

NALC introduces Informal Step A training that can be taken online or in person

For the past two and a half years, NALC has been developing a standard Informal Step A training program designed to assist shop stewards as they represent letter carriers on the workroom floor. During this time, a group of dedicated and experienced NALC representatives from across the country have been working to create learning modules for this program. The learning modules created by this group are designed to be delivered either in-person or electronically through a learning management system (LMS).

Each learning module is designed to be between 15 and 60 minutes in length, regardless of whether they are taken in person or online. There are four general categories of classes. The first are *National Agreement* modules, the goal of which is to explain what the contract means and how it's

interpreted. The second is grievance procedure modules, which will explain the nuts and bolts of filing a grievance. These will include several modules that deal with topics such as filling out the PS Form 8190, getting statements and interviewing witnesses. The third category is the “how to grieve” modules. These are longer, and they take those contractual provisions and explain to a steward how to file a grievance for a specific violation. And then the fourth category is general education, which includes subjects such as ethical decision making, the structure of NALC and labor history.

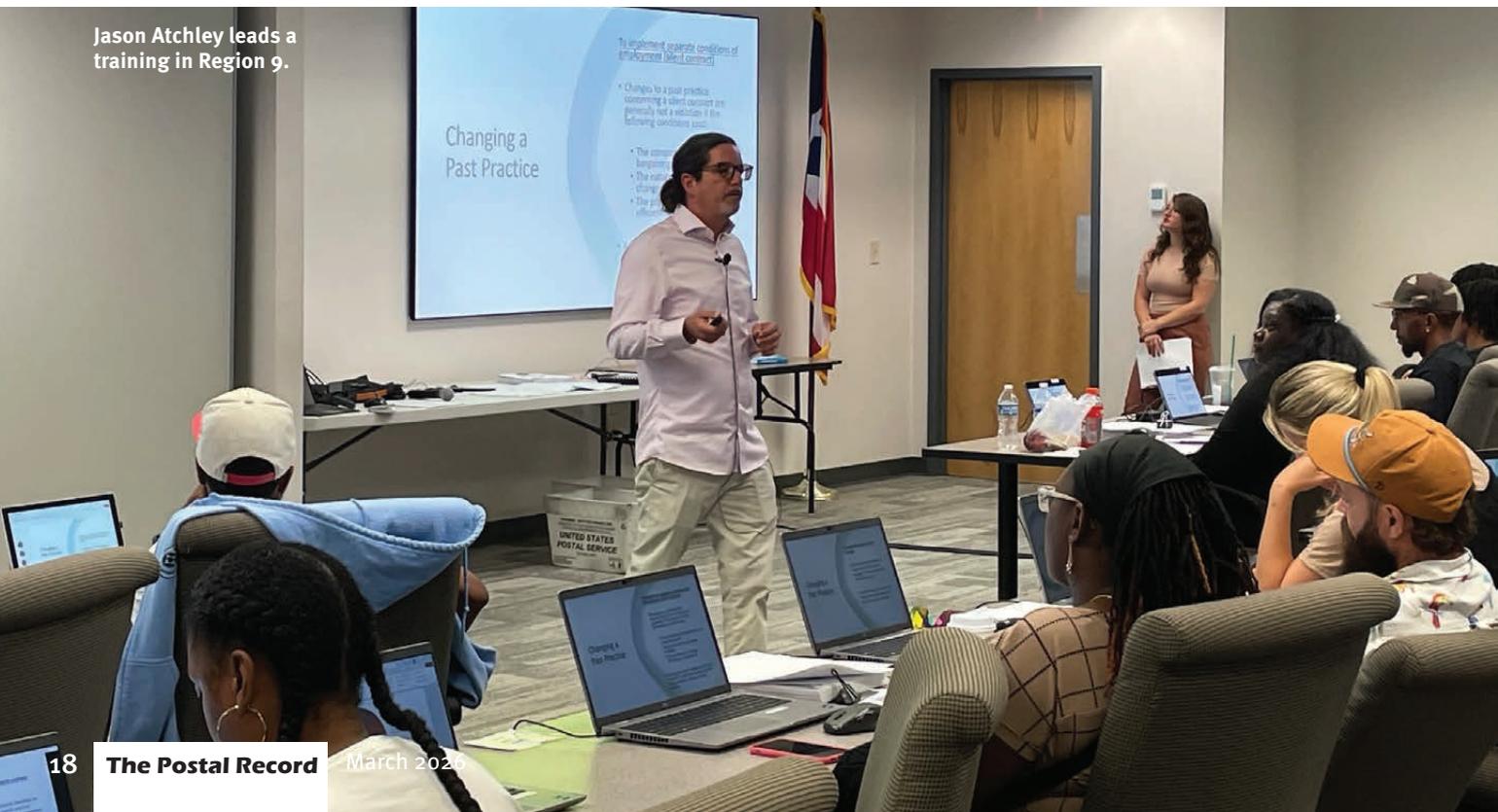
One major goal of the training is to train newer shop stewards and those without a lot of experience investigating and filing grievances using a standard Informal Step A training class. Over the past few years, there has been

high turnover in the letter carrier craft and in the union due to retirements. This program is intended to help pass on the institutional knowledge that may have been lost as more experienced shop stewards have left the workforce.

