

PSC DEPARTMENT DIGEST

Nebraska Public Service Commission

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PSC Telecom/NUSF Department

The Telecommunications/NUSF Department of the Nebraska Public Service Commission is responsible for administering programs and enforcing rules and regulations that facilitate competition, maintain quality voice service, and ensure that all Nebraskans have access to quality telecom and information services at affordable and comparable rates.

In this edition of the PSC Digest, we'll explore the department's role when it comes to the **Nebraska Universal Service Fund (NUSF)**.



Created by the Legislature in 1997, the Nebraska Universal Service Fund (NUSF) is designed to ensure that all Nebraskans have access to quality telecommunications and information services at affordable and comparable rates. The Commission currently has five programs within the NUSF:

1. High Cost Program- seeks to make telecommunications and information rates generally affordable and comparable across Nebraska.
2. Rural Tele-Health Program- supports the provision of telecommunications services to a statewide Tele-Health Network.
3. Nebraska Telephone Assistance Program (NTAP) - formerly known as the Lifeline/Link-Up Program provides discounted rates to qualifying low-income Nebraskans.
4. Broadband Program/Wireless Tower Fund- provides funding to construct mobile wireless towers in areas that lack coverage, but would not otherwise be economically feasible.
5. E-Rate Special Construction Program- provides funding toward the costs of construction for libraries and schools that are not fiber connected.



NUSF CONTINUED.....

Funding for the NUSF is collected via a surcharge on eligible telecommunications services. Specific categories of services subject to NSUF surcharge are;

- Local service, including connection charges, enhanced service, such as Caller ID and Extended Area Service (EAS).
- Wireless services, including cellular, PCS, and paging
- In-state long distance services, including prepaid calling cards, operator-assisted, collect calling cards and private lines.
- Voice Over the Internet Protocol (VoIP)

Read more about NUSF portion of the Telecom/NUSF Department on the PSC website @ www.psc.nebraska.gov



Entering the World of NUSF



NUSF Policy Analyst Carrie Gans may have said it best, “the NUSF program is complex with an expansive history and filled with nuance, which makes for interesting and rewarding work.”

As the newest member of the Telecom/NUSF department, in her first year, Gans has immersed herself in the world of telecommunications.

As policy analyst, she works with the department director, staff attorney and economic/data analyst on NUSF related policies and rules. Most recently she has been assisting with the E-Rate Special Construction Program ([NUSF-117](#)) which will match FCC funding provided to libraries that need access to higher speed broadband.

She also works closely with the regulatory and financial staff to ensure telecom carriers are complying with required filings and keeps a close eye on Universal Service Fund (USF) related policies implemented by the FCC, USAC and other states as necessary.

Always up for a challenge, Gans says she is grateful for the opportunity to play even a small role in ensuring Nebraskans have equal access to affordable communications services.

Two Decades of NUSF



The history and nuances of NUSF is something Administrative Assistant Brandy Zierott is well acquainted with.

As the NUSF administrative assistant for more than 20 years, Zierott could be described as the jack of all trades for NUSF. Have a need or a question, just ask Brandy.

One of two people in the department (including the director) when she started in 1999, Zierott is now one of five full-time staff working in support of NUSF.

Over the years, she has experienced the growth of NUSF, the programs it supports and an increase in the number of telecom carriers utilizing that support.

When she first started, collection and tracking of NUSF was done manually. That all changed in 2009, with the first online remittance reporting system. Just last year the online remittance reporting was upgraded to include even more automated systems.

Zierott says her job keeps her on her toes. "The last 20-plus years have gone by so fast. Every week there is something new to learn. With constant change in telecommunications technology it has been interesting and challenging, but never boring."

Implementing Change is Their Mission

Improving processes and implementing new programs are just a few of tasks on the plate of Victor Kapustin and Dohee Kim.

As the economic and data analyst for the Telecom/NUSF department, Kapustin has his hand in just about every big project. From working with cost models, forecasting, data analysis and reporting to maintaining and developing databases and automation he is an invaluable resource within the agency.

Among his current projects is working with the NUSF-108 model, which is used to determine annual support received from the NUSF. In his spare time he continues to consolidate, normalize, and optimize the department's data storage and entry, making it easier to access and view.

With the agency for three years, Kapustin was recognized as employee of the year in 2018.



