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Lifeline Listening Session for Tribal Stakeholders

Tuesday, April 9, 2024

Universal Service Administrative Co.

Agenda

- USAC 101
- Break
- Listening Session

Meet Our Team

Gem Shandiin Labarta

Tribal Liaison | Shared Services

Provide clear, accurate, real-time support to Tribal Stakeholders.

TribalLiaison@usac.org

Winta Woldu

Communications Specialist | Lifeline

Winta creates website content and training for consumer advocates, consumers, and service providers.

Winta.Woldu@usac.org

Kevin Green Jr.

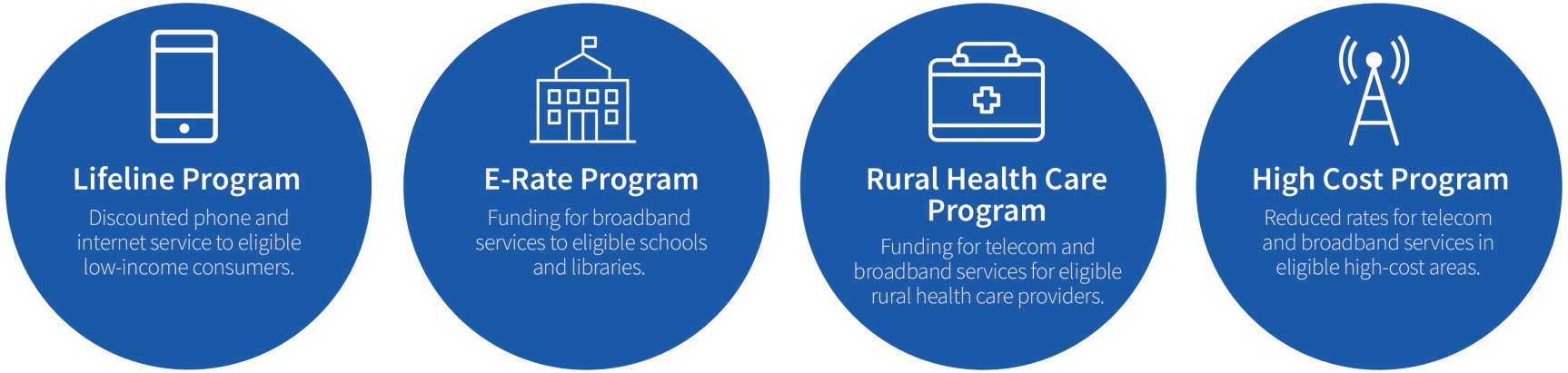
Sr. Director | Lifeline

Kevin manages USAC's relationship with stakeholders and vendors.

Kevin.Green@usac.org

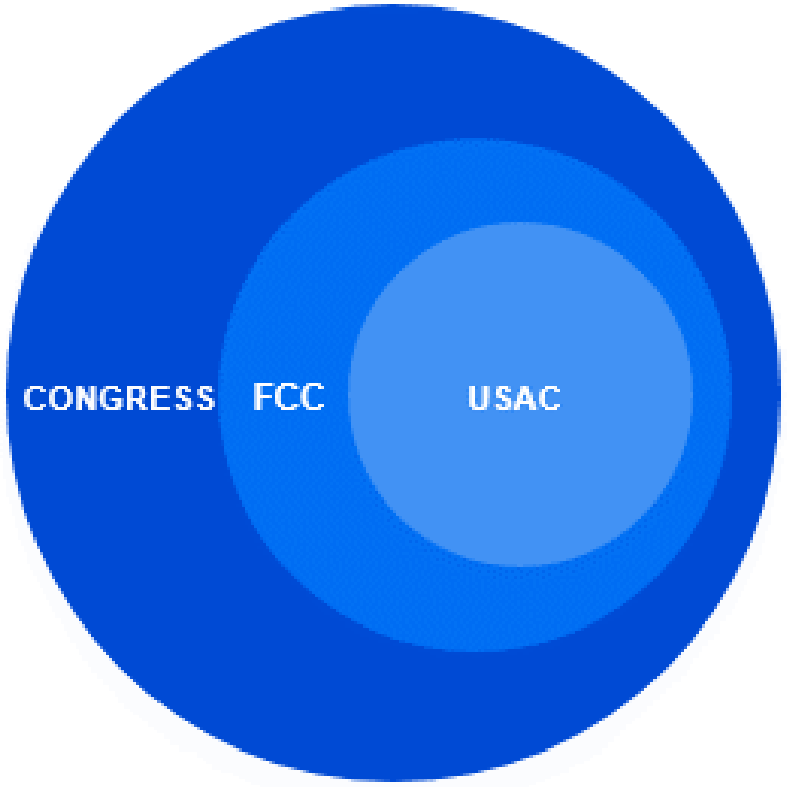
Who We Are: The Universal Service Administrative Company

- The **Universal Service Administrative Company** (USAC) is an independent not-for-profit organization designated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).
- USAC is responsible for administering the **Universal Service Fund** (USF) and its four programs.
- The USF exists to ensure that all people in the United States have access to quality and affordable connectivity services.



Overview: Who Makes the Rules?

- Congress enacted the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which tasks the FCC with ongoing management of the Lifeline program and other universal service efforts.
- The FCC sets rules and policies for the program and gives direction to USAC.
- USAC is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the Lifeline program in accordance with FCC requirements.



E-Rate Program

Ensuring that schools and libraries across the U.S. are connected to information and resources through the internet

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E-Rate Program: Overview

- Supports schools and libraries across the nation in obtaining affordable, high-speed broadband services (or internal connections) that can increase learning opportunities and services for students and library patrons
- Eligible applicants: public or private schools (K-12), libraries, and groups of schools and libraries (e.g., consortia, districts, systems)
- Available funding: reduces the costs of eligible equipment and services by 20 percent to 90 percent

E-Rate Program: Tribal Libraries

- In 2022, the FCC expanded E-Rate rules to include Tribal libraries, ensuring their eligibility for USF support.
- In 2023, the FCC further amended its E-Rate rules to make eligible for support Tribal college or university libraries that act as a public library in their communities.
- A library may be designated as a Tribal library by a Tribal government (e.g., pursuant to a Tribal Resolution).
- A Tribal library may also work with its local state library administrative agency.
- Tribal libraries should demonstrate three characteristics of a library, commonly associated with Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grants to Native American libraries:
  - Regularly scheduled hours
  - Staff
  - Materials available for library users

E-Rate Program: Improving E-Rate for Tribal Applicants

A Report and Order adopted on July 20, 2023 amended program rules to enhance Tribal applicants' access to the E-Rate program and encourage wider program participation.

- Extended E-Rate eligibility to Tribal college or university libraries also serving as local public libraries
- Created a new competitive bidding exemption for libraries seeking Category Two services and equipment that costs $3,600 or less per year, per library
- Increased the maximum Category Two discount rate from 85 percent to 90 percent and the Category Two funding floor from $25,000 to $55,000 for Tribal libraries
- Provided guidance on cost allocation issues experienced by applicants
- Adopted a formal definition of "Tribal" for the E-Rate program
- Expanded USAC Board of Directors to add a Tribal community representative
- Increased USAC outreach and training on E-Rate and the USF programs for Tribal applicants
- Sought comments on simplification of other program rules for all E-Rate applicants

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Rural Health Care Program

Connecting health care facilities across America

Universal Service Administrative Co.

Rural Health Care Program

- The Rural Health Care (RHC) program provides funding to eligible health care providers for telecommunications and broadband services needed to deliver health care.
  - Telecommunications Program funds voice and other telecommunications services
  - Healthcare Connect Fund (HCF) Program funds broadband services, network equipment, and related costs
- Eligible applicants: non-profit or public health care providers located in a rural area (as defined by the FCC).
  - Eligible health care providers must meet program requirements.

High Cost

Expanding access to modern communications networks across rural America

Universal Service Administrative Co.

High Cost Program

- The federal universal service High Cost program (including the Connect America Fund) is designed to ensure that consumers in rural, insular, and high-cost areas have access to modern communications networks capable of providing voice and broadband service, both fixed and mobile, at rates that are reasonably comparable to those in urban areas.
- The program fulfills this universal service goal by allowing eligible carriers who serve these areas to recover some of their costs from the federal Universal Service Fund.

FCC Form 481

- All eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs) participating in High Cost and/or Lifeline programs must file FCC Form 481 annually.
- FCC Form 481 collects financial and operational information used to validate carrier support.
- Tribal Officials can download and view FCC Form 481 data submitted by carriers that serve their lands using the 54.314 System in E-File.
- New! Tribal Access to FCC Form 481 User Guide

Questions?

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Break

Lifeline

Lowering the monthly cost of phone and internet service

Lifeline Program

The Lifeline program is a benefit program that helps low-income households pay for phone or internet service.

Eligible households can receive:

$9.25 Standard Discount
Up to $9.25/month discount for internet or bundled services and up to $5.25/month for phone service that meets the minimum service standards.

$34.25 Tribal Discount
Up to $34.25/month discount for households on qualifying Tribal lands.

$100 Link Up Discount
A one-time discount of up to $100 off the initial set up fees at addresses on qualifying Tribal lands receiving service from certain service providers.

The Lifeline benefit is limited to one monthly service discount per household.

