

**Questions
&
Answers**
**about
the
APWU**

1) What is the APWU?

The APWU - American Postal Workers Union is a national organization of postal employees dedicated to advancing the interests of our members and their families. Representing 330,000 workers in every state and territory of the United States, the APWU is the largest union of postal workers in the world. It is recognized as the collective bargaining agent for postal workers in the clerk, motor vehicle service and maintenance crafts, as well as workers employed in support services: information systems/ accounting service centers, mail equipment shops, material distribution centers, and operating services facilities.

The APWU also represents workers in the private-sector postal industry, including mail haulers and mail transport equipment service workers

2) What does the union do?

The primary job of the union is to negotiate collective bargaining agreements with the US Postal Service and other employers. These contracts establish wages, working conditions and other benefits for the workers represented by the APWU.

The union also fights for the interests of postal workers in the political arena, monitoring legislation that affects working people - especially postal workers - and standing up for our interests.

In addition, the APWU educates workers about workplace safety provides technical assistance when hazards are discovered, and fights for safety on the job. The union evaluates the impact of technological change and works to ensure job security.

The union also protects workers' rights by representing them when they face problems on the job such as discipline, violations of seniority, harassment, discrimination or other management abuse.

3) What are the benefits of belonging?

Membership in the APWU gives you a voice in determining your future. Members have the right to participate in local meetings, to vote for local and national officers, to vote on contracts, to run for office, and to petition for change in the union.

Other membership benefits include eligibility for:

- The APWU Health Plan, which provides comprehensive coverage at a very reasonable cost.
- The Voluntary Benefits Plan, which offers an APWU MasterCard, Group Legal Services, Term Life Insurance, Short- and Long-term Disability Insurance, a Supplemental Hospital Cash program, Accidental Death & Dismemberment Insurance, a Dental Plan, a Basic Care Hospital Plan and more! (***The Basic Care Hospital Plan is not available in NY State.***)
- College and vocational scholarships, which are awarded to outstanding APWU members, their children and grandchildren.
- ***The American Postal Worker*** magazine, which informs members about issues and programs affecting postal workers.

4) Who can join?

APWU membership is open to any employee of the USPS regardless of race, color sex, sexual orientation, nationality, handicap, political affiliation, age or religion. USPS employees who work in supervisory or management positions can join only to enroll in the APWU Health Plan.

APWU membership is also open to workers employed by private companies in the postal industry

5) Who runs the union?

You do! Every level of the APWU operates democratically on the principle of majority rule. Members are encouraged to vote and to express their views freely. All local, regional, and national officers are elected by the members, as are the officers in each craft. Members also ratify negotiated collective bargaining agreements and elect delegates to the APWU national and state conventions.

The national convention, which convenes every two years, is the highest governing body of the union. Between conventions, the National Executive Board directs union policy and programs.

6) How is APWU structured?

The APWU operates on several levels. Most members belong to a local union that provides front-line representation in their city town or area. Local union members elect their own officers and conduct their own day-to-day business. They may establish local dues and may negotiate a local contract to supplement the APWU-USPS National Agreement on issues that concern them.

The APWU maintains its national headquarters in Washington, DC, to administer the union and to implement programs and policies mandated by the convention and the National Executive Board. The Executive Board consists of the President, Executive Vice President, Secretary-Treasurer, Director of Industrial Relations, Clerk Division Director, Motor Vehicle Division Director, Maintenance Division Director and five Regional Coordinators.

The various divisions - Clerk, Motor Vehicle Service, Maintenance and Support Services - are concerned with the special problems of the workers in each craft. In addition to the directors and other national officers, each division has representatives in the field called national business agents.

The APWU also has national officers and departments that are responsible for providing special services to the membership—Legislative, Organization, Research and Education, Human Relations, and Health Plan. Regional coordinators maintain offices in each of five regions: Central, Eastern, Northeast, Southern, and Western.

7) How are officers elected?

APWU members elect national union officers every three years by mail-in ballots. The members of each craft elect their officers and national business agents, and the members of each region elect their regional coordinators.

Any member may become a candidate for national office by filing a petition in accordance with the APWU constitution.

8) How much are dues?

Dues are very reasonable and vary from local to local. They include national dues established by the national convention and local dues determined by your local union.

After you have joined the APWU, dues are automatically deducted from your paycheck. Your steward or local officer can tell you the cost of dues.

9) How are my dues spent?

