

SUPPORTING STATEMENT

The Federal Communications Commission (“the Commission”) is seeking approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) to revise this information collection to reflect the elimination of most long-form application requirements associated with the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF). This change results from the Commission’s decision in the *Delete, Delete, Delete* proceeding where the Commission determined that certain rule parts – including 47 C.F.R. §§54.315(a)-(b) and §§54.804(a)-(b), are outdated and obsolete, and unnecessary because all associated long-form application review processes have concluded. Additionally, the proposed revisions include retitling this collection from “Application for Connect America Fund Phase II and Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Auction Support” to “Connect America Fund Phase II and Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Auction Support.”

A. Justification

Circumstances that make the collection necessary.

Connect America Fund Phase II Auction

On November 18, 2011, the Commission released the USF/ICC Transformation Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, WC Docket No. 10-90 et al., FCC 11-161 (*USF/ICC Transformation Order and/or FNPRM*), which comprehensively reformed and modernized the high-cost program within the universal service fund to focus support on networks capable of providing voice and broadband services. Among other things, the Commission created the Connect America Fund (CAF) and concluded that support in price cap areas would be provided through a combination of “a new forward-looking model of the cost of constructing modern multi-purpose networks” and a competitive bidding process (CAF Phase II auction or Auction 903). The Commission also sought comment in the accompanying USF/ICC Transformation FNPRM on proposed rules governing the CAF Phase II auction, including basic auction design and the application process.

In the CAF Phase II auction, service providers competed to receive support of up to \$1.98 billion over 10 years to offer voice and broadband service in unserved high-cost areas. The information collection requirements reported under this collection are the result of several Commission decisions to implement the reform adopted in the *USF/ICC Transformation Order* and move forward with conducting the CAF Phase II auction. In the *April 2014 Connect America Order*, WC Docket No. 10-90 et al., FCC 14-54, the Commission adopted various rules regarding participation in the CAF Phase II auction, the term of support, and the eligible telecommunications carrier (ETC) designation process. In the *Phase II Auction Order*, WC Docket No. 10-90 et al., FCC 16-64, the Commission adopted rules to govern the CAF Phase II auction, including the adoption of a two-stage application process, which includes a pre-auction short-form application to be submitted by parties interested in bidding in the CAF Phase II auction and a post-auction long-form application that must be submitted by winning bidders seeking to become authorized to receive CAF Phase II auction support. The Commission concluded, based on its experience with auctions and consistent with the record, that this two-

stage application process balances the need to collect information essential to conducting a successful auction and authorizing CAF Phase II support with administrative efficiency.

On January 30, 2018, the Commission adopted a public notice that established the final procedures for the CAF Phase II auction, including the long-form application disclosure and certification requirements for winning bidders seeking to become authorized to receive CAF Phase II auction support. See *Phase II Auction Procedures Public Notice*, WC Docket No. 17-182 et al., FCC 18-6. The Commission also adopted the *Phase II Auction Order on Reconsideration*, WC Docket No. 10-90 et al., FCC 18-5, which modified the Commission's letter of credit rules to provide some additional relief for CAF Phase II auction support recipients by reducing the costs of maintaining a letter of credit. On January 19, 2023, WCB released a public notice announcing that the Commission had concluded its review of CAF Phase II auction long-form applications. See *WCB Concludes CAF II Application Review, Long-Forms Made Public*, AU Docket No. 17-182 et al., DA 23-49.

Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Auction

On February 7, 2020 the Commission released the *Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Order*, WC Docket Nos. 19-126, 10-90, FCC 20-5 which will commit up to \$20.4 billion over the next decade to support up to gigabit speed broadband networks in rural America. Funding was allocated through a multi-round, reverse, descending clock auction that favored faster services with lower latency and encouraged intermodal competition in order to ensure that the greatest possible number of Americans will be connected to the best possible networks, all at a competitive cost.

To implement the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction (or Auction 904), the Commission adopted new rules for the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction, including the adoption of a two-stage application process. Like with the CAF Phase II auction, this process included a pre-auction short-form application submitted by parties interested in bidding in the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction (FCC Form 183) and a post-auction long-form application that must be submitted by winning bidders (or their designees) seeking to become authorized to receive Rural Digital Opportunity Fund support (FCC Form 683). The Commission received approval for the short-form application (FCC Form 183) in a separate collection under the OMB control number 3060-1252.

