

**Universal Service Fund Council Meeting**  
Virtual Meeting  
Public access telephone call-in number: (224) 501-3412  
Access code: 744-531-085

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contact Holly O'Higgins at [holly.ohiggins@wisconsin.gov](mailto:holly.ohiggins@wisconsin.gov).

<b>Open Meeting Agenda for Wednesday, June 17, 2020 from 1 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.</b>
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1. Introductions, Welcome and Announcements

Attending via GoTo Meeting:

Jim Jermain, AT&T, Council Chairperson; Ted Hankins, CenturyLink, Council Vice Chairperson; Michele Ahlman, Clear Sounds; Shari Brunes, Access to Independence; Pam Holmes, Ultratec; David Mortimer, Hospital Sisters Health System; Brad Paul, WisCAP; Adam Raschka, Charter; Michelle Reinen, Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection; Jerry Schneider, Marquette Adams Telephone Cooperative; Janet Zander, Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources (GWAAR)

Attending via telephone: David Byers, NEIT; Vanessa Johnson, New Concept Self Development Center; Nicole Mauritz, TDS Telecom

Commission staff: Kristy Nieto, Division Administrator; Alyssa Kenney, Director of Digital Access; Holly O'Higgins, USF Director; Billy Mauldin, TEPP Director; Pete Jahn, Principle Telecommunications Analyst; Christi Whiting, Commission Attorney.

Members of the public attending: Jean Pauk, TDS Telecom

Not in attendance: Scott Bohler, Frontier

2. *Approval of Minutes of December 17, 2019 (Council vote needed)*

The Council voted unanimously to approve the minutes.

3. Council membership

Welcome to new members:

- i. Nicole Mauritz, TDS Telecom (through December 31, 2022)
- ii. Michelle Reinen, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (through December 31, 2021)

The Council welcomed new members Nicole Mauritz and Michelle Reinen.

4. *Election of Officers (Council vote needed)*

Jerry Schneider nominated Jim Jermain for the position of Chairperson, seconded by David Mortimer. Jim was unanimously elected as the Chairperson.

Jim Jermain nominated Ted Hankins for the position of Vice Chairperson, seconded by David Byers. Ted was unanimously elected as Vice Chairperson.

5. Rules 1-AC-251 status
  - a. Low Income and Rules subcommittees

Holly described the role of the Council in this rules docket is to advise the Commission. Six members of the Council volunteered to participate on an ad-hoc subcommittee to work on this process:

<b>Council Member</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Michelle Ahlman, Clear Sounds	Consumer
Jim Jermaine, AT&T and USF Council Chairperson	Industry
Nicole Mauritz	Industry
Brad Paul, WisCAP	Consumer
Adam Raschka	Industry
Michelle Reinen, Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection	Consumer

6. USF Director Report, Holly O’Higgins

The Council generally addresses the USF budget in its summer meeting, but instead of addressing at this meeting, the Council will do so later in 2020.

- a. Lifeline Program

Holly described the changing rules and dates from the federal Lifeline program that are specific to the pandemic. These include: reduced documentation for unemployment, cessation of involuntary de-enrollment, delayed re-verification, and suspension of re-certification. The Commission will stay on top of these changes, specifically as it pertains to the Lifeline budget, and keep the Council abreast of changes.

Holly shared a summary of Lifeline subscriber statistics from March to June 2020, and noted that descriptions of the different technologies are on the USAC website. Wireless providers are included in the voice subscriber figures.

Holly updated the status of the National Verifier transition, noting that Wisconsin’s posting in the Federal Register indicates that we are nearing the end of the process. We expect to go live on July 8, 2020. The Commission updated its website, and implemented a communication plan to reach out to community agencies on how to work with community members on using the National Verifier. The website now includes a one-pager summarizing the Lifeline program.

On December 1, 2019 the federal government reduced the amount of federal support. Commission staff anticipated requests for revised rates, and developed a data request for those requests. There is another decrease in federal support scheduled for December 1, 2020.

- b. Nonprofit Access Grants

Holly updated the Council on the 2018 and 2019 grants. Grantees have been nimble in switching to different service models in response to the pandemic. The pandemic underscored the value of access to telecommunications. The 2019 grants were a mix of: individualized service available to the community, such as computer labs; purchases of phones and data to support folks for employment and schooling; and access to experts in specialized technology to assist people with disabilities obtain access to telecommunications. The variety of grants demonstrated the value and diversity of programs the USF is able to fund.