“The hardest job in the NALC is that of our shop stewards,” said NALC President Brian L. Renfroe. “They are the frontline contract enforcers, working to protect and defend city letter carriers’ rights. We’re proud to offer this new training to bolster their ranks with anyone interested in learning about the process or learning more about the process.”

While the Informal Step A training modules were being developed, NALC has been working with eLearning company Vocalmeet, which has years of experience in the online learning

Jason Atchley leads a training in Region 9.





Anna Mudd (l), Josh Leeking and Kate Drass conduct a training in Region 9.

environment. Vocalmeet assisted NALC in determining the best way to convert the union’s current in-person training to an electronic format. This will allow NALC members who either cannot attend an in-person class for personal reasons or due to financial constraints to complete classes on their time and at their own pace.

NALC decided to create the online platform after seeing the expansion of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Once the LMS is launched—anticipated to occur this spring—members will access the platform by logging into the Members Only portal, which will ensure the platform is only available to NALC members.

Members need to keep in mind that the creation of an online learning platform does not mean that NALC is moving away from in-person training. A majority of NALC branches are small, many with 50 or fewer members, and can’t afford to send people for every training at the regional or national levels. NALC’s newly created online learning system will help to bridge the gap in knowledge and provide the training shop stewards need in smaller branches at no charge.

“By offering it as our first eLearning course, we are making it available to anyone, anywhere who is interested, while doing the course from the convenience of their own home,” Renfroe said.

Following the launch of the LMS, NALC will continue to create new learning modules to meet the needs of the membership. As these modules are

developed, they will be added to the platform. Modules will also be created, and older ones modified, as the contract changes once a new *National Agreement* is implemented.

There are no prerequisites for the online training. As long as an NALC member has access to a computer, tablet or smartphone and is able to log into the Members Only portal, they’ll have access to the online learning system and can take the training whenever they’d like to. One benefit of the online training is that there is no limit to the class size; it’s open to as many carriers as would like to do it.

A group of knowledgeable and experienced letter carrier facilitators worked to create these modules:

- **Jason Atchley** started as a letter carrier in 2005 as a member of Tuscaloosa, AL Branch 1096. In his six years there, he served as a steward, Formal A representative, and eventually branch vice president before transferring to his hometown of Decatur, AL, in 2011. He immediately joined Branch 1314 and became a steward, Formal A representative, and eventually branch president. In 2016, Atchley began serving the members in Alabama and Mississippi as both backup and primary Step B representative, and a few years later became an arbitration advocate for Region 8, which represents Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee. He was appointed as a regional grievance assistant (RGA) for Region 8 in 2019, a position he still serves in.

- **Anna Mudd** began her career in 1996 as a part-time flexible (PTF) as a member of Louisville, KY Branch 14. She served her branch as a steward and sergeant-at-arms/scribe before becoming assistant financial/recording secretary in 2013, secretary in 2015 and vice president in 2016, and also was elected vice president of the Kentucky State Association in 2017. Mudd was appointed as a legislative and political organizer for NALC in 2019 before becoming an RGA for Region 6, which represents Kentucky, Indiana and Michigan, in 2023.

- **Kate Drass** has worked for the Postal Service since 2015 and served as a shop steward at her station, handling grievances at the Informal Step A and Formal Step A level since 2016. Last year she became the first female president of Huntsville, AL Branch 462 and continues to handle grievances at Formal Step A. Drass serves as a legislative liaison for District 5 in Alabama and is also an arbitration advocate. In her roles, she has developed and conducted training for new stewards in her branch, at regional training sessions, and now at the national level.

- **Josh Leeking** started at the Postal Service in December 2012 as a transitional employee and then became a city carrier assistant (CCA) at the Lancaster, PA, Post Office. He was elected as a steward for Branch 273 in the fall of 2014, and has been

Informal Step A training (continued)

representing letter carriers ever since, as a Formal Step A representative, backup member of the Central Pennsylvania/South Jersey dispute resolution team and branch vice president. Leeking is also an arbitration advocate and national assigned assistant for Region 12, which represents Pennsylvania and south and central New Jersey, and was appointed RGA for Region 12 in 2025. He graduated from the NALC Leadership Academy in 2023.

- **Amie Gallo** is a Salt Lake City, UT Branch 111 member who began her career as a PTF in November 2006, becoming a steward in 2008. Since then, she has represented letter carriers in various capacities, including as an arbitration advocate, Step B representative, vice president and director of education for Branch 111. In 2023, Gallo was hired as an RGA for Region 2, which represents Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Utah and Washington.
- **Jennifer Nolf** began her Postal Service career 13 years ago as a CCA and stepped up as a shop steward when she saw management trying to sidestep the *National Agreement*. The Huntsville, AL Branch 462 member later served at both the Informal and Formal A levels and worked as a backup dispute resolution team member for Region 8. Nolf has helped lead trainings locally and regionally and teaches at the Carrier Academy in Huntsville.
- **Jade McBride**, a member of Olympia, WA Branch 351, began carrying mail in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic and quickly became involved with the union. She has served in many roles within her



Mudd leads a training in Region 6.

branch, starting as a trustee and editor. She is now vice president as well as a shop steward, meeting on grievances at the Informal and Formal A levels.