On September 30, 2025, the Commission adopted an order that conducted a comprehensive review of legacy requirements and determined that certain high-cost program rules no longer serve any operational purpose. *Delete, Delete Delete; Removal of Obsolete Regulations*; GN Docket No. 25-133, FCC 25-68 (rel. September 30, 2025) (*Delete, Delete, Delete*). This requested change results from the Commission's decision in that proceeding. The Commission determined that 47 C.F.R. §§54.315(a)-(b) and 47 C.F.R. §§54.804(a)-(b) are outdated and obsolete, and unnecessary because all associated proposals using FCC Form 683 have concluded.

Therefore, the Commission proposes to remove the application requirement and retains only the limited ongoing requirements related to the annual maintenance of letters of credit under 47 C.F.R. §§54.315(c) CAF Phase II and §§54.804(c) RDOF.

Currently Approved Requirements in this information collection that are being eliminated:

- (1) Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Auction Application by Winning Bidders for Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Support – Application Contents (FCC Form 683) (See 12.a): Sections

54.804(b) and (c) of the Commission's rules specify the requirements for the information to be collected in applications submitted by winning bidders or their designated operating companies seeking to receive Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction support, 47 CFR § 54.804(b), (c). Specifically, each long-form applicant must submit the following within the number of business days after release of the *Auction 904 Closing Public Notice* as provided by public notice or by the deadline noted below:

1) The identification of the party seeking the support, including ownership information as set forth in section 1.2112(a) of the Commission's rules, 47 CFR §§ 1.2112(a), 54.804(b)(2)(i).

2) A certification that the long-form applicant is financially and technically qualified to meet the public interest obligations for each performance tier and latency combination and in each area for which it seeks to be authorized to receive support, 47 CFR § 54.804(b)(2)(ii).

3) A certification that the long-form applicant will meet the relevant public interest obligations for each relevant performance tier and latency combination, including the requirement that it will offer service at rates that are equal or lower to the Commission's reasonable comparability benchmarks for fixed services offered in urban areas, 47 CFR § 54.804(b)(2)(iii).

4) A description of the technology and system design the long-form applicant intends to use to deliver voice and broadband service, including a network diagram which must be certified by a professional engineer. The professional engineer must certify that the network can deliver to at least 95 percent of the required number of locations in each relevant state, voice and broadband service that meets the requisite performance requirements. 47 CFR § 54.804(b)(2)(iv). A long-form applicant must submit a high-level overview of its intended technology and system design for each state in which winning bids were made within a certain number of business days after release of the *Auction 904 Closing Public Notice* as provided by public notice, and must submit a more detailed description and the network diagram within a specified number of days after release of the *Auction 904 Closing Public Notice* as provided by public notice.

5) A certification that the long-form applicant will have available funds for all project costs that exceed the amount of support to be received from the Rural Digital Opportunity fund auction for the first two years of its support term and that the long-form applicant will comply with all program requirements, including service milestones, 47 CFR § 54.804(b)(2)(v).

6) A description of how the required construction will be funded, including financial projections that demonstrate the applicant can cover the necessary debt service payments over the life of the loan, if any, 47 CFR § 54.804(b)(2)(vi).

7) A certification that the party submitting the application is authorized to do so on behalf of the long-form applicant, 47 CFR § 54.804(b)(2)(vii).

8) A certification and documentation, including the relevant ETC designation order, demonstrating that the long-form applicant has in fact obtained the necessary ETC designation in the relevant areas (must be submitted within 180 days after the release of the *Auction 904 Closing Public Notice*). 47 CFR § 54.804(b)(5). Before a long-form

applicant can be authorized to receive Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction support, it will be required to obtain designation as an ETC from the relevant state commission or the Federal Communications Commission, as applicable, in the areas where it will be receiving the support. See 47 U.S.C. § 214(c)(2), (6). Approval for the information collection associated with obtaining an ETC designation from the Commission can be found under OMB control number 3060-1081.

9) Audited financial statements from the prior fiscal year that are audited by an independent certified public accountant (must be submitted within 180 days after the release of the *Auction 904 Closing Public Notice*; required only of long-form applicants that have provided voice, broadband, and/or electric transmission or distribution service for at least two years that did not submit audited financial statements with the short-form application). 47 CFR § 54.804(a)(7)(i), (b)(4).

10) A letter of credit commitment letter from an eligible bank committing to issue an irrevocable stand by letter of credit that, at a minimum, provides the dollar amount of the letter of credit and the issuing bank's agreement to follow the terms and conditions of the Commission's model letter of credit (must be submitted within a specified number of days after the release of the *Auction 904 Closing Public Notice* as provided by public notice). 47 CFR § 54.804(b)(3).