Lifeline Program

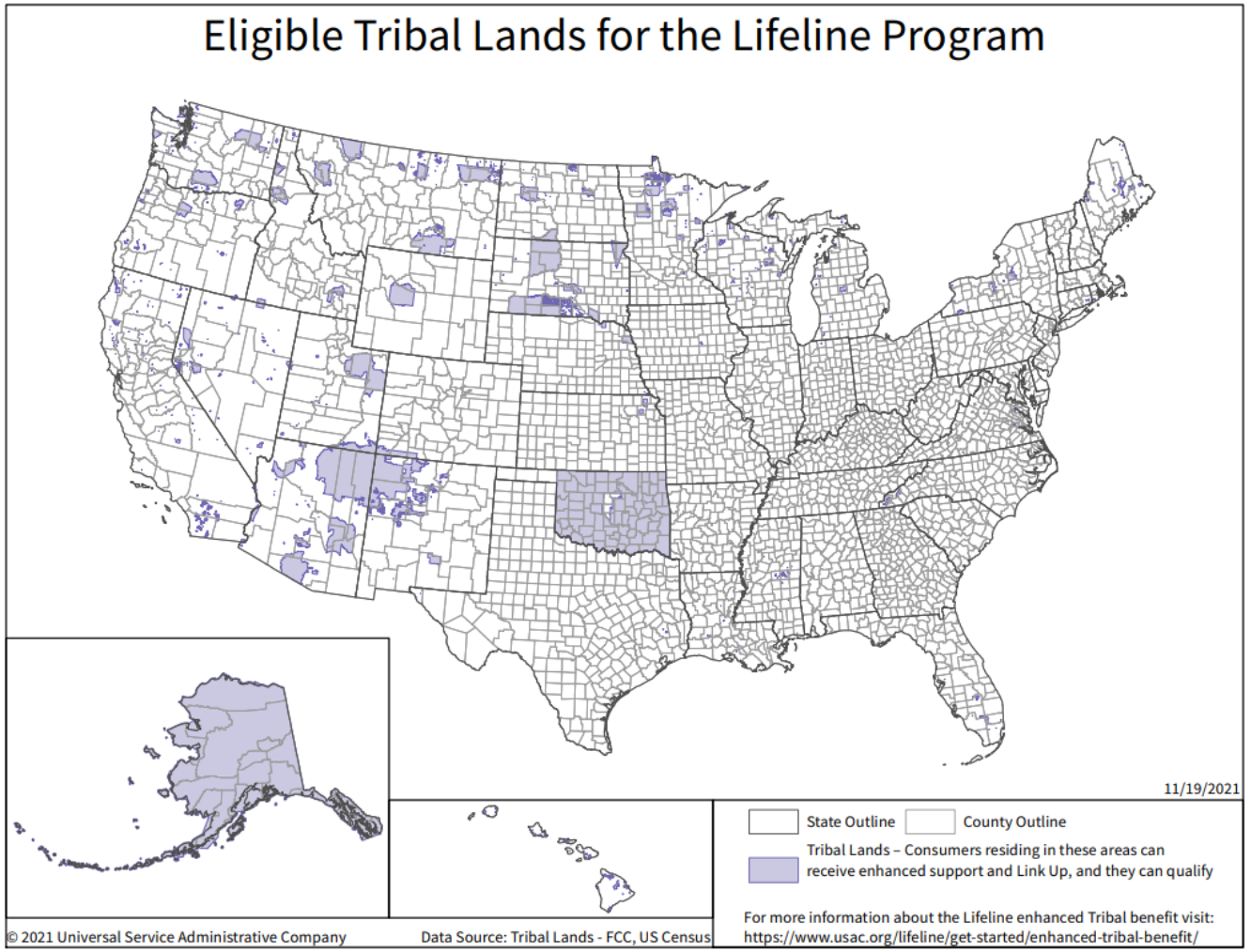
There are **three ways** a household can qualify for the Lifeline program:

- Household income at or below 135 percent of the federal poverty guidelines.
- Participation in certain federal assistance programs such as SNAP, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income, federal housing assistance, or Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefit.
- Participation in certain Tribal assistance programs (only available to households that live on Tribal lands) such as Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Head Start, Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (Tribal TANF), or Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations.

Lifeline Program

- Only one Lifeline benefit is allowed per household.
  - A household is a group of people who live together and share income and expenses.
- Benefit qualifying person (BQP): If an individual is not eligible for Lifeline but has a dependent that is eligible (e.g., a child), the individual may qualify for Lifeline program benefits based on the status of their dependent.

Lifeline Program



Lifeline Eligible Tribal lands map.

Lifeline Program

Apply Online

- Visit LifelineSupport.org and select *Apply Now.*

Apply by Mail

- Fill out and send in the Lifeline Application Form (Spanish).

Apply With a Service Provider

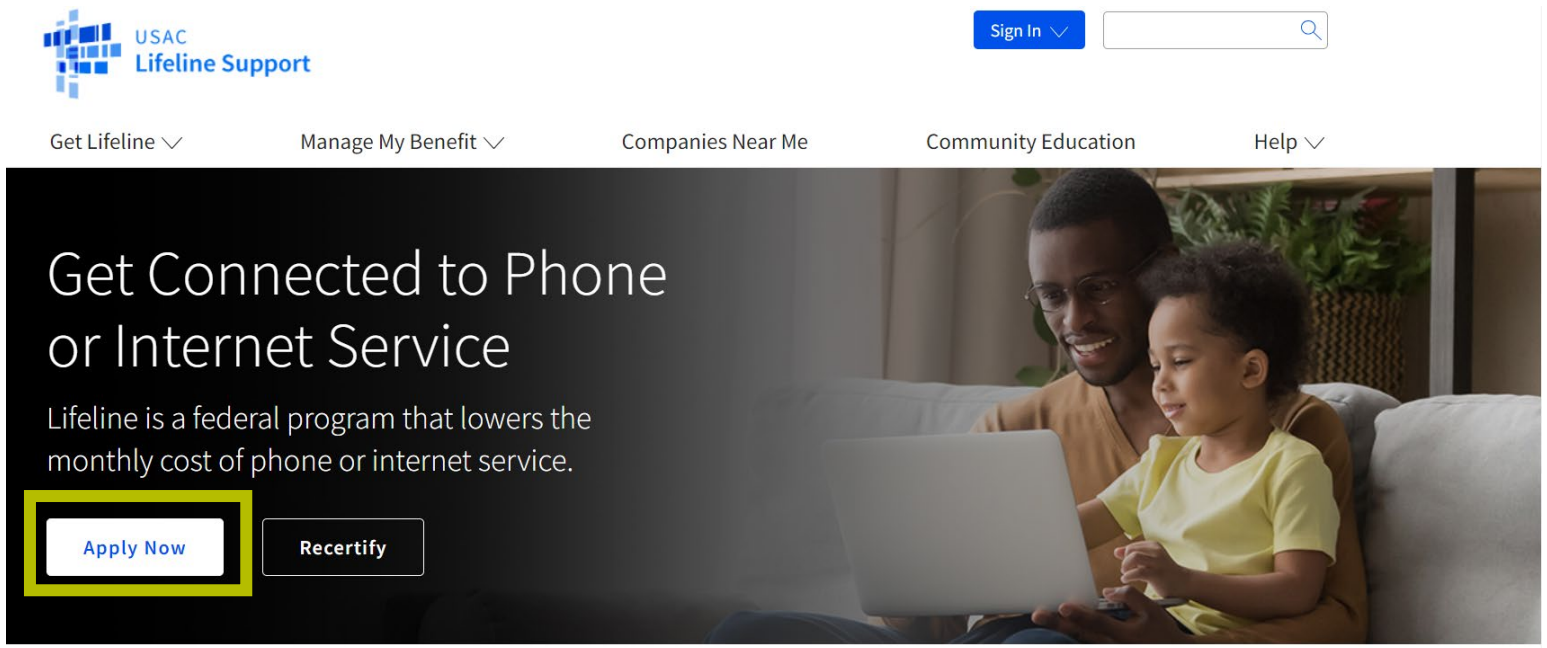
- Find a service provider company using the Companies Near Me tool.

Consumers who live in California, Oregon, or Texas should contact their state to apply for the program.

How to Apply for Lifeline Online

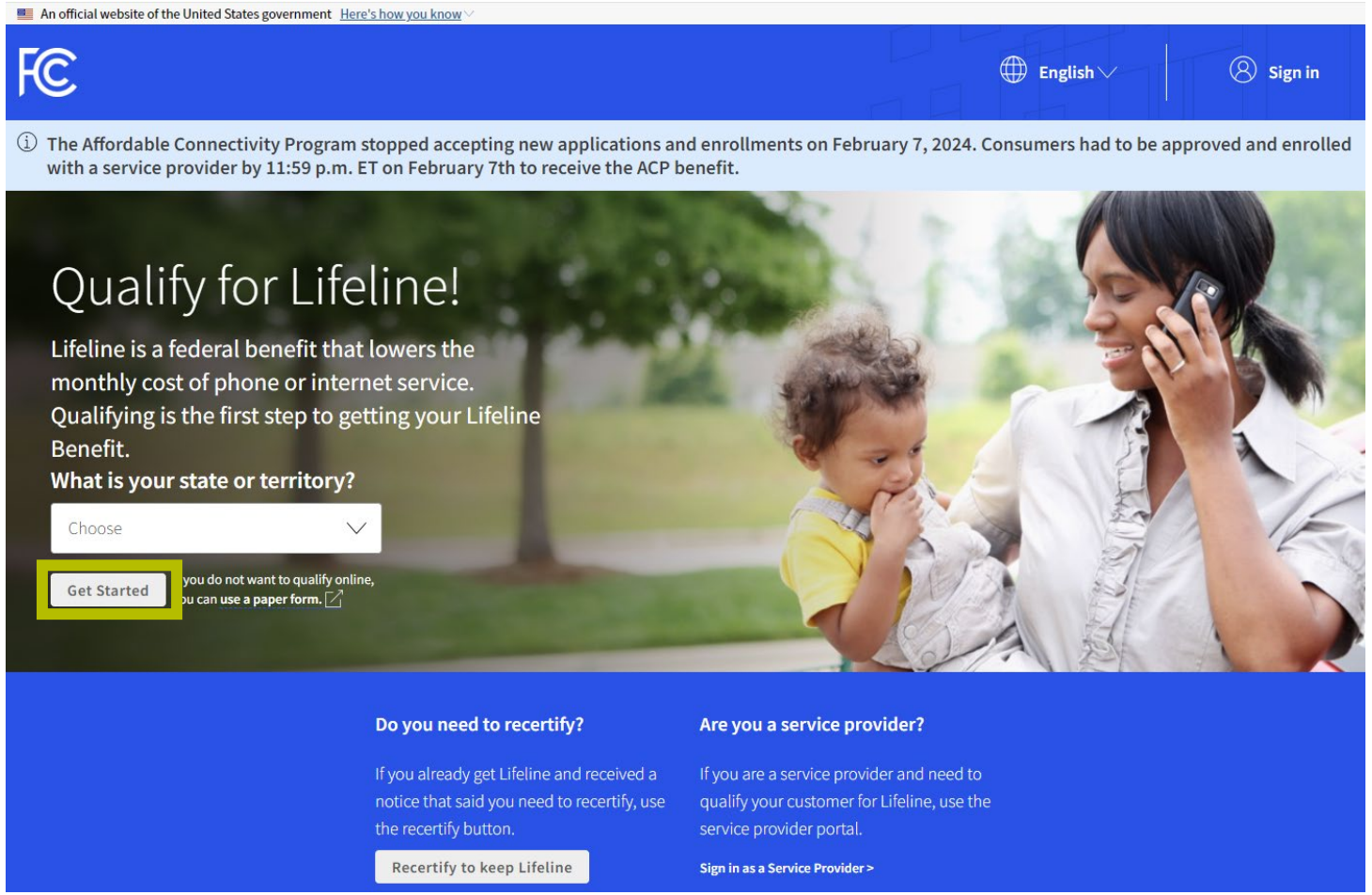
How to Apply Online

- Visit LifelineSupport.org.
- Select **Apply Now** to be redirected to the application landing page.



