

Mentoring Guide for City Carriers

US Postal Service / NALC

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WHAT IS THE NEW EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE, RETENTION AND MENTORING PROGRAM?

WELCOME

Welcome to the NALC and USPS joint New Employee Experience, Retention and Mentoring Program and thank you for volunteering as a mentor! You have been invited to join the mentoring ranks because you have demonstrated what it means to be a professional carrier, and we look forward to giving you the opportunity to share your experience with our newest city carriers.

The purpose of this program is to provide newly hired city letter carriers with the opportunity to develop mentoring relationships with experienced city carriers.

This voluntary program provides an avenue for experienced carriers to share their knowledge, skills, and passion with newly hired city letter carriers. The program is included and outlined in the NALC-USPS National Agreement and in Appendix A of this guide.

We hope that you will find mentorship a rewarding experience and encourage you to explore the full benefits mentoring brings to you, your mentee, and your unit.

A JOINT STATEMENT FROM USPS AND NALC

Training material presented in this guide was developed through a partnership between the National Association of Letter Carriers and the United States Postal Service. These course materials are intended to be used for training purposes only. They have been prepared in conformance with existing policies and standards and do not represent the establishment of new regulations or policies.

THE NEED FOR CULTURAL CHANGE

We often speak of cultural change, but how can we change the culture? Mentoring allows our experienced carriers the chance to directly influence the learning and behavior of the next generation. As a mentor, you can directly shape the next generation of carriers and help define the future Postal Service.

A JOINTLY CREATED MENTORING PROGRAM

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 obstacles, difficulties, and stumbling blocks new employees may encounter. Additionally, effective mentoring programs provide opportunities

for new employees to freely ask questions, gain information necessary to effectively perform their jobs and help build effective and diverse organizations.

Realizing the benefits of a successful mentorship program, the USPS and NALC have jointly created the New Employee Experience, Retention and Mentoring Program to define the scope of the mentorship program for new city letter carriers.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MENTOR

When you choose to be a mentor, you are forming a relationship between yourself and a new city letter carrier. As a more seasoned individual, you will not only pass along what you have learned, but you will help guide the new employee on their Postal journey. You help demonstrate what it means to be a professional city letter carrier!

You, working with local management, will provide direction and guidance for the new employee. As your mentee develops skills, you reflect on their progress and help set new developmental milestones. The typical relationship spans the new employee's first 120 days after they enter your unit.

WHY BE A MENTOR?

A mentoring relationship not only benefits the new employee, but it also benefits you! You have the chance to invest in another person and watch your investment grow. As you progress, you may find that you are growing as much as your mentee. Mentoring may provide an opportunity for you to develop better communication skills, strengthen personal relationships, build trust and, perhaps, develop lifelong friendships.

Within the office, your efforts may help build comradery among your fellow carriers. As the new employee's skills develop, they will help relieve the burden currently shared among the more senior carriers by independently and efficiently casing and carrying routes on their own. This, in turn, helps stabilize the office schedule, allowing for better work-life balance for all carriers in the unit.

MENTORING

WHAT IS MENTORING?

Mentoring is about helping others help themselves by asking questions, providing feedback, and helping people think through their own solutions. Mentoring is not giving someone all the answers and directing their actions. Mentoring works best when you are working with people who have already grasped the basics, but who may need help with breaking through to their next level of achievement. Mentoring is also about helping the new employee work through the struggles of a new job and the job's impact on their work-life balance.

When you mentor, you help the new employee:

- Focus on the future.
- Clarify the pathway from the present situation to a brighter future.
- Make informed choices.

Focus on the person, not the issue:

- What are they going through?
- What are their goals?
- What are their challenges?
- How are they thinking?

Key mentoring skills:

- Listen before you talk. Don't just listen to their words, but also their tone of voice and body language. Shifts in tone or body position may signal something of importance to the mentee.
- Be positive and encouraging.
- Focus on their agenda, not yours.
- Be present in the conversation.

Great mentors do the following:

- Listen to the situation.
- Clarify understanding by asking questions.
- Help the mentee understand their options.
- Gain commitment for action.
- Reflect on the outcome.

INTENT

The intent of this mentoring program is for the mentor to spend a few minutes in regular conversations to clarify a new employee's skills and help reflect on their learning. It is not intended for the mentor to take longer blocks of time to teach fundamental skills – in such cases, the mentor should coordinate with the new employee's supervisor to arrange formal

training they think may be needed to improve the new employee's skills. Mentoring is about reinforcing the skills the new employee learned in the academy. It is not intended as a replacement for formal on-the-job instructor (OJI) or academy training.

THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

BUILDING A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Ideally, your relationship with your new mentee will begin on their first day working in the delivery unit. Think about first impressions. What kind of impression do you want to make on the new employee?

Consider incorporating the following to help make a great first impression:

- Help welcome the new employee into your unit.
- Thank the new employee for joining your team.
- Let them know you are there for them from day one.
- Explain how you will support them as their mentor.
- Share your contact information with the new employee.
- Project a positive image.

What impressions do you have of the new employee? Are you making any assumptions based on your first impressions? If so, consider how those assumptions will reflect in the mentoring relationship. Realize that a first impression is just that – a beginning.

As your relationship with the new employee develops, you can help strengthen it by fostering trust, investing your time, listening to their needs and being genuinely supportive as they learn what it means to be a city letter carrier.

BEST PRACTICE

Encourage others by listening attentively and consistently for strengths, efforts, progress, contribution, good intentions, willingness to go outside of comfort zone, energy, and enthusiasm, etc.

As the mentor, be sure to reflect back what you notice and most importantly, be genuine! Notice the impact and check to see that your feedback has “landed.” If not, rephrase and try again.

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Each relationship is unique. The skills you use for one individual may not be applicable to another. Relationships grow with empathy, understanding and patience.

Here are some qualities you may consider developing to strengthen your relationship skills:

- Willingness to share skills, knowledge, and expertise.

- Demonstrate a positive attitude and act as a positive role model.
- Take a personal interest in the mentoring relationship.
- Exhibit enthusiasm for the relationship.
- Place a value on the opinions of your mentee.
- Provide positive guidance and constructive feedback.
- Be genuine and appreciative.
- Set a good example by doing what you say (“walk the walk”).

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

ACTIVE LISTENING

Listening actively is the most basic skill you will use throughout your relationship. Active listening not only establishes rapport but creates a positive, accepting environment that permits open communication. By listening actively, you will ascertain your mentee's interests and needs. When actively listening be sure to:

- Show interest in what the mentee is saying and reflect on important aspects of what they said to show that you've understood.
- Use body language (such as making eye contact) that shows you are paying attention to what they are saying.
- Reserve discussing your own experiences or giving advice until after your mentee has had a chance to thoroughly explain their issue, question, or concern.

COMMUNICATION WITH MANAGEMENT

The program encourages management and local union partners to discuss the progress of the mentee. These discussions should focus on identifying skill gaps, determining progressive milestones, and giving praise for accomplishments. The mentor helps bridge communication between the mentee and their supervisor.

- Focus on what is in your control.
- Communicate early and often.
- Develop a positive relationship.
- Focus on the task, not the individual.

HAVING A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

It is inevitable that a time will come when you need to discuss something difficult – either with your mentee or the supervisor. How you handle this situation will have a direct reflection on its outcome. Before going into the conversation, ask yourself the following questions:

- What is your purpose for having the conversation?
- What do you hope to accomplish?
- What would be an ideal outcome?

Here are some effective tools when confronted with a challenging exchange:

- Tell a story... Dry information and stats don't inspire people to make a change or listen to you.
- Chunk it down... Break down your message into bite sized pieces that can be easily consumed.

- Be respectful... Gain understanding by asking powerful questions.
- Get to the point... Don't confuse the conversation unnecessarily.
- Share your own experience.

BEST PRACTICES

- Create a safe space.
- Ensure confidentiality.
- Listen completely.

YOUR ROLE IN SUPPORTING THE INTENT OF THE MOU

WELCOMING THE NEW EMPLOYEE AND THE FACILITY TOUR

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 intent regarding participation in the facility tour and introduction to colleagues is for the mentor to form a relationship with the new employee as early as possible. Participating in the new employee's first experiences in the unit will help build a bond of trust and support. Reasonable efforts should be made to participate in the welcome experience. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), however, does not require exceptional efforts such as changing days off, modifying daily schedules or working additional hours.

REGULAR MEETING SCHEDULE

The mentor and mentee 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. Such requests should not be unreasonably denied.

The intent regarding regular meetings is not to set a specific schedule or number of minutes per day/week. Rather, the intent is to maintain regular face to face meetings between the mentor and mentee sufficient to support the new employee and gauge their development. This can look like:

- Five minutes a day in the morning during the carriers initial learning period.
- A short meeting once or twice a week as the carrier begins to gain mastery of their new skills.
- A three-minute phone call around handling a street issue.

