

The uniform program—How does it work?



Over decades, the Postal Service has established a high level of confidence with the American public and has consistently been rated the most trusted federal agency. City letter carriers, in their familiar blue uniforms, are the public face of USPS. People recognize the USPS brand and feel at ease when they see their letter carrier wearing the familiar uniform.

Besides brand recognition, the city carrier uniform serves several other purposes. Uniforms provide immediate visual identification to the public, which makes the job safer when carriers are going down streets, up to houses, and into businesses. Uniforms provide protection from the elements while delivering mail outdoors for hours a day. In addition, uniforms project a neat and professional appearance that customers associate with the outstanding service provided by letter carriers.

Over the years, NALC has negotiated numerous contractual provisions related to uniforms. Since it is a requirement that eligible letter carriers wear postal uniforms, it was established that the Postal Service must provide eligible letter carriers with the resources to acquire them. Article 26 of the National Agreement states that all employees who are required to wear uniforms or work clothes shall be furnished uniforms or work clothes or shall be reimbursed for purchases of authorized items from licensed vendors. This commitment from the Postal Service is intended to keep letter carriers prepared for duty while relieving them of the financial burden that comes with acquiring durable and comfortable uniform items.

Understanding how the uniform program works can be confusing

for newly hired letter carriers. It is important to know when a new employee becomes eligible for his or her uniform allowance, how much that allowance will be and how it will be provided, and the ways in which uniforms can be purchased. The uniform program varies depending on the employee's status at the time he or she becomes eligible to receive a uniform allowance. Whether the employee is a city carrier assistant (CCA) or career employee can affect how the employee receives the allowance and how items are purchased.

CCAs are eligible to receive their uniform allowance upon completion of whichever of the following two comes first: either 90 workdays or 120 calendar days of employment. The date they become eligible becomes their uniform anniversary date. This anniversary date is maintained for the duration of their career, even after converting to career status, and becomes the date each year they receive their next uniform allowance.

Within 14 days of the eligibility date for receiving a uniform allowance, newly eligible employees should be provided with a letter of authorization—more commonly referred to as a voucher—from their local management, to purchase uniforms. Once the form is completed, they may take the letter of authorization to USPS-authorized vendors to purchase uniform items. Uniform allowances may be used only to buy items from authorized USPS vendors. A list of USPS authorized vendors can be found on the LiteBlue website at liteblue.usps.gov. Click on the “My HR” section and then the “Uniform Program” link. From this section, click on the “Licensed Uniform Vendors” link.

Effective May 21, 2022, the annual uniform allowance for all eligible letter carriers is \$499. After a CCA converts to career status, he or she will receive a one-time additional credit on the next uniform anniversary date. Effective May 21, this one-time additional credit is \$116.

Unfortunately, uniform prices are on the rise. Uniform manufacturers and vendors cite several reasons for higher prices, including increases in the cost of materials, labor, utilities and shipping.

As stated earlier, letter carriers receive a new uniform allowance each year on their anniversary date. Any unspent funds cannot be carried over from the previous year and will be forfeited if they are not used. If a CCA does not use the full allowance before his or her appointment ends, the remainder of the uniform allowance will carry over into the next appointment, but it must be spent before the next anniversary date. CCAs cannot purchase uniform items during their five-day break in service. Again, as a reminder, when a CCA converts to career status, their uniform anniversary date remains the same.

The one significant difference in the uniform program between CCAs and career status employees is the way in which uniform allowances are received and purchased. Career employees do not typically use the letter of authorization or voucher system used by CCAs.

Career employees are provided with a preloaded Visa debit card and simply provide the card number to the authorized vendor to pay for their uniform order. Upon conversion to career status, letter carriers will receive the preloaded debit card in the mail near their next uniform anniversary date.

In the event a CCA is converted to career status after his or her uniform

eligibility or anniversary date, and already has been issued a voucher, the CCA will still have the remainder of the one year of eligibility to use the uniform allowance voucher before receiving the purchasing card on the next anniversary date.

The uniform eligibility date for employees hired directly to career status is upon completion of the 90-day probationary period. As a reminder, career employees will receive the one-time additional credit to their uniform allowance for their first allotment received after becoming a career employee.

Be aware of backorders; vendors are not permitted to charge your allowance until the purchased items ship. Many items are in short supply as production slowed during the pandemic. It's important for both CCAs and career employees to remember to shop early to avoid forfeiting any unspent funds.

New city carriers who have questions about the uniform program, or who have met the eligibility requirements but have not received their letter of authorization or purchasing card to buy uniform items, should contact their NALC shop steward or a branch officer. For more information about uniform allowances and the purchasing process, visit the "New Member Resources" section of the NALC website at nalc.org/member-benefits/new-member-resources.

NALC will continue to address uniform issues using several avenues: the City Carrier Uniform Task force is exploring modified or alternative methods to supply city carriers with sufficient uniform items, the Uniform Control Committee considers all non-cost matter pertaining to the Uniform Allowance Program, and uniform allowances are addressed in collective bargaining. **PR**

