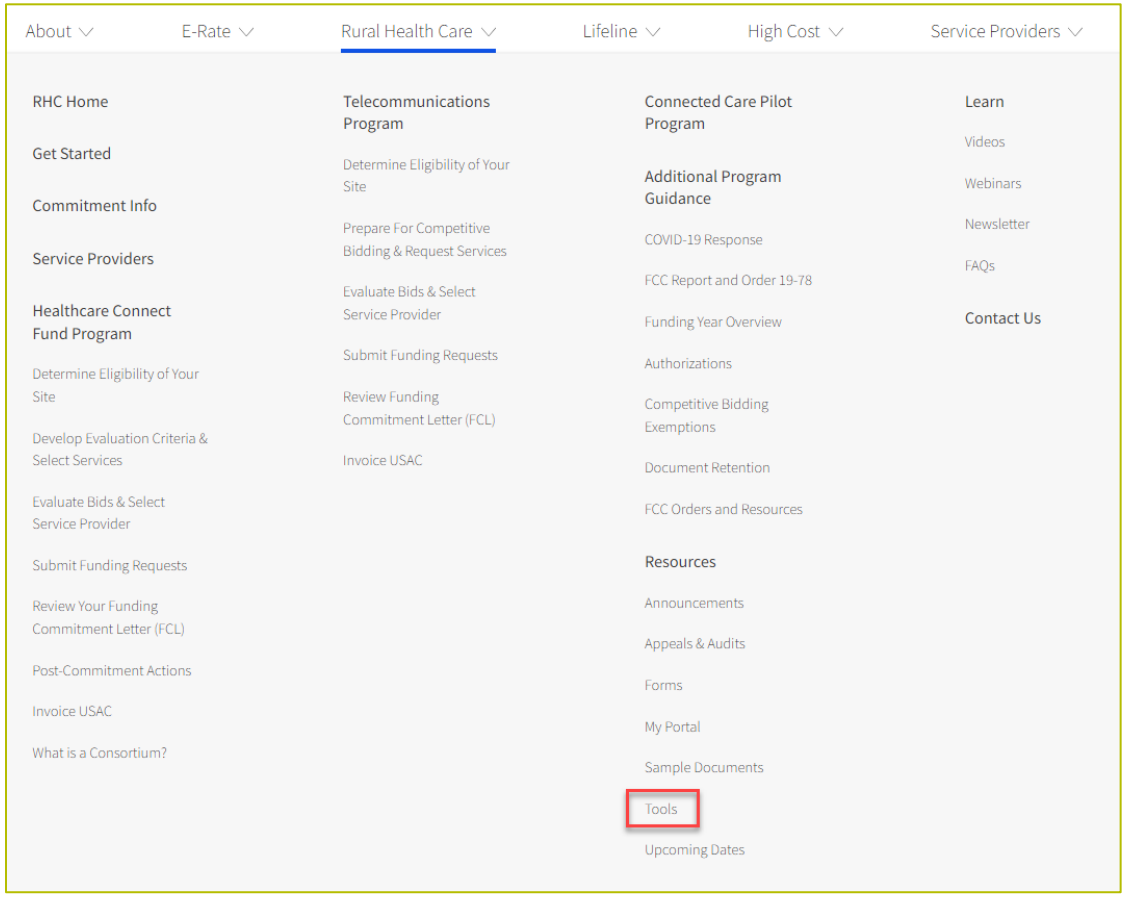
Questions?

Search Posted Services

Submitting the FCC Form 465

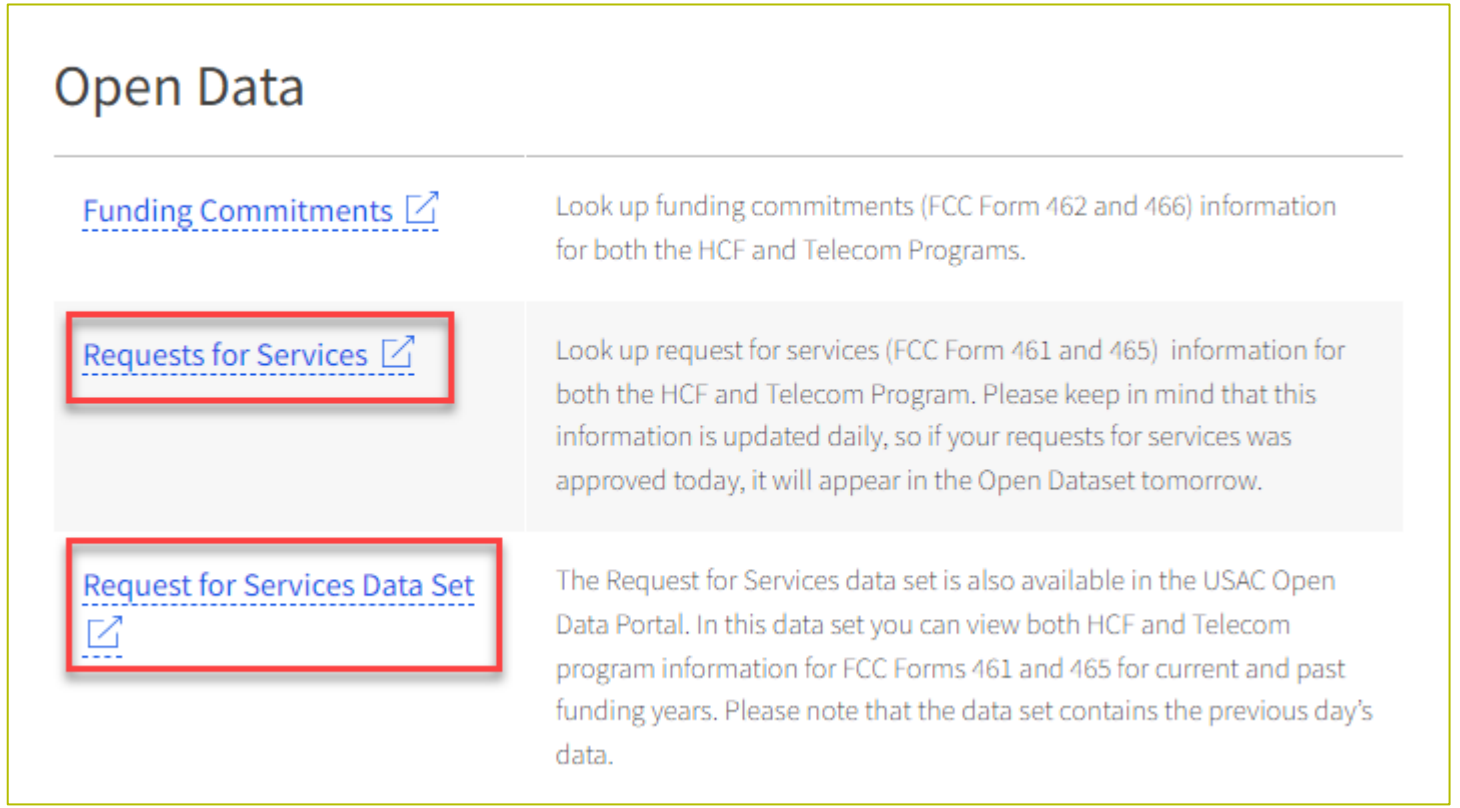
HCF Search Posted Services

- The Search Posted Services tool for HCF and Telecom has moved to the Open Data Platform on the USAC website.



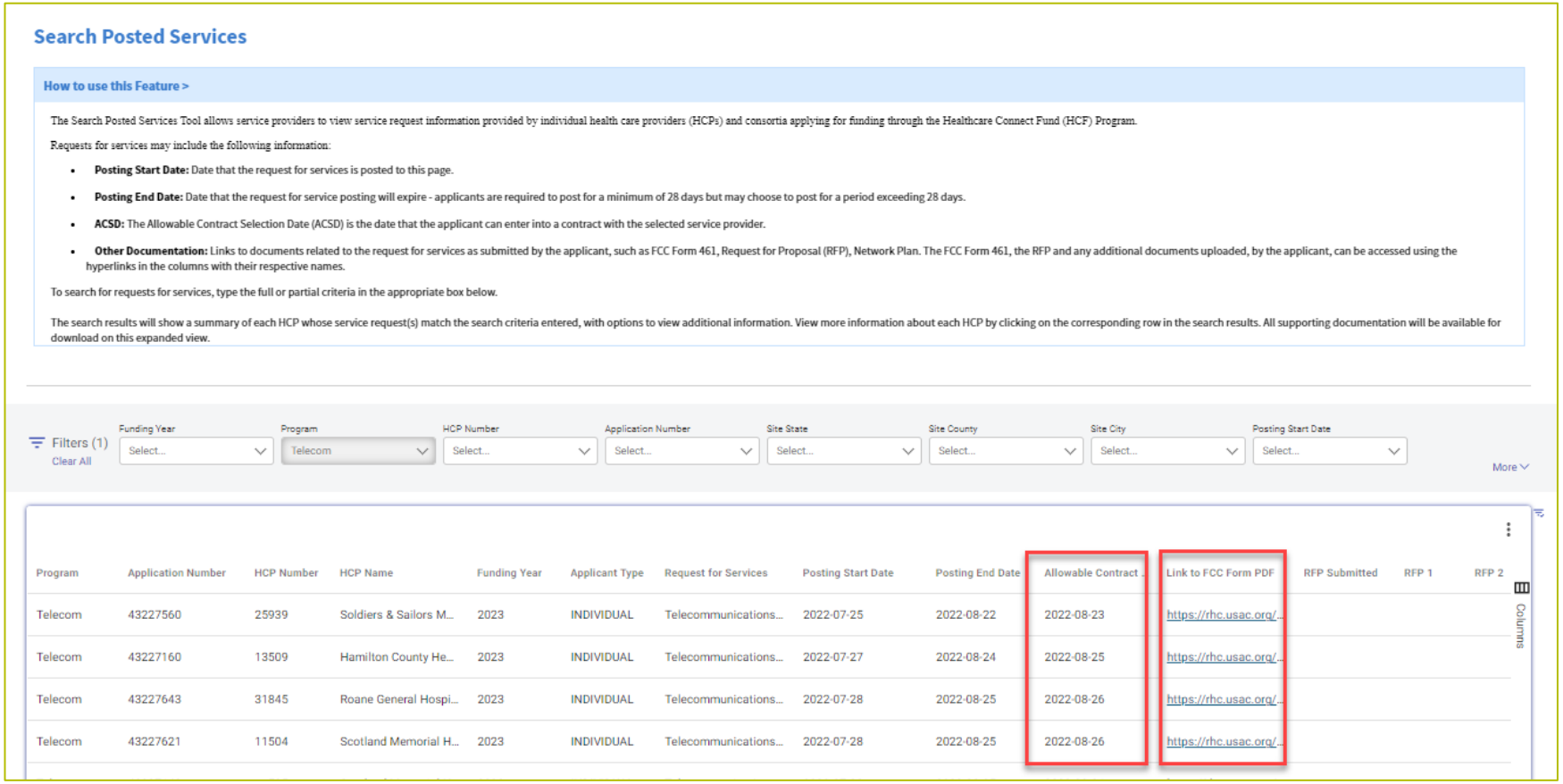
Search Posted Services (continued)

- **Request for Services** is a streamlined tool and **Request for Services Data Set** is the complete data set.