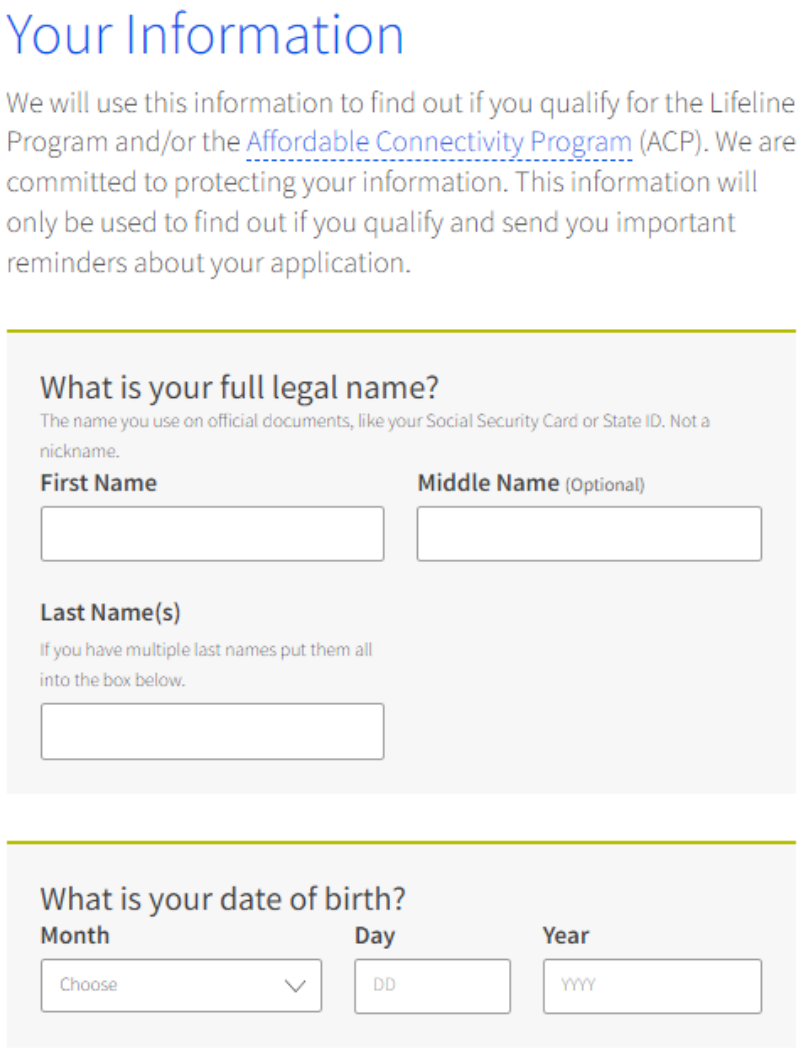
How to Apply Online (Continued)

- On the landing page, the consumer will select the state or territory where they live from the drop-down menu.
- Then select "**Get Started**" to begin the application.



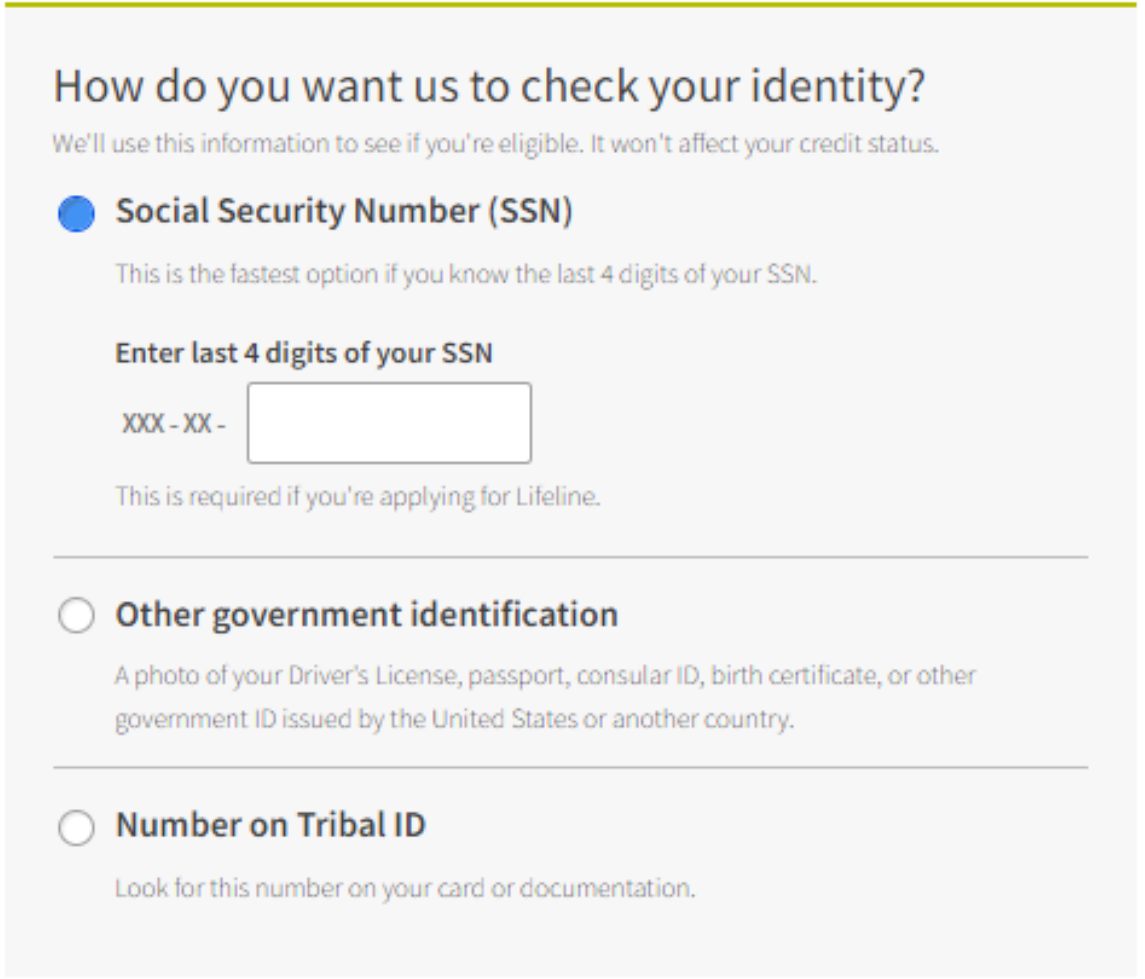
How to Apply Online (Continued)

- The consumer enters their first and last name as it appears on official documentation.
- Next, their date of birth.



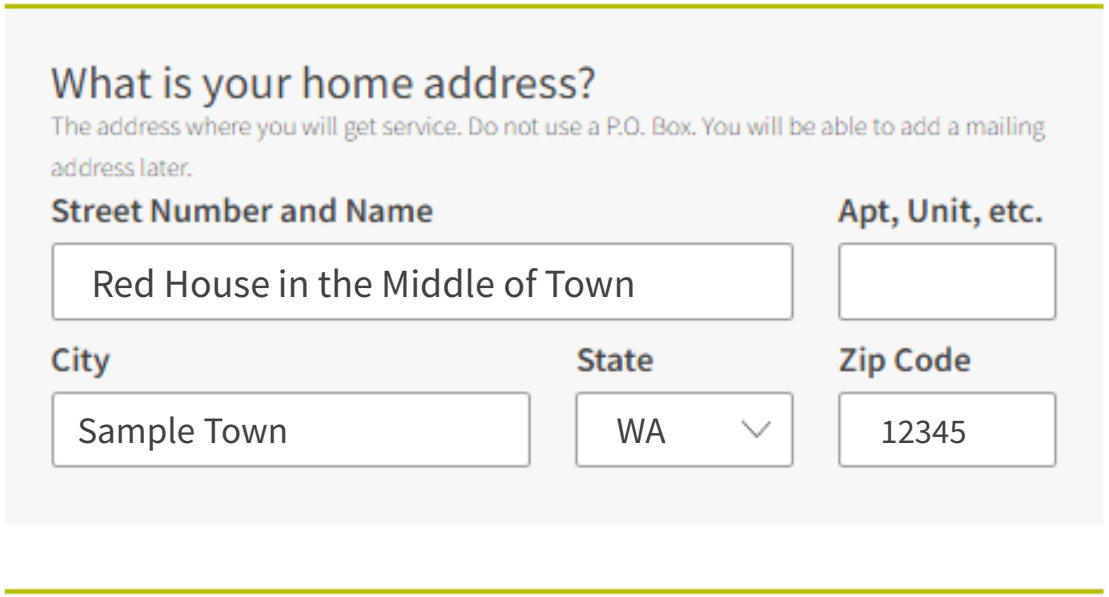
How to Apply Online (Continued)

- The consumer then enters the last four digits of their Social Security Number (SSN) or Tribal ID number.
  - Providing their SSN may speed up the process and reduce the need to provide documentation.



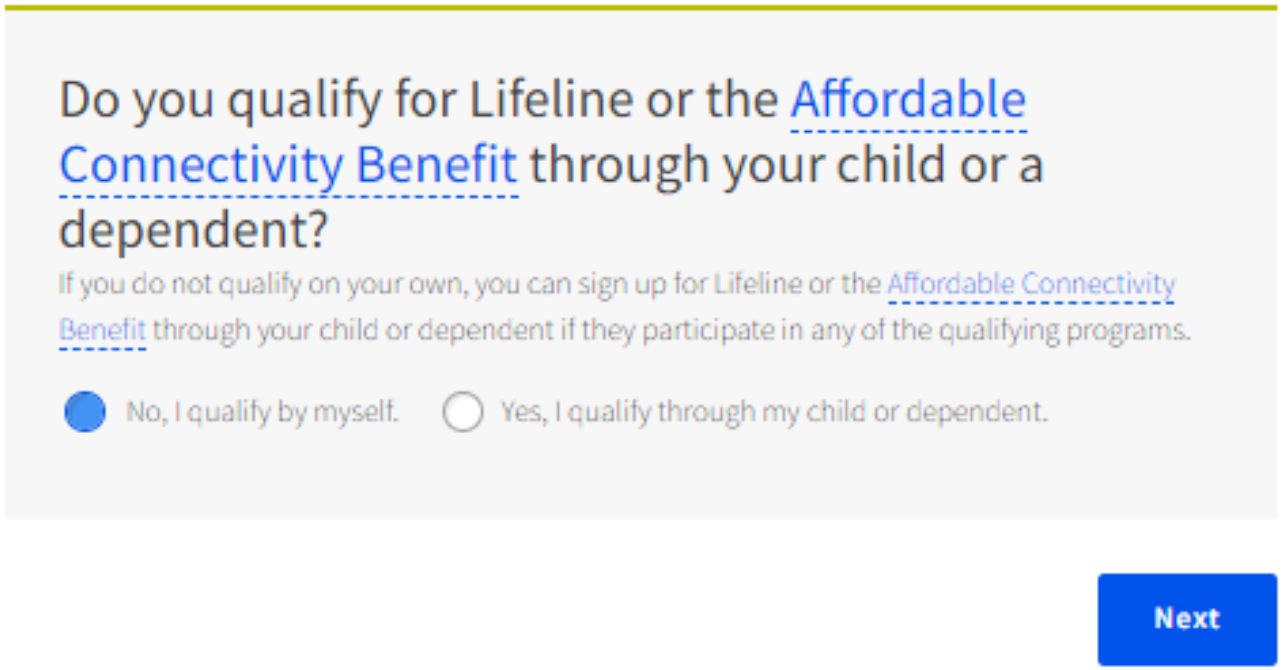
How to Apply Online (Continued)

- Consumer enters their home address.
- **Note:** This information will be used to confirm that the household resides on qualifying Tribal lands.