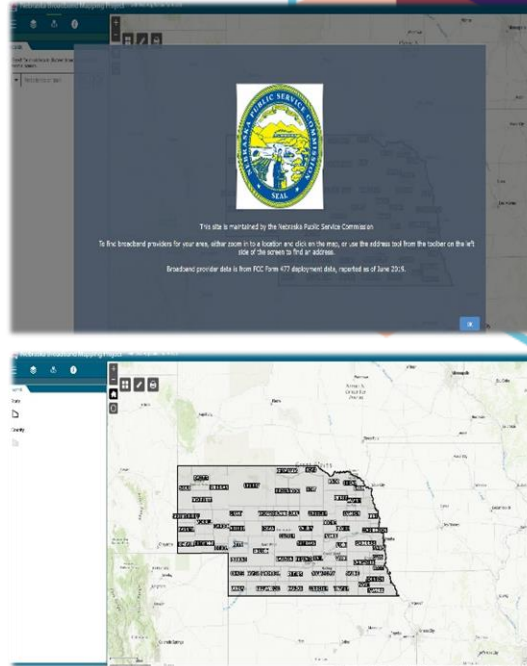
Implementing Change is Their Mission Continued...

Want to know if broadband is available in your geographic area? Then you'll want to check-out the most recent project of NUSF GIS specialist Dohee Kim.

Developed by Kim the new Broadband GIS map allows users to determine where broadband is available and where the PSC, FCC and USDA have broadband projects underway or planned.

Interested in taking a look? You can access the Broadband GIS Map @ <http://broadbandmap.nebraska.gov>

Kim, who moved to Nebraska from California has worked at the Commission for two years.



Lifeline Awareness Week Draws Attention to the Importance of staying connected

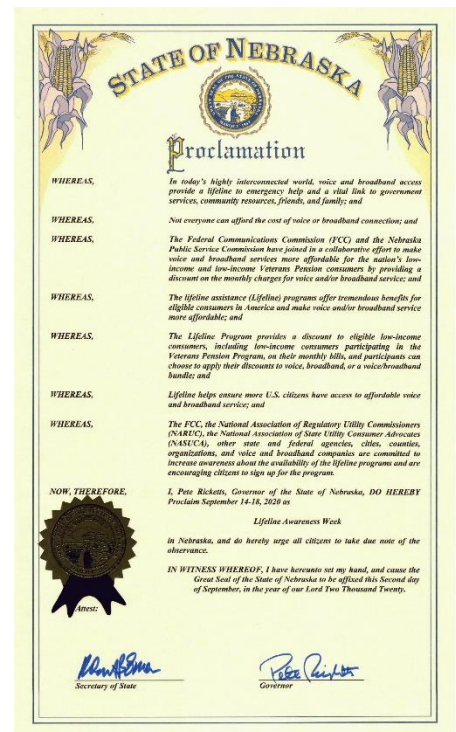


September 14-18 was celebrated as Lifeline Awareness week in Nebraska.

As the Nebraska Telephone Assistance Program (NTAP)/Lifeline manager, Andrea Grell knows how important staying connected is to the people she serves.

NTAP/Lifeline provides consumers who participate in certain public assistance and veterans programs or qualify based on income eligible phone, broadband or bundled phone/broadband service.

A 14-year veteran of the agency Grell has been manager of NTAP going on 12-years. During that time she has seen plenty of changes in the program.



Lifeline Awareness Week Continued...

When the program began in 1999, each state was responsible for processing and approval of customer applications. Recent changes by the FCC to the federal lifeline program requires all states to now utilize a federal verification process.

In addition to the federal Lifeline Program, NTAP operated by the PSC adds an additional discount for qualified participants.

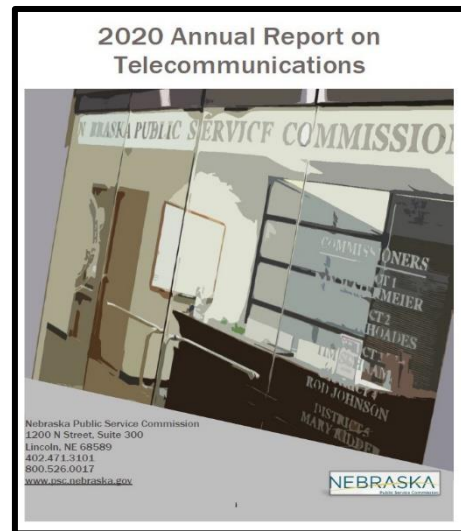
Visit the [NTAP/Lifeline program](#) page of the [PSC website](#) for eligibility and program information.



2020 Annual Report on Telecommunications

Wanting more detail on Telecommunications/NUSF?

The 2020 Annual Report on Telecommunications is available for viewing @ https://nebraskalegislature.gov/FloorDocs/106/PDF/Agencies/Public_Service_Commission/268_20200929-151117.pdf





The Nebraska Public Service Commission regulates telecommunications carriers, natural gas jurisdictional utilities, major oil pipeline, railroad safety, household goods movers and passenger carriers, grain warehouses and dealers, construction of manufactured and modular homes and recreation vehicles, high voltage electric transmission lines, and private water company rates.

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