National dues pay for all the operating expenses of the union, including contract negotiations and the cost for arbitration at the regional and national levels. Members' dues also cover the cost of publications, legal fees, legislative activities, education and training, and community service programs.

10) How does the union negotiate collective bargaining agreements?

For negotiating the APWU-USPS National Agreement, the union has a negotiating team comprised of the president, the executive vice president, the director of industrial relations, and the directors of the crafts we represent. This team meets with Postal Service management several months before a current contract expires. The team proposes contract language, the Postal Service responds, and through the give-and-take of negotiation, they try to reach agreement.

Members of the APWU who are not covered by the APWU-USPS National Agreement form their own negotiating teams. These teams include APWU representatives as well as legal counsel.

11) Do I get to vote on the contract?

Yes. A negotiated collective bargaining agreement becomes valid only after approval by the membership through a mail ballot.

After the national negotiating team reaches an agreement with the Postal Service, a rank and file bargaining advisory committee reviews the proposed contract. If they approve it, the contract is sent to APWU members for ratification. If the committee is not satisfied, it can return the contract to the national negotiating team to reopen negotiations.

12) What about strikes?

The APWU believes that the right to strike is an inalienable right of all American workers. However, federal law prohibits strikes by postal and federal employees and requires us to submit unresolved contract disputes to arbitration before an impartial third party for resolution.

Our national leaders are authorized to continue negotiations past the contract deadline if they feel an agreement is possible, provided postal workers would continue to be covered under the previous contract. The APWU views striking as a weapon of last resort to be used only when all other means of reaching agreement have been exhausted.

Workers in the private-sector postal industry have the legal right to strike. Before striking, a private sector workers represented by APWU must go through a strike sanction procedure adopted by the APWU 2000 National Convention, which includes votes by the affected members and approval by the APWU National Executive Board.

13) Suppose I have a grievance?

If you have a grievance - if you believe that management has violated your rights' or subjected you to harassment or discrimination - you should immediately talk to your steward about the problem. The steward, who is your union representative on the work floor, will determine whether a violation has occurred and will try to reach a settlement with your immediate supervisor. If this effort fails, the union can appeal to a higher level. If all these efforts fail to result in a satisfactory solution, the union may request that an impartial arbitrator be called in to settle the grievance.

14) What about job security?

As spelled out in the APWU-USPS National Agreement all career postal workers have a lifetime guarantee of job security after six years of service.

15) How is APWU fighting privatization?

Some right-wing politicians want to dismantle the US Postal Service as we know it and carve it up into profitable pieces for their big business allies. The APWU leads the fight against these schemes because privatization would be devastating to postal workers and their families, and to the postal customers who depend on our efficient, economical universal service, at a uniform price.

16) Is the APWU affiliated with other organizations?

Yes. The APWU is affiliated with the AFL-CIO, a federation of 66 national unions with a combined membership of 13 million workers. The APWU also is affiliated with Union Network International (UNI), an organization of labor unions representing workers in the field of communications in nations throughout the world.

17) Is the APWU involved in legislation and politics?

Because legislation has a major impact on our members and their families, the union is involved in legislative matters. The APWU monitors legislation being considered by Congress and acts as an advocate for postal workers on a wide array of issues. APWU COPA - the Committee On Political Action - raises voluntary contributions from our members to contribute to the campaigns of legislators who support our causes and defeat those who consistently oppose us.

18) How can I find out what's going on in the union?

You can stay informed by attending union meetings and participating in the activities of your local. Remember, you have an equal voice and vote with all other the members. Your steward and local officers can answer questions you may have about specific union programs and policies. Additionally, reading local and national union publications, such as The American Postal Worker and the APWU News Service bulletins, will keep you informed about your union. You may also visit the union's web site at www.apwu.org.

19) I'm not a member yet. How do I join?

USPS employees can ask their shop steward or a local officer for a Form 1187 and fill it out. Once you do that, you'll be eligible for all the privileges of membership. Your union dues will be deducted from your paycheck automatically. If you work in a very small office, or if you are employed in the postal industry outside of the USPS, write to Frank A. Romero, Director of Organization, at APWU headquarters, 1300 L Street, NW, Washington DC 20005, or call him at (202) 842-4227

20) I'm already a member. What can I do to help the union?

Our members are the lifeblood of the APWU. The best way to improve the union is to get involved. Attend union meetings, consider joining a committee, help organize non-members, become a steward, and volunteer to help in union activities. Your union brothers and sisters will appreciate your participation.

21) What are you waiting for?