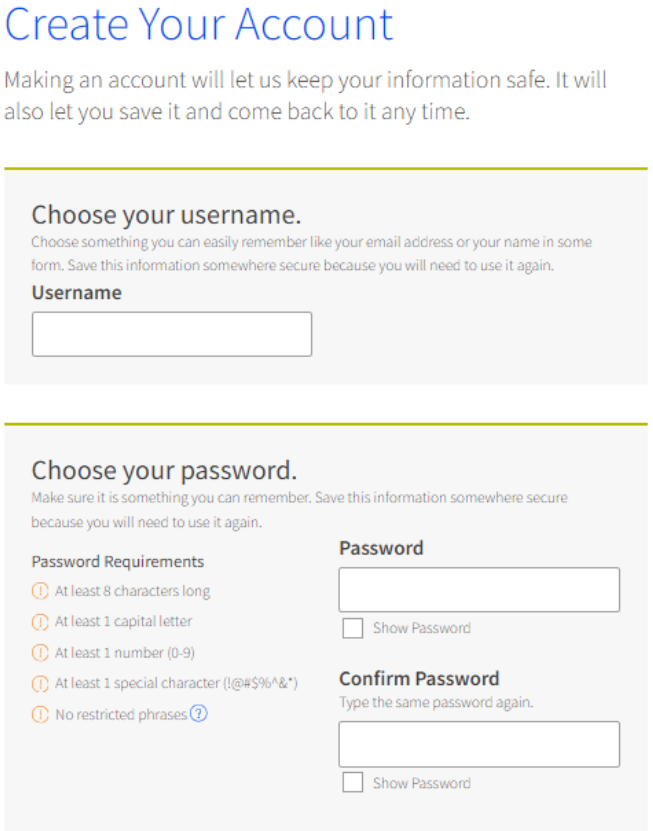
How to Apply Online (Continued)

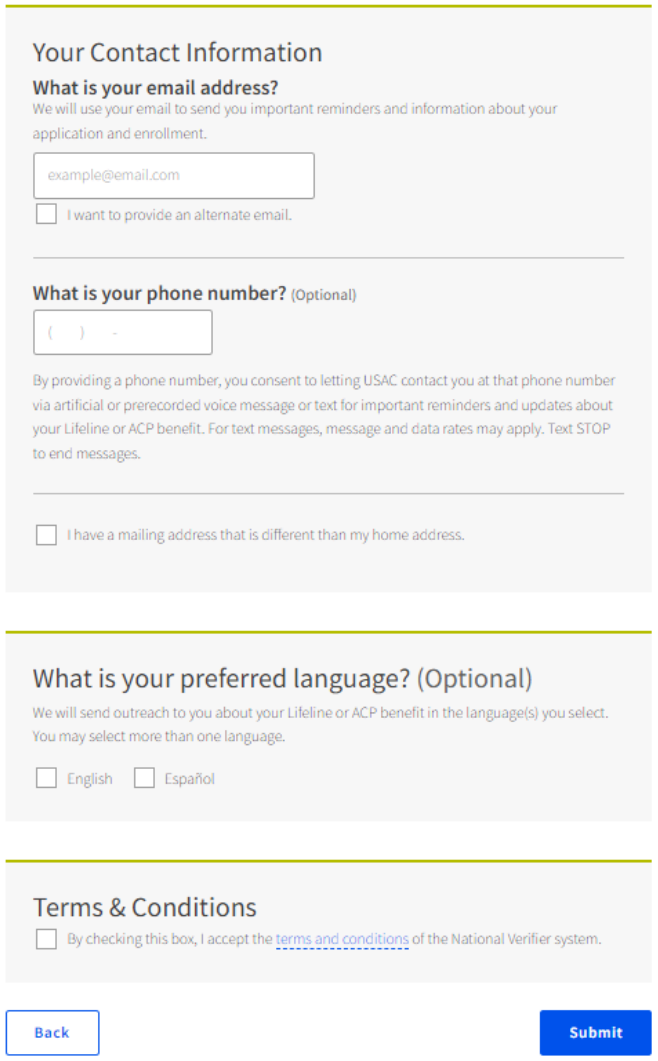
- Consumer identifies if they qualify for the benefit through themself or through a child or dependent.
  - Select no, if they qualify by themself.
  - Select yes, if they qualify through a child or a dependent.



How to Apply Online (Continued)

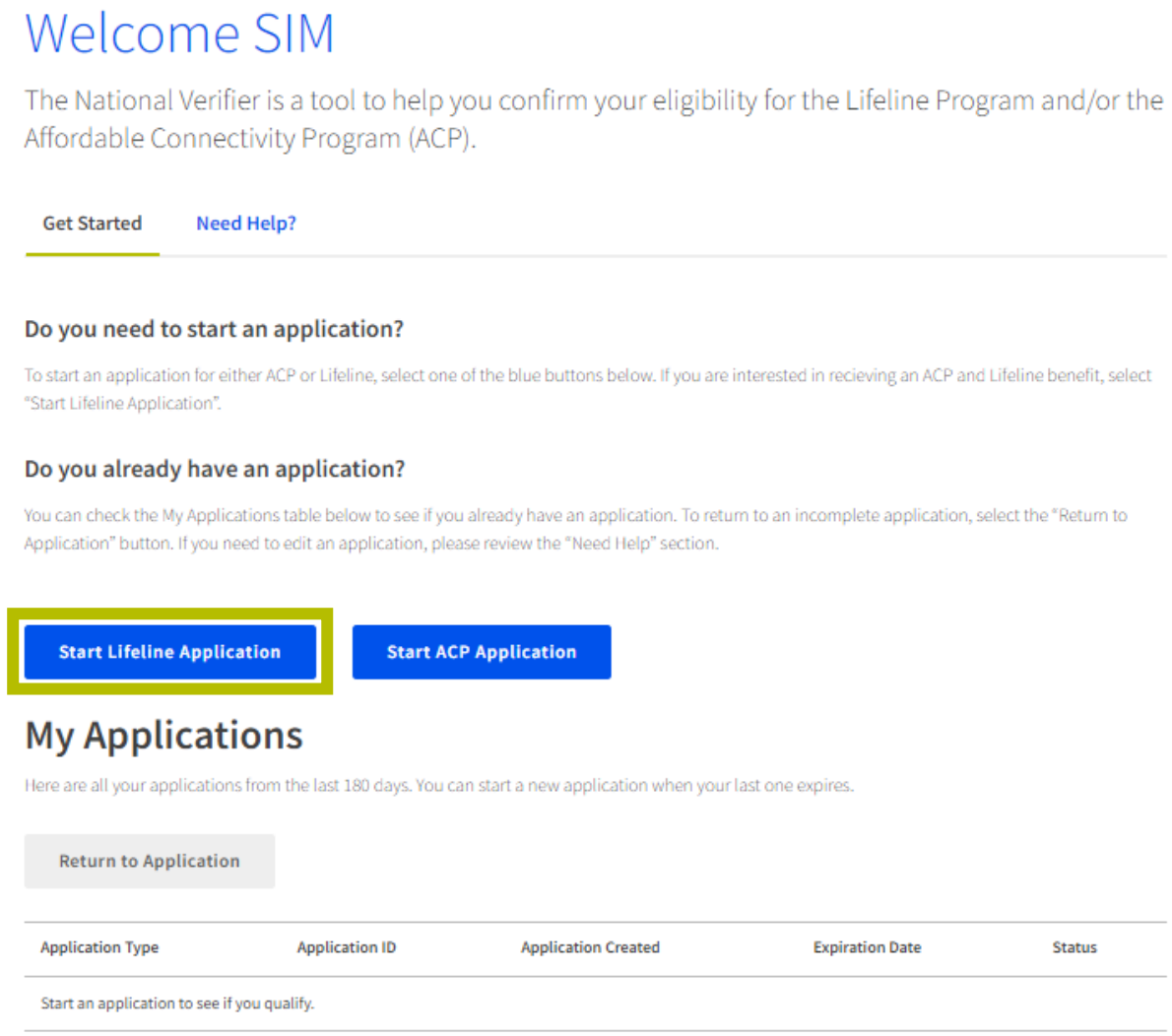
- The consumer must choose a **username** and **password** to create an account and sign in.
- Then enter their email address.
- Enter their phone number (optional).
- If their mailing address is different from their home address, they enter that information here.
- Select preferred language, English or Spanish (optional).





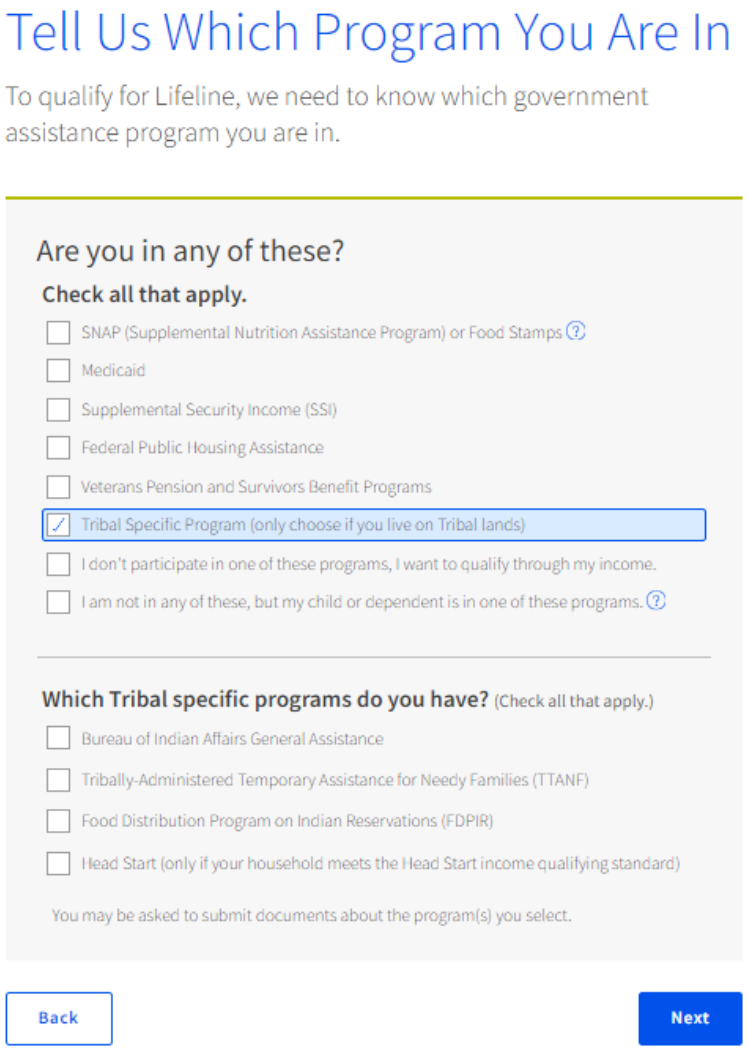
How to Apply Online (Continued)

- Select **Start Lifeline Application** on the account homepage to continue with the application.