Search Posted Services – Requests for Services

- A PDF copy of the FCC Form 465 and any additional posted supporting documentation can be downloaded by clicking the hyperlink under each column.
- ACSD is clearly displayed.

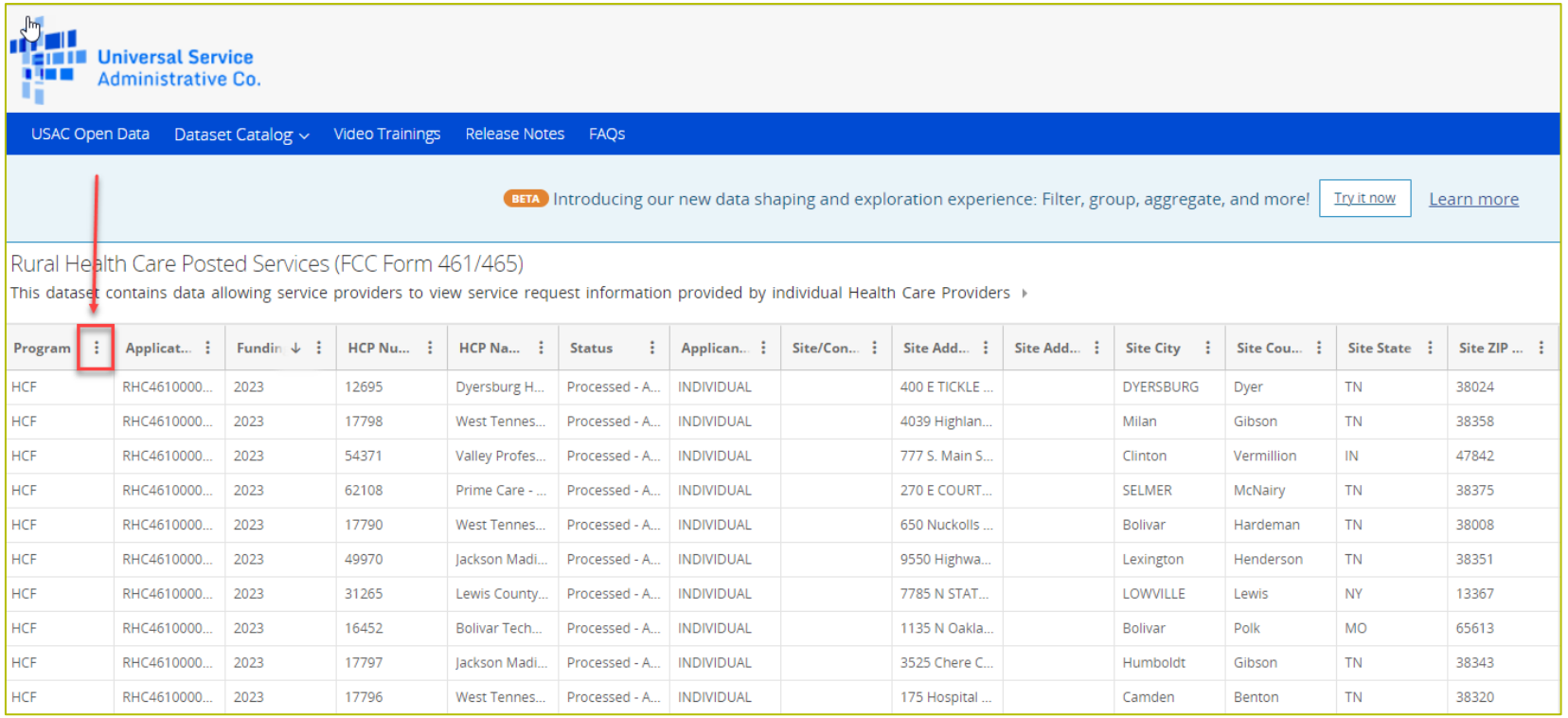


Search Posted Services – Request for Services Data Set

- You can view the dataset directly on the screen or you can export the data to an Excel spreadsheet.

Search Posted Services – Request for Services Data Set (continued)

- This is the on-screen view of the dataset.
- Click the three dots beside each column title to sort and filter.



Program	Applicat...	Fundin	HCP Nu...	HCP Na...	Status	Applican...	Site/Con...	Site Add...	Site Add...	Site City	Site Cou...	Site State	Site ZIP ...
HCF	RHC4610000...	2023	12695	Dyersburg H...	Processed - A...	INDIVIDUAL		400 E TICKLE ...		DYERSBURG	Dyer	TN	38024
HCF	RHC4610000...	2023	17798	West Tennes...	Processed - A...	INDIVIDUAL		4039 Highlan...		Milan	Gibson	TN	38358
HCF	RHC4610000...	2023	54371	Valley Profes...	Processed - A...	INDIVIDUAL		777 S. Main S...		Clinton	Vermillion	IN	47842
HCF	RHC4610000...	2023	62108	Prime Care - ...	Processed - A...	INDIVIDUAL		270 E COURT...		SELMER	McNairy	TN	38375
HCF	RHC4610000...	2023	17790	West Tennes...	Processed - A...	INDIVIDUAL		650 Nuckolls ...		Bolivar	Hardeman	TN	38008
HCF	RHC4610000...	2023	49970	Jackson Madi...	Processed - A...	INDIVIDUAL		9550 Highwa...		Lexington	Henderson	TN	38351
HCF	RHC4610000...	2023	31265	Lewis County...	Processed - A...	INDIVIDUAL		7785 N STAT...		LOWVILLE	Lewis	NY	13367
HCF	RHC4610000...	2023	16452	Bolivar Tech...	Processed - A...	INDIVIDUAL		1135 N Oakla...		Bolivar	Polk	MO	65613
HCF	RHC4610000...	2023	17797	Jackson Madi...	Processed - A...	INDIVIDUAL		3525 Chere C...		Humboldt	Gibson	TN	38343
HCF	RHC4610000...	2023	17796	West Tennes...	Processed - A...	INDIVIDUAL		175 Hospital ...		Camden	Benton	TN	38320

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Questions?

Submitting the FCC Form 465

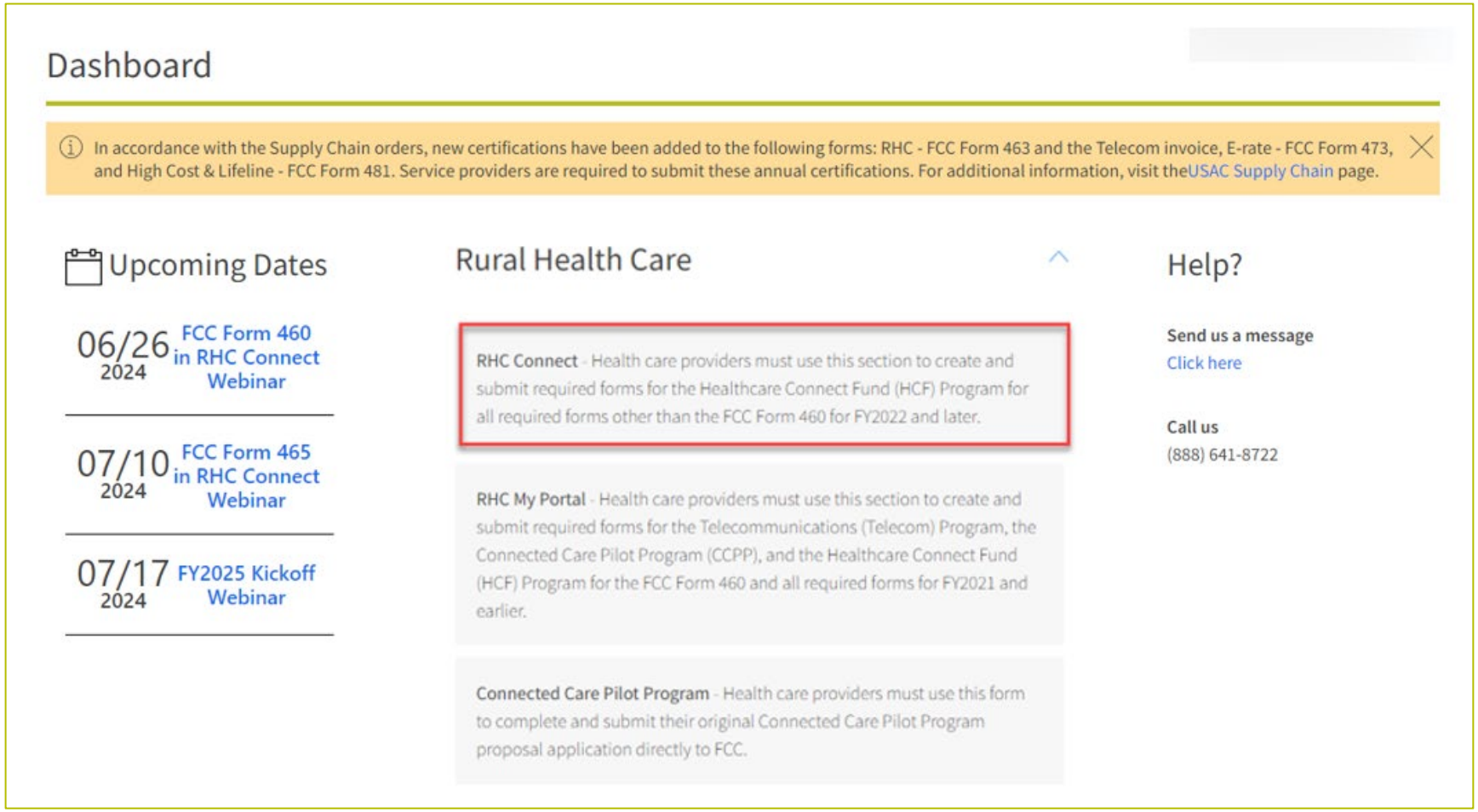
Submitting the FCC Form 465 in RHC Connect

New! RHC Connect Update

- FCC Form 465 has moved to RHC Connect to begin competitive bidding for FY2025.
- All information from FCC Forms 460 and existing FCC Forms 465 will migrate to RHC Connect.
- Prior year information will remain in My Portal as well as CCPP forms.
- We have posted a step-by-step RHC Connect User Guide – FCC Form 465 on the new Welcome to RHC Connect – FCC Form 465 webpage.

