

Verification of Lifeline Eligibility

Overview:

All Wisconsin ETCs are required to offer Lifeline service. All ETCs are required to verify that customers requesting Lifeline service are eligible before enrolling them. The first step in verifying such eligibility must be a query to the CARES database, using the CALER interface. This is true for all ETCs, including “federal-only” ETCs since using CALER is both a state and federal requirement.

Lifeline Eligibility:

A customer is eligible for Lifeline service if they meet any of the following criteria:

- Have a Household Income (HI) of less than 135% of the federal poverty level (FPL)
- Receive Medical Assistance (MA) or “Medicaid” (or “Badger Care” as it is called in Wisconsin)
- Receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Receive Food Stamps or “SNAP” (or “Foodshare” as it is called in Wisconsin)
- Qualify for State or Federal Home Energy Assistance (LIHEAP or WHEAP) provided their HI does not exceed 135% of the FPL.
- Qualify for the Wisconsin Homestead Tax Credit (Schedule H) provided their HI does not exceed $\leq 135\%$ FPL

Providers must use the CALER interface to verify Lifeline eligibility of Wisconsin customers. This requirement applies to all ETCs, including “federal-only” ETCs.

If the CALER query comes up negative, *and the customer claims eligibility under one of the following two programs*, the providers may verify eligibility using other proof of participation as set forth in the Federal guidelines. Proof of participation may only be used for the following two programs.

- Section 8 Subsidized Housing
- Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefit

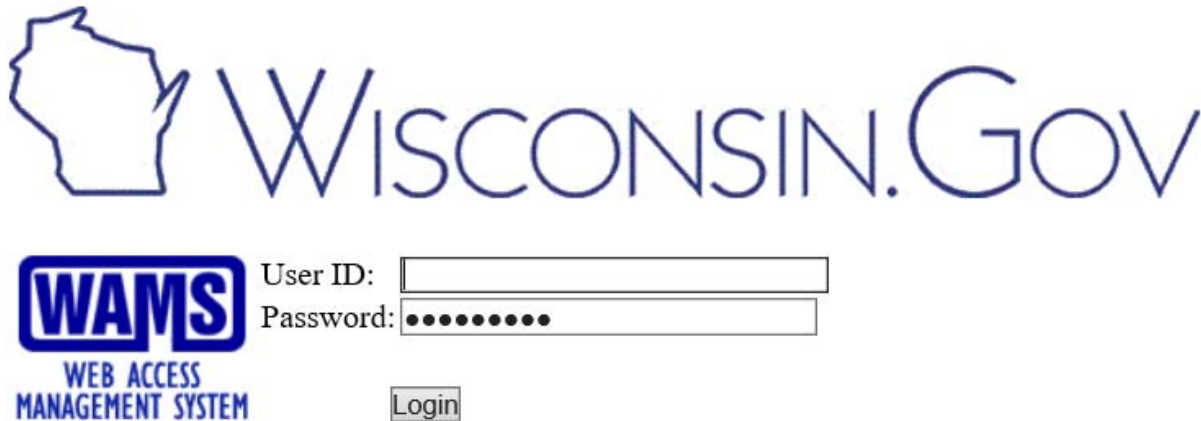
How CALER Works:

Providers enter the customer’s name and social security number into CALER. The system responds with either a “Yes” indicating that the customer is eligible for Lifeline or a “No” indicating that the customer name and SSN did not appear in the relevant databases as a participant in any of the qualifying programs. The system also repeats the name and SSN used, so the provider representative can check for entry errors. CALER cannot be used to verify Section 8 Subsidized Housing or Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefits, but it can be used to verify the income requirement.

To access CALER/CARES, providers must apply for an access code for each company representative that will be using the system. Applications, initiated via email, go through the

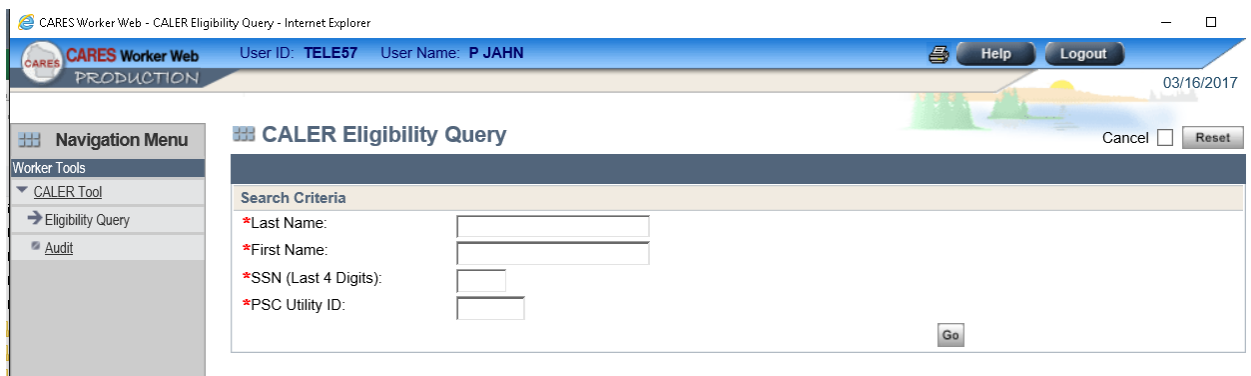
DHS Security Office. Use this email address DHSDHCAAIACC@wisconsin.gov to initiate the process. The provider will be required to sign a contract to authorize use of the CALER interface. DHS charges a \$500 annual fee to cover the costs of maintaining access to CALER.