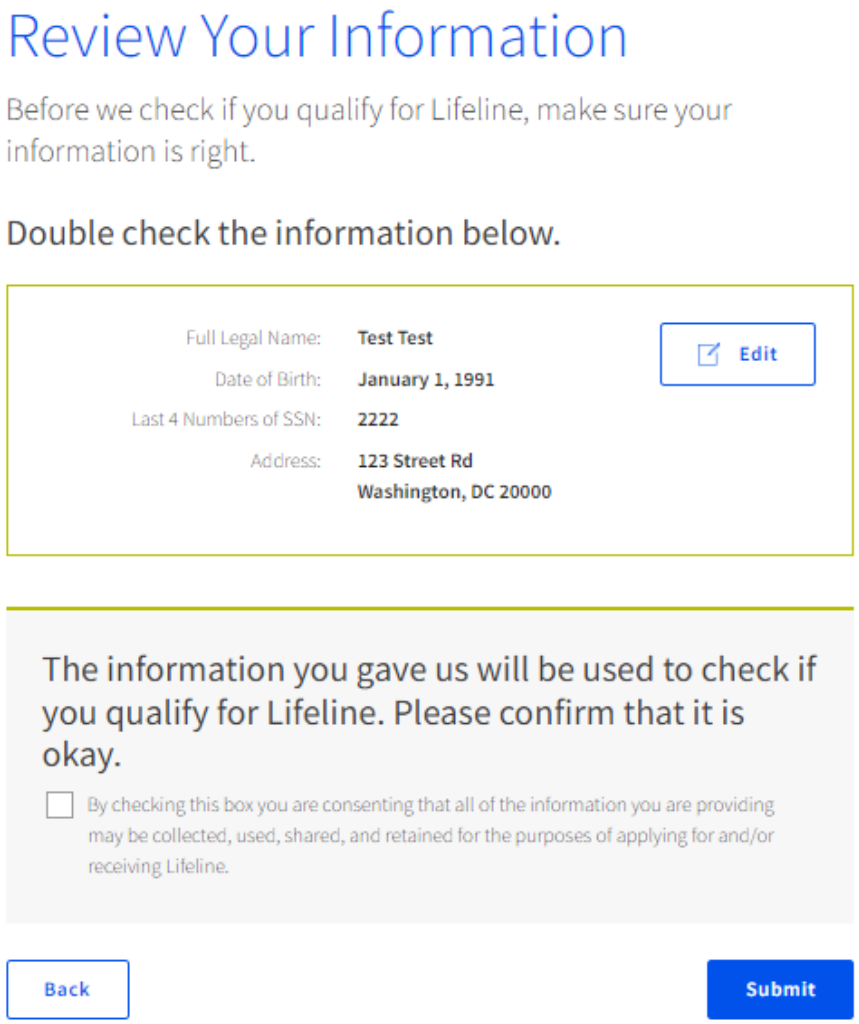
How to Apply Online (Continued)

- The consumer selects **all** the qualifying programs they participate in from the provided list.
  - If they do not participate in a qualifying program, they can also qualify based on their income or through a child or dependent.
  - Those who live on Tribal lands may also qualify based on their participation in Tribal assistance programs.



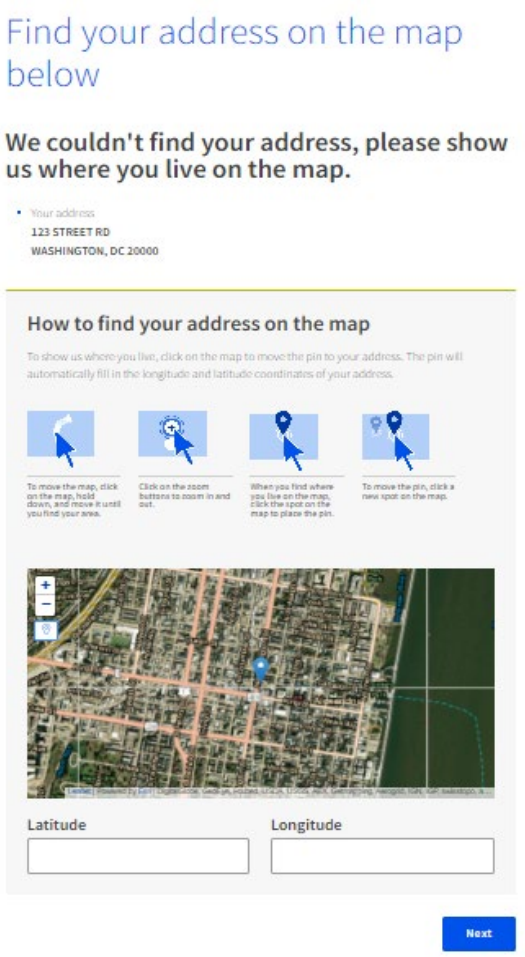
How to Apply Online (Continued)

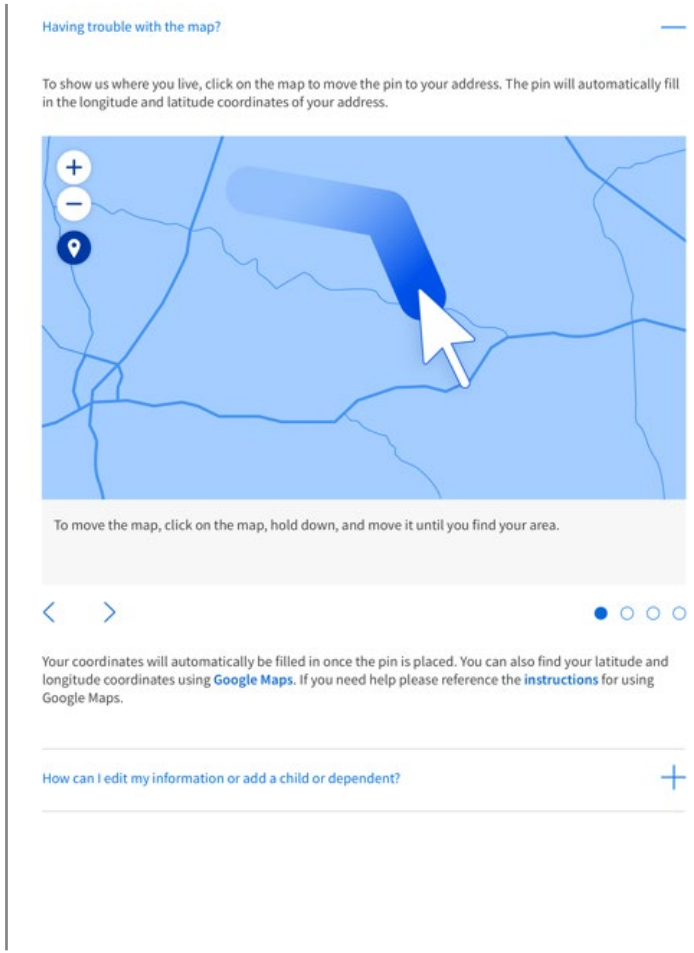
- Review the consumer's information to ensure it is correct.
  - If corrections are needed, select **Edit** to update the information.
- Confirm with the consumer that USAC may use their information to check their eligibility for the Lifeline program.
  - Then click the checkbox confirming their consent.
  - Select **Submit**.



How to Apply Online (Continued)

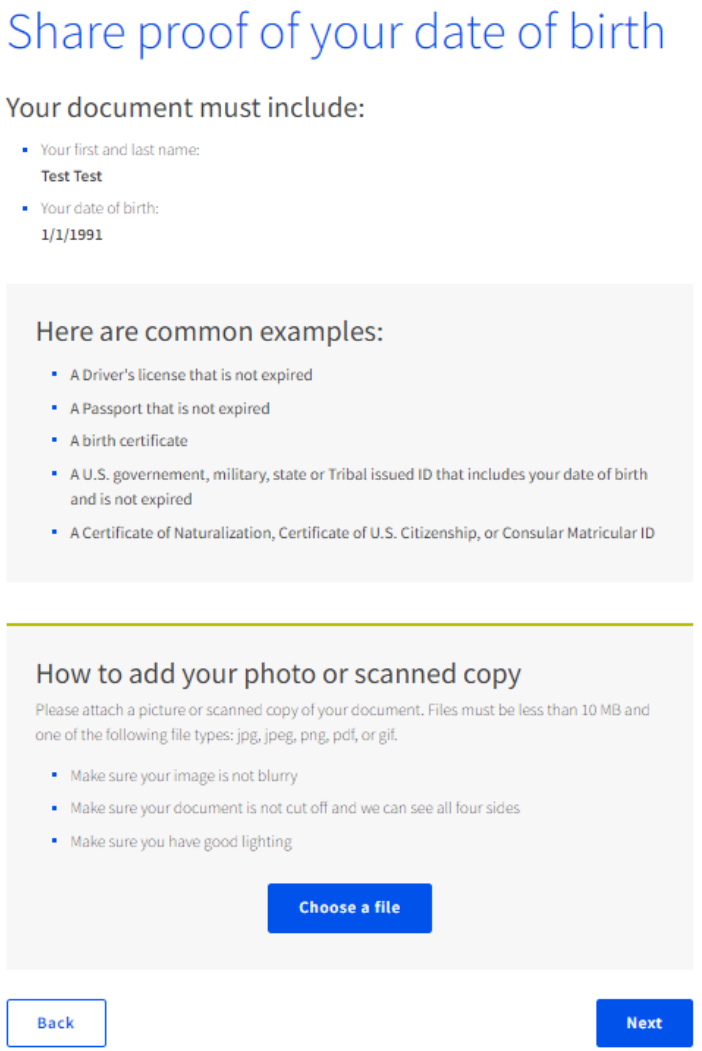
- The consumer may be asked to confirm their address by locating where they live on the map.
  - They can click on the map to move the pin to their address.
  - The coordinates automatically populate.
- This tool helps to confirm that the consumer lives on Tribal lands.