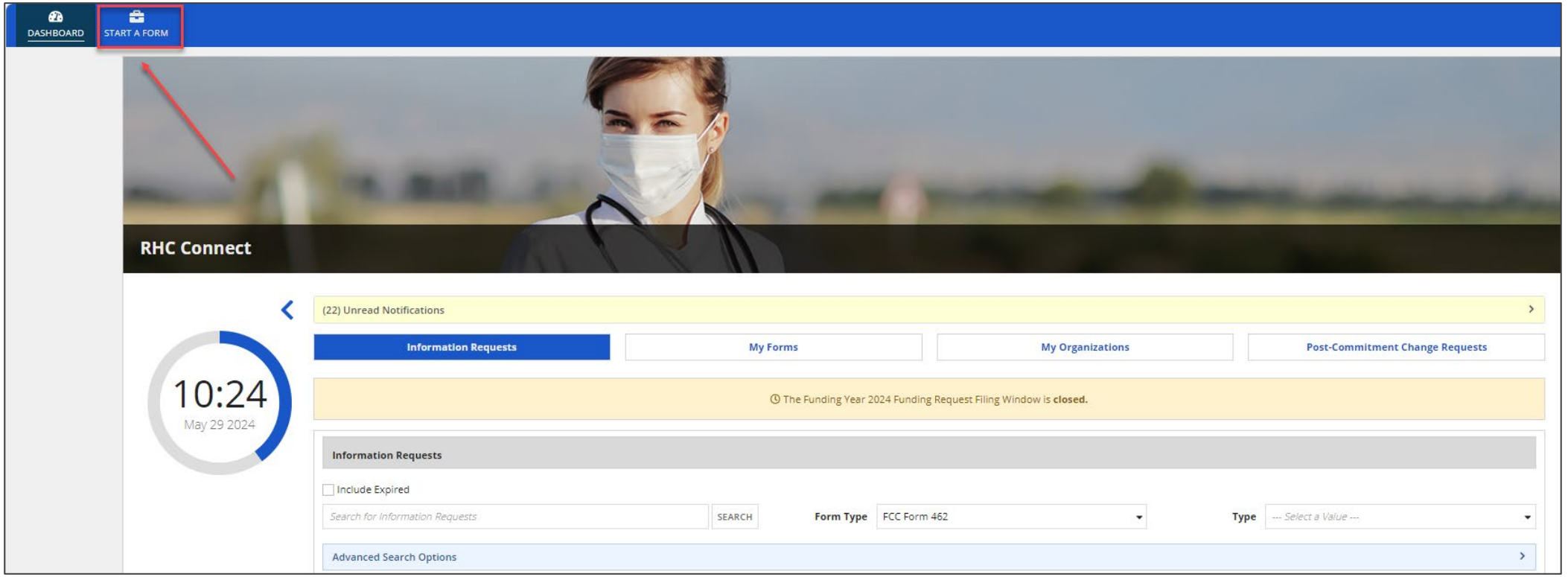
My Portal Landing Page

- Log into My Portal and click **RHC Connect**.



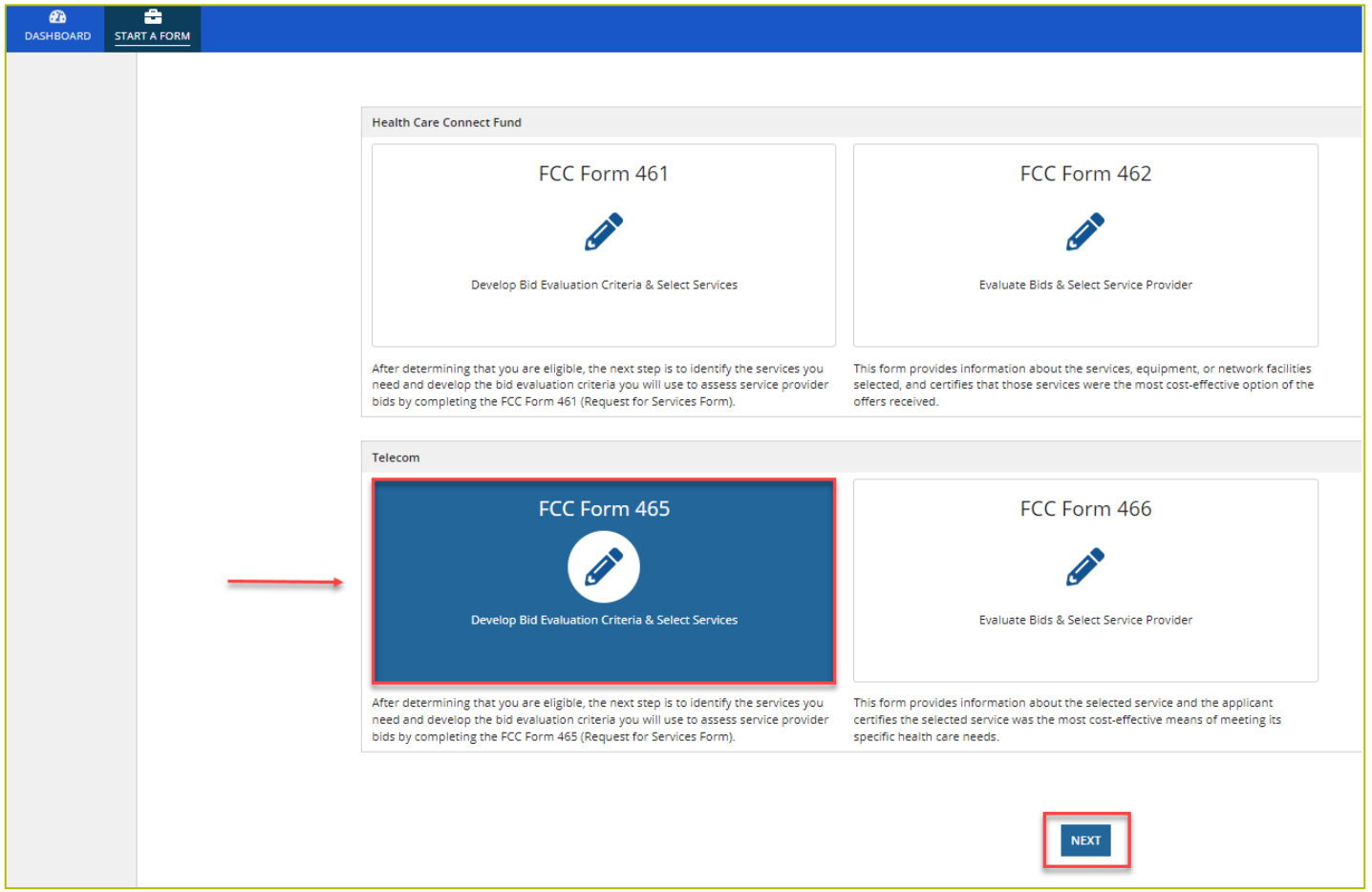
RHC Connect

- Click **Start a Form**.



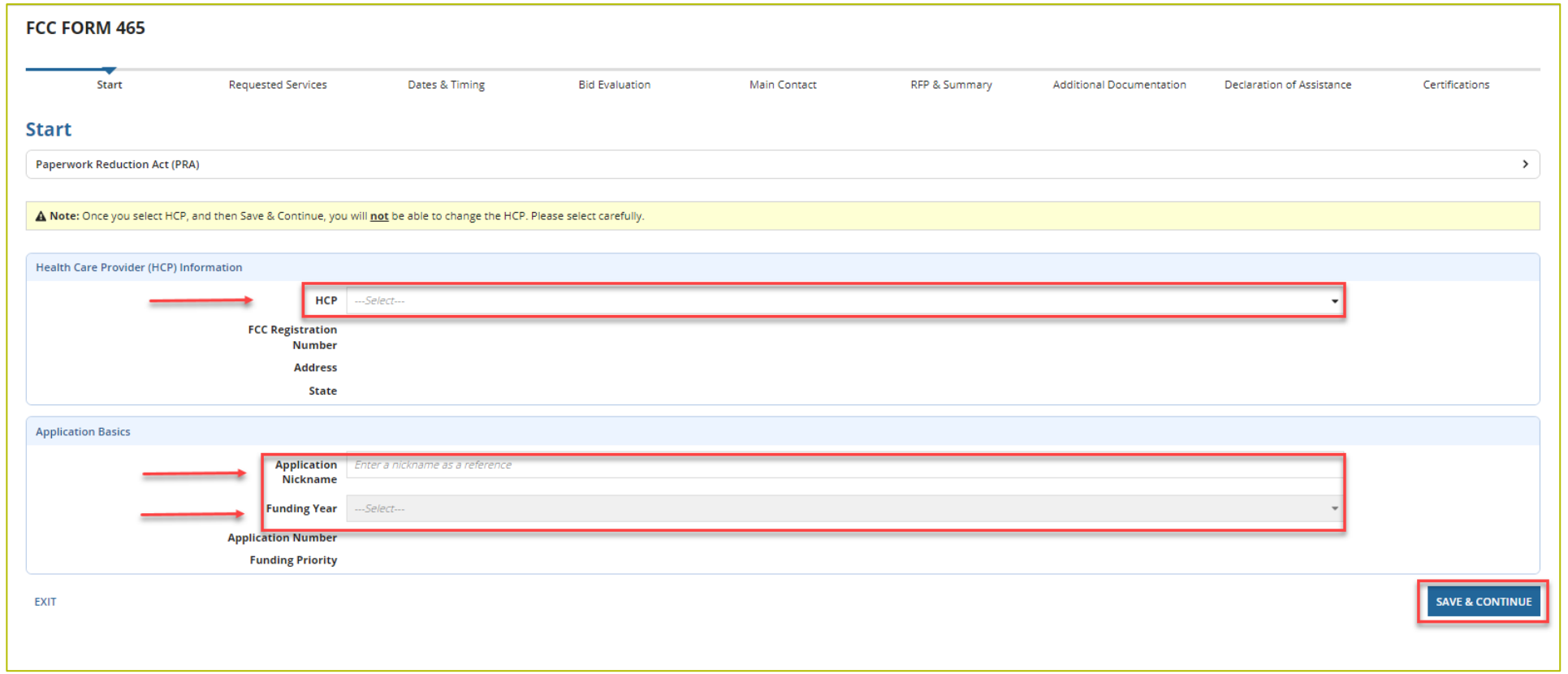
RHC Connect (continued)

- Click **FCC Form 465**, then click **Next**.



