

American Postal Workers Union



Guide to Fighting Consolidation

The tools needed to:

- Expose the negative effects of consolidation
- Build a community coalition
- Reach out to elected officials
- Generate favorable press coverage
- Build support for the *Access to Postal Services Act*





June 2009

Dear Local and State Presidents:

The Postal Service strategy for responding to its financial crisis can be summed up in a single word: cut. Cut service, cut jobs, cut the postal network. One example is the USPS “consolidation plan,” which includes a study of the feasibility of consolidating some mail processing operations in your area.

Many locals are bringing attention to the negative effects consolidation would have on mail service, and are generating opposition to the plans among legislators and in their communities.

The information in this booklet is designed to assist you in such efforts. It is intended for internal use by local and state organizations, and includes broad guidelines for involving our members; forming community coalitions; gaining support from elected officials; refuting management’s claims about the benefits of consolidation; preparing for public meetings; winning endorsements for important legislation, and obtaining favorable media coverage. Many samples are included, along with “how-to” instructions for dealing with the media. The packet also includes some resources provided by locals.

We realize that some of the materials may not apply to your situation, and we encourage you to customize them as appropriate. The national office is available to answer questions and help in any way we can, and we are eager to hear about your campaign. Executive Vice President Cliff Guffey is coordinating the national union’s involvement.

Thank you for being a leader of the American Postal Workers Union.

In union solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William Burrus". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'W'.

William Burrus
President

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The Fight Against Consolidation

The Postal Service first announced it would overhaul the mail processing network when it released the first Transformation Plan in April 2002; but it ignored demands by workers and Congress for details about where, when, and how consolidations would take place. To date, the USPS has refused to provide an overview or specifics of its plans.

More than three years passed after the 2002 announcement with no consolidations taking place; but between Oct. 19, 2005, and Jan. 6, 2006, the Postal Service notified the APWU that it would conduct Area Mail Processing (AMP) feasibility studies at approximately 50 facilities.

APWU local unions alerted their legislators, local media, and neighbors about the possible curtailment of mail processing and what it would mean for service. The subsequent opposition in many communities played an important role in derailing USPS consolidation proposals. In 2006 and 2007, 37 consolidation initiatives were terminated, placed on hold, or reversed.



Helena MT Local members protest consolidation at rally in October 2006.

During this time period the Postal Service was the subject of tough criticism by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC) for the lack of transparency in its planning efforts, and for failing to allow for sufficient input from workers, citizens, and public officials in affected communities.

Round Two

Only a handful of new AMP surveys were announced in 2006, 2007, and most of 2008; however, the Postal Service unleashed a barrage of new AMP studies in late 2008 and early 2009.

Since then, APWU locals have been blowing the whistle on consolidations that would have a negative effect on service and the affected communities. They have enlisted support from elected officials, notified the media, picketed, launched petition drives, developed Web sites, and turned

the tables on management at USPS-sponsored meetings designed to “sell” the plans to the public. APWU members, legislators, and community activists note that if facilities were consolidated:

- Key mail-processing operations would be moved away – in some cases more than 100 miles.
- Incoming and outgoing mail would be delayed. Checks would arrive late, bills would not get paid on time, and medication delivered by mail would take longer to arrive.
- Local mail – which small businesses, newspapers, churches, and other community organizations rely on the most – would suffer the longest delays.
- Mail would be collected earlier and arrive later in the day – perhaps even in the evening.
- Local jobs would be moved away.
- Cities and townships could lose their postmarks – an important part of their identity.

The USPS claims consolidation of postal facilities will lead to greater efficiencies, but has consistently failed to offer conclusive evidence. And despite assurances to the contrary, citizens, community leaders, and postal workers are concerned that a “realigned” mail processing network will delay delivery of their mail. For postal employees, consolidation often means that their jobs will be shifted far from their communities.

Our Goals: Educate, Organize, Change the Law

Postal workers have a unique ability to expose the negative effects facility consolidations are likely to have on service to our communities. We can educate legislators and civic organizations, inform the media, and organize opposition to consolidation plans. We also must build support for legislation that will require the Postal Service to meet strict criteria before deciding to combine operations.

The *Access to Postal Services Act* (H.R. 658) would require improved notification to affected communities, and would strengthen commitments to service. It would require the USPS to conduct an investigation to determine if there is need for the proposed consolidation, and to notify members of the affected community by mail and in area newspapers. In deciding whether to consolidate a facility, the Postal Service would be required to consider the effect on the community and employees, while continuing to provide “a maximum degree of effective and regular postal services to rural areas, communities, and small towns.” The USPS would be required to post the decision and findings prominently in each postal facility



Members of the Sioux City (IA) Local rally opposition to moving mail processing across state lines.

that would be affected, and the notice of the posting “shall be sent by mail to all persons served by such postal facility, at least 90 days before a final determination is made, to ensure that such persons will have an opportunity to submit comments.”

So our task is twofold: organizing local opposition to consolidation, *and* changing the law.

Building a Coalition

To enlist the support of potential allies, locals must develop an outreach campaign that identifies possible partners, informs them, and encourages them to take action. We must form alliances with individuals and organizations that are likely to suffer if postal services are reduced.