11) An irrevocable stand-by letter(s) of credit acceptable to the Commission from an eligible bank that covers the first year of Rural Digital Opportunity Fund support, at a minimum, and a letter of credit opinion letter from legal counsel meeting the Commission's requirements (must be obtained before a long-form applicant will be authorized to receive support). 47 CFR § 54.804(c).

12) Such additional information as the Commission may require, 47 CFR § 54.804(b)(2) (viii).

Currently Approved Requirements in this information collection (no changes to requirements):

(2) Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Annual Submission of Letter of Credit (See 12.b): Before a support recipient can receive its next year's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction support, it must modify, renew, or obtain a new letter of credit to ensure that it is valued, at a minimum, one year of support, until the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) has verified that the recipient has served 100 percent of the Connect America Cost Model-determined total (or the adjusted Connect America Cost Model location count if there are fewer locations) by the end of year six. The amount of support the letter of credit must cover is dependent on whether the support recipient has met certain service milestones. Any support recipient that obtains a new letter of credit, rather than renewing or amending an existing letter of credit, will also need to obtain a new attorney opinion letter accompanying the new letter of credit. 47 CFR § 54.804(c).

(3) Connect America Phase II Auction - Annual Submission of Letter of Credit (See 12.c): Before a support recipient can receive its next year's CAF Phase II auction support, it must modify, renew, or obtain a new letter of credit to ensure that it is valued, at a minimum, at the total amount of support that has already been disbursed plus the amount of support that is going to be provided in the next year, subject to modest adjustments in value once the support recipient has substantially met its service obligations. The support recipient will be required to maintain an open letter of credit until it has certified that its buildout is complete and

USAC has verified buildout. Any support recipient that obtains a new letter of credit, rather than renewing or amending an existing letter of credit, will also need to obtain a new attorney opinion letter accompanying the new letter of credit. 47 CFR § 54.315(c).

Statutory authority for this information collection is contained in 47 U.S.C. §§ 154, 214, 254, and 303(r) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended.

This information collection does not affect individuals or households; thus, there is no impact under the Privacy Act.

2. *Use of Information.* The remaining information collection: annual submission, modification, renewal, or replacement of letters of credit is used by the Commission and USAC to verify compliance with CAF II and RDOF deployment milestones and to protect program funds.

3. *Technological collection techniques.* The Commission is committed to meeting the requirements of the E-Government Act, which requires government agencies to provide the general public the option of submitting information or transacting business electronically to the maximum extent possible. Applicants will be permitted to submit the required documentation electronically. No changes are being made to the technological method of submission.

4. *Efforts to identify duplication.* There will be no duplication of information.

5. *Impact on small entities.* The collection of information may affect small entities as well as large entities. In conformance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, the Commission is making an effort to minimize the burden on all respondents regardless of size. The Commission has limited the information requirements under this collection to that which is necessary for compliance with Commission's Universal Service Fund programs.

6. *Consequences if information is not collected.* Without annual letters of credit, the Commission could not ensure the protection of universal service funds in the event of non-compliance. Thus, the information is being collected to meet the objectives of the universal service program.

7. *Special circumstances.* There are no special circumstances associated with this information collection.

8. *Federal Register notice; efforts to consult with persons outside the Commission.* A 60-day notice was also published in the Federal Register pursuant to 5 C.F.R. § 1320.8(d) on January 30, 2026. See 91 FR 4081. No comments were received from the public as a result of this notice.

9. *Payments or gifts to respondents.* Respondents will not receive any payments or gifts.

10. *Assurance of confidentiality.* Respondents may request confidential treatment pursuant to 47 C.F.R. § 0.459.

11. *Questions of a sensitive nature.* This information collection does not address any private matters of a sensitive nature.

Estimates of the hour burden of the collection to respondents. The following represents the hour burden on the collections of information.

a. Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Long-Form Application Requirements (FCC Form 683) (eliminated requirement):

- (1) Number of respondents: 0.
- (2) Frequency of response: 0.
- (3) Total number of responses per respondent: 0.
- (4) Estimated time per response: 0.
- (5) Total annual hour burden: 0 hours.

0 hours per respondent for approximately 0 applicants/respondents each filing 0 times. Total annual hour burden is calculated as follows:

0 applicants/respondents x 0 submissions = 0 responses x 0 hours = **0 total annual hours.**

- (6) Total estimate of in-house cost to respondents: **\$0** (0 hours x \$0/hour).
- (7) Explanation of calculation: Given the Commission proposes to eliminate these information collection requirements, the total annual hour burden and in-house costs for these respondents will be 0.

b. Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Annual Submission of Letter of Credit (no changes):

- (1) Number of respondents: Approximately 400. Each recipient of Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction support will need to at a minimum submit a renewed or obtain a new letter of credit annually until USAC has verified that the recipient has served 100 percent of the Connect America Cost Model-determined location total (or the adjusted Connect America Cost Model location count if there are fewer locations) by the end of year six. Recipients that obtain a new letter of credit, rather than renewing or amending an existing letter of credit, will also need to submit a new attorney opinion letter accompanying the new letter of credit.
- (2) Frequency of response: Annually.
- (3) Total number of responses per respondent: Approximately 1.
- (4) Estimated time per response: 2 hours.
- (5) Total annual hour burden: 800 hours.

