

The New Employee Experience, Retention and Mentoring Program



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The 2023-2026 National Agreement contains a nationwide program called the New Employee Experience, Retention and Mentoring Program. The program, which is new for most of the country, was designed with the intent of improving communication between new letter carriers and their managers and co-workers, providing work experiences that give new letter carriers the ability to learn their jobs at a more moderate pace, and providing them with continuing education beyond the Carrier Academy and the on-the-job instruction stages.

The initial idea behind the New Employee Experience, Retention and Mentoring Program was introduced in 2019 during contract negotiations for the 2019-2023 National Agreement. During negotiations, NALC developed and proposed to the Postal Service a memorandum of understanding (MOU) outlining and detailing a mentoring program that would be afforded to all new city letter carriers as they embarked on their careers with the Postal Service. The Postal Service was interested in the concept, and the two sides agreed to pursue it jointly in a subcommittee of the City Delivery and Workplace Improvement Task Force once the National Agreement was finalized.

The 2019-2023 National Agreement was ratified in March 2021. The subcommittee was then immediately formed and the two sides hit the ground running in pursuit of developing processes to improve the onboarding, retention and mentoring of new employees. By April 2021, the parties had already jointly developed their first program and agreed to conduct a pilot test with the signing of MOU Re: New Employee Experience and Retention Program. The pilot started out small, with two delivery units, as the parties sought to learn about the new processes put in place. By August 2021, the parties had developed a second pilot program with the signing of MOU Re: New Employee Mentoring Program. It, too, started out small.

The two pilot programs were subsequently combined and modified through an addendum in June 2022, and eventually the testing of both programs was expanded to 881 stations and offices throughout the country. As a result of the testing and expansion of these programs, as well as lessons learned and the proven success in

the pilot sites, the MOU Re: New Employee Experience, Retention and Mentoring Program was created, further modifying the programs and combining them into one. Arbitrator Dennis R. Nolan included the MOU and the program in the 2023-2026 National Agreement, and it was to be implemented nationally, to all offices in which city letter carriers work, on July 1, 2025.

The MOU Re: New Employee Experience, Retention and Mentoring Program contains two sections, the first titled “New Employee Experience and Retention” and the second titled “Mentoring Program.”

New Employee Experience and Retention

With the nationwide implementation of the program on July 1, all newly hired city letter carriers now will receive the following, prior to leaving the Carrier Academy and reporting to their employing office:

- Contact information for their employing office, including the direct phone number and email address of the employee’s immediate supervisor, the office phone number, the address of the delivery unit, building access information, and the employee’s reporting date and time.
- A defined work schedule for their first week in the delivery unit. This schedule will include anticipated start and end times, daily hours of work, and scheduled days off. It also will identify days specified for training with an on-the-job instructor (OJI). Additionally, their first day in the office will not be on a Sunday.
- An Employee Identification Number (EIN) and instructions for completing time reporting records. This requirement is necessary to ensure that new letter carriers get paid for the time they spend at Carrier Academy and that they have no issues with their pay when they arrive at their delivery unit.

No later than the first day in the employing office following completion of the Carrier Academy, or as soon as administratively possible, all newly hired letter carriers will receive:

- A new USPS-branded reflective vest, mail satchel and hat. These employees also will receive dog spray as well as all other items regularly

(continued on next page)

The New Employee Experience (continued)

(continued from previous page)

supplied to new employees.

- An introduction to and familiarization with the employing office, including a facility tour, introduction to union steward/officials, management staff and other key personnel, along with locations of communication/bulletin boards. The introduction and tour will be performed jointly by USPS and NALC representatives.

Additionally, the following policies will be in effect (note that the weeks referenced below begin with the first week the new letter carrier begins OJI training following Carrier Academy):

- All city carrier assistant (CCA) and part-time flexible (PTF) city letter carriers will be guaranteed a minimum of one non-scheduled day each service week, except during the penalty overtime exclusion period.
- Following completion of the Carrier Academy, work hours and work locations for CCAs and PTFs will be limited as follows (again, Week 1 begins the week the new employee reports to their delivery unit following Carrier Academy and begins OJI training):
 - Weeks 1-8—restricted to working only in their employing office. This includes restricting these employees from working in hubs outside of the employing office.
 - Weeks 1-4—limited to a maximum of eight work hours per day and 40 work hours per week, including OJI training.
 - Weeks 5-8—limited to a maximum of 10 work hours per day and 56 work hours per week.
 - Weeks 9-11—limited to a maximum of 11.5 work hours per day, which is consistent with *Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM)*, Section 432.32), and 60 work hours per week.
 - Effective beginning Week 12—limited to a maximum of 11.5 work hours per day (consistent with *ELM*, Section 432.32).
- All CCAs and PTFs will receive a defined work

schedule, identifying anticipated non-scheduled days, start and end times, and route assignments. This schedule will be posted by the close of business on the Wednesday of the preceding week.