If the media and our legislators hear only from postal workers, they are likely to disregard our concerns as narrow self interest. If, on the other hand, we are able to persuade business groups, senior citizens, residents of rural communities, community activists, residents of poor neighborhoods, and others that they, too, have a stake in this fight, we are more likely to be successful.

Different constituencies may be motivated by diverse concerns. For example, businesses may be motivated by worry that their mail will not arrive at its destination in a timely manner, or that mail will have to be prepared earlier in the day. Residents of underserved communities may believe that if mail service deteriorates, their communities will suffer disproportionately. Some groups may be concerned by the loss of the local postmark. Others may be alarmed by the effect consolidation will have on the local economy.

Locals and state organizations should identify possible partners; explain how mail service will be affected, and ask for their support. Ask them to engage in specific activities as well, such as:

- Attend a public meeting about the proposed consolidation;
- Attend a press event, or a leafleting or picketing activity;
- Write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper;
- Write a letter to elected officials;
- Seek support from legislators for the Access to Postal Services Act (H.R. 658).

Once you have the formal support of a community group, be sure to keep in touch with them, and include the fact that they are supporting you in your press materials and in letters to elected officials.



Members of the Bloomington (IN) Local reach out to community organizations.

Involving Our Members

Within our own ranks, we cannot rely solely on the usual core of activists who participate in union activities. We must reach out to more of our members and ask for their active participation.

That can mean setting up a table in the swing room with sample letters to elected officials that we ask members to send, speaking one-on-one with them in the cafeteria, organizing special activities at union meetings, and inviting members to visit potential allies in the struggle (along with more experienced union officials) seeking their support.

As we pursue our goals, we should not neglect the chance to engage non-members. They will be affected by the outcome of our efforts just as much as our members, and we must seize the opportunity to invite them to join our ranks and join the fight.

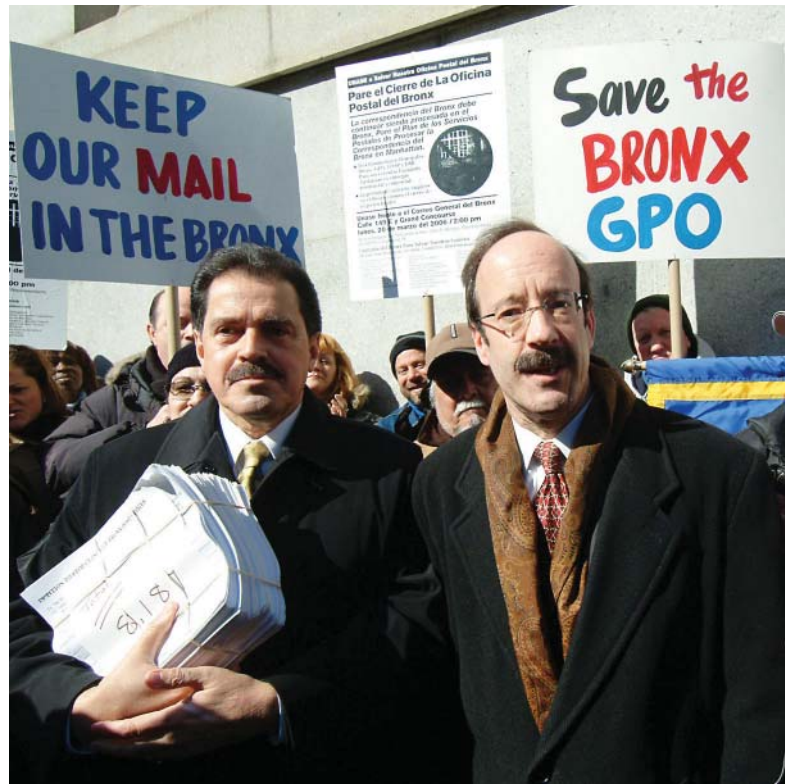
Winning Support from Elected Officials

Winning support from elected officials will put pressure on the Postal Service, and their involvement increases the likelihood of media coverage.

APWU locals and state organizations should encourage members to write to legislators and ask for their support. (*See sample, page 5.*) Locals also should plan to meet with their elected officials at all levels, and be prepared to explain how the proposed changes will undermine, rather than improve, service and efficiency.

First, identify the elected officials you wish to persuade. In the case of federal office-holders, you should contact their local offices, rather than their Washington offices.

When you reach elected officials (or their staff), brief them about the situation and ask them to attend an event; sign-up to co-sponsor the Access to Postal Services Act (H.R. 658); write to the Postmaster General, or publicly state their opposition to consolidation through a press statement.



Reps. Jose Serrano and Eliot Engel (D-NY) were outspoken opponents of consolidation.

Sample Letter to Legislators

DATE

The Honorable NAME

U.S. Senate/ House of Representatives [Select one.]

LOCAL OFFICE [Do not direct to Washington, DC office.]

