

NALC's structure works for you

For many letter carriers, being hired by the Postal Service provides them with an opportunity and a benefit they have never had before—being represented by a union. Joining NALC is not a requirement to be a city letter carrier; however, more than 92 percent of letter carriers choose to join. But what does it mean to be part of a union? How does the union work?

NALC represents all letter carriers, both career and non-career. We represent the interests of city letter carriers from the workroom floor to the national bargaining table, and NALC has a structure specifically designed to provide the best representation for its members.

At the national level, NALC's leadership consists of a 28-member executive council responsible for all aspects of union administration and policy. The executive council, composed entirely of letter carriers from throughout the country who have been elected by the membership to their positions, is made up of 10 resident national officers: president, executive vice president, vice president, secretary-treasurer, assistant secretary-treasurer, director of city delivery, director of safety and health, director of retired members, director of life insurance, and director of the health benefit plan. Three trustees are also on the executive council, as are 15 national business agents who represent the union's 15 geographical regions.

The 10 resident national officers work at NALC Headquarters in Washington, DC. Here, among many other things it does to represent the members, NALC negotiates with the Postal Service to set the terms of the National Agreement, the union contract that

outlines workplace rules, pay and benefits for city letter carriers.

NALC's national administration is grouped into 15 regions, each directed by an elected national business agent (NBA). Every region also employs at least two regional administrative assistants (RAAs), appointed by the NALC national president. Acting under the national president's ultimate direction, NBAs have extensive authority over union affairs in their regions.

An NBA's primary responsibility is contract administration—handling grievances, presenting arbitrations and dealing with postal management. They also provide skilled services to the field, responding to branch officers' requests for advice and assistance.

The 49 NALC state associations are responsible for legislative and political matters that affect letter carriers. State associations work closely with branches, NBAs and Headquarters on legislative and political issues. This work is important as we fight in Congress for the future of the Postal Service and for our jobs.

NALC's real strength, power and representation starts at the local level, with members belonging to more than 1,900 locals of varying size, known as branches, throughout the country. Here, local shop stewards and local branch officers work to protect letter carriers and to make sure postal management abides by the National Agreement.

Branches are run entirely by letter carriers. Although some of the larger NALC branches have one or more full-time elected officers, most branches elect officers to part-time positions. However, all branches rely heavily on volunteer union activists who, along with the branch officers, give their time

to help their fellow members. Members elect their own branch officers in free and fair elections, and any regular member in good standing may run for office. In addition, each branch has shop stewards—letter carriers who represent other letter carriers in their dealings with management.

In postal facilities, NALC's union shop stewards ensure that the rules and policies that NALC negotiates with postal management are followed. Stewards are branch activists who represent their fellow carriers on the job. A great deal of everyday NALC business begins, and ends, with stewards. "Some say stewards have the hardest job in the union," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "But they also have the most important job. Stewards are the face and strength of our union."

Stewards are the bedrock of the union's representation of its members and enforcement of the National Agreement. Their work is essential because the National Agreement protects us in every facet of our job—it guarantees our wages, hours and working conditions. It also contains procedures for enforcing those guarantees.