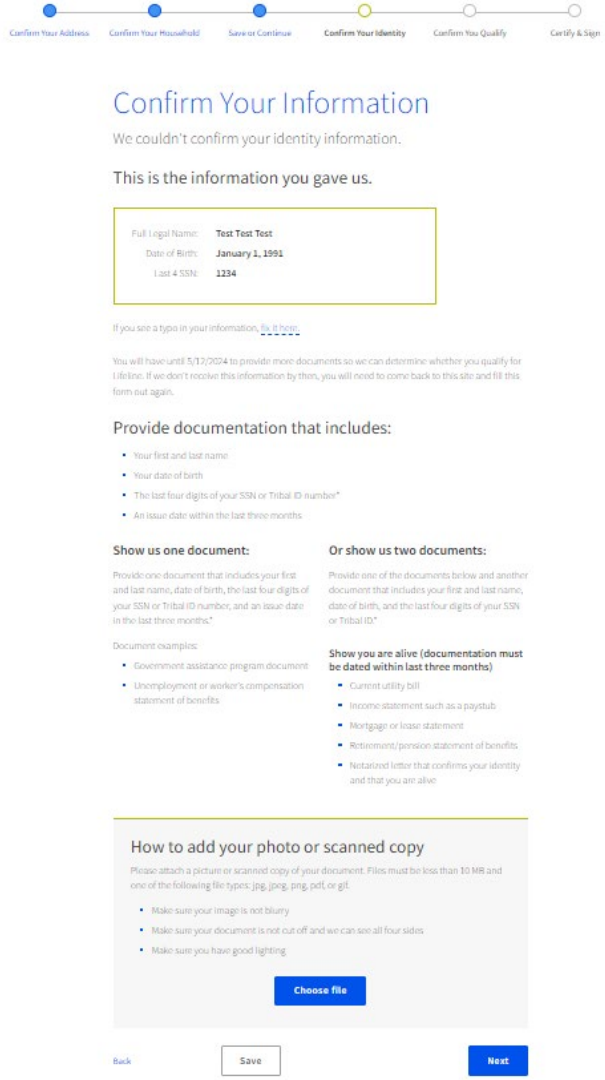
How to Apply Online (Continued)

- The consumer may be asked to upload documents that confirm their date of birth.
- Documents must include:
  - First and last name, and
  - Date of birth.



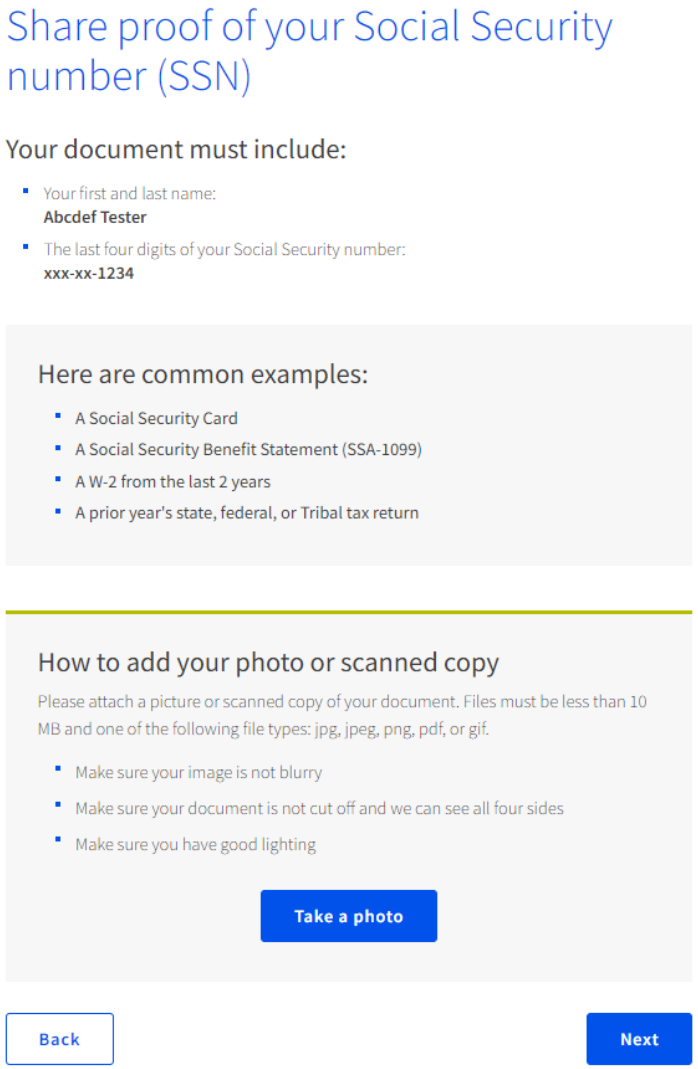
How to Apply Online (Continued)

- The consumer may be asked to upload documents that confirm their Tribal ID number.
- Documents must include:
  - First and last name, and
  - The Tribal ID number.



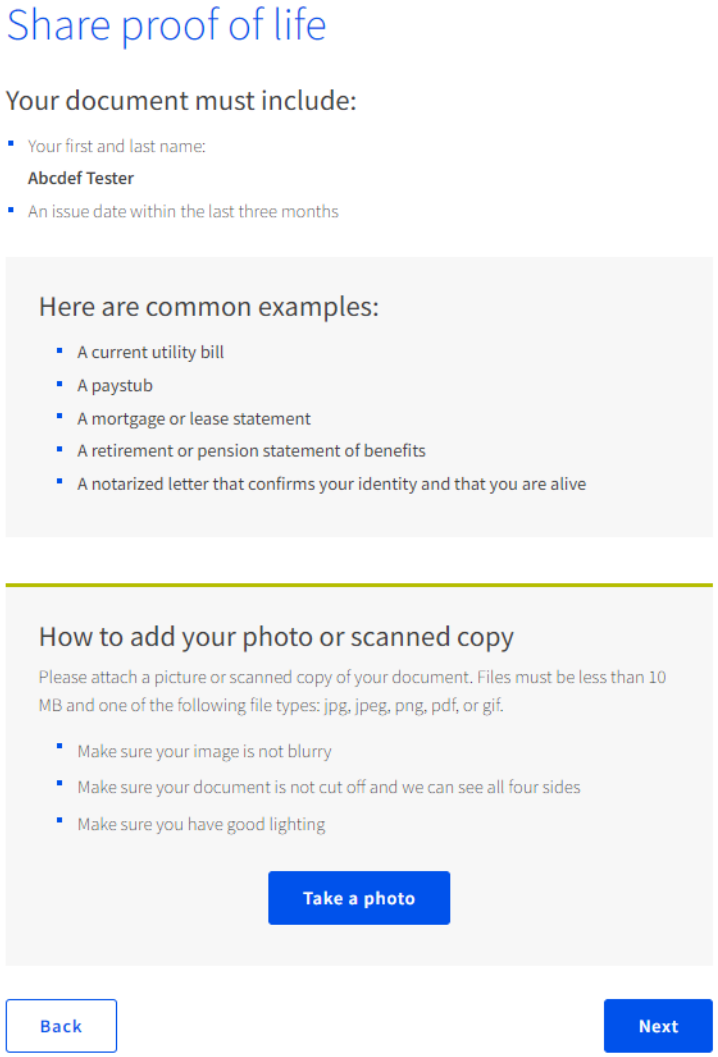
How to Apply Online (Continued)

- The consumer may be asked to upload documents that confirm their Social Security number (last 4 digits).
- Documents must include:
  - First and last name, and
  - The last 4 digits of the SSN.



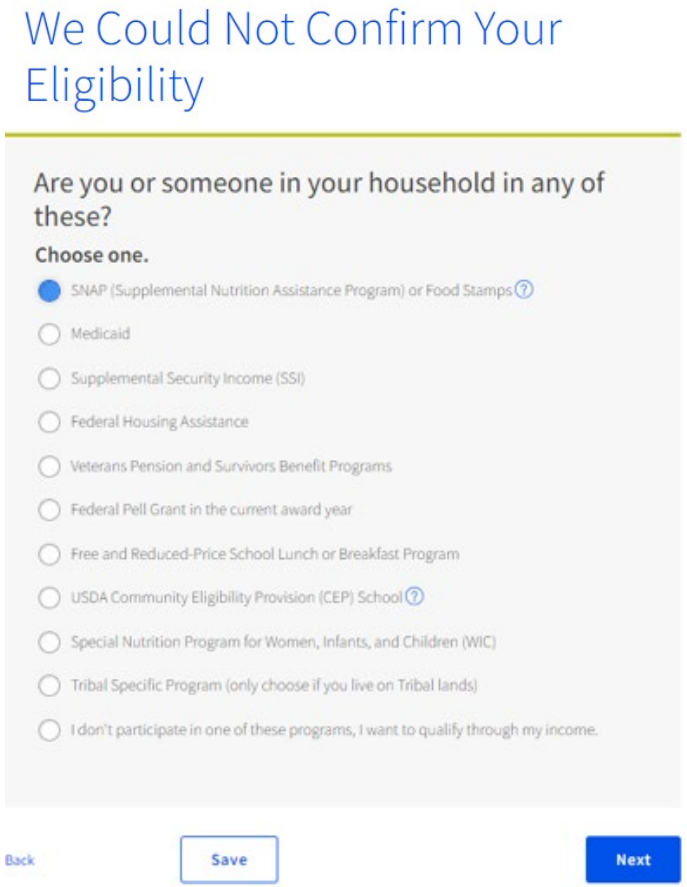
How to Apply Online (Continued)

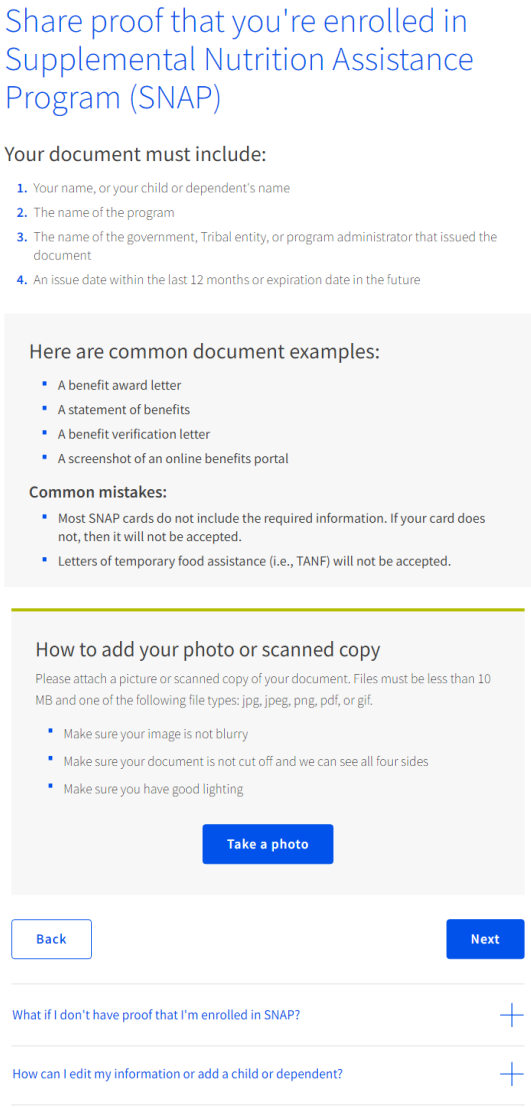
- The consumer may be asked to upload documents that confirm they are alive.
- Documents must include:
  - First and last name, and
  - An issue date within the last three months.