Meeting time and frequency should be adjusted based on the individual's development. A new carrier who is quick at picking up the job may need shorter and/or less frequent conversations than someone who is struggling with mastering the skillset.

Regular meetings do not mean:

- A required number of minutes each day (reasonable times of a few minutes per day appropriate for your situation are acceptable).
- A required number of times to meet each week.
- A required day or time to meet (this does not preclude setting a meeting schedule that is mutually agreeable).

MEETING DISCUSSION TOPICS

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.

The intent of this section of the MOU is for the mentor to provide a positive influence that reinforces the new employee's training and bolsters their experience.

Keep the discussions positive, informative, and focused on the new employee's development and future with the Postal Service.

Example topics of conversation could include:

- Organization skills – organizing the mail.
- Adjusting to the physical requirements of being a city letter carrier.
- Understanding markups.
- Completing vehicle inspections.
- Loading the truck.
- PM office duties / cleaning up.
- Casing tips.
- Working safely in the office and on the street.
- Benefit programs offered to the new employee (60 days to sign up).
- Support programs available such as EAP.

The mentor works in partnership with management to support a developmental journey that offers the new employee a brighter prospect of success in their new job than they would have without mentoring.

APPENDIX A – MOU

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE AND THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LETTER CARRIERS, AFL-CIO

Re: New Employee Experience, Retention and Mentoring Program

Pursuant to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Re: *City Delivery and Workplace Improvement Task Force*, the parties agreed to conduct two pilot programs related to the onboarding, retention, and mentoring of new employees. These pilot programs, outlined in MOU Re: *New Employee Experience and Retention Program* and MOU Re: *New Employee Mentoring Program*, were agreed to in April 2021, and August 2021, respectively. The programs were subsequently combined and modified through an addendum in June 2022.

As a result of the testing and expansion of these programs within hundreds of offices throughout the country, as well as the proven success in the pilot sites, the parties agree to implement the New Employee Experience, Retention and Mentoring Program within all USPS installations in which city letter carriers work. All newly hired city letter carriers will be informed of this program as part of the education they receive at the Carrier Academy. The guidelines of the program are as follows:

New Employee Experience and Retention

Prior to leaving the Carrier Academy and reporting to their employing office, all newly hired city letter carriers will receive:

- Contact information for the applicable employing office, including the direct phone number/email address of the employee's immediate supervisor, the office phone number, address of the delivery unit, building access information, and the employee's reporting date and time.
- A defined work schedule for the employee's first week in the delivery unit. This schedule will include anticipated reporting start and end times, daily hours of work, and scheduled day(s) off. It will also identify days specified for training with an on-the-job instructor (OJI). An employee's first day in the office will not be on a Sunday.
- An Employee Identification Number (EIN) and instructions for completing time reporting records.

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 will also receive dog spray and all other items regularly supplied to new employees.
- Introduction to and familiarization with the employing office, including a facility tour, introduction to union steward/officials, management staff, and other key personnel, and 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:

- All City Carrier Assistant (CCA) and Part-time Flexible (PTF) city letter carriers will be guaranteed a minimum of one (1) nonscheduled day each service week, except during the penalty overtime exclusion period. This exception to receiving at least one nonscheduled day each service week during the penalty overtime exclusion period does not apply to CCAs or PTFs during Weeks 1 through 8 following completion of the Carrier Academy. Effective beginning Week 9, CCAs and PTFs may volunteer to work beyond six days per service week.
- Following completion of the Carrier Academy, workhours and work locations for CCAs and PTFs will be limited as follows (week 1 begins the week the new employee begins OJI training):
 - Weeks 1 through 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 through 4 - limited to a maximum of 8 workhours per day and 40 workhours per week, including OJI training.
 - Weeks 5 through 8 - limited to a maximum of 10 workhours per day and 56 workhours per week.
 - Effective beginning week 9 - 11 limited to a maximum of 11.5 workhours per day (consistent with Employee and Labor Relations Manual, Section 432.32), and 60 workhours per week.
 - Effective beginning week 12 limited to a maximum of 11.5 workhours per day (consistent with Employee and Labor Relations Manual, Section 432.32).

Note: CCAs and PTFs are unavailable beyond the hours specified above during weeks 1-11.

- 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 90-day intervals in accordance with current guidelines. During these progress reviews, local management will identify opportunities for improvement, provide constructive feedback, and consider additional OJI/hands-on training, as necessary. Copies of these reviews will be provided to the local union.