- **Chris Williams** began carrying mail in 2018, became a steward in 2020 and was elected vice president of Northern Kentucky Branch 374 in 2023. He spent two years as a Route Evaluation and Adjustment Team member during the TIAREAP process and has served as president of Branch 374 since October 2025. In addition, Williams is Step B certified, an arbitration advocate, and a graduate of the NALC Leadership Academy.
- **Jazzy Correa** began her career as a PTF in 2006 and is a member of Lancaster, CA Branch 4430. She has served in several roles within the NALC, including sergeant-at-arms, NALC organizer, food drive coordinator (local and regional), shop steward at both the Informal and Formal Step A levels, regional outside steward, DRT member and branch vice president. Since

October 2022, Correa has served as an assistant to the president for the Contract Administration Unit at NALC Headquarters.

“Members will be getting information from experts,” President Renfroe said. “The carriers who are teaching these modules are regional grievance assistants working in the field filing grievances, or they are branch leaders who are working presidents, vice presidents, and grievance handlers who are doing the job of a shop steward today.”

And the carriers who are leading the training are excited to play a role.

“Those first couple of years as a steward were the hardest for me. I felt like I had a basic understanding of the contract, but I was never really taught how to be a shop steward,” Leeking said. “I think my experience of learning as you go is a common one among stewards all over the country. ... I believe this training will help get more people involved and help stewards build better grievances.”

Nolf concurred. “Passion fuels the fight, but knowledge wins it,” she said. “Navigating the contract can feel overwhelming, especially for new members



Atchley conducts a training in Region 6.

and stewards, and my goal is to help make it easier. When we share what we know, we strengthen each other—and our union stays strong.”

Stewards at the Informal Step A are the backbone of our union, Drass says. “Our power lives on the workroom floor,” she said. “We need a force that is knowledgeable, meticulous and active. This training is going to give shop stewards from big and small branches the tools to better represent city letter carriers all over the country. ... I hope this training reaches folks who will take this knowledge, represent their fellow letter carriers to the best of their ability, and pay it forward to others and their successors.”

As this initiative has grown, the number of members working to develop the Informal Step A training materials has increased. Individual members of the team have created each module and will work on creating new modules. During monthly group meetings, they will review the modules that have been created between meetings and help the creators to improve them. Once a module gets approved by the team, it’s ready to be tested in an in-person class.

During the last two and a half years developing this program, the group conducted live classes in Regions 6 and 9, presenting the in-progress modules to a group of shop stewards, and then soliciting responses from the class to find out if there was anything that could be improved. They then took that feedback and made any

necessary edits to the modules. After that, the group got together and filmed the modules.

Initial modules are videos of an instructor with a PowerPoint presentation, as though they were standing in a live classroom. After the modules are filmed and are reviewed, they get sent to the online vendor, who uses them to create the online classes that get posted onto the LMS.

As modules were being completed and it became clear how valuable these trainings were, NALC President Renfroe challenged the group to create a weeklong in-person class from them, which has become a new in-person course being presented this month. This new Informal Step A training will be comprehensive—covering the grievance procedure, general education, how to grieve, and how to apply the *National Agreement* effectively—and the group believes the curriculum successfully teaches brand-new stewards what they need to do in order to interpret the contract and to file grievances.

NALC held an in-person pilot test of this training for a group of 18 letter carriers in July 2025 at the Maritime Conference Center just south of Baltimore, MD. The lessons used a combination of videos and in-person instruction. Participants provided the facilitators with a lot of feedback, which was used to finalize the official in-person training this month for a group of 50 members. A second class is planned for September. At least 175 carriers have applied so far. Moving forward, depending on

the response the training gets and the number of people who want to attend, NALC will look at conducting more classes to accommodate additional applicants.

“In my opinion, this may be the best resource the NALC has provided for its members,” Williams, one of the facilitators, said. “This is a game changer and will take representation to the next level. I hope this resource not only better equips current stewards, but also sparks interest and motivates the next generation of union activists.”

Because everything taught in person will be available in the LMS, whichever way new stewards receive their training, they will be prepared to lead the union forward.

“The online learning system is a thrilling innovation,” Renfroe said. “This brand-new system is going to get training down to that frontline shop steward who doesn’t have the chance to travel for whatever reason. But those members in that branch deserve the same representation as a branch that can send somebody to every training. We had to find a way to deliver that. And from what I’ve seen of what this group has created, we have.

“As excited as I am for what we’ve accomplished, I’m even more excited for how we can continue to develop this new, powerful tool,” he said.

As NALC gets closer to the launch of the learning management system, members will receive updates in *The Postal Record* and on the NALC website. **PR**