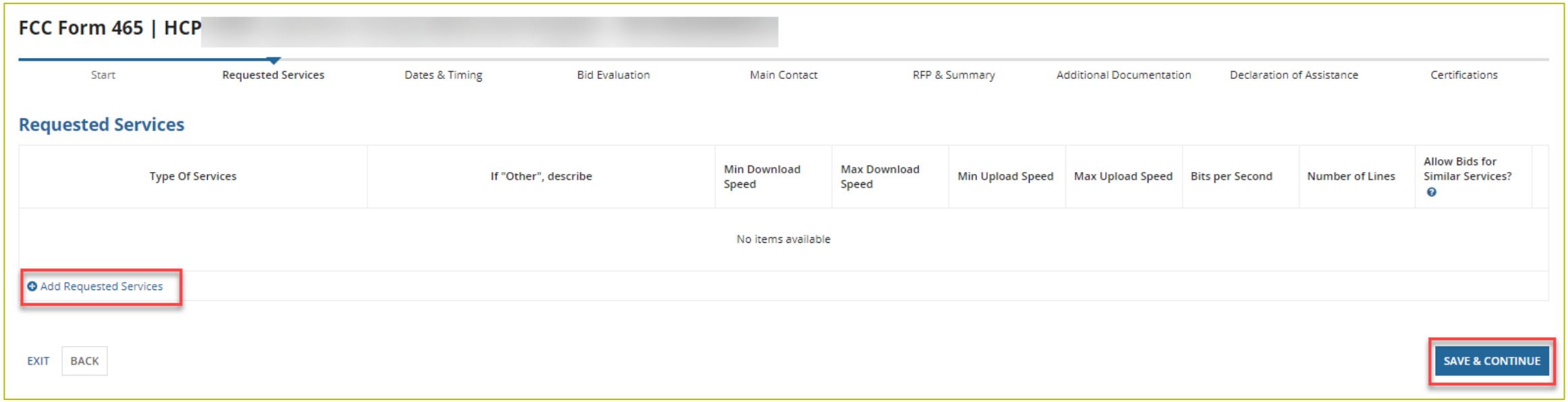
Start

- Select the HCP from the drop-down menu, enter **Application Nickname**, and select **Funding Year**.
- Click **Save & Continue**.



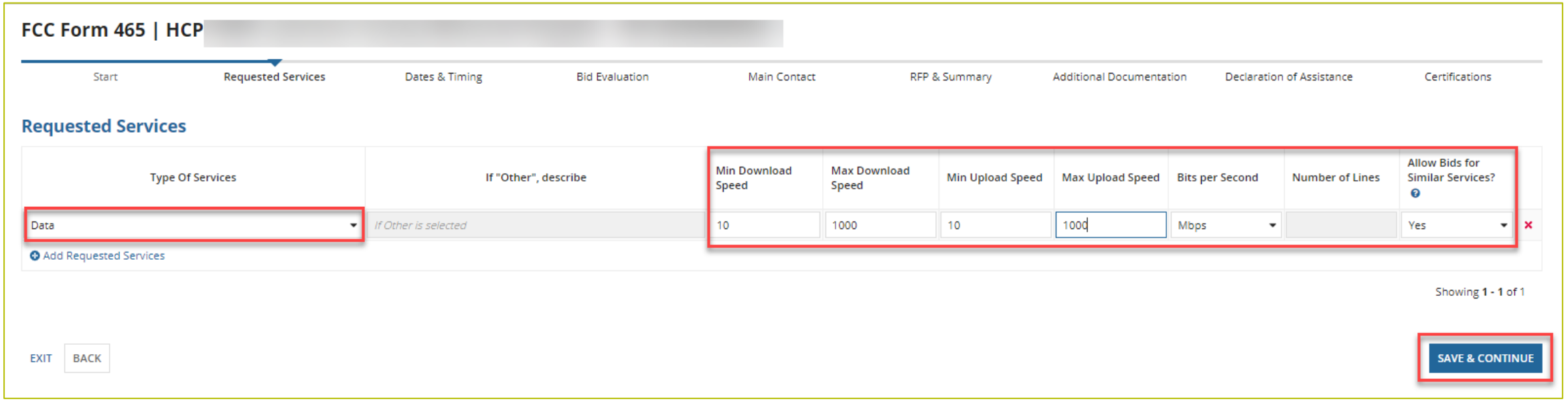
Requested Services

- Click **Add Requested Services**.



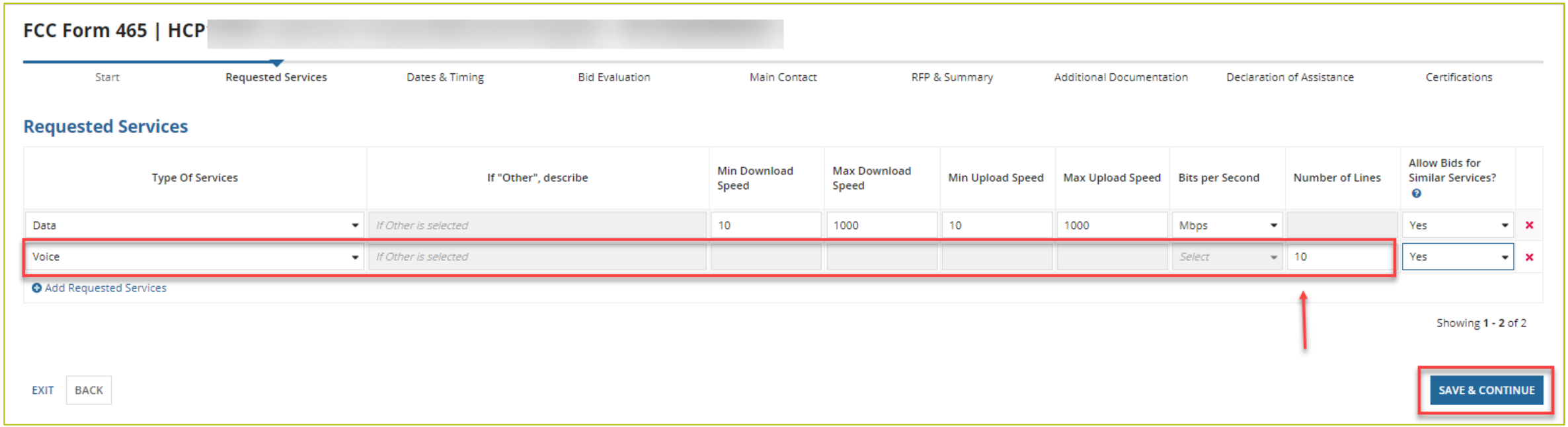
Requested Services (continued)

- Select type of service from the drop-down menu.
- Enter minimum and maximum bandwidths.
- Answer **Yes** or **No** if you'll consider bids for similar services.



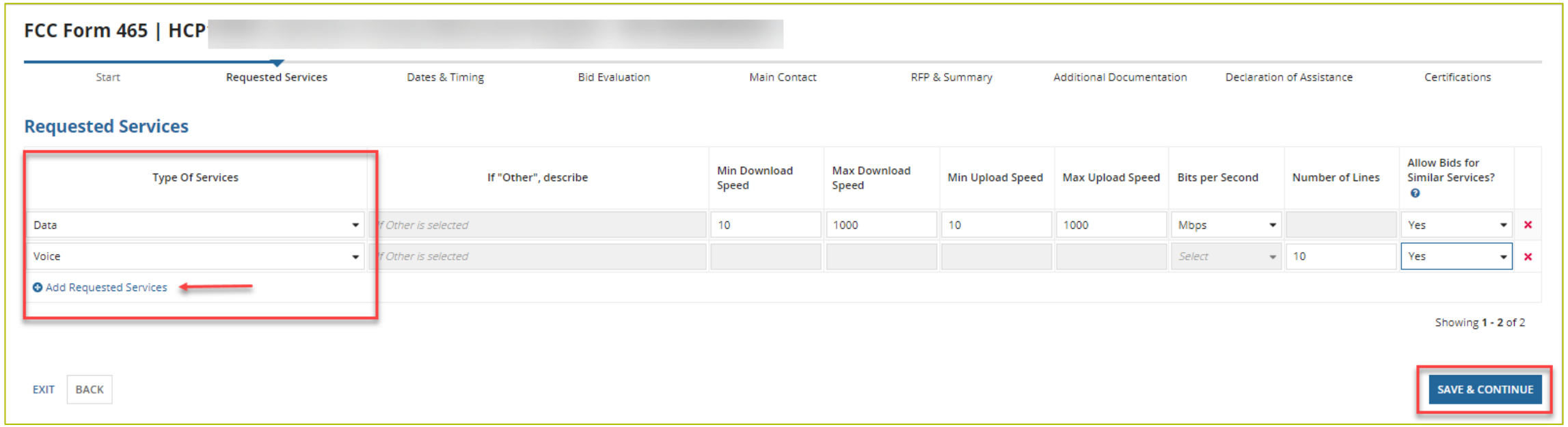
Requested Services (continued)

- Select type of service from the drop-down menu.
- For voice services, enter the number of phone lines in the field shown.