- All newly hired city letter carriers will receive training on Sunday/Dynamic Delivery procedures with an experienced employee prior to performing Sunday delivery services on their own.
- Progress reviews for newly hired city letter carriers will be conducted at 30-, 60- and 80-day intervals in accordance with current guidelines. Copies of these reviews will be provided to the local union.
- Employees will have access to updated route books and maps. Prior to delivering a new route assignment, employees will be provided with reasonable time to review the route book and, if desired, converse with another carrier familiar with the assignment.
- To the extent possible, newly hired letter carriers will be provided with consistent route assignments to help promote confidence, route knowledge, quality of service and familiarity with the employing office.

Mentoring Program

As I stated earlier, NALC introduced the idea of a mentoring program for new city letter carriers in 2019. Research concerning mentoring programs has shown that mentoring relationships increase retention rates and help employees adapt to new workplaces. Employees who have workplace mentors have been found to be more likely to experience greater job satisfaction, and mentoring relationships can help eliminate the obstacles, difficulties and stumbling blocks that new employees may encounter. Additionally, mentoring programs provide opportunities for new employees to freely ask questions, and gain information necessary to successfully perform their jobs while helping build effective and diverse organizations.

To have a successful mentoring program, we must have experienced city letter carriers willing to serve as mentors to help guide new employees during the early stages of their careers. City letter carriers interested

in serving as mentors can submit their names to the postmaster or branch president, or their designees, for consideration to be selected. Mentors will then be jointly selected by the applicable NALC national business agent and USPS district manager.

When practicable, the mentor will participate in the mentee's tour of the delivery unit, introducing the new employee to colleagues and providing them with an overview of the workroom floor. The mentor and mentee also should meet regularly, as needed, to discuss the mentee's experiences and to address any work-related concerns or issues the mentee may be experiencing. Additionally, the mentor should provide encouragement and advice to the new employee regarding their performance and ability to adapt to the requirements of being a city letter carrier. During the first 120 calendar days of a mentee's employment as a city letter carrier, whenever possible, topics and results of any discussions related to the performance of a mentee should also be shared with the mentor.

Mentor and mentee participation in the program is voluntary. Mentors conduct their duties on the clock and are paid at their normal pay rate. While NALC and

USPS have a joint expectation that mentoring relationships will last for a period of four calendar months, the mentorship can be terminated by either the mentor or mentee at any time. In these circumstances, when practicable, efforts will be made to jointly assign a new mentor to the newly hired employee. Once mentors are jointly selected by the NALC and USPS, they will be provided with a training program to provide them with the skills necessary to properly mentor new letter carriers.

This program was a huge success in the pilot locations that implemented it and complied with the requirements. Retention rates, employee satisfaction, workplace culture and employee availability skyrocketed, positively affecting all employees in those delivery units. To read more about the program, the MOU begins on page 258 of the 2023-2026 National Agreement, which can be found on the NALC website. Additionally, an article that explains the program in detail has been published in the special National Agreement issue of the *NALC Activist*. To read the newest edition of the *NALC Activist*, go to nalc.org/activist.

FECA reform hearing (continued)

(continued from page 44)

pecially for cumulative or occupational diseases. This has made it more difficult for workers to qualify for benefits. The 2015 ProPublica and NPR investigation found that several states, including Florida and Texas, had raised the burden of proof on workers, requiring more extensive medical evidence and documentation.⁶

Reforms often included the imposition of treatment guidelines and provider networks that limited the medical care available to injured workers. These rules frequently delayed or denied necessary treatment. In some states, including Texas and California, reforms allowed insurers to require injured workers to use company-selected doctors and follow rigid treatment guidelines, which often prioritized cost control over recovery.⁷

Clearly, these state "best practices" would betray the trust of the social compact embodied by the FECA and would run roughshod over its remedial intent. FECA reform should prioritize the prompt adjudication of cases and the timely provision of benefits and medical treatment. A focus on these priorities in the long run would achieve greater savings than any of the proposed state "best practices."

It's been our experience—and the DOL has the data to back this up—that the quicker the injured worker gets their claim accepted and receives appropriate treatment, the sooner and more likely it is that they will return to work. Delays in claims adjudication and the resulting postponement of treatment exponentially reduces the chances of the injured worker returning to their pre-injury employment and undermines the FECA's stated purpose of rehabilitating injured workers so that they become productive members of the workforce and society.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Spieler, Emily A., and John F. Burton Jr. "The Lack of Correspondence Between Work-Related Disability and Receipt of Workers' Compensation Benefits." *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, Vol. 55, No. 6, 2012 (onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ajim.21034).