Dear Senator/Representative NAME:

As part of a misguided cost-cutting scheme, the Postal Service has announced plans to move mail sorting operations currently performed at the FACILITY NAME in TOWN to FACILITY NAME in TOWN, approximately NUMBER miles away.

Despite USPS assurances to the contrary, this “consolidation” will have a negative effect service in the TOWN area. Mail will be collected earlier in the day and arrive later – possibly after dark. Checks will be delayed; bills may not get paid on time, and medication delivered by mail will take longer to arrive.

Sending our mail to GAINING AREA for processing also will hurt local businesses and will drain more jobs from TOWN. The Postal Service claims the move will “improve efficiency,” but it has failed to provide any real evidence that the plan would save money or that the current level of service could be maintained.

I hope we can count on you to demand a full, public accounting of how the consolidation would affect our mail and our local economy, and to oppose any consolidation plans that would reduce service and result in job losses in our community.

In addition, I urge you to co-sponsor the Access to Postal Services Act (H.R. 658), introduced by Rep. Albio Sires, which would establish appropriate procedures for the USPS to follow before closing or consolidating any postal facility.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

NAME

ADDRESS

Keep in mind that officials at different levels of government may be motivated by different concerns. Presumably, they all will be troubled about the potential for deterioration of service; local officials may be alarmed by the loss of postmarks, as well as by the loss of tax revenue and jobs from the communities they represent.

After visiting your elected representatives, please complete the Legislative Contact Report Form. (See page 26.) Return it to Myke Reid, APWU Legislative Director, at 1300 L Street NW, Washington, DC 20005. This will help us coordinate our legislative outreach efforts.

Refuting Management’s Claims

The USPS will claim that the proposed consolidation is expected to improve efficiency and save money. We must refute these contentions and point out that service is likely to suffer as well.

One way to debunk management’s claim is to request copies of USPS documents, analyze them, and point out discrepancies. This can be a frustrating process, because management is often slow



President Burrus refutes management claims about consolidation in testimony before a House panel on May 20, 2009.

to respond to these requests. You may be able to use management’s delays and/or refusal to provide information as an opportunity to question the legitimacy of USPS assertions, but don’t wait for the Postal Service’s reply. Begin to organize your campaign.

Keep in mind that if management provides the information, it is likely to project significant savings and other data favoring its plans.

However, as the Postal Rate Commission (PRC) concluded in a December 2006 report,

“Recent AMPs conducted by the Postal Service do not comport with applicable guidelines. They do not reflect systematic, consistent, or replicable projections of costs; they provide limited review of service impacts; and they utilize no discernable standards for evaluating or balancing cost and service impacts.” [www.prc.gov/docs/55/55431/N2006-1AdvDec.pdf]

In 2007, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported that: “Inconsistency in data calculations also impacts the ability of USPS to accurately determine the expected cost savings of the AMP consolidations... For example, during a review of one AMP consolidation, the Inspector General found discrepancies in the projected cost savings in the AMP consolidation study, resulting in savings that may have been significantly overstated.” (GAO-07-717) [www.prc.gov/docs/55/55431/N2006-1AdvDec.pdf]

And criticism from the GAO continues. Despite its stated objective “to minimize the degree to which any mail plant consolidations results in downgrades to the First-Class Mail service standards,” the agency reported in July 2008 that, “USPS has not established measurable performance targets for its realignment initiatives.” (GAO-08-1022T) The GAO reiterated those concerns in September 2008. (GAO-08-1134R)



The Manasota (FL) Local wins community support through an aggressive outreach campaign.

Although the 2008 GAO report also credited the Postal Service with improvements in realignment planning and communication, these alleged enhancements have not reached the affected communities. In fact, the USPS’ failure to heed the concerns of citizens and to proceed with a controversial consolidation, prompted the Bradenton (Florida) Herald to ask, “Was the fix in?”

The newspaper noted that the consolidation was approved, “despite objections from a congressman, mayors, council members, county commissioners, other civic leaders, business people and residents from around the region” as well as postal workers. “How much more opposition must there be?” the editorial asked.

Postal officials have estimated that the closing would save \$3.2 million a year, “yet nobody’s seen any documentation to support that,” the paper said. “Where is it? Does it even exist? The public should have access to that in order to question its validity.”

Another method for challenging management’s claims would be to examine the results of previous consolidation efforts, but little data is available. Postal regulations require management to prepare semi-annual Post Implementation Reviews, with the first taking place within 30 days after the second full quarter following implementation; however, as the 2006 PRC report noted, “required post implementation reviews have not been done.”

The bottom line is this: The Postal Service will estimate that consolidation will result in substantial savings, but there is no solid evidence to support these claims.

Press Outreach

Spreading Our Message

Getting our message to the media is a key element in this struggle, because it enables us to reach a vast audience that we cannot reach on our own. Media coverage encourages elected officials to take notice of our struggle and get involved; it informs potential allies; inspires our members and supporters, and forces the Postal Service to defend its plans.

Some activists may find dealing with the media intimidating, but it shouldn't be! The more you work with the media, the more comfortable you will become. And media outreach is great way to promote the union.

