



FCC Establishes Affordable Connectivity Program Pilot & Other Actions to Improve Access for Federally-Assisted Households

Updated August 8, 2022

Background

When Congress passed the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act* in late 2021, it extended and amended the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) program established earlier that year with an additional \$14.2 billion for the new Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), placing it on longer-term footing. The ACP provides a benefit of \$30/month (down from \$50 per month for EBB), a one-time \$100 device discount, increases program eligibility from 135% of the federal poverty line (FPL) to 200% FPL and has new consumer protections.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) published [final rules](#) for the ACP in January 2022, and sought feedback on a proposed pilot to help enroll federally-assisted households, recognizing that only a small number of federally-assisted households enrolled in the EBB even though most were eligible. SAHF learned from our members that many residents declined to enroll into EBB due to the cumbersome enrollment process, service coordinator capacity constraints and the lack of automatic eligibility. SAHF provided [comments](#) to the FCC on the pilot proposal with recommendations to ease ACP enrollment barriers and strengthen collaboration with HUD to better ensure federally assisted households can successfully participate in the ACP.

On August 5, SAHF was pleased to see the [FCC approve](#) its order establishing the one-year pilot program, “Your Home, Your Internet,” which will introduce several methods to increase ACP participation among federally-assisted household, many of which are based on SAHF’s recommendations. In the same announcement, the FCC also took additional actions (outlined below) that will greatly reduce barriers for federally-assisted households participating in the ACP and Lifeline – a federal program that subsidizes the cost of phone (wireline or wireless) and internet services for low-income individuals. SAHF and our members look forward to collaborating with the FCC on the pilot and other actions help bridge the digital divide in affordable housing communities across the country. Below are highlights from the pilot and other actions from the FCC:

“Your Home, Your Internet Pilot Program”

- Provides up to \$5 million for 20 pilot participants for communication and other purposes aimed at increasing enrollment of federally-assisted households, and an additional \$5 million for FCC’s own outreach and coordination with HUD.
SAHF urged the FCC to include designated funding as part of the pilot program and is pleased to see a \$10 million allocation for the pilot to ensure its success. Depending on program demand, FCC could accept more than 20 participants.
- Entities eligible to apply include federal agencies, state and local housing agencies, and nonprofit organizations working with federally-assisted households. The FCC intends to select a variety of pilot participants operating across Tribal, rural, and urban communities.
Under the program rules, SAHF member organizations are eligible to be pilot participants and receive funding. As organizations with trusted relationships between residents and onsite resident services coordinators or service delivery partners, SAHF members are well positioned to support residents enroll in the ACP and support digital navigation efforts.

Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future



- Participants can propose a variety of activities including development of specialized toolkits and outreach materials tailored to federally-assisted households, hands on application assistance and site-based outreach. Participants are also encouraged to be creative in developing pilot program proposals beyond the provided list of activities.
- Participants (including on-site service coordinators) will have limited access to the National Verifier¹ to help residents navigate application process.
SAHF advocated for FCC to collaborate with HUD to establish building-wide eligibility for residents of a federally-assisted properties to streamline ACP enrollment. Though the FCC declined our recommendation, SAHF will continue to advocate for innovative solutions that reduce internet access and adoption barriers for both owners and residents.
- Within 60 days of the release of this Order, there will be a public notice announcing application requirements, application window will be open for no more than 28 days

Other FCC Actions to Enhance Enrollment Process

- Expands automatic eligibility for the ACP and Lifeline programs by clarifying that HUD Project-Based Rental assistance, Section 811 Housing for People with Disabilities, and Section 202 Housing for the Elderly qualify as Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA) that FCC had previously interpreted to be just Public Housing. The FCC will also update ACP application and USAC materials to include more recognizable language to describe FPHA eligibility so participants can more easily identify their respective housing program.
SAHF has long advocated automatic eligibility for all federally-assisted households and this is a significant step forward.
- Directs USAC to “expand and swiftly” finalize revised data sharing agreement with HUD that would operationalize automatic eligibility for federally-assisted households in PBRA, Section 811 and 202. The FCC notes that staff are already working with HUD to explore establishing additional connection with HUD’s TRACS data system and directs USAC to expedite process so pilot program participants can benefit.
*SAHF has also [advocated](#) for HUD and USAC to enter into a data sharing agreement to facilitate automatic eligibility into both EBB/ACP for residents of **all** federally-assisted housing (an agreement exists with HUD’s Office of Public and Indian Housing) and is pleased to see the FCC take these important steps to ease enrollment barriers for residents participating in HUD multifamily programs.*
- Directs USAC to designate a point of contact, trained on issues related to federal housing assistance eligibility, to support pilot participants on the application process.
- Emphasizes expanding collaboration with HUD and other federal agencies to raise awareness of ACP.

For more information, please contact [Lucas Asher](#), Senior Policy Associate, Housing Stability and Resident Well-Being.

¹Managed by the FCC’s administrative entity, Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC), the National Verifier is a system with connections to state and federal eligibility databases that automatically verifies eligibility electronically for ACP & Lifeline.