

Uniform program for city carrier assistants



**Brian
Renfroe**

Letter carriers in uniform are the public face of one of the country's largest employers, representing more than 500,000 employees of the USPS. Uniforms serve several purposes. They provide immediate visual identification to the public, which makes the job safer when going down streets and up to houses all over America. In addition, uniforms project a neat and professional appearance that customers associate with the outstanding service provided by letter carriers.

I often field calls and questions about issues related to uniforms for city carrier assistants (CCAs). It is important for CCAs, shop stewards and NALC representatives to understand how the uniform program works so

that they are in the best position to ensure CCAs are provided with a uniform allowance and may purchase uniforms.

The interest arbitration award issued on Jan. 10, 2013, by the panel chaired by Arbitrator Shyam Das incorporated a uniform allowance for CCAs equivalent to that afforded to career letter carriers. This is reflected in Article 26.3 of the National Agreement. This is the first time that non-career letter carriers have been provided with the same allowance as career letter carriers. However, the process of obtaining the allowance and purchasing uniforms is different for CCAs.

The first point to understand is when a CCA becomes eligible for a uniform allowance. Article 26.3 of the National Agreement states:

When the CCA has completed ninety (90) work days, or has been employed for 120 calendar days, whichever comes first, the CCA will be provided with an annual uniform allowance equal to the amount provided to career employees in Section 2.A. Time served as a Transitional Employee will count toward the 90/120 day requirement.

The uniform purchases are reimbursed by the Postal Service directly to the vendor. Uniforms will be returned by CCAs separated and not reapportioned.

CCAs are eligible for a uniform allowance after completing 90 workdays or having been employed for 120 calendar days, whichever comes first. This date is the anniversary date the CCAs will maintain for the duration of their career, even after being converted to full-time career status. This is the date each year that the letter carrier becomes eligible for the yearly uniform allowance.

The second point to understand is how a CCA receives the allowance and purchases uniforms. We reached agree-

ment with the Postal Service on the process that would be used to provide the uniform allowance to CCAs. This agreement is reflected in the *Questions and Answers 2011 USPS/NALC National Agreement*. It is assigned Materials Reference System (MRS) number M-01833 and is available on the NALC website at mseries.nalc.org/M01833.pdf. CCA uniform information, including how the uniform allowance is provided, how uniforms are purchased and how the uniform vendor is reimbursed, is addressed in this document in Questions 47-56.

The most common issue that arises is failure to provide a letter of authorization form to purchase uniforms within 14 days of the eligibility date as required by Question 50, as follows:

50. How is a uniform allowance provided to a CCA?

When a CCA becomes eligible for a uniform allowance, funds must be approved through an eBay submission by local management. After approval, a Letter of Authorization form must be completed and provided to the employee within 14 days of the eligibility date. The CCA takes the completed form to a USPS authorized vendor to purchase uniform items. The Letter of Authorization can be located on the Uniform Program website on the Blue Page under Labor Relations.

I strongly encourage each CCA to review these questions and answers. If you have any questions about uniforms or have not received a letter of authorization for purchasing uniforms within 14 days of your eligibility date, promptly contact your shop steward or an NALC branch officer.

Any violation of the agreed-upon process defined in M-01833 is a contract violation. In such case, a grievance should be filed citing a violation of Article 26.3 of the National Agreement and the *Questions and Answers 2011 USPS/NALC National Agreement (M-01833)*. An issue statement for such a grievance could be:

Did management at the [Installation name] Installation violate Article 26.3 of the National Agreement and the jointly developed Questions and Answers, 2011 USPS/NALC National Agreement (M-01833) by not providing a completed Letter of Authorization for uniform purchase to CCA(s) [name(s)] within 14 days of their eligibility date. If so, what should the remedy be?

The Postal Service also created an additional document designed to help explain the uniform program and how it works to local managers. This document has been assigned MRS number M-01822. It is available on the NALC website at mseries.nalc.org/M01822.pdf. This document provides detailed instructions for local managers on all aspects of the uniform program and how it relates to CCAs. Issues that arise locally can often be quickly rectified by providing this document to your manager.

