

Step B task force update



**Lew
Drass**

We created a task force in the 2016-2019 National Agreement through a Memorandum of Understanding that can be found on pages 202-203 of the contract. The relevant text follows:

Re: Article 15—Dispute Resolution Procedure Task Force

The parties mutually recognize that maintaining an efficient and effective Dispute Resolution Procedure (DRP) is dependent on consistently productive Step B Teams and contract compliance at all levels of both parties. In keeping with that concept, the parties agree to establish a DRP Task Force for the purpose of improving the effectiveness of Step B Teams.

The Task Force will be comprised of up to three members from the union and up to three members from the Postal Service and will report to the NALC President and USPS Vice President, Labor Relations. The principal purpose of the Task Force will be to monitor implementation of the procedures outlined below and to evaluate and recommend other methods for evaluating and improving Step B performance.

The parties agree the following factors will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of individual Step B Teams:

- Increase in grievance activity
- Grievance processing delays
- Reoccurring grievances
- Incomplete grievance files from Formal Step A
- Consistent impasses on the same issue
- Step B resolution rate below 80%
- Step B decisions that are consistently not educational
- Step B impasses that are unnecessarily lengthy

The Area Manager, Labor Relations (AMLR) and National Business Agent (NBA), or their designees, are responsible for using the above factors to review performance of their respective Step B Teams. When a Step B Team is consistently experiencing one or more of the above factors, the AMLR and NBA, or their designees, will jointly review the circumstances and determine any action(s) necessary to address the situation(s).

This memorandum is effective during the term of the 2016 National Agreement.

The intent of this MOU is to address the inefficiencies that exist with some of our Step B teams around the country and ultimately cure the underlying processing problems that exist at Formal Step A in some cities, which cause Step B backlogs in the first place.

Unfortunately, we have spent most of our time trying to clear the Step B backlogs that we have experienced since our contract was ratified on Aug. 7, 2017.

I reported on this situation in my June article last year. At that time, we had 4,278 cases pending a decision at Step B. Of those, 2,680 grievances were backlogged (awaiting a decision for more than 14 days) at Step B. This is not how the process is intended to work. Teams from 10 of the 67 USPS districts around the country accounted for 60 percent of the total number of grievances pending a decision at Step B, and 80 percent of the backlogged cases.

I reported on this situation again last December. At that time we had 2,589 cases pending a decision at Step B. Of those, 1,351 grievances had been at Step B awaiting a decision for more than 14 days. At that point, 52 percent of the total number of grievances pending a decision at Step B and 80 percent of the backlogged cases came from just six of the 67 USPS districts.

Here is where we stand now: There are currently 1,622 cases pending a decision at Step B. Of those, 438 grievances have been at Step B awaiting a decision for more than 14 days from just nine of the 67 USPS districts. Currently, 42 percent of the grievances pending a decision and 58 percent of the backlogged cases come from these nine USPS districts.

As you can see, we have once again made significant progress in reducing grievance backlogs at Step B. I want to take this opportunity to thank all the Step B representatives and everyone at the NALC regional/USPS area offices who have contributed to our efforts in this regard.

This is just the first step toward fully implementing the MOU referenced above. We still have plenty of work to do if we are going to make long-term improvements to the Step B process. We need to figure out a way to reduce and resolve more disputes at the local level in many locations.

We have a national joint meeting scheduled on March 27 to discuss where we are going from here with Step B and arbitration scheduling/hearing processes. This will be the first such meeting in more than two years. The NALC regional/USPS area parties that oversee both steps of the Dispute Resolution Process are slated to attend this meeting.

I am hoping this session will help produce results that meet our joint goal of achieving a backlog-free Step B process and an arbitration process where impasse grievances are scheduled for/heard in arbitration within 120 days of appeal.