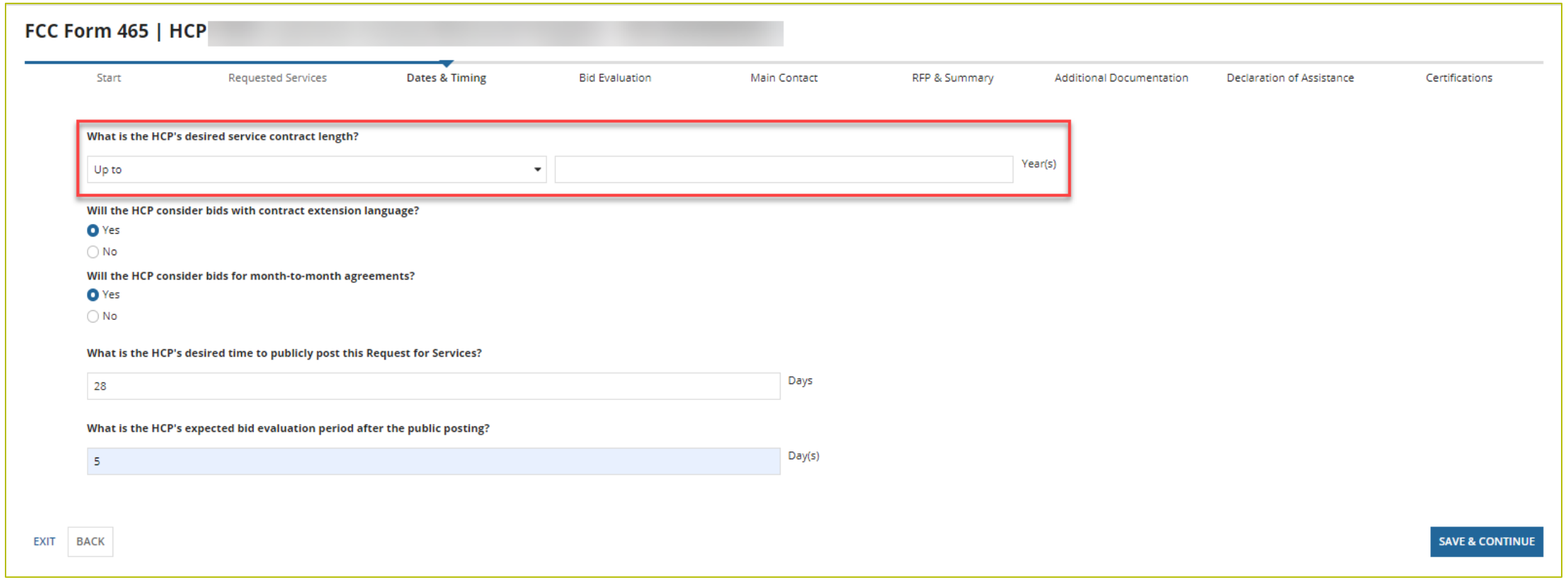
Requested Services (continued)

- Click **Add Requested Services** for each additional service and follow the same steps.
- Click **Save & Continue**.



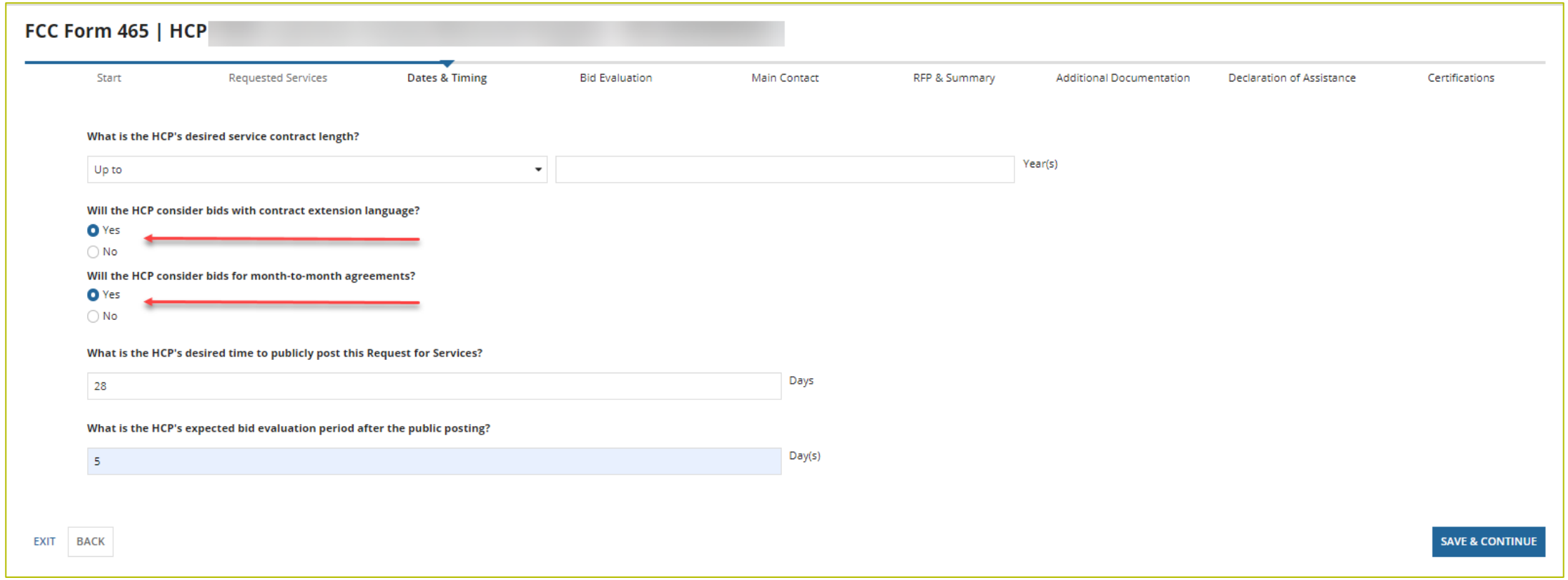
Dates & Timing

- Use the drop-down menu to select “Up to” or “Equal to” for the desired contract length.
- Enter the number of year(s).



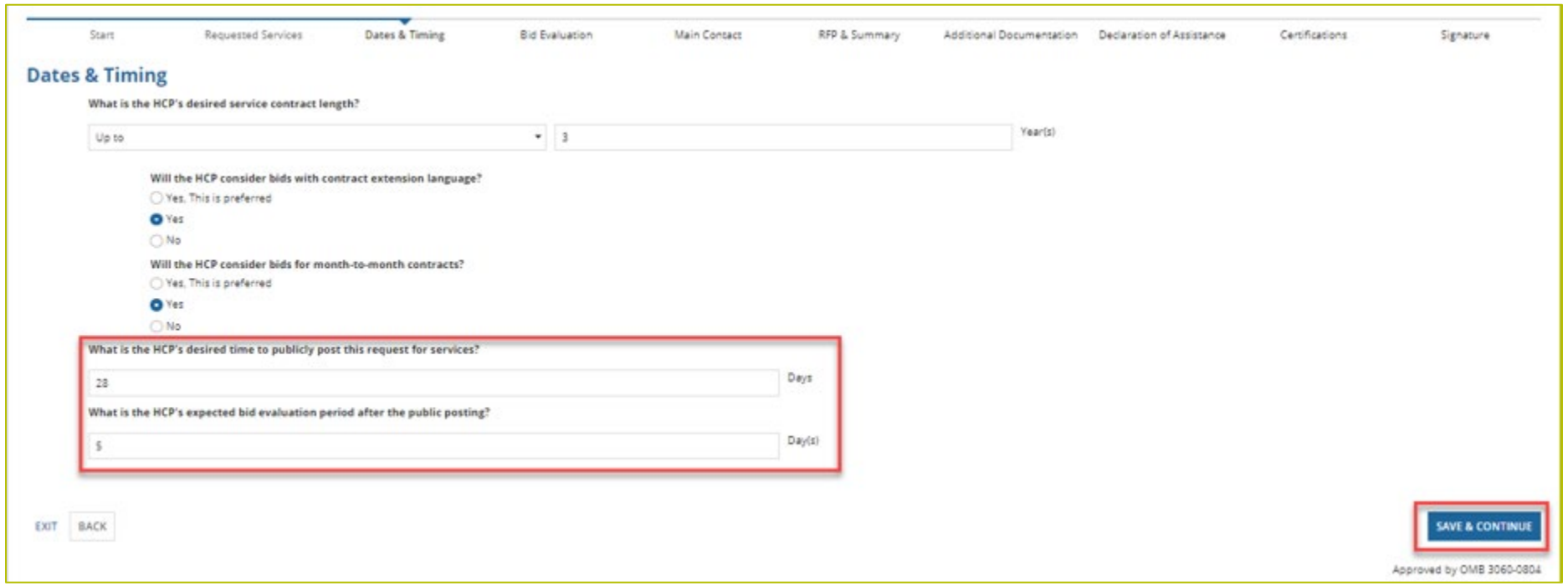
Dates & Timing (continued)

- Answer the questions about contract extensions and month-to-month agreements.



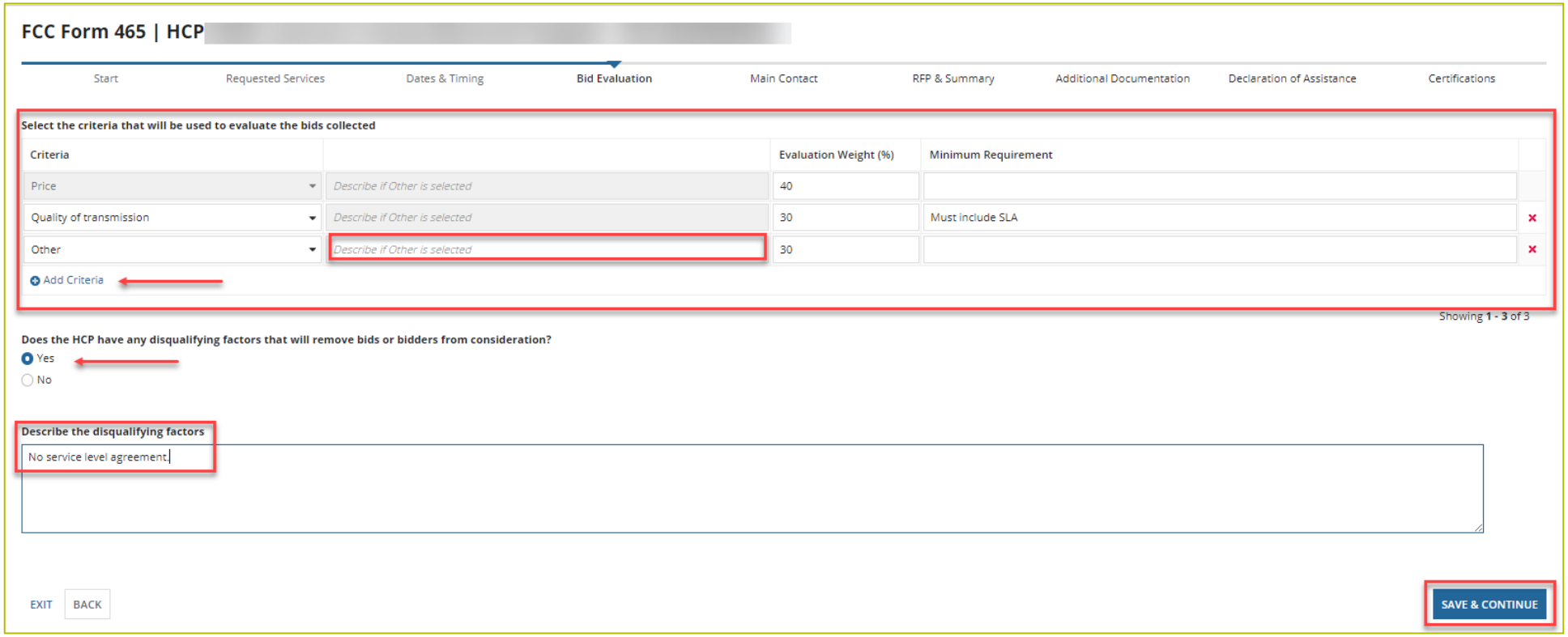
Dates & Timing (continued)

- Enter the desired time to publicly post the Request for Services.
  - Minimum of 28 days is required under program rules but can be longer.
- Enter the expected evaluation period after the public posting ends.
- Click **Save & Continue**.



