Mini Guide to the Affordable Connectivity Program for HUD-Assisted Communities

The **Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)** is a **Federal Communications Commission (FCC)** benefit program providing monthly discounts on internet service and devices for eligible households. This program is a big step forward in digital equity and puts federal broadband assistance on a semi-permanent footing for the first time.

This mini guide builds on the ConnectHomeUSA (CHUSA) Webinar "Affordable Connectivity Program for ConnectHomeUSA Communities" held on March 15. You can find the full webinar online at the HUD Exchange. **We hope this combined package of technical assistance materials will help ConnectHomeUSA communities and other HUD-assisted communities better understand the ACP benefit and enrollment process.**

Read on to learn more about the steps to enroll, other resources to help you, and best practices from two ConnectHomeUSA communities!

Helping Residents Register - Chicago Housing Authority Says "Outreach, outreach, outreach…"

Since ACP opened, the **Chicago Housing Authority (CHA)**, led by Patricia Steward, Digital Inclusion and Program Support Manger, has provided direct enrollment assistance to over fifty-five residents using just a small team of staff conducting targeted outreach campaigns, on-site enrollment assistance, and a lot of resource sharing. **CHA has had greatest success reaching residents through enrollment fairs – holistic digital inclusion events where residents can get devices, assistance with ACP enrollment, and other services**. To maximize effectiveness of these events, the CHA team posts flyers and provides checklists of required documentation, so residents come to the fair with everything they need for enrollment.

Challenges and Lessons-Learned

At the outset, CHA staff and residents struggled with the multi-step process, often running into barriers when connecting the ACP benefit to a specific Internet Service Provider (ISP). To address this, CHA contacted ISPs serving their residents to learn what documentation and verification process they require. **CHA now has ISP-specific flyers with instructions for residents to follow on their own. CHA also keeps a record of each resident's ACP application number, password, and other key information and it is setting up a longer-term record-keeping system.**

> ### Key takeaways from CHA
> 1. Share instructions with residents so they come prepared or can enroll on their own.
> 2. Develop ISP-specific information and ACP requirements to share with staff and residents.
> 3. Keep track of important information to help you monitor progress!

Navigating the Multi-Step Enrollment Process

Generally, ACP enrollment is a two-step process. Eligible households must first **apply for the program** and then **contact a participating ISP** to select a plan and have the discount applied to the bill. The second step may be most difficult. Please note: some ISPs have consolidated the process whereby ACP eligibility verification and enrollment is done through them. This is why you may want to first contact ISPs serving your area to understand their process.

1. **Apply for the program at ACPBenefit.org.** If you are assisting a resident with their application, make sure they have all the information they'll need before you start the application. Find a full list of the [required documents here](#) and consider making a checklist for residents! There are options for what documentation to use but consider which information will cause the fewest hiccups – *for example, Pat from CHA recommends using the resident's SSN since other forms of ID may state a different address than the one used for the application.*

2. *Contact an ISP to help residents select a plan and have the discount applied to that plan.* This step may be more complicated *since the verification requirements and process will vary depending on the ISP*. To make this process easier, try reaching out to the ISPs that your residents will be working with first to find out what requirements they have up front. Keep in mind that some residents may need in-person assistance, so don't be afraid to ask the ISP if they

ConnectHomeUSA

can assist customers in their store or if they offer other options for customers to connect ACP to their plan.

> **TIP:** Remind residents they can shop around participating ISPs to find a plan that works for their needs. Many ISPs offer low-cost and market rate plans, and the ACP will cover up to $30 on any of their plans. If a resident selects a plan that is higher than $30, they will be responsible for the remainder of the charges. That said, many ISPs have upgraded their low-cost plans to provide faster speeds and higher data limits – and often times the $30 benefit is enough to cover these plans.

Other Considerations for the Enrollment Process:

- Do you and your staff run into problems in this process? What are they, and how can you address them moving forward to make the process easier for everyone?
- Consider *how* you assist your residents – not every resident is going to need one-on-one assistance, can you develop flyers or tip sheets to help residents navigate the process themselves?
- Can you partner with non-profits, anchor institutions such as libraries, or volunteers to support residents through this process? Is there an opportunity for partnership with the ISPs in your area?

Go to the ACP Application

Jersey City Housing Authority Focuses on ISP Requirements

Jersey City Housing Authority (JCHA) works with the ISP providers participating in the ACP to streamline the enrollment process for residents. Since all JCHA residents are eligible for ACP benefits, the housing authority **starts its enrollment process by understanding the various ISP requirements and low-cost offerings** and supporting residents to select the best plan for their needs. At the start of ACP enrollment, JCHA developed a comprehensive list of ISP offerings in their region by using the USAC ACP Program Providers tool and then called each ISP in the state to confirm the boundaries of their services and their ACP verification process. Once a resident chooses an ISP, JCHA staff walks the resident through the sign-up process to make sure the ACP verification process required by the ISP is followed.

One key step for streamlining the enrollment process for JCHA residents was to identify one verification document that was accepted in the Lifeline National Verifier account – **the HUD 50059 A form**. This document contains all the necessary information ISPs require to verify eligibility for ACP and use of this standard HUD form has expedited the verification process.

> ### Key takeaways from JCHA
> 1. Understand ISP low-cost offerings in your region up front.
> 2. Talk to ISPs to understand ACP verification requirements – they will vary!
> 3. Use the HUD 50059 A form rather than internal documentation.

ConnectHomeUSA

Know your Internet Service Providers (ISPs)

ISPs who elect to participate in ACP will accept the ACP benefit from customers who follow their verification process. Major broadband companies have opted into ACP, and you can find the full list of ISPs here, sorted by state.

In addition to opting in, many ISPs have adapted programs so customers can maximize the benefit of the ACP, in some cases resulting in free monthly internet. The **Benton Institute** published a roundup of the offerings by big cable companies related to ACP. While information is available on most ISPs' websites, you can also call the ISP to find out what options ACP customers have.

Read Big Cable Companies Opt In

Tips for Community Outreach

- **Provide actionable information to resident services staff and resident organizations/leaders** so they are aware of this program and can help spread the word.
- **Identify community leaders** who can help get the word out.
- **Keep ACP on the agenda!** Keep people talking about ACP in every department.
- **Assist the most vulnerable populations.** Seniors may struggle most with navigating the process, so bring enrollment assistance to them.
- **Host enrollment events** and be sure to share information about what documents to bring!

ACP Resources from the FCC

The FCC has several online resources that can help you and your residents navigate the enrollment process:

- **Train the Trainer Program.** Through this program, housing authority staff leading enrollment in their communities can schedule time with an FCC expert to learn more about the program and ask any questions. To schedule a time, email ACPspeakers@fcc.gov or request a speaker through the FCC website.
- **Affordable Connectivity Program Providers.** Search a comprehensive list of ISPs in your state that are participating in ACP. This resource also indicates whether they are providing devices.
- **Consumer Outreach Toolkit.** The FCC website has fact sheets, flyers, infographics, social media posts and more in English, Spanish, and ten other languages.
- **ACP Support Center.** Call **877-384-2575** for direct assistance.
- **ACP Enrollment and Claims Tracker**. See enrollment data in your region by searching based on zip code, state, county.

Reimagining Lifeline: Universal Service, Affordability, and Connectivity

The **Benton Institute** also recently published a report examining data on affordable connectivity in American households and discussing how the ACP is a step toward comprehensive universal service. The author examines how ACP expands on previous broadband benefit programs and offers hope for a permanent broadband assistance solution.

Read the Report here

ConnectHomeUSA