There are several ways to generate media attention: Submit letters to the editor and Op/Ed articles (*See Pages 10-13*); arrange for interviews on local radio talk stations; “pitch” the story to television and radio news stations; and conduct news-worthy events, such as picketing, leafleting, and press conferences. (*See Pages 14-16.*)



The Southwest Florida Area Local generates media coverage.

Advertising also can be a valuable tool, if locals can afford it. A radio ad developed by the Mansfield (OH) Local gets the message across very effectively, and can be easily adapted for use by others. (*See Page 10.*) Most radio stations will produce an ad for free, provided the local purchases air time for it.

There are other important ways to spread our message. Several locals have created Web sites dedicated to this goal, which can serve as models for others. The locals used their Web sites to launch petition drives; publicize USPS-sponsored Town Hall Meetings about the consolidation; thank elected officials for their support, and generally promote the cause. Links to these sites can be found at www.apwu.org/issues-consolidation/consolidation-localwebsites.htm.

Working with the Media

The following are tips on conducting press outreach and “staying on message.” Generating media coverage is invariably a challenge.

While on the job, reporters are likely to be:

- In a hurry. This may not be the only story they are working on.
- Driven by deadlines and competition. Daily deadlines make their jobs difficult and stressful. In addition, they may be competing with other media outlets. The combination can make them very eager and even pushy, or they may lose interest quickly and not want to bother.
- Generalists, not experts. Reporters are unlikely to be experts on the issue of postal consolidation. But their lack of expertise can work to our advantage: If you dominate the information flow, you are likely to get better coverage!
- Focused on the negative. More and more often, reporters tend to gravitate towards a negative storyline. That may work in our favor in the case of postal facility consolidation, but we do want to make sure we talk about a positive storyline as well – what people can do to stop the attack on their postal service!
- Skeptical. Reporters are inherently doubtful. Be prepared to back up anything you say. Reporters will often want more information to substantiate claims.

The good news is that reporters need your help. If you conduct yourself in a professional manner and provide them with the right information, you can get your message across! Reporters will need:

- The facts. You are likely to be their main source – the most important person they talk to on the story.
- Quotes. Reporters will need quotes from you to legitimize and lend authority to the story. What you say – during the press conference, but also when you call to tell them more about it – may be quoted. Remember that at all times!
- Additional background information. Your goal should be to become reporters’ “go-to source” on the issue of postal facility consolidation. Make them feel comfortable with you by making sure they are comfortable with what you saying. Encourage them to contact you if they need additional information.

Sample Radio Ad Script

Developed by the Mansfield Area Local

The 30-second radio ad below gets our message across very effectively, and can be easily adapted for use by others. Many radio stations will produce ads free-of-charge, provided customers purchase advertising air time.

Here's a crazy idea. The government wants to send our local mail 70 miles away to Akron to process it and then drive it back 70 miles to Mansfield. If you live in a zip code that starts with 448 or 449, this could slow down your mail service.

Over half the mail processed in Mansfield stays in our area. Why send it to Akron and then back here again? Keep good mail service. Don't let the Post Office take First Class mail processing out of Mansfield. Call or write your Congressman or Save Our Service, PO Box 515, Mansfield, Ohio 44901. Presented by the Concerned Citizens.

Submitting an Op-Ed to Your Local Newspaper

An Op-Ed or guest editorial is an excellent way to deliver your message in your own words. Often times, however, getting Op-Eds printed can be challenging. Keep in mind that newspapers are more likely to print Op-Eds (and Letters to the Editor) on topics that have generated news coverage. They also will be seeking varying points of view.

- A sample Op-Ed appears on the facing page. Try to localize it – this improves the chances of getting it published. Feel free to change any aspect that you believe will make it more relevant to your situation.
- Guest editorials are more likely to be printed if they offer a timely response to an article or editorial, or if they offer perspective on a newsworthy subject.
- Many newspapers have word limits; check before you submit an Op-Ed. Shorter articles are more likely to be printed.
- Once you have an Op-Ed, find out how the newspaper would like to receive it, then mail, e-mail or fax it. Plan to send it as soon as possible after there has been press coverage of the issue.
- A few hours after you submit your Op-Ed article, call the publication to ensure they got it.
- If the article does not appear, follow up with any contacts you have at the paper.
- If the newspaper turns down your Op-Ed, consider submitting it to another newspaper in your area.
- DO NOT submit the same Op-Ed to two publications at the same time.

Sample OpEd

Saving Our Local Postal Service

By NAME, TITLE

The Postal Service’s plan to shift mail processing operations from TOWN to NEW LOCATION poses a serious threat to prompt and reliable mail service for the TOWN area.

The ideal of providing reliable mail service to every American community is enshrined in Article 1 of the U.S. Constitution, and for more than two centuries that standard has held true as the nation’s postal system grew to provide dependable and equitable services to every city and town – large or small, rich or poor, urban or rural.

But if USPS executives get their way, the concept of equal mail service could be coming to an end for the citizens of TOWN.

