

Universal Service Fund Council Meeting Minutes
Open Meeting Agenda for Wednesday, July 27, 2022, 1:00 p.m.

1. **Call to Order 1:00 PM**, Jim Jermain

Council members present: Jim Jermain, AT&T, Council Chairperson; Ted Hankins, CenturyLink, Council Vice Chairperson; Michele Ahlman, Clear Sounds Communications, Business Community; Nicole Mauritz, TDS Telecom, Compliance Manager; Scott Bohler, Frontier Communication; Brad Paul WISCAP Association; David Byers, Upper Midwest Wireless, Chief Operating Officer; John Van Ooyen, Mt. Horeb Telephone Company; David Mortimer Hospital Sisters Health System, Director of Government Grants; Amanda Miller, Independent Living Centers; Brian Peters, Independent Living Centers; Christopher Stark, University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension; David Berka, United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County; Helen Marks Dicks, AARP; John Kinstler, Ultratec/Captel, TDI; Michelle Reinen, Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection;

*Mike Hill of Charter Communications attended on behalf of Adam Raschka

Commission Staff present: Laura Fay, Tara Kiley, Alyssa Kenney, Billy Mauldin, Dennis Klaila, Rita Hargot, Jenna Schmidt, Kathy Endres, Peter Jahn, Samantha Jurvich

2. **Approval of Minutes of December 13, 2021**, motion by Ted Hankins to approve the minutes and a second by David Mortimer - minutes approved
3. **Council Member Exchange**
 - a. **Introductions of Members and information sharing**
4. **Review and approve Fiscal Year 2023 USF Budget draft**, motion by David Byers to approve the USF Budget and a second by David Mortimer - Budget approved

Laura provided a description of each of the USF Programs in the Budget:

Outreach for Low Income: Also known as the Lifeline Outreach Grant, assists low-income customers obtain affordable access to telecommunications through the Lifeline program, which provides a discount on essential telecommunications services.

Nonprofit Access Grant: Facilitate affordable access to telecommunications through programs or projects not available through other USF programs. 500k each year, projected sustained level of interest.

Telemedicine Equipment: Enables non-profit medical clinics or public health agencies to apply for funding to purchase medical telecommunications equipment. \$1 million over 2 years, FY 2023 is the second year and reflects remaining available funds. Next funding cycle in Fall 2023.

TEPP Outreach and Support Services: USF funding for Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program (TEPP) outreach to the Independent Living Centers (ILCs) to ensure a cooperative venture for delivery of TEPP support services.

Lifeline: Lifeline is the USF's low-income support program. This program reduces monthly telecommunications costs for eligible low-income customers by providing reimbursement to telecommunications providers who meet program requirements and are authorized to receive Lifeline payments. Reduced by \$150,000 from the FY 2022 budget due to trends in spending and decreased subscribership.

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Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program (TEPP): The Telecommunications Equipment Purchase Program (TEPP) is to help people with disabilities buy specialized equipment they need in order to use basic telephone services. TEPP spending has seen decreases for 3 consecutive years. Proposed funding is in line w/trend in decreased spending.

High-Rate Assistance Credit: Eligible Telecommunication Carriers (ETCs) shall provide high-rate assistance (HRAC) credits to residential customers when the price of voice service exceeds one percent of median household income (MHI) for the county in which the service is provided. Zero expenditures since 2018. Will only kick in if the cost of VOICE ONLY is \$50+/month, no providers charge this.

Two-Line Voice Carry-over: For consumers with hearing loss to use captioned telephone service with a second line for simultaneous voice communications. Anticipated decreases in the future, likely due to downward trend in demand for wireline telephone services. –Low demand, 12 customers served.

Administration: Program administration includes contract with USF administrator Solix, Lifeline and general administrative expenses.

5. Nonprofit and Telemedicine Grant Program update and budget plan

Nonprofit Access Grant Program

- The Nonprofit Grant enables nonprofits to apply for funding of programs/projects that facilitate affordable access to telecommunications, assist 1) low-income 2) Disabilities 3) High cost areas of the state
- A maximum total of \$500,000.00 per fiscal year available to be disbursed to qualified applicants.
- 16 grantees (2 received partial funding) to utilize the full \$500k
- Conducting site visits to observe the work of these grant funds inaction – Sam to expand on report
- Half of the recipients requested extensions from 5-NF-2021
- Highlights from this grant round:
 - **Benedict Center:** Will provide 120 low-income, justice-involved women with smartphones, data plans, tablets, and Wi-Fi service to facilitate connections with community resources, education and training and basic needs assistance.
 - **Golden House, Inc.:** A domestic violence shelter that will purchase Chromebooks and tablets for shelter residents' use, prepaid phones and minute cards for shelter and outreach clients to access a safe phone option, and security cameras for outreach clients use at home.
 - **HEAR Wisconsin:** Connect individuals with hearing loss, speech, mobility, or vision loss to advanced technologies to aid in their communication.
- This fall the PSC will submit its USF Biennial Report to the Legislature for review. The Governor's proposed budget will be presented to the legislature early in 2023.
- At this point in time, it is anticipated that the PSC will request continued funding for the NonProfit Access Grant program at the same \$500,000 per year for the FY 2024/2025 biennium.