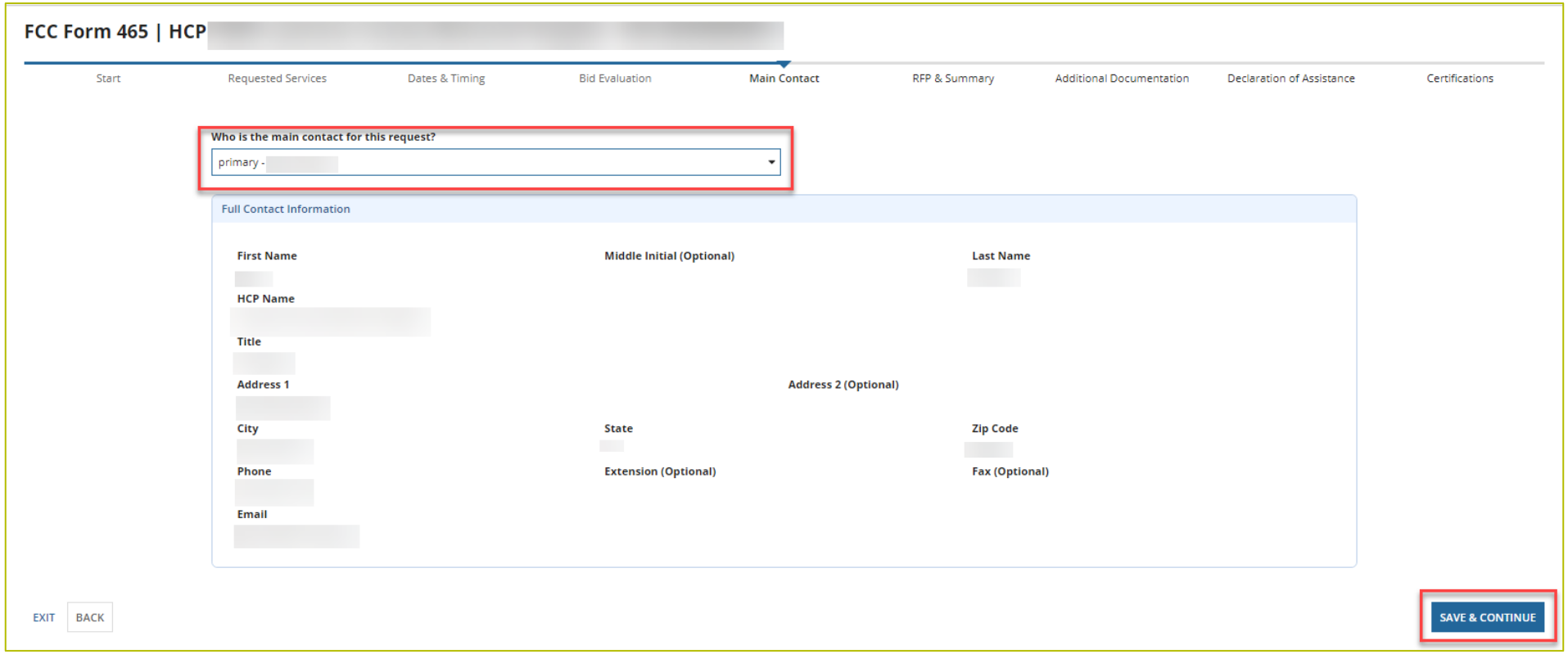
Bid Evaluation

- Select the bid evaluation criteria from the drop-down menu.
  - If you select **Other**, provide a description of the criterion.
- Enter the description of minimum requirements for each criterion.
- Provide details about any disqualification factors, then click **Save & Continue**.



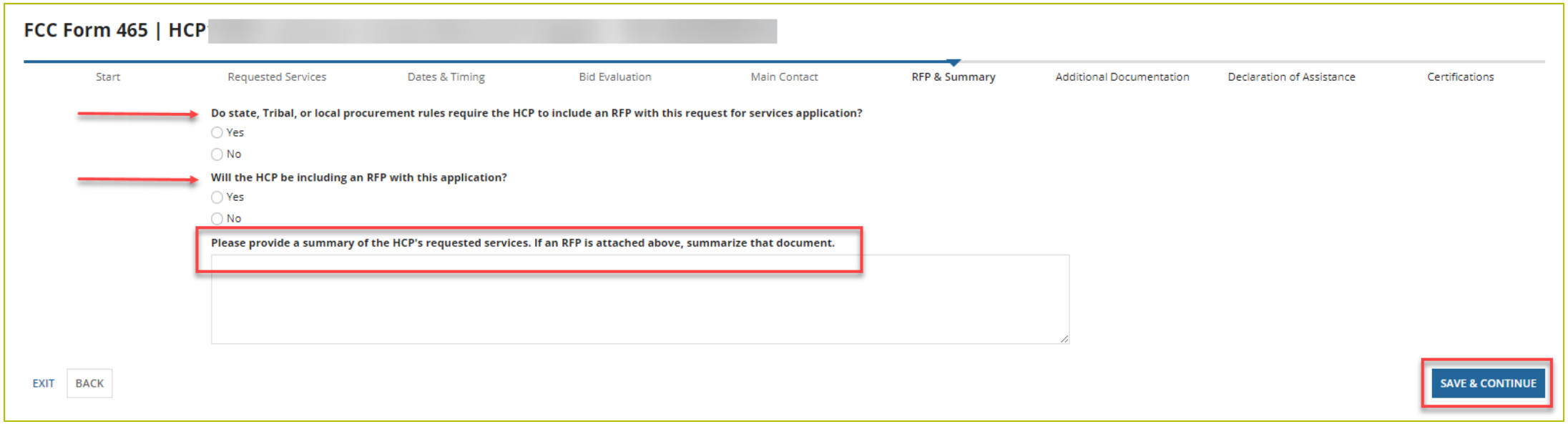
Main Contact

- Choose an account holder from the drop-down menu.
- Information is pre-populated based on information from the FCC Form 460.
- Click **Save & Continue**.



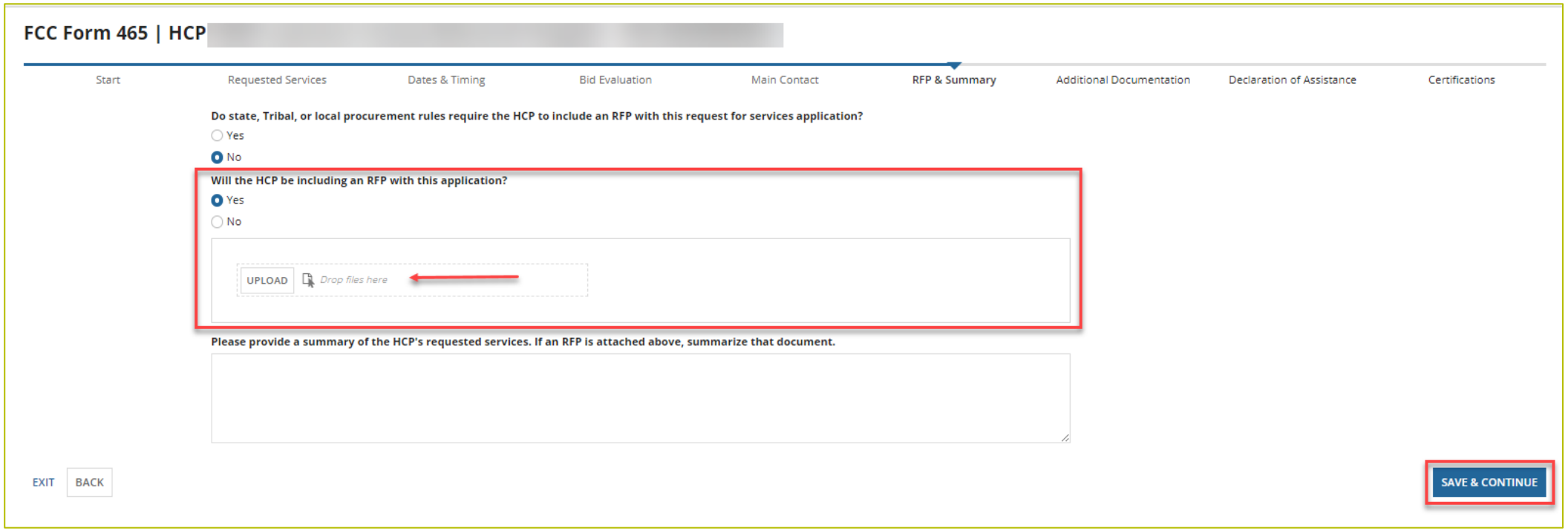
RFP & Summary

- Answer questions about the Request for Proposal (RFP).
- Provide a summary of requested services and/or RFP (if applicable), then click **Save & Continue**.



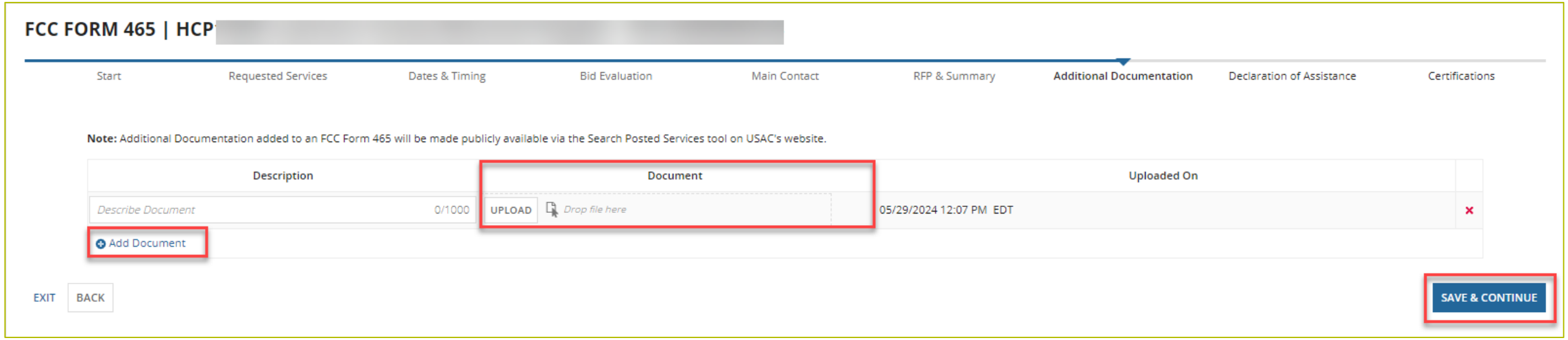
RFP & Summary (continued)

- If **Yes** is selected to the questions, an **Upload** section will appear.
- Upload the RFP, then click **Save & Continue**.