[PROVIDE DETAILS ABOUT THE CONSOLIDATION PLAN IN YOUR AREA. FOR EXAMPLE, INDICATE HOW FAR THE MAIL WILL HAVE TO BE TRANSPORTED BEFORE IT IS PROCESSED AND RETURNED FOR DELIVERY, AND HOW LONG IT COULD TAKE.]

What does this mean for the citizens of TOWN? Despite USPS assurances to the contrary, mail service will suffer. Mail will be collected earlier in the day and will arrive later, maybe even after dark. And we could experience delays of several days in the time it takes to send and receive our mail. Checks and medications may not reach their destination when they are needed; credit ratings will suffer because of late bill payments, and birthday cards and gifts will arrive late.

The consolidation plan will also hurt TOWN’s local economy. By moving mail processing operations so far away, we will see the loss of up to NUMBER postal jobs. Small businesses that depend on prompt mail service also will endure hardships.

This plan will have a profound affect on our community, yet the USPS is advancing its proposal without providing any real evidence that operations will be more efficient. To date, the Postal Service has largely ignored the concerns expressed by citizens and elected officials across the country – as well as several Government Accountability Office reports requested by members of Congress [IF APPROPRIATE, NOTE YOUR U.S. REP] that have found that USPS consolidation plans lack “transparency” and “accountability.”

TOWN’s postal workers have sounded the alarm about the Postal Service’s poorly-conceived consolidation plan. [NOTE EFFORTS YOU HAVE ENGAGED IN.]

But to stop the consolidation, we need more citizens and community leaders to make their voices heard. You can start by [DESCRIBE ACTIVITIES].

Submitting a Letter to the Editor

A letter to the editor can be a good substitute for an Op-Ed, or another way to get your message out to smaller papers. Many newspapers have word limits: check before you submit a letter.

Letters to the editor are more likely to be printed if they are brief and offer a timely response to a recently published news story or editorial. We encourage you to customize the letter below, which is less than 200 words. If you are responding to a published article, editorial, guest column, or letter, be sure to refer to it in the heading or first sentence of your letter.

If your OpEd is turned down by the main newspaper in your area:

Offer that newspaper a Letter to the Editor (*See page 13*) instead. This is the “second best” option.

Find out how the newspaper wants to receive letters, then send it in. (If you submitted an Op-Ed that was rejected, note in your e-mail or fax that the newspaper turned down your Op-Ed, but that you are hoping they will publish the letter to the editor instead).

If your Op-Ed is accepted by the main newspaper in your area, consider submitting a Letter to the Editor to another print publication.

The Message: A Summary

Message One: Attack on Service

Our area’s postal service is under attack. The USPS has a plan to consolidate our local postal facility. That will mean slower, less reliable mail service for our area. Specifically, mail will likely be collected earlier in the day and arrive later in the day – perhaps even in the evening. We expect significant delays in sending and receiving our mail.

Message Two: Consultation:

This plan will have a significant effect on our local community, but the Postal Service has failed to seek real input from residents, businesses, and elected officials.

Message Three: Call to Action:

Citizens must help stop this attack on our service. Suggest whichever activity you are promoting (attend a public meeting on [day], at [time] at [location], call your senators and congressmen, sign a petition, support legislation, write a letter to the editor, visit a Web site).

Sample Letter to the Editor

To the Editor:

Postal workers take pride in providing prompt, dependable mail service to COMMUNITY, which is why we are so concerned about the Postal Service's plan to shift mail-sorting operations from TOWN to GAINING AREA.

The USPS "consolidation" plan will result in slower, less reliable mail service for the citizens of TOWN. Mail will be collected earlier in the day and arrive later – possibly after dark. Checks will be delayed, bills may not get paid on time, and medication delivered by mail will take longer to arrive.

Sending our mail to GAINING AREA for processing also will hurt local businesses and will drain more jobs from TOWN. The Postal Service claims the move will "improve efficiency," but it has yet to prove that the plan would save money or that it could maintain the current level of service.

TOWN'S postal workers encourage citizens and community leaders to take a stand against the consolidation. You can start by [DESCRIBE ACTIONS YOU ASKING THE PUBLIC TO TAKE].

Sincerely,

NAME & SIGNATURE
TITLE

ADDRESS
PHONE NUMBER
E-MAIL ADDRESS

Picketing, Leafleting, and Press Conferences

One of the best ways to generate media coverage is by conducting a newsworthy event, such as picketing or leafleting, or by holding a press conference. Have a succinct message ready. The goal is both to inform the public directly and to generate print, television, and/or radio stories about the issue: Local postal workers are asking the community for help to fight the misguided consolidation plan.

For Best Results

- Pick a date and time for your event. Generally between 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. is best.
- Make sure at least five APWU members attend. Television stations will want images of your members giving out leaflets to citizens, and signs will make an effective backdrop.
- Pick a location. The best spot would be in front of the post office. If that is not feasible, pick a local landmark (such as City Hall). Make sure that there will be members of the public around at the place and time you choose. Let the local police know about your plans and inquire about whether you need a permit. In the event that you encounter difficulties obtaining a permit, you may want to consider an alternative location that does not require one, such as the union hall or meeting venue.