How to Apply Online (Continued)

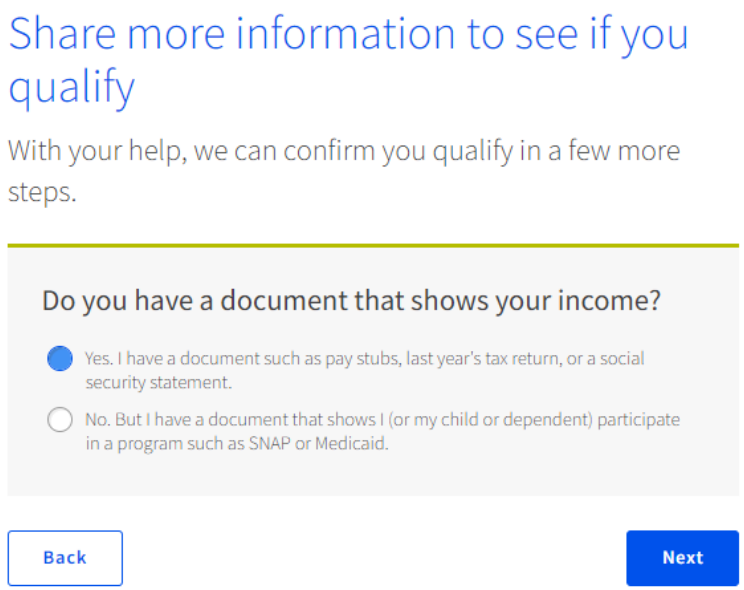
- The consumer may be asked to upload documents that confirm their program eligibility.
- Documents must include:
  - Name, or child or dependent's name,
  - The name of the program,
  - The name of the issuing agency, and
  - An issue date within the last 12 months or an expiration date in the future.

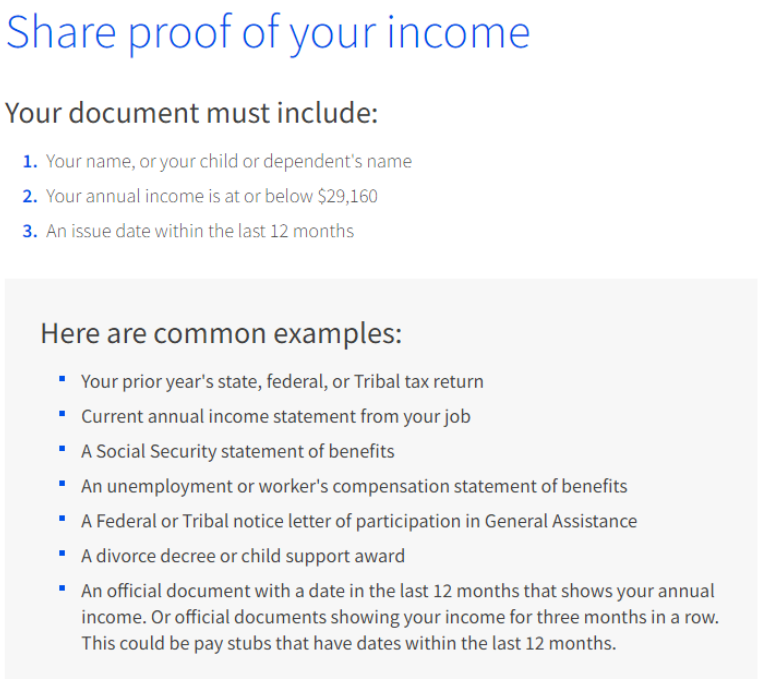




How to Apply Online (Continued)

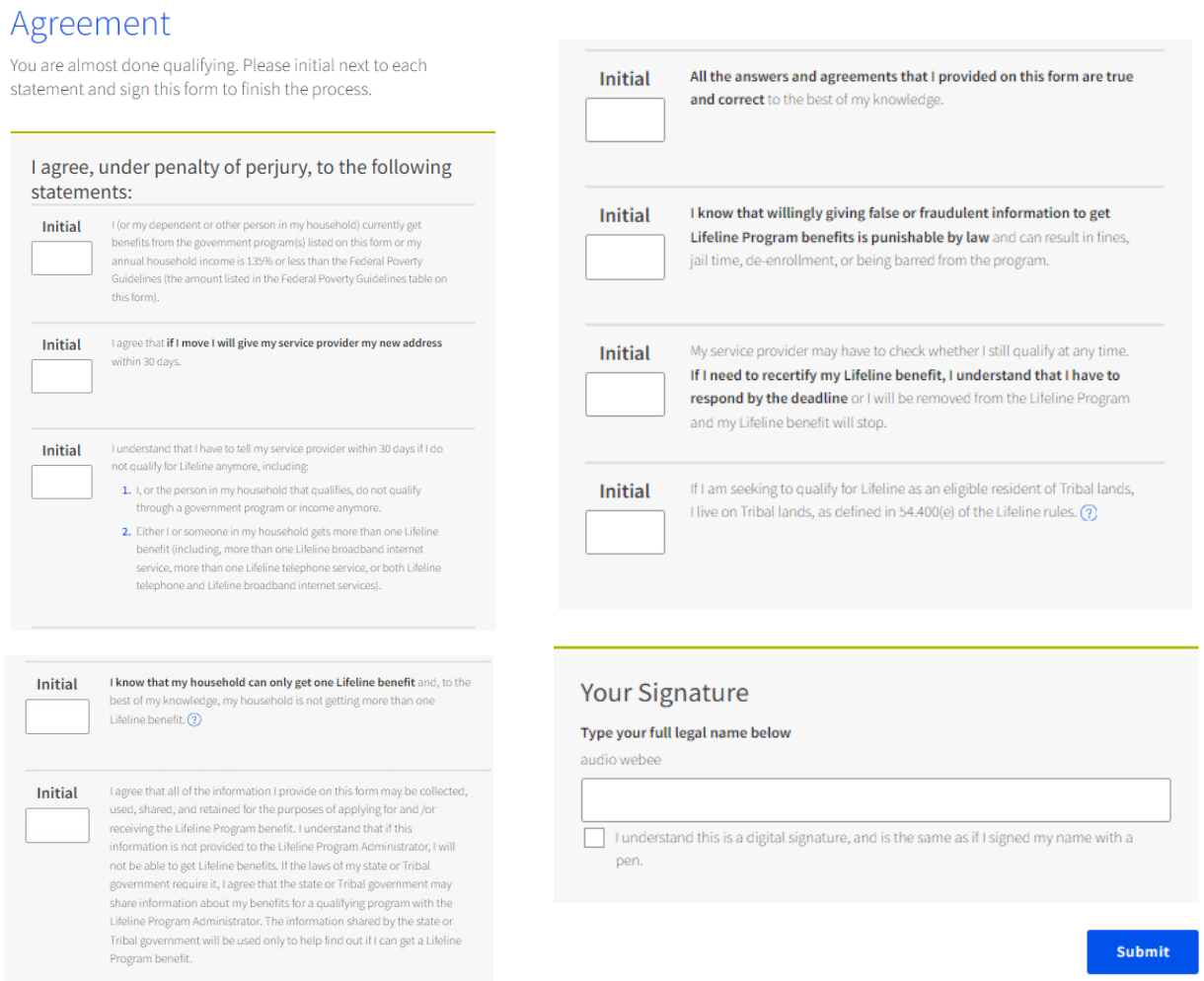
- The consumer may be asked to upload documents that confirm their income.
- Documents must include:
  - Their name, child or dependent's name,
  - Their annual income, and
  - An issue date within the last 12 months.





How to Apply Online (Continued)

- The consumer must initial each box and consent to the information in each statement, then electronically sign with their first and last name.
- Once they press **submit**, they have finished the application!



Agreement

You are almost done qualifying. Please initial next to each statement and sign this form to finish the process.

I agree, under penalty of perjury, to the following statements:

Initial — I (or my dependent or other person in my household) currently get benefits from the government program(s) listed on this form or my annual household income is 135% or less than the Federal Poverty Guidelines (the amount listed in the Federal Poverty Guidelines table on this form).

Initial — I agree that **if I move I will give my service provider my new address** within 30 days.

Initial — I understand that I have to tell my service provider within 30 days if I do not qualify for Lifeline anymore, including:

1. I, or the person in my household that qualifies, do not qualify through a government program or income anymore.
2. Either I or someone in my household gets more than one Lifeline benefit (including, more than one Lifeline broadband internet service, more than one Lifeline telephone service, or both Lifeline telephone and Lifeline broadband internet services).

Initial — **I know that my household can only get one Lifeline benefit** and, to the best of my knowledge, my household is not getting more than one Lifeline benefit.

Initial — I agree that all of the information I provide on this form may be collected, used, shared, and retained for the purposes of applying for and /or receiving the Lifeline Program benefit. I understand that if this information is not provided to the Lifeline Program Administrator, I will not be able to get Lifeline benefits. If the laws of my state or Tribal government require it, I agree that the state or Tribal government may share information about my benefits for a qualifying program with the Lifeline Program Administrator. The information shared by the state or Tribal government will be used only to help find out if I can get a Lifeline Program benefit.

Initial — **All the answers and agreements that I provided on this form are true and correct** to the best of my knowledge.

Initial — **I know that willingly giving false or fraudulent information to get Lifeline Program benefits is punishable by law** and can result in fines, jail time, de-enrollment, or being barred from the program.

Initial — My service provider may have to check whether I still qualify at any time. **If I need to recertify my Lifeline benefit, I understand that I have to respond by the deadline** or I will be removed from the Lifeline Program and my Lifeline benefit will stop.

Initial — If I am seeking to qualify for Lifeline as an eligible resident of Tribal lands, I live on Tribal lands, as defined in 54.400(e) of the Lifeline rules.