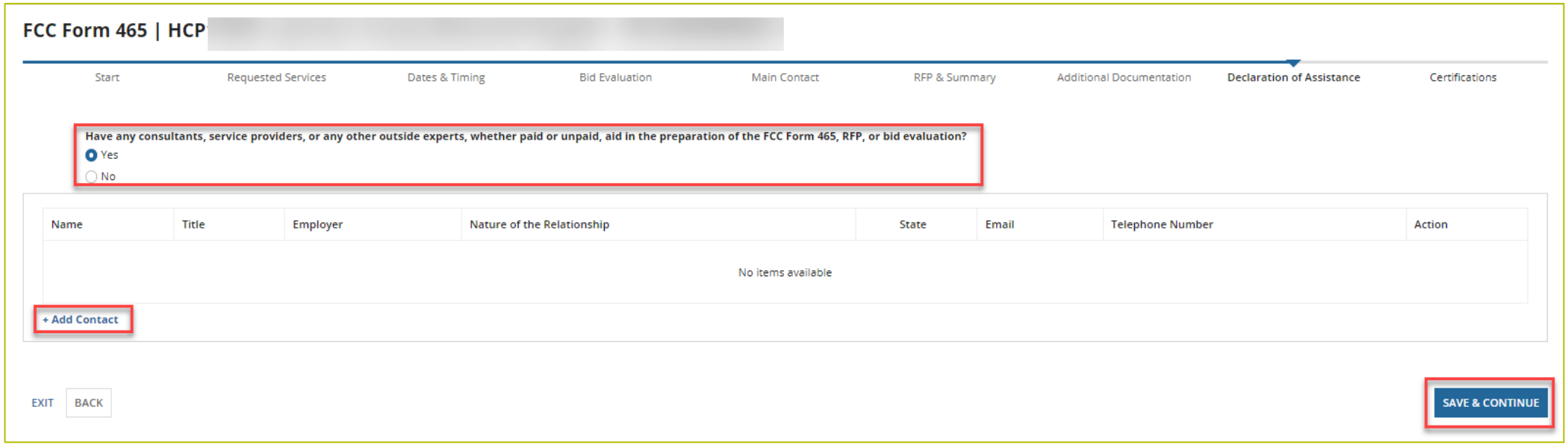
Additional Documentation

- Click **Add documents** for each additional document you are including in your submission.



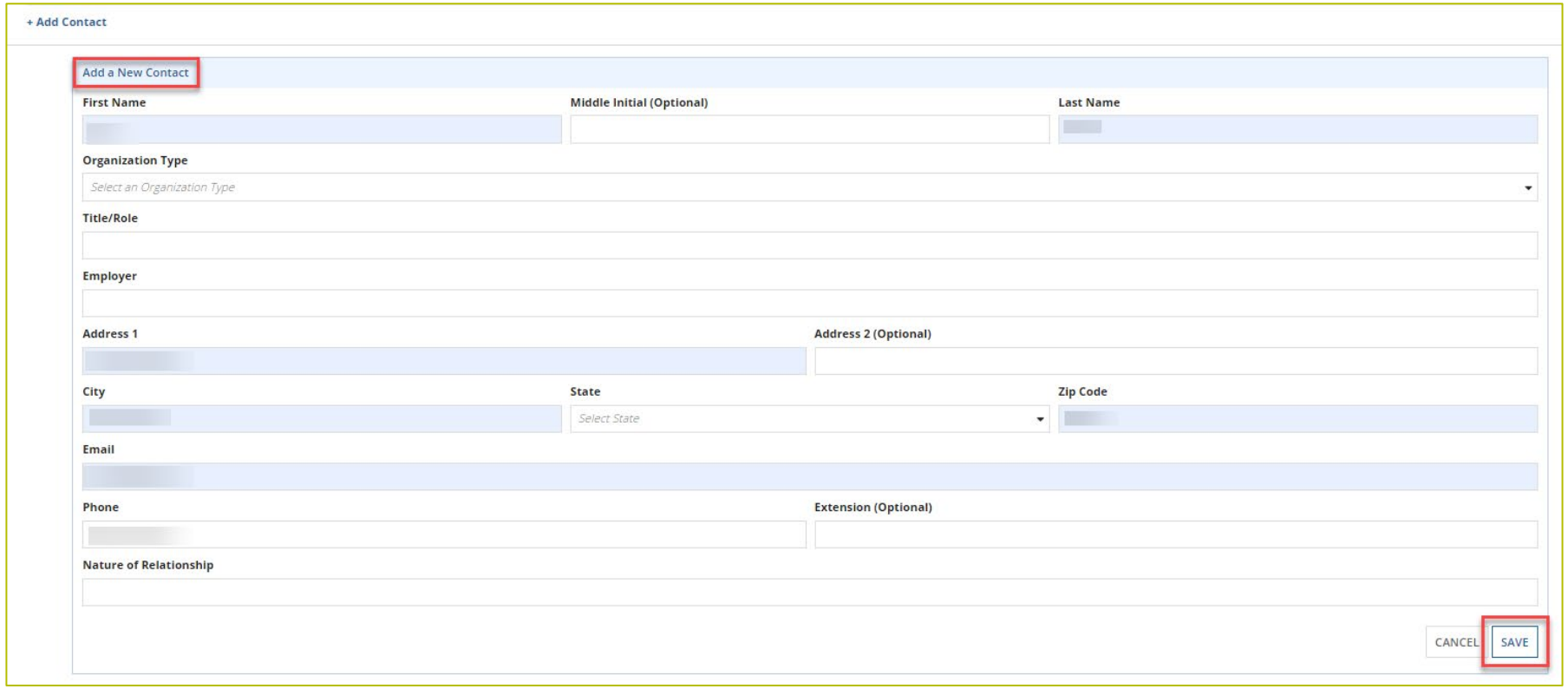
Declaration of Assistance

- Enter information about third parties who assisted the HCP with preparing any FCC Forms or participated in the competitive bidding process.
- If a Tertiary Account Holder submits the FCC Form 461, this field is auto-populated with their information.



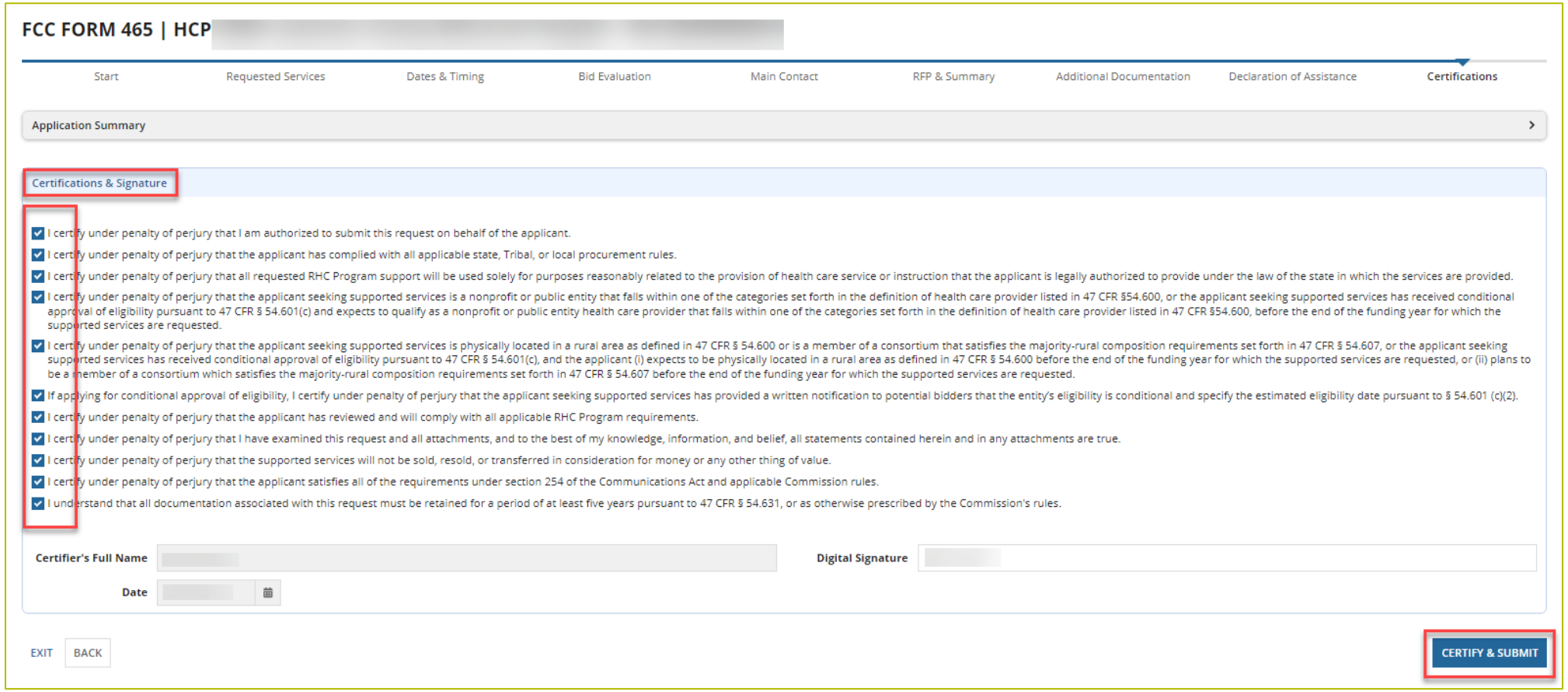
Declaration of Assistance (continued)

- Enter information about third parties who assisted the HCP with preparing any FCC Forms or participated in the competitive bidding process.
- Then click **Save**.