2 hours per respondent for approximately 400 support recipients filing annually. Total annual hour burden is calculated as follows:

400 recipients x 1 submission = 400 responses x 2 hours= **800 total annual hours.**

- (6) Total estimate of in-house cost to respondents: **\$62,520** (800 hours x \$78.15/hour).

(7) Explanation of calculation: The Commission estimates that support recipients will use staff equivalent to a GS-14/Step 5 (\$78.15/hour) Federal employee to obtain, compile, and submit the required documentation to the Commission.

400 (responses) x 2 (hours to obtain, compile, and submit documentation) x \$78.15/hour = \$62,520.

c. CAF Phase II Auction Annual Submission of Letter of Credit (no changes):

(1) Number of respondents: Approximately 130. Each recipient of CAF Phase II auction support will need to submit a renewed or new letter of credit annually until it has certified that its buildout is complete and the USAC has verified the buildout. Recipients that obtain a new letter of credit, rather than renewing or amending an existing letter of credit, will also need to submit a new attorney opinion letter accompanying the new letter of credit.

(2) Frequency of response: Annually.

(3) Total number of responses per respondent: Approximately 1.

(4) Estimated time per response: 2 hours.

(5) Total annual hour burden: 260 hours.

2 hours per respondent for approximately 130 support recipients filing annually. Total annual hour burden is calculated as follows:

130 recipients x 1 submission = 130 responses x 2 hours= **260 total annual hours.**

(6) Total estimate of in-house cost to respondents: **\$20,319** (260 hours x \$78.15/hour).

(7) Explanation of calculation: The Commission estimates that support recipients will use staff equivalent to a GS-14/Step 5 (\$78.15/hour) Federal employee to obtain, compile, and submit the required documentation to the Commission.

130 (responses) x 2 (hours to obtain, compile, and submit documentation) x \$78.15/hour = \$20,319.

The estimated respondents and responses and burden hours are listed below:

Information Collection Requirements	Number of Respondents	Number of Responses Per Year	Estimated Time per Response (hours)	Total Burden Hours	In-house Cost to Respondents
a. Deleted RDOF Long-Form 54.804(c)	0	0	0	0	0
b. Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Annual Submission of Letter of Credit (no changes)	400	400	2	800	\$62,520
c. CAF Phase II Auction Annual Submission of Letter of Credit (no changes)	130	130	2	260	\$20,319

TOTALS:

Total Number of Respondents: 530.

Total Number of Responses Annually: 530.

Total Annual Hourly Burden for Requirements (a) – (c): 1,060.

Total Annual In-House Costs to Respondents: \$82,839

12. *Estimates of the cost burden of the collection to respondents.* There are no outside costs to the respondents for this information collection. See the last column in the chart in item 12 above for the estimated in-house cost to respondents.

14. *Estimates of the cost burden to the Commission.* There will be few, if any, costs to the Commission because ensuring proper use of universal service support is already part of Commission duties.

15. *Program changes or adjustment.* The Commission is reporting a program change as a result of revised requirements. The application process for the RDOF winning bidders has concluded and the Commission is proposing eliminating the information collection requirement related to the RDOF winning bidders, FCC Form 683. With the elimination of the application requirement, the total number of annual responses has decreased from 930 to 530 (-400) and the annual burden hours also decreased from 5,860 to 1,060 (-4,800). The number of respondents remains the same.

There are no adjustments being reported to this collection.

16. *Collections of information whose results will be published.* The information collection will not be published for statistical use. As discussed above, the Commission will make any non-proprietary information publicly available as the Commission deems appropriate.

17. *Display of expiration date for OMB approval of information collection.* There is no paper form associated with this information collection; it is collected electronically through the Commission's Electronic Comment Filing System. The Commission seeks approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of this information collection. OMB approval of the expiration date for the Commission's information collection will be displayed on OMB's website.

18. *Exception to the certification statement for Paperwork Reduction Act submission.* There are no exceptions to the certification statement.

B. Collections of Information Employing Statistical Methods:

No statistical methods are employed.