To initiate a query, the provider logs in on the Wisconsin government's WAMS [website](#).



[Forgot your password? Is your account locked?](#)
[Request a Wisconsin User ID and Password.](#)

Once logged into WAMS, the representative will need to click on “Data Exchange” and “CALER Search.” That will bring up this screen.



The representative then enters the customer’s first and last names, the last four digits of the customer’s SSN, and the company’s PSCW Utility ID number. The company must also upload a PDF copy of the waiver (see below) signed by the customer. If the company has not uploaded a waiver, the representative will be redirected to the upload screen. If a waiver has been uploaded, the representative will receive either a Yes or No result based on whether a match for the customer is found in the database. A Yes result indicates that the customers is eligible. A No result indicates that the customer is not eligible.

Uploading Signed Waivers:

Providers need to upload a PDF (or other accepted electronic format) copy of the signed customer waivers with each request. These waivers may be part of a larger application form, or may be a stand-alone document with the following waiver language and the customer signature. In either case, the waivers must include language substantially similar to this:

“I give permission to the Department of Revenue and the Department of Health Services to verify to [named telephone company] whether I participate in a low-income assistance program that would make me eligible for the lifeline telephone assistance program, or that my household income or status as a Homestead Tax Credit recipient would make me eligible. [Name of company] shall maintain the information in this form and any information received about me from the Departments as confidential account information.”

The form must also include the customer’s signature, either handwritten or electronic.

Providers will not be able to perform initial queries without uploading the appropriate PDF for that customer.

PDFs will not be required for annual reverifications for customers for which the provider has previously uploaded a PDF, or has attested that they have obtained a signed waiver for that customer and that utility number prior to March, 2016. In other words, a PDF will be required for all new queries done after March, 2016, but they will not be required for annual reverifications of customers verified via CALER prior to March, 2016.

Annual Batch Reverification Process:

The CALER system allows providers to upload a single file with the names and last for digits of their customers’ SSNs, and the system will return the file with each customer’s eligibility indicated. Providers upload the batch files through a special log-in using an FTP client program such as FileZilla or WinSCP.

To obtain a login ID for the batch file process, providers need to send an email request to VDLTCALERFTP@wisconsin.gov. The email should include the following information:

1. Identification of whether the requestor is a consultant, a holding company or the ETC itself.
2. The name of the company (ETC, holding company or consulting firm) making the request.
3. The company’s address.
4. The name, title, phone # and email address of the person requesting the account.
5. The PSC utility ID numbers of the companies for which the account will be used.

The batch file to be uploaded should be a .CSV file, titled with the provider’s PSC ID #, followed by the date and time, in the format [#####]-[YYYY]-[MM]-[DD]-[HH]-[MM].csv The

first line of the file should be HDR (for header) and number of records being uploaded. Each additional line should contain five pieces of data per customer. These are the customer ID number, the PSC ID # of the company, the customer first and last name and the last four digits of the customer SSN, subject to the following limits.

- The customer ID number may be anything the provider uses to identify their customers internally, and can be up to 20 characters long. If the company does not use special customer IDs, then just copy the customer's last name here.
- The PSC ID # is up to three to five digit number assigned to the provider by the PSCW.
- The customer first name must be truncated to no more than 15 letters, without hyphens, spaces or other non-letter characters. This is because the CARES database, against which the name is being matched, uses these same rules.
- The customer last name must be truncated to no more than 20 letters, without hyphens, spaces or other non-letter characters. This is because the CARES database, against which the name is being matched, uses these same rules.
- The last four digits of the customer social security number should be in numeric form, e.g. ####, without spaces or dashes.

Once the batch file is uploaded, it will be verified. If the file is not of the appropriate type, or if some of the entries are not in the expected format, the file will be returned with an error message explaining what is wrong. If the batch file is correct, then the system will process the file during slack time on the system, and will be ready for download within one business day. When processed, the system will append a "yes" or "no" for each customer in the batch file. Providers will be able to download the processed file from the appropriate DHS FTP website.

Questions or comments:

If you have questions or comments on lifeline verification or the CALER interface, please contact Peter Jahn of the Commission staff at peter.jahn@wisconsin.gov or 608-267-2338.