In the Days Before the Event

- Call reporters, editors or news directors in your area to tell them about the event and let them know you want to make sure they have it on their calendars. (*See page 17 for a suggested phone script.*)
- The day before the event, preferably in the morning, e-mail and/or fax a media advisory to local reporters and media outlets to alert them to the event. (*See page 22.*)
- Follow-up with pitch phone calls to make sure they received the advisory and to ask them whether they plan to attend.
- The morning of the event, e-mail and/or fax the media advisory, and make calls to any reporters that did not confirm (or reject) plans to attend the day before.

Event Preparation and Follow-Up

- Union members should spend one to two hours distributing leaflets to members of the public (or picketing). Press should be invited to attend just after the start of your event while participants still have lots of energy. For example, if you plan on leafleting between 10:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., press should be invited to attend at 11 a.m.

- At the appointed time, be prepared to deliver a short opening statement to the press. (*See page 24.*) If T.V. cameras are present, make sure you position yourself with a good backdrop – for example, the post office or local landmark. Ask members to stand behind you with posters or signs.
- Introduce yourself, take note of the press in attendance, and then deliver your opening statement.
- Next, open up for questions from the press. (*See pages 20-21 for a set of likely questions and answers.*)
- It is possible the press conference will not materialize as a single union statement with questions and answers. Reporters are likely to ask for one-on-one interviews.
- Whenever possible, ask the members of the press when they plan to run a story, and make sure they have your contact information so they can follow up with you.
- Take your own pictures of the event, and forward the good ones to the national office!

Just After the Event

- Call the reporters who attended. Ask them whether they have everything they need and offer to answer any additional questions.
- Call reporters that were unable to make it. Tell them you are sorry they missed the event, but that you hope they will consider covering the issue. Tell them you would be pleased to meet them to discuss it more at their convenience.
- Make a list of the reporters that covered the event, and keep them informed of developments.
- Maintain a list of media contacts for future use.



Wilkes-Barre (PA) Area Local members picket against USPS plans to shift mail processing operations.

The Day After

- Monitor the media for stories about the issue.
- If they do not appear within a few days, follow up with phone calls and ask whether they need anything else.

Be sure to keep the national office apprised of your work, and share photos (high-resolution whenever possible) with the Communications Department (*sdavidow@apwu.org*).

The Public Meeting

The public meeting, which is required by the PO-408 Handbook, provides a focus to our organizing efforts, and is an excellent opportunity to generate media coverage and spread our message. Locals should publicize these meetings vigorously and encourage postal workers, elected officials, and citizens' groups to attend. Make sure the press is aware of these events.

At the meeting, be prepared to explain the negative effect consolidation is likely to have on service. Be creative! The Manasota (FL) Local got a copy of management's slide-show presentation in advance of the meeting, amended it with notes exposing contradictions, and distributed it at the public meeting!

Developing a Media List, 'Pitching' the Media

Whether you know the media in your area very well or you will be making your first attempt at press outreach, you have the tools to start developing relationships with journalists.

- Each time you make a pitch phone call, be sure to keep notes and follow up, especially if your contact suggests someone else to talk with. Successful pitching requires persistence and identifying the appropriate people to talk to.
- Find the right person. Start with the "news desk" or "assignment editor." Regardless of who you speak to, ask whether anyone else in the news operation should be getting your material as well.
- Respect deadlines. Here is a brief guide:

Print: It is best to call a newsroom between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. At this time, reporters are probably not in planning meetings or working against a 5 p.m. deadline. (Note: Most online-newspaper operations keep the print-edition timetable.)

TV: Planning editors generally take calls from 10-11 a.m. and from 1-3 p.m. It is best to call the assignment desk after the morning planning meeting, which usually ends by 10 a.m.

Radio: The best time to call is between 7:30-8:30 a.m. After that, the staff goes into planning meetings, but you can call again after 10 a.m. News directors, reporters, and producers are

often gone by the afternoon. If a reporter is not able to attend the event, offer to do a taped interview.

Making the Pitch: Do's and Don'ts

DO: Be concise while pitching the story;

DO: Assume your story is worth the reporter's time and effort;

DO: Be enthusiastic about your event;

DO: Be persistent and call back if you do not get in touch with the reporter right away.

DON'T leave a long phone message ending with your phone number; leave your name and number after your brief pitch;

DON'T sound like you are reading a script;

DON'T argue with a reporter;

DON'T call during a big news story or at deadline.

Sample Phone Scripts for 'Pitching' Reporters

For use two to three days before the event:

"Hi, my name is NAME – I'm a postal worker in TOWN, and I'm calling about a news event that will expose a plan that could seriously jeopardize TOWN's mail service.

Postal workers and other concerned citizens will be taking to the streets, distributing flyers at LOCATION on DAY/DATE at TIME, telling folks how the plan to cut back on operations at the local postal facility will affect them. I'll be in touch again DAY BEFORE THE EVENT with a media advisory, but I wanted to let you know about the event, and tell you that I am available to answer any questions you may have about the issue.