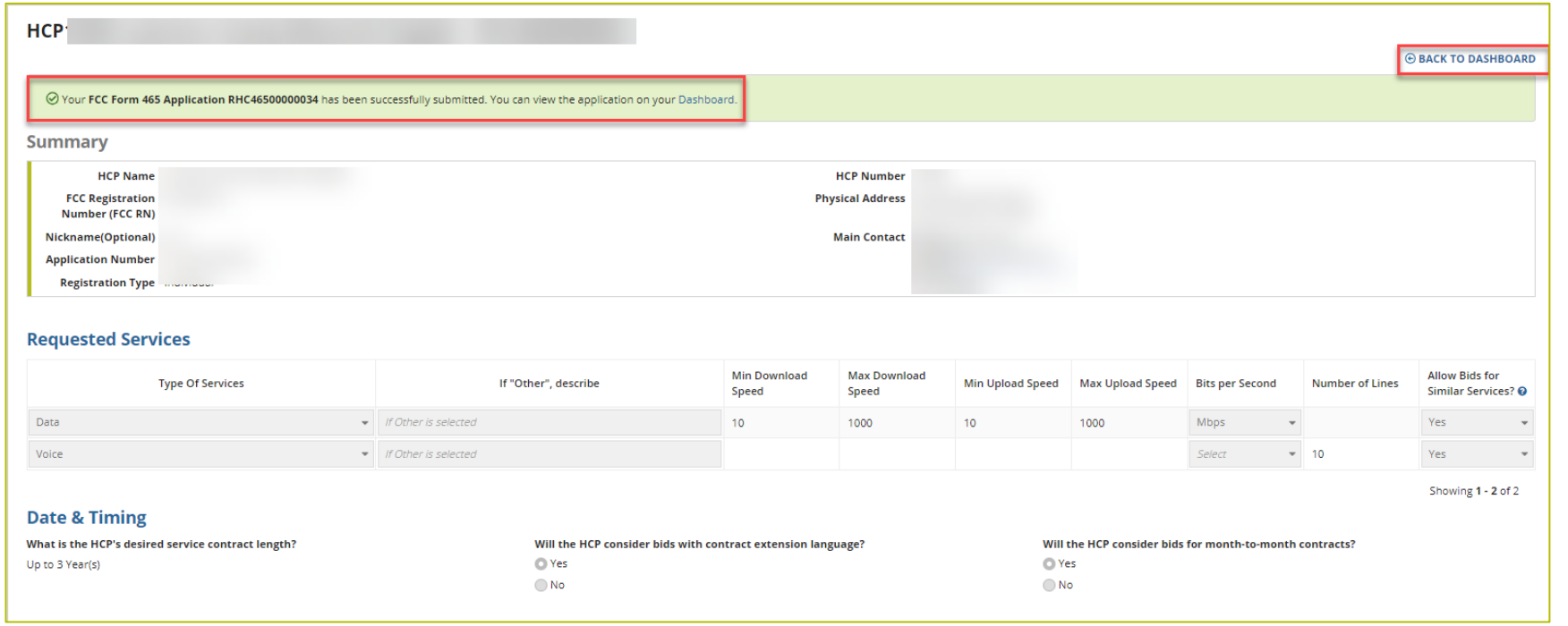
Certifications

- Click the box beside each certification, enter **Certifier's Full Name** in the **Digital Signature** field, then click **Certify & Submit**.



After Submitting

- Once the FCC Form 465 is submitted, the message in the green banner will appear with a summary of the submitted form.
- Click the hyperlink in the green banner titled **Dashboard** or the **Back to Dashboard** hyperlink to return to the RHC Connect Dashboard.



After Submitting (continued)

- An email will be sent confirming that the form was submitted along with a copy of the PDF form.
  - If you do not receive a confirmation email, reach out to the RHC Customer Service Center at RHC-Assist@usac.org.
- Respond to Information Requests within 14 calendar days or by the deadline listed in the Information Request.
  - Failure to respond to the Information Request will result in a denial.
- For FY2025 FCC Forms 465, an auto-generated email will be sent directing applicants to RHC Connect to respond.
- **Applicants should respond through RHC Connect only.**
- Please use the Information Request tip sheet as a resource.

Available for Public Use

Questions?

Best Practices and Resources

Submitting the FCC Form 465 in RHC Connect

Best Practices: Communicating with Your Service Provider

- Once your ACSD has passed and you've chosen a service provider, include them when you reply to Information Requests via email.
- Ensure your service provider is aware of all the necessary documentation needed for future steps in the application process.
- Include language in your bid documentation that confirms your service provider will act in compliance with all RHC program rules and FCC Orders.
- All bid correspondence should be handled via email for audit purposes.
- HCPs and service providers are required to retain documentation for a minimum of five years.

Milestones to Apply for Funding for FY2025: Recommended Last Day to Submit Forms NOT using a Request for Proposal (RFP)

HCF 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 465 (Request for Services)	February 10, 2025 Recommended Date
FCC Form 466 (Funding Request)	April 1, 2025 **Deadline to Submit**

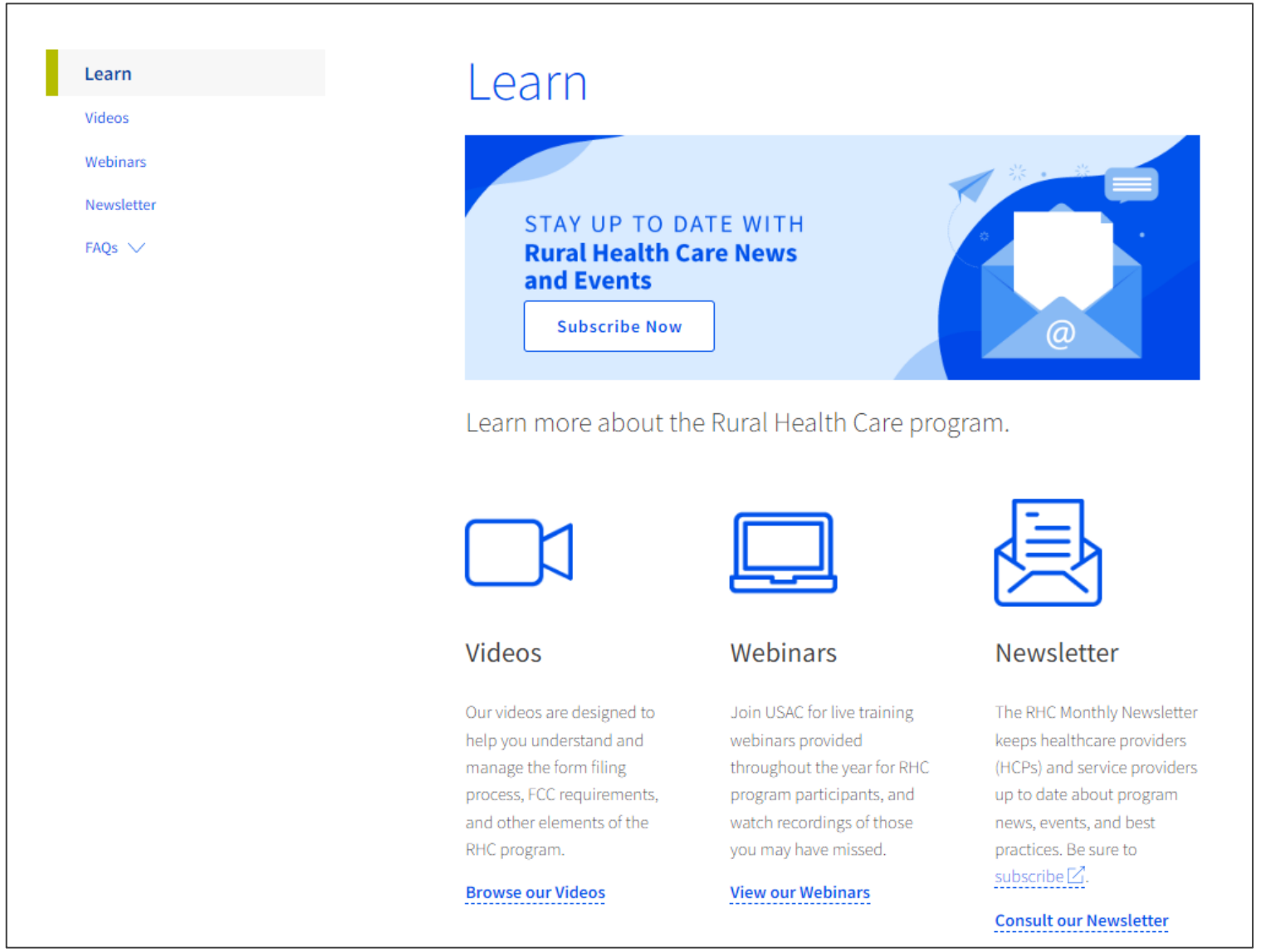
Please note that the FCC Form 460 and 465 submission dates are not mandatory deadlines, but rather recommended milestones to ensure that the FCC Form 465 is posted to USAC's website early enough for a 28-day competitive bidding period before the deadline to submit an FCC Form 466 .

Milestones to Apply for Funding for FY2025: Recommended Last Day to Submit Forms using a Request for Proposal (RFP)

HCF 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 465 (Request for Services)	February 1, 2025 Recommended Date
FCC Form 466 (Funding Request)	April 1, 2025 **Deadline to Submit**

Please note that the FCC Form 460 and 465 submission dates are not mandatory deadlines, but rather recommended milestones to ensure that the FCC Form 465 is posted to USAC's website early enough for a 28-day competitive bidding period before the deadline to submit an FCC Form 466.

RHC Learn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Our videos are designed to help you understand and manage the form filing process, FCC requirements, and other elements of the RHC program.
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Join USAC for live training webinars provided throughout the year for RHC program participants, and watch recordings of those you may have missed.
View our Webinars
Newsletter
The RHC Monthly Newsletter keeps healthcare providers (HCPs) and service providers up to date about program news, events, and best practices. Be sure to subscribe.
Consult our Newsletter

Resources

- Competitive Bidding FAQs
- Requests for Services – Search Posted Services Tool
- RHC Program Request for Services Dataset
- Welcome to RHC - Connect FCC Form 465 webpage
- RHC Connect User Guide - FCC Form 465
- Information Request Tip Sheet
- Subscribe to the RHC Monthly Newsletter

RHC Program Customer Service Center

Email: RHC-Assist@usac.org

- Include in your email:
  - HCP Number
  - FRN Number

- Phone: **(800) 453-1546**
  - Hours are 8 a.m. – 8 p.m. ET
  - Monday- Friday

RHC Customer Service Center

The RHC Customer Service Center CAN	The RHC Customer Service Center CANNOT
Answer general questions regarding both programs	Determine eligibility of a specific site or service before an official form submission
Provide account holder information for an HCP	Review a form or document for accuracy before an official submission
Provide clarity regarding FCC Report and Order 19-78	Contact a service provider or other account holder on someone else's behalf
Provide helpful resources and best practices for forms	Provide documents that are not already accessible in My Portal
Assist with My Portal	Transfer a call to a specific form reviewer

Questions?

Thank You!

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