APPENDIX A – MOU (CONTINUED)

- Employees will have access to updated route books and maps. Prior to delivering a new route assignment, employees will be provided 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 consistent route assignments to help promote confidence, route knowledge, quality of service, and familiarity with the employing office. It is the parties' expectation that newly hired letter carriers will be given the same assignment as was worked the previous day, to the extent possible during their first 12 weeks. In circumstances in which a letter carrier is assigned to work on a route with which they are not familiar, the reasonable amount of time necessary to become familiar with the route will be considered when evaluating the carrier's performance.
- New employees are prohibited from performing work outside of the city letter carrier craft during their first 90 work days or 120 calendar days, whichever comes first.
- During the first 90 work days or 120 calendar days of a new city letter carrier's employment, a meeting should occur prior to any voluntary or involuntary separation. When practicable the new employee, a union representative, their mentor, and the appropriate management representative should discuss the reasons for the potential separation and whether there are possible alternatives or resolutions to address the underlying issues. Note: The new employee has the right to decline union or mentor representation during these conversations.
- Joint Retention Teams (JRTs) may be established by mutual agreement of the USPS District Manager and NALC National Business Agent, or designees. JRTs are comprised of one NALC member (compensated on a no loss, no gain basis) and one USPS member. The respective NALC National Business Agent, or designee, will select the NALC team member and the District Manager, or designee, will select the USPS team member. JRTs will educate, assist, and monitor compliance with this program at installations with city letter carriers.

Mentoring Program

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 obstacles, difficulties, and stumbling blocks new employees may encounter. Additionally, effective mentoring programs provide opportunities for new employees to freely ask questions, gain information necessary to effectively perform their jobs and help build effective and diverse organizations. With this in mind, a mentoring program will be established for all newly hired city letter carriers.

City letter carriers interested in serving as mentors may submit their names to the postmaster or branch president, or their designees, for consideration. Mentors will be jointly selected by the applicable NALC National Business Agent and USPS District Manager, or their designees, based on the following criteria:

- Sufficient understanding of USPS policies, rules, and regulations
- Ability to convey a positive image and attitude
- Demonstrated good communication skills, safe working practices, and regular attendance
- Commitment to a four-month mentoring relationship, during which time the mentor will make themselves available for telephonic and/or in-person discussions during regularly scheduled workhours
- Willingness to meet, both independently and with mentee participation, with management concerning the work performance of mentee
- Ability and willingness to successfully complete a mentor training program jointly developed by the national parties

Once a reasonable amount of time has been provided for employees to volunteer as mentors, the local parties (installation head or designee and the branch president or designee) will begin to facilitate mentor-mentee relationships. Pairings will be jointly selected by the local parties.

Mentoring relationships established by this program will include the following:

- 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 should meet regularly, as needed, to discuss the mentee's experiences and to address any workrelated concerns or issues the mentee may be experiencing. Such requests should not be unreasonably denied.
- 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 (positive or negative), including 30-, 60-, and 80-day evaluations as described by Handbook EL-312, *Employment and Placement*, Section 584, *Employee Evaluation*, should be shared with the mentor. Note: The new employee may choose to not have this information shared with the mentor.

Mentor and mentee participation in this program will be voluntary. While the parties have a joint expectation that mentoring relationships will last for a period of four calendar months, the mentorship may 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.

This program will be implemented as agreed upon by the national parties. Prior to implementation, all city letter carriers will be provided with information about the program. This agreement is without prejudice to the position of either party in this or any other matter.

APPENDIX B - A COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY

The Postal Service is committed to fostering and achieving a work and learning environment that respects and values a diverse workforce. Valuing and managing diversity in the Postal Service means that we will build an inclusive environment that respects the uniqueness of every individual and encourages the contributions, experiences, and perspectives of all people.

It is essential that our work and learning environments be free from discrimination and harassment on any basis.

In our classrooms, on the workroom floor, in casual conversation and in formal meetings, employees and faculty are asked to encourage an open learning environment that is supportive of everyone.

Course materials and lectures, classroom debates and casual conversation should always reflect the commitment to safety and freedom from discrimination, sexual harassment and harassment on any prohibited basis. Instructors and class participants are expected to support this commitment.

If you find course material that is presented in the classroom or in self-instructional format that does not follow these guidelines, please let an instructor know immediately.

If classroom discussions do not support these principles, please point that out to the instructor as well.

Diversity is a source of strength for our organization. Diversity promotes innovation, creativity, productivity, and growth, and enables a broadening of existing concepts.

The Postal Service's policy is to value the diversity of our employees, customers, and suppliers, and to do what is right for our employees and the communities we serve, thereby ensuring a competitive advantage in the global marketplace.