For use the day before the event (after you have sent the media advisory):

"Hi, my name is NAME – I'm a postal worker in TOWN, and I'm calling to make sure you received our media advisory about the event that my co-workers and I are holding tomorrow to highlight the serious threat to TOWN'S postal service – the plan to close some operations at our local postal facility, which could significantly delay mail.

We'll be taking to the streets to distribute leaflets at LOCATION tomorrow at TIME, telling folks about how the plan to close some operations at the local postal facility could affect them.

We're hoping you will be able to join us. I am calling to remind you about the event and to let you know I am available to answer any questions you may have about the issue.

Pitching Local Radio Stations

Even the most popular local news and talk-radio stations have time to fill. Pitching your issue – and yourself – to local radio stations is an excellent way to promote our message. Resulting interviews are often much longer than television coverage, and they can give you an opportunity to talk about your issues in your own words.

- Send out a radio advisory to stations in your area via e-mail or fax. (*See page 23.*)
- Follow up to make sure they have your advisory. Ask them whether they need any more information and whether they would be interested in scheduling an interview.
- If the station is interested, they will set up a live or a taped interview. It will most likely be on the phone, but they may ask you to come to the station.
- Bring your Question-and-Answer document or have it in front of you during the phone call. (*See pages 20-21.*)

Preparing For Interviews

Being prepared for any interaction with the press is extremely important! Although you cannot script an interview or Q&A session, you can prepare to tell your side of the story. To do that:

- Review your material – messages, opening statement and Q&A document. Your main message is that the consolidation will result in a deterioration of service. Practice delivering these short statements.
- Remember: Repetition is critical. T.V. stations will want a 6-second sound bite. Repeating a short, simple message will provide the best chance that the message you want to give is the one they air.
- Keep it simple. Don't get tied up providing complicated background information. Practice explaining the issue simply and directly. Avoid jargon.
- Remember to issue a “call to action.”



The Southwest Louisiana Area Local emphasizes the importance of a local postmark.

Interview Techniques

The following will help you during Question-and-Answer sessions:

- Whatever the question, use it as an opportunity to promote your message, and explain the negative effects of consolidation. If you are asked a difficult or irrelevant question, “pivot” back to your message. In other words, acknowledge that the question is important, but then go back to your message about the detrimental effect moving operations will have on service.

Here is an example of an irrelevant question and how to turn it back to your message:

Reporter: “But haven’t stamp prices increased a lot in recent years?”

Spokesperson: “That’s an interesting point – on the whole, stamp prices have remained close to inflation. But let’s remember the key issue for the folks in TOWN: If this plan goes through we’re likely to see slower and less reliable mail service with delays in delivery.”

- Think “sound-bite.” Today, the average sound bite is only 6 seconds long! Remember that what you say could be spliced into that short period of time. Don’t say anything you wouldn’t like to hear as your sound bite on this issue.
- Answer questions one at a time. If a reporter asks you a long list of questions, don’t let it throw you off and don’t take the questions too literally. Pick the one you like best and answer that. Or, step back and give the reporter a broader perspective: “I think what you’re really asking is...”
- Tell the truth; don’t guess. Make sure you’re being as accurate as possible – this is vital for your credibility. If you don’t know the answer to a question, don’t make it up. It is okay to tell reporters that you will have to research something and get back to them.
- Deal with mistakes. If you make a mistake on camera during a taped interview, just stop, compose yourself, and say, “I’m sorry, what I meant to say was...” or “I should correct that by explaining...” Correct yourself as best you can and move on; do not say, “Don’t quote me on that.”
- Avoid jargon or technical language that may be unfamiliar to the general public. Try to simplify your explanations and use analogies to help explain difficult concepts.
- Maintain eye contact. This holds the listener’s attention and will make you look confident.
- Be enthusiastic. You are talking about an important and compelling issue.
- Keep your answers short. Don’t feel compelled to keep talking. When you have made your point, stop talking.

Questions and Answers

Questions you might get from reporters – along with suggested answers – are listed below. It is not necessary to try to memorize them; they are provided simply to help you prepare for interviews.

Q How soon can we expect to see these delays in mail service?

Very soon. If the Postal Service goes ahead with its plan to consolidate NAME OF FACILITY, we will immediately start seeing mail being collected earlier and delivered later in the day – perhaps even in the evening or at night. And the mail we send and receive could be delayed by several days. These are serious and very real threats to our service here in TOWN.

Q Isn't this really about union jobs?

No. Most postal workers are protected against lay offs by a negotiated agreement, although they can be reassigned to another location. We are here today because we believe all citizens have a stake in this issue and stand to lose if this plan goes into effect.

Q What is the timeline on this proposal?

[PROVIDE LOCAL DETAILS.] Obviously, we're hoping to prevent this from happening. We feel that the Postal Service is just going through the motions with [IF APPROPRIATE] its announcement of a public hearing on the matter. We believe they have a duty to be fully transparent.

Q Won't moving this facility save consumers money in the end?

There is no solid proof of that. Reports from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) have criticized the consolidation plan, citing the lack of "clarity, criteria and accountability." The claims of savings are dubious.

Q What steps are you taking to stop the consolidation?