Telemedicine Grant

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- Enables non-profit medical clinics or public health agencies to apply for funding to purchase medical telecommunications equipment 12 Telemedicine Grant Awards to 12 different applicants. Some highlights:
- This grant round provides funds to:
 - **Access CHC and Aurora Health Care** to purchase retinal cameras for use in screening diabetic patients for diabetic retinopathy.
 - **Mile Bluff Medical Center and UnityPoint Health-Meriter** to purchase camera and monitor suites to implement a new approach to medical care for ICU patients. The equipment will permit Mile Bluff and UnityPoint-Meriter to subscribe to a tele-ICU service provided by UW Health to augment the intensive care provided by Mile Bluff and Meriter.
 - **SSM Health at Home** to purchase 70 home health monitoring units. These units permit a patient to provide vital signs and a video connection daily with a supervising clinic employee. The expectation is that frequent check-ins from home will better identify circumstances when a patient should travel to a clinic for treatment.
 - **Progressive CHC and Scenic Bluffs Health Center** to purchase iPads with an installed interpreter service. These devices provide a way for a patient and care provider to communicate with each other even though they do not speak in a common language.
- PSC staff expect to begin sending out grant agreements this week to set up the grant award accounts for the new grant awards
- This fall the PSC will submit its USF Biennial Report to the Legislature for review. The Governor's proposed budget will be presented to the legislature early in 2023.
 - At this point in time, it is anticipated that the PSC will request continued funding for the Telemedicine grant program at the same \$500,000 per year for the FY 2024/2025 biennium.
 - If approved, the PSC would tentatively schedule its announcement for the next round of telemedicine grants in late fall of 2023, with a tentative due date in February or March 2024. All these dates are preliminary and are subject to change as the budget-making process plays out.

6. TEPP Program updates

Decline in number of vouchers due to Covid and not going into the centers to test equipment. Centers are creative in their efforts for outreach and the services they need.

Since we have six new council members, I will pull up new TEPP logo. Billy Mauldin shared the new TEPP logo on the screen and explained that the Commission worked with a third-party vendor on the design. Most consumers prefer Apple devices because of the accessibility features. iPad used for VRS, video relay, speech apps, commands for mobility restrictions. Billy shared updated TEPP brochure. Updated from the original brochure from 1996, that was not visually friendly. Front and back trifold

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brochure. New brochure is bifold, more visual, shows the steps in a visual manner. Looking forward to getting out to the consumers. 750 mailed out last week, to the ILCs and vendors that request them.

David Mortimer asked if the PDF will be available on the website. Billy explained that there are several versions, printed and online with and without a URL.

John Kinstler asked if there would be a change in the voucher amount, which has not increase in 22 years. Billy explained that there are 6 disability categories and they have changed over the years, Billy showed a spreadsheet showing the changes over the years.

John Kinstler also asked if you can use TEPP to buy android. Billy explained that you can use it for any wireless device.

Brian Peters had questions about coverage under the TEPP Program. Billy explained that the brochure has a contact number for equipment not covered, and Billy will explain.

Jim Jermain the last agenda item and passed it over to Laura.

7. Universal Service Fund Program updates:

- **Grant program updates** – transition to online grant system: All applications managed in the system, required fields, controlled ending deadline, reporting and close out of grants. Webinar yesterday.
- **Trends in Lifeline numbers and reinstating the Lifeline Outreach program** this year. As of July 2022, Wisconsin has a total Lifeline subscriber count of 105,500, which is an 18% take rate of the 565,403 eligible households, need for outreach.
- **Ending of Lifeline waivers:** Many of the COVID-19 waivers for non-usage, annual re-certification rules, reinstatement of de-enrollment and broader income qualification requirements for the majority of Lifeline subscribers ended on June 30, 2022, now no longer eligible due to income and they are now employed. A lot of churn in the economy reflected in the program. Lifeline saw an uptick in subscribers during the pandemic, peaking at 141,254 subscribers in April 2021. However, once disconnections of customers who had left the program or lost eligibility resumed, the total number of Lifeline “customer” fell sharply to a low of 89,000 in October of 2021. Since that time, however, has gradually increased to a current total of 105,500 in July 2022.
- Sam provided an update on her report related to the Nonprofit Access Grant Program and site visits with grantees.
- Laura mentioned next Doodle Poll for next meeting in order to schedule interpreters and whether the meeting will be in person or virtual. Billy asked about Cart and interpreting services. Brian and John said either is good.
- Future of USF
 - One quarter last year the contribution factor reached a record high of 33.4%
 - Broaden the contribution base to include broadband revenues and big tech platforms

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- Direct appropriation from a congressional budget item.
8. **Adjournment**, Jim Jermain entertained a motion to Adjourn. Scott Bohler moved to adjourn and second by Ted Hankins. Meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.