Your Signature

Type your full legal name below

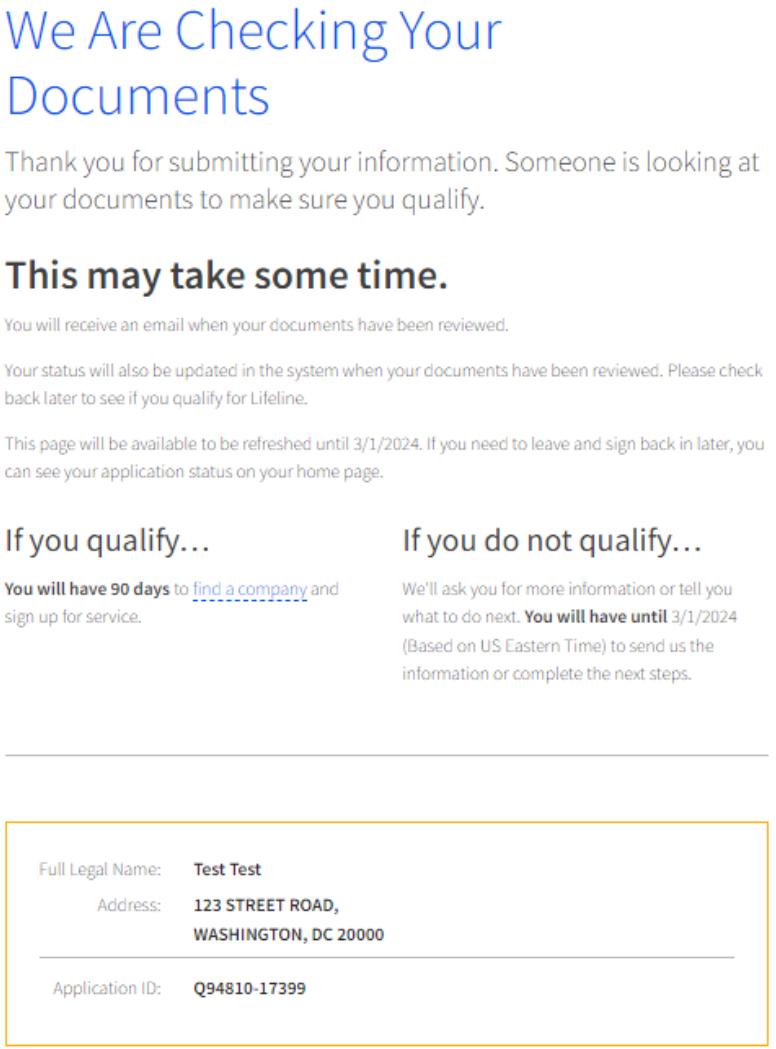
audio webee

I understand this is a digital signature, and is the same as if I signed my name with a pen.

Submit

How to Apply Online (Continued)

- After submitting the required documentation, you will receive a status update confirming that we are reviewing the consumer's documentation.
- The consumer will receive an email about the status of their application. They can also sign into their account to check their application status.
  - If we cannot confirm their information, they will receive instructions on how to submit additional documentation.
  - If the application is approved, they will receive a message that says they're approved and instructions for how to start receiving the benefit.



We Are Checking Your Documents

Thank you for submitting your information. Someone is looking at your documents to make sure you qualify.

This may take some time.

You will receive an email when your documents have been reviewed.

Your status will also be updated in the system when your documents have been reviewed. Please check back later to see if you qualify for Lifeline.

This page will be available to be refreshed until 3/1/2024. If you need to leave and sign back in later, you can see your application status on your home page.

If you qualify…

You will have 90 days to find a company and sign up for service.

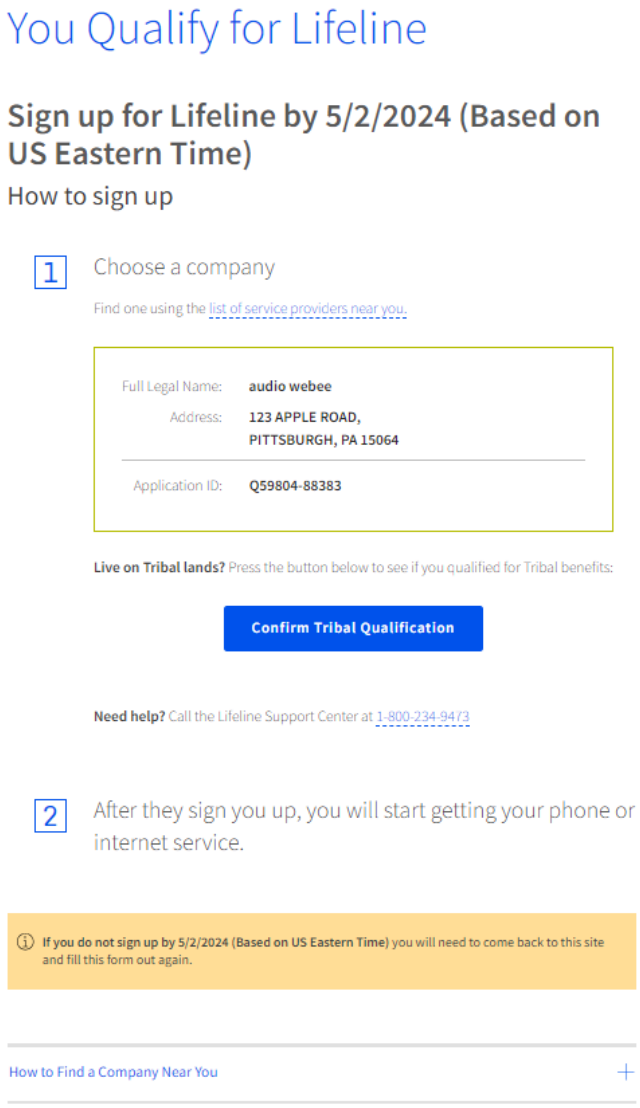
If you do not qualify…

We'll ask you for more information or tell you what to do next. **You will have until** 3/1/2024 (Based on US Eastern Time) to send us the information or complete the next steps.

Full Legal Name:	**Test Test**
Address:	**123 STREET ROAD, WASHINGTON, DC 20000**
Application ID:	**Q94810-17399**

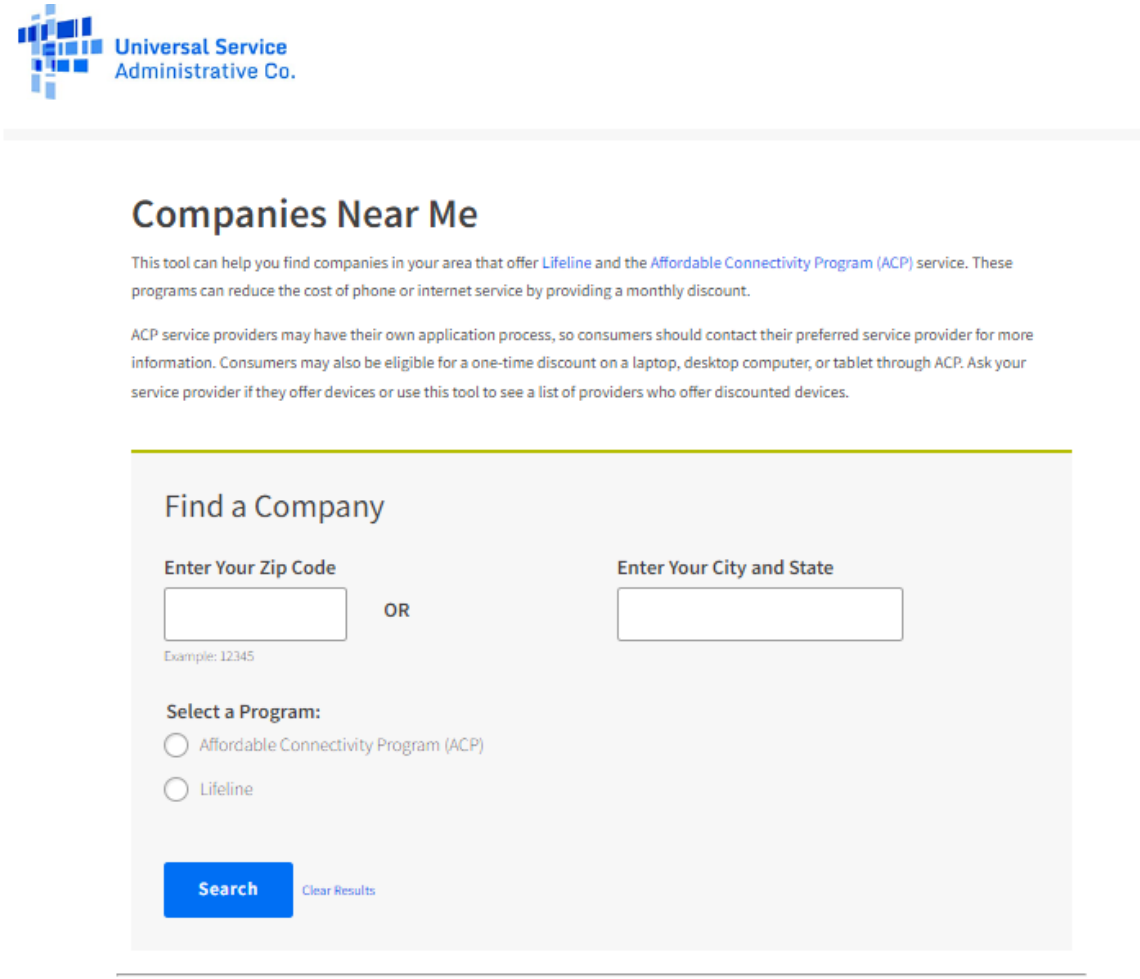
How to Apply Online (Continued)

- Once the application is **approved**, the consumer will need to sign up with a participating phone or internet company by the deadline provided on the application.
- **Note**: If the consumer does not sign up by the designated deadline, they will need to fill out the application again. The application deadline will vary based on how long their application has been open.
- The deadline may be found in the orange box on the “You Qualify for Lifeline” page.



How to Apply Online (Continued)

- The Companies Near Me tool can help consumers find companies offering Lifeline in their area.
  - To use the tool, they'll enter their home zip code or city and state.
  - Then select Lifeline and click Search to receive a list of local providers.



Listening Session and Q&A

Resources

Interested in becoming an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (ETC)?

- To offer Lifeline-supported services, service providers must be designated as an ETC by their respective state regulatory commission or by the FCC.
  - Where states designate Lifeline ETCs, service providers should contact their respective state public utility commission to initiate the ETC designation process.
  - Where states do not designate Lifeline ETCs, service providers must apply to the FCC for designation.
- For more information on how join the Lifeline program and access Lifeline systems, browse the Service Provider Toolkit.

Resources

- Visit Lifeline's consumer-facing website, Lifelinesupport.org, for more information and materials.
  - Tribal Flyer
  - Tribal Toolkit
- Visit USAC's Lifeline website for service providers, state and federal partners, consumer advocates, and Tribal partners: usac.org/lifeline.
  - USAC web page for Tribal Nations: Tribal Nations Page
  - Lifeline web page for Tribal partners: Enhanced Tribal Benefit Page
- Contact LifelineProgram@usac.org for technical questions, assistance, and general National Verifier inquiries. Be sure to **CC the Tribal Liaison**, TribalLiaison@usac.org, on all inquiries.
- Call the Lifeline Support Center for general application support:
  - Available by email at LifelineSupport@usac.org or telephone at (800) 234-9473 seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. ET.

USAC Contact Information

- For program information, visit USAC.org.
- Consumers interested in Lifeline can visit LifelineSupport.org.
- Service Providers interested in participating in Lifeline can visit the Get Started page.
- For general USAC Tribal information, visit the Tribal Nations web page.
- USAC's Tribal Liaison can answer questions and connect you to resources. Contact Gem Shandiin Labarta at TribalLiaison@USAC.org.

Thank You!

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