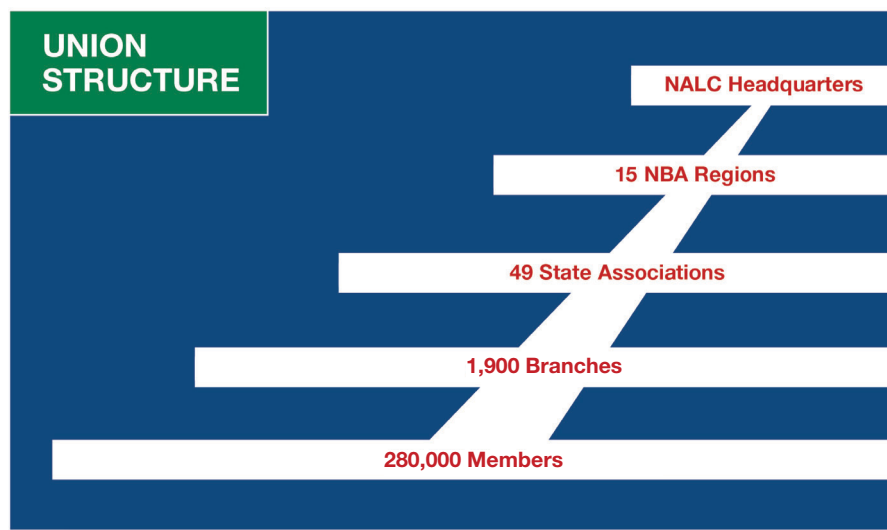
If you have a problem related to work, large or small, a steward is the person to approach. Have a work schedule problem? See your steward. Something wrong with your paycheck? Talk to a steward. The steward will know whether management is violating the contract, and if so, what to do about it.

Prior to employees being disciplined by management, generally they will be given a pre-disciplinary interview (PDI) or an investigatory interview (II) by management. If you are given one of these interviews, there is no doubt

that your supervisor or manager is looking for information to use against you so they can issue you discipline. All letter carriers, including city carrier assistants (regardless of how long they have been employed), have Weingarten rights, which means that you have the right to have a union steward present during a meeting in which management asks you questions that could lead to discipline. Stewards can assist you in any investigation by management and help ensure you get your “day in court.” If called to a meeting with management, U.S. postal inspectors or an Office of Inspector General (OIG) agent, always request that your union representative, officer or steward be present at the meeting before you answer any questions or participate in this discussion.

Stewards have the power to investigate, present and process grievances on behalf of a carrier, group of carriers or for the union as a whole. A grievance, as defined by the National Agreement, is “a dispute, difference, disagreement or complaint between the parties, related to wages, hours and conditions of employment.”

The grievance process has several steps, beginning with the steward filing the grievance paperwork and discussing the grievance situation with your immediate supervisor. This is known as “Informal Step A” of the process. Often, the problem is resolved at this point, but if not, the grievance is elevated to the branch president and postmaster (or their designees) to handle. This is “Formal Step A” of the process. If still not resolved, it is sent to “Step B”—involving a dispute resolution team (DRT), made up of one NALC member and one USPS management member.



Any grievance that the DRT is unable to resolve is sent to the national business agent for the region, who may decide to appeal the grievance to arbitration. If the grievance goes to arbitration, an NALC representative and a USPS representative present evidence and testimony to a neutral arbitrator, who makes a final and binding decision on the grievance.

Though some grievances go all the way to arbitration, most are resolved in the lower steps of the process. No matter how far it goes, every grievance involves a process that may take time and be subject to certain deadlines. If you have a problem, notify a steward immediately to allow ample time to investigate the situation and correct it or prepare a grievance.

What if a steward isn’t available? In that case, contact your branch. In a small branch, that could mean contacting the branch president directly. In a larger branch, you might be directed to talk to a specific officer who is responsible for your area. If the officer isn’t in your station and you can’t talk to him or her in person, call the branch.

Your steward and branch officers handle most contractual situations. If you are unable to contact the steward or branch officers, you should contact your NBA’s office.

“NALC is here to protect your contractual rights,” Rolando said. “So, when you have an issue, no matter how big or small, contact your steward or branch officers, and if necessary, your NBA.”

Contact us

While stewards and branch officers often can easily be reached in person or by phone, an NBA’s office may be farther away. To reach your NBA’s office, call or write him or her directly. The office numbers and addresses are listed on page 2 of each issue of *The Postal Record*. They also can be found on the NALC website—nalc.org.

If you need to contact one of the departments at NALC Headquarters, or the NALC Health Benefit Plan, you may call or write them as well. You can reach the main switchboard for Headquarters at 202-393-4695 and for the HBP at 888-636-6252. **PR**