

Universal Service Administrative Company USAC Board Meeting

INFORMATION ITEM

Update on Call Center Transition

Information Presented:

USAC management is providing an update to the USAC Board of Directors (Board) on activities related to the transition of call center services for Rural Health Care, High Cost and Schools and Libraries to the new call center vendor, Sutherland Global Solutions (Sutherland).

In past years, USAC's call center model has been to set up separate call centers for the Schools and Libraries, High Cost and Rural Health Care programs, requiring USAC to manage separate vendors and contracts for the different programs. The resulting differences in cost structures, processes, analytical capabilities, and management limit USAC's ability to draw on resources during call center volume spikes (e.g., during the E-rate application filing window period) and to provide uniform, high-quality customer support services across the enterprise.

To leverage the economies of scale, balance workload, improve performance and take advantage of price declines, USAC issued a request for proposals (RFP) for call center services in the summer of 2017 to consolidate its call center services for these three programs. The RFP process culminated with the selection and approval of Sutherland by the Board on October 24, 2017. A contract was finalized with Sutherland on December 14, 2017. It is anticipated that the contract will deliver more sophisticated capabilities and reduce costs by approximately 60% (from >\$4 million to <\$2 million overall annual spend).

In 2018, USAC has been working to consolidate its call center support services to improve program efficacy, cost-effectiveness, and ultimately the user experience for program participants. This change will allow for the introduction of a transaction-based model, streamline operations, enhance USAC's customer support offerings, and increase flexibility.

Discussion:

During the kick-off meeting in December 2017 between the Sutherland management team and USAC representatives, participants reviewed and finalized the transition plan, confirmed the timeline to complete in early April 2018, and established a governance structure, lines of communication and defined points of contact. The joint project team currently meets at least weekly to assess progress and review open action items and any associated risks.

USAC and Sutherland's technology team have been working closely together to refine requirements, validate processes, test systems, and ensure a stable environment for the transition of call center services to Sutherland. The team has been responsible for all activities related to technology implementation, including the transition of the agent knowledge base, building and testing an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system, creating a call flow, and building out Sutherland's customer relationship management (CRM) system to include proper documentation.

Additionally, the team has been working to ensure Sutherland has the proper information technology (IT) security and privacy controls in place to support their systems and USAC/FCC data. To ensure this, working closely with Sutherland, a plan was put in place to satisfy Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA)/National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) requirements by May 28, 2018.

As part of the transition plan, Program-specific key performance indicators (KPIs), reporting and quality assurance standards and processes are being developed for all aspects of the call center operation, including agent performance and call monitoring. USAC has been working with Sutherland to develop and implement proper contact monitoring guidelines for phone, email and web inquiries. USAC will conduct daily calibration sessions at the launch of each program to ensure proper quality assurance. When USAC deems appropriate, frequency for the call/web inquiries calibration sessions will be changed to a weekly basis.

The team is also working on developing the training documents started in December with Sutherland using USAC as the subject matter expert for each program. New hire training has been a combination of classroom training, call monitoring, role plays, hands-on instructions of all systems, and soft skills training. All Sutherland personnel will be required to pass knowledge and skills evaluations before graduating from new hire training.

Transition timelines have been implemented based on hand-offs from existing vendors/contracts, key program activities such as filing windows, and time spent ensuring IT security standards are met. USAC transitioned the Rural Health Care help desk to Sutherland in February of 2018, and launched the High Cost calls and help desk in April of 2018. Work continues on transitioning the Schools and Libraries call center, which is scheduled to start training at the beginning of May and fully convert to Sutherland by the end of May.