

Advanced Formal Step A and Beyond training



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The first Advanced Formal Step A and Beyond training session was held Jan. 10-15 at the Maritime Institute just outside Baltimore. There were 80 registered participants from 62 branches representing all 15 regions.

I thank everyone who helped me put this training together. There are too many of you to try to name everyone, but I do want to let y'all know that your help is greatly appreciated. Special thanks go out to the facilitators who helped present this training. The main facilitators were Regional Administrative Assistants James Henry (Region 1), Steve Lassan (Region 8), Javier Bernal (Region 10) and Rick DiCecca (Region

14). Tonya Detrick (Branch 443), Greg Dixon (Branch 1119) and Mark Sims (Branch 203) also made guest-star facilitator presentations during the week.

The Advanced Formal Step A and Beyond training program is designed for activists who already have experience representing letter carriers at Formal Step A of the grievance procedure. The amount of experience the participants had before attending the training was surprising to me. Of the 78 participants who attended the training, 62 of them had at least one year of prior experience; of those, 27 had at least five years of experience processing Formal Step A grievances. There were only 16 participants with less than a year of experience.

The goal of this training program is to help experienced activists sharpen their skills and more effectively process grievances at Formal Step A. In our exit survey, we asked the participants if they would recommend this training to others. The question was answered with responses such as "Yes, absolutely," "Definitely," "For sure" and "Already did." One participant said, "Yes, and I would give them a heads-up that it is a lot of work—but definitely worth the effort." I think that was well said.

As you can see, this was not a vacation for the participants. Every one of them worked hard all week and should be congratulated for their efforts. I believe the branches that decided to send participants to the training will enjoy a great return on their investment.

I am in a much better position to describe this training program now that it is all together and tested.

The class began on Sunday afternoon. We went for five hours with a dinner break. This was tough on many of the participants because most of them traveled in that day,

too. We spent most of the classroom time on effective writing skills. Every participant had multiple opportunities to put this skill to work over the course of the week. We also covered writing statements and writing disputed facts and contentions. When we finished Sunday night, we passed out the first set of cases for the participants to develop and process.

From Monday through Thursday, the participants started at 8 a.m. and worked late into the evening putting their skills to work writing grievances, preparing grievance files, and presenting grievances. On Friday, we went from 8 a.m. to noon.

Most of Monday was spent on presentations from the facilitators on topics such as theory of the case, burden of proof, time limits, information/interview requests, issue statements, undisputed facts, remedies, additions and corrections, preparing grievance files, just cause, and using grievance starters. When we finished on Monday, the participants had developed the evidence associated with their cases and the homework assignment was to write their disputed facts and contentions.

The participants spent Tuesday presenting their grievances at Formal Step A and receiving a computer research workshop. When we finished on Tuesday, the participants had been given their second case, developed the evidence associated with their cases, and the homework assignment was once again to write their disputed facts and contentions.

The participants spent Wednesday presenting their second grievance at Formal Step A and attending a rap session. In the afternoon, everyone attended a presentation on how to write a Step B decision. After that, each participant was assigned a case appealed from Formal Step A. The homework assignment was to prepare for a Step B meeting.

The participants spent Thursday presenting their Step B cases, writing and editing their Step B decisions and attending a workshop for writing Formal Step A settlements.

On Friday, the participants turned in their final Step B decisions, took an open-book contract test, filled out exit surveys, and received an exit presentation from me. We ended with a well-earned graduation ceremony.

By the time you read this, letters will have gone out to notify those activists who have sent in applications that they have been selected to attend this training. The next two classes will be held Sept. 18-23 and Oct. 16-21. The cost to attend this training is \$1,097.45 (single) or \$1,646.90 (double occupancy). This includes room, meals, snacks and training materials. Applications can be found on the home page of our website. Simply print out an application, fill it out, and mail it back to me if you are interested in attending.