

Advice to branches: Start preparing for local negotiations now



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So when are we going to get a national contract? Like you, I am in no position to answer that question. As of this writing, negotiations are still ongoing. One thing I know for sure is that we will get a national contract. It will either be negotiated (and ratified by the members), or we will end up with a contract that is decided through interest arbitration. Neither outcome is a foreign experience, as we have been down both of these roads many times before.

Another thing we know for sure is that once the terms of our next national contract are determined, a 30-day negotiating period for every local memorandum of understand-

ing (LMOU) will follow a few months after our national contract is finalized.

Negotiating the LMOU for each city doesn't happen very often, but it is one of the most important aspects of representation at the local level. Just like every member is directly affected by the terms of our national contract, the same is true with respect to the terms of their LMOU. There are 22 items that can be negotiated, including local vacation planning and other annual leave rules, the holiday schedule pecking order, and whether non-scheduled days will be on a fixed or rotating basis, to name a few.

Preparation is the key to successful local negotiations, and there are some things you can do now to get started. The first thing is to review your current LMOU and evaluate any problems you may have had with any of the existing provisions over the last few years. You should also take into consideration the views about the current LMOU of the active letter carriers in each city your branch represents.

This can be accomplished in many ways, such as sending out a survey or having a discussion at your monthly meeting. If you decide that you want to send a survey to your active members, there is a sample survey in the "Members Only" section of our website that each branch president has access to. The sample survey is in Word format, so you can change the mailing address and questions to fit your needs.

Some branches may get this far and decide that they do not wish to open local negotiations during the next 30-day negotiating period. Unfortunately, that isn't the end of it. We have to remember that management also has the right to open local negotiations. That happened in many cities during the last round of bargaining. The best advice I

can give is to prepare for local negotiations, regardless of whether you plan to open them.

Another thing you can do now is to form a local negotiations committee and choose a chief spokesperson. When choosing a local negotiations committee, consider mixing experience with youth. This is the best way to ensure that the next generation of letter carriers in every city understands the provisions of their LMOU, what they mean and how important this issue is. Many branches have more than one local negotiations committee to cover several cities under their jurisdiction. Many of the more successful branches form a core group to conduct local negotiations for several cities; they then rotate members from each city to participate in the process in their individual installation.

Once formed, each local negotiations committee can help evaluate all the information you gather and then decide whether it would be in the members' best interest to open local negotiations, and if you do, in which installations under your branch's jurisdiction. This group can also begin to draft proposals. Once again, whether or not you want to open local negotiations, you should be prepared to negotiate. A big part of being prepared to negotiate is drafting proposals for each of the 22 items that can be negotiated locally.

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When the 30-day negotiating period is announced, NALC will produce an updated local negotiations guide and distribute it through your national business agent's office, as we normally do. We will also use our new "Members Only" section of our website to provide additional resources designed to assist branches with the local negotiations process.

I will report on this subject again when our national contract is finalized. In closing, I just want to say how much I enjoyed personally visiting with many of you at the convention. It was great to see all of you who were in attendance, and a special thanks to those of you who attended the training classes that my group presented.