

How do I get city carrier uniforms?



Over the 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 they become 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 CCAs 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 provide the letter of authorization to USPS-authorized vendors to purchase uniform items. Uniform allowances may be used to buy items only 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 sec-

tion, 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, they will receive a one-time additional credit of \$116 on the next uniform anniversary date.

The one significant difference in the uniform program between CCAs and career status employees is the way in which uniform allowances are received and uniforms 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 close to their next uniform anniversary date. Keep in mind, this process is not automatic. After conversion to career status and as the employee’s uniform anniversary date approaches, local management must complete the Uniform Allowance Request Interactive Worksheet and submit it to the Human Resource Shared Services Center (HRSSC) for the card to be issued.

In the event a CCA is converted to career status after their 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.

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 not used. If a CCA does not use the full allowance before their 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. Be aware of backorders; vendors are not permitted to charge your allowance until the purchased items ship. It’s important for both CCAs and career employees to remember to shop early to avoid forfeiting any unspent funds.

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. NALC is concerned about city carrier uniform pricing and availability and routinely engages with the Postal Service on uniform issues in several ways. As part of ongoing collective-bargaining negotiations, NALC will continue to pursue Article 26 improvements to uniform allowances. Additionally, NALC will use the City Carrier Uniform Task Force to explore modified or alternative methods to supply city carriers with sufficient uniform items. As part of the duties of



the Uniform Control Committee, the parties consider all non-cost matters pertaining to the Uniform Allowance Program.

CCA uniform program details, including how the uniform allowance is provided, how uniforms are purchased, and how the uniform vendor is reimbursed, are explained on pages 26-2 through 26-4 of the *Joint Contract Administration Manual* and in the uniform section of the *Letter Carrier Resource Guide*, which are available on the NALC website (at nalc.org/jcam and nalc.org/resourceguide, respectively). 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. **PR**