Providing Uniforms to City Carrier Assistants (CCA)

Article 26, Section 3, of the 2011 National Agreement between the United States Postal Service and National Association of Letter Carriers, AFL-CIO, states:

When the CCA has completed ninety (90) work days, or has been employed for 120 calendar days, whichever comes first, the CCA will be provided with an annual uniform allowance equal to the amount provided to career employees in Section 2.A. Time served as a Transitional Employee will count toward the 90/120 day requirement. The uniform purchases are reimbursed by the Postal Service directly to the vendor. Uniforms will be returned by CCAs separated and not reappointed.

Article 26, Section 2.A of the Agreement provides the specific allowance amounts as follows:

Effective Nov. 21, 2012 = \$390
Effective Nov. 21, 2013 = \$399
Effective Nov. 21, 2014 = \$409
Effective Nov. 21, 2015 = \$420

Procedures

1. Determining Eligibility for Uniform Allowance

The local manager determines the eligibility based on the number of days in service:

- The eligibility date is the date in which the CCA has completed ninety (90) work days, or has been employed for 120 calendar days, whichever comes first.
- The CCA is eligible on the 91st or 121st day to receive annual uniform allowance in a lump sum amount.
- CCAs who have previously satisfied the 90/120 day requirement as a transitional employee (with an appointment made after September 29, 2007) become eligible for a uniform allowance at the beginning of their first CCA appointment.

Note: The CCA Eligibility Report is posted on the Blue Page under the Uniform Program Website, select CCA Uniform Procedures. This report provides a list of all CCAs, as well as their entered-on-duty (EOD) dates and eligibility dates. There will be two reports located on the website: 1) CCAs with prior TE service and 2) new hire CCAs. Updated reports will be added to the website periodically.

2. Authorizing the Expenditure in eBuy

The local manager must prepare a separate eBuy for each eligible CCA assigned to the unit for the lump sum annual allowance.

The following information must be included in the eBuy:

- CCA full name
- CCA entered-on-duty date (EOD)
- Eligibility date
- Total annual allowance amount.

Note: The annual allowance amount must not exceed the contractual agreement.

3. Completing the Letter of Authorization

The local manager completes the Letter of Authorization for each CCA. The letter can be found on the *Blue Page* under the *Uniform Program Website*. **The Letter of Authorization must be printed on official USPS office letterhead.**

The Letter of Authorization must be completed in full, including the complete installation address and the local manager's original signature and date.

4. Making the Purchase

The CCA presents the original completed Letter of Authorization to an authorized USPS uniform vendor and official Postal identification at the time of purchase.

A listing of all authorized vendors can be found on both the Blue Page and LiteBlue. Instructions are attached.

The CCA purchases cannot exceed the annual allowance amount.

The vendor retains the original Letter of Authorization.

The vendor creates an itemized invoice of the sale and provides a copy to the employee. The vendor mails the invoice for payment, along with the original Letter of Authorization to the facility address of the local manager.

Note: The vendor will not accept a Letter of Authorization that does not contain an original signature and date, and will not process the purchase unless Postal identification is presented.

5. Paying the Invoice

Upon receipt of the invoice, the local manager verifies the amount of the purchase and ensures that it is equal to or less than the current balance of the CCA's allowance. The total amount of invoices paid to a uniform vendor for CCA uniform item purchases cannot exceed the amount of the approved eBuy.

The local manager certifies the invoice and pays using his/her office SmartPay Purchase card.

Note: Effective October 1, 2013, the PS Form 8230, *Authorization for Payment*, method will become obsolete and will no longer be accepted for the local purchase of goods and services. To find out how to obtain a purchase card, please go to the following Blue Page site: http://blue.usps.gov/purchase/operations/ops_impachome.htm or contact the Purchasing Shared Services Center (PSSC) at 877-293-2410.

6. Required Documentation for Purchase Reconciliation

Reconciliation of the CCA's uniform allowance expenditure includes the approved eBuy, Letter of Authorization, copies of each certified invoice, and the uniform allowance log. As with all SmartPay Purchase card transactions, this documentation must be kept on file for three years (Handbook AS-709, Section 314).

Local managers must maintain a uniform allowance log that documents the following information for each CCA:

- Entered-on-duty (EOD) date
- The eligibility date
- The amount of allowance spent
- The amount of allowance balance
- Total amount spent year-to-date

The sum must not exceed the total amount of the annual allowance.

An instruction to create your office log is attached.

7. Collecting Uniform Items at the End of Appointment

CCAs separated and not reappointed must return all purchased uniform items to local managers upon separation.