The 2020 grant cycle just finished up. The Commission received 33 applications totaling \$1.48 million, allowing the review panel to select the best applicants from a broad pool. The final funding decision will be made by the Commission, and Council members can keep an eye on the Commission's Open Meeting calendar for the discussion; it will be under Docket 5-NF-2020.

#### c. Telemedicine Grants

The Commission recently awarded the 2020 Telemedicine Equipment Grants to 17 grantees, awarding \$500,000 per year, for a total of \$1 million over two years. The Commission received 19 applications for funding totaling \$1.19 million. The Memorandum and the Order from the Commission can be found in Docket 5-TF-2020. Telemedicine is particularly relevant now as a way to deliver socially distanced medical care.

#### d. USF Administrator

The Commission is required to have a USF Administrator. The current Administrator is Solix and they are in the last of the one-year extensions allowable under the contract. The contract was for two years, followed by three one-year extension options. The Administrator has a wide variety of responsibilities including making payments to all grantees; processing funding and voucher requests for TEPP, Lifeline and 2-line VCO; sending invoices to carriers; and, a number of other tasks. The RFP process is underway.

The Council participates in this process as a reviewer. Holly will reach out to the Council when the timeline for reviewers is more firm.

#### e. Open Records

All Council members on all Councils are required to participate in Open Records training. The training is available online through the Department of Transportation LearnCenter. Instructions were provided to Council members, and the due date is July 17, 2020.

#### f. Annual recertification of ETCs and FCC 481 filings

The Commission will send an affidavit with request for supporting document to all carriers subject to annual re-certification. Responses from carriers will be due August 3, 2020. The Commission will certify to USAC that ETCs are appropriately using USF dollars.

### 7. TEPP Program Director Report, Billy Mauldin

TEPP has been impacted by the pandemic with providers, vendors, and Independent Living Centers moving from an in-person to a virtual model for service delivery. However, the application and processing functions at Solix and the Commission were not impacted by the pandemic.

The voucher statistics demonstrate the slow down:

- From July 2019 to March 2020, 181 vouchers were processed monthly with a value of \$82,000
- In April 2020, 59 vouchers were processed, valued at \$38,000
- In May 2020, 135 vouchers were processed, valued at \$71,000
- June is on-track statistically to bring the program back to regular voucher and spending levels.

Of the \$1.4 million TEPP budget, spending (paid vouchers) is at \$144,000, with a balance of \$580,000. Billy noted that he anticipates a surplus at the end of this fiscal year.

Currently, TEPP vendors follow the “Vendor Guidelines.” The program is transitioning to using “Vendor Protocols,” which are substantively similar to the Guidelines. The proposed Protocols are now out for public comment and the deadline is June 24, 2020. Staff will present any comments and the Protocols to the Commission for final review and approval.

Following the approval of the Protocols, the Commission will:

- Send a copy of the Protocols to all vendors along with a form to be signed and returned to the Commission indicating compliance. Of the current 124 vendors, Billy anticipates that the program will return 90-to-95 vendors
- Distribute the updated Equipment List to all vendors via Solix. This will also be posted to the Commission website.

The TEPP Outreach Grants to the ILCs will wrap up on June 30, and all performance reports are due by July 31. Commission staff are looking at possibly transitioning this program to a calendar year schedule.

#### 8. Presentation: Janice Mertes from DPI

Holly noted that Wisconsin USF assessments fund a wide range of programs at the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), the Department of Administration and at the University of Wisconsin.

Janice Mertes, Assistant Director of Teaching and Learning, at the Digital Learning Collaborative (DLC) spoke at the meeting to provide the Council members a broader understanding of the way USF dollars are used to provide access to telecommunications across the state.

The DLC is an organization that operates in partnership with DPI, funded in-part by USF, and serves as the state web academy. Spring 2020 was unique because the pandemic resulted in school districts trying to put every student online for virtual learning. That experience highlighted the disparity in access to the internet for families and students.

The DLC supports providers in the state to expand options for student learning, helping to reduce costs to districts through content access. Janice discussed how the programs funded by the USF provide valuable support programming for families and students throughout the state, specifically the hotspot program for English Language Learning families. Accessibility to internet instruction in terms of

affordability of internet services, and access for people with disabilities, were discussed with the Council. The DLC also worked to provide training to teachers on how to teach digitally, which was rolled out relatively quickly. Janice comments that after catching our collective breath following the end of the school year, she's anticipating a very busy summer to get ready for digital learning in the fall.

## 9. Adjourn

Janet Zander moved to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Brad Paul. The Council voted unanimously to adjourn at 2:52 p.m.