We're reaching out to local organizations and residents to fully explain the impact this plan will have on our local service. We want them to get involved and make their voices heard. We are asking their help by [ACTIONS YOU ARE ASKING PUBLIC TO ENGAGE IN].

Q Is this plan for consolidation in TOWN part of a broader program by the USPS?

Unfortunately, yes. The Postal Service has proposed dozens of similar actions in communities across the United States. It is a large-scale attack on reliable mail service for our country. And it is

of particular concern for communities such as ours that rely so heavily on dependable mail service. That is why it is so important that citizens get involved.

Q Are you getting support?

[OUTLINE LOCAL SUPPORT SO FAR: FROM PUBLIC, LOCAL POLITICIANS OR ORGANIZATIONS.]

Q With so many people relying on the Internet and e-mail these days, does it really matter that mail service is going to be delayed?

A large number of citizens still depend on timely and efficient mail service. Greeting cards are still very popular, and while many people like the convenience of paying bills online, studies show that eight out of 10 still prefer to get a paper invoice for household expenditures. More and more, medicine is sent by mail. Mail still serves a vital role and should not be put at risk.

Q Do you really expect to be able to stop this plan?

Many similar consolidations have been stopped. Wherever citizens have been made aware of plans to curtail services and eliminate postmarks, there have been protests, and many plans were stopped in their tracks.

Q What sort of political support have you received?

[IF APPROPRIATE, INCLUDE MENTION OF YOUR POLITICAL SUPPORT – NATIONALLY AND LOCALLY]. But the most important support we can get is from the public that will be directly affected by this.

Q Have TOWN's leaders done anything to protest these plans?

[IF YES, OUTLINE SUPPORT YOU HAVE.] We are very grateful for this support and we believe it shows real leadership on this important issue.

[IF NO: That's a good point. Not yet.] We believe that the impact on mail service in TOWN will be so severe that it is the duty of political leaders [NAMES, IF APPROPRIATE] to join our cause.

*****MEDIA ADVISORY*****

DATE YOU ARE SENDING THE ADVISORY

Media Contact: NAME

TITLE

PHONE NUMBER

E-MAIL ADDRESS



**SAVE OUR MAIL SERVICE!
[TOWN'S] POSTAL WORKERS WARN
OF THREAT TO MAIL SERVICE**
*Event Will Highlight Impact of Plan
That Will Delay Deliveries*

WHEN: DATE, TIME OF EVENT

WHAT: TOWN'S local postal workers will [PICKET (OR OTHER DESCRIPTION)] to inform citizens and the media about the latest developments in the fight against a plan to consolidate LOCAL POSTAL FACILITY. The plan would mean slower, less reliable service for our area. Checks would arrive late, bills would not get paid on time, and medication delivered by mail would take longer to arrive.

WHERE: SPECIFIC LOCATION

WHO: YOUR NAME, TITLE, and local postal workers.

MORE: The consolidation plan would move parts of LOCAL POSTAL FACILITY to GAINING AREA, which would mean mail delivery and pickup would be seriously delayed, and local jobs would be lost. The plan will disproportionately help major advertising mailers who presort their mail, at the expense of local business owners and citizens.

Postal workers are telling local citizens about the plan, and what they can do to fight it.

******RADIO ADVISORY******

DATE YOU ARE SENDING THE ADVISORY

Media Contact: NAME

TITLE

PHONE NUMBER

E-MAIL



**SAVE OUR MAIL SERVICE!
[TOWN'S] POSTAL WORKERS WARN OF MAIL DELAYS
Call On Citizens To Get Involved!**

WHAT: TOWN'S local postal workers are blowing the whistle on a plan that could cause significant delays in our area's mail deliveries. We are launching a campaign to inform citizens and the media about the misguided plan to consolidate LOCAL POSTAL FACILITY.

WHY: If the plan is enacted it would mean slower, less reliable mail service for our area. Not only would mail would be collected earlier in the day and delivered later, but it could be delayed as long as a whole week. In addition, NUMBER of local jobs will be lost and small businesses will suffer from reduced service. We feel the Postal Service has been trying to sneak this plan in under the radar.

WHO: NAME, TITLE is available for live or taped interviews.

MORE: The consolidation plan would move parts of LOCAL POSTAL FACILITY to GAINING AREA, meaning mail delivery and pick up would be seriously delayed and local jobs would be lost. Postal workers are informing local citizens about the plan along with what they can do to fight it.

Sample Press Conference Statement

Good [morning/afternoon]. Thank you for coming.

My name is NAME. I am the TITLE for our local postal union in TOWN, and I am joined today by my some of my co-workers – men and women who work hard to ensure timely mail service for the citizens of our area.

We are here because we are deeply concerned about what we see as an attack on TOWN’s postal service and we are asking the citizens to help us fight it.

As you may know, the United States Postal Service has unveiled a plan to consolidate our local postal facility [EXPLAIN THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL FACILITY]. If the USPS is successful, a major portion of postal operations will be moved all the way to TOWN – a full NUMBER of miles away.

What does that mean for the residents of TOWN who rely on timely mail service?

It means mail will be collected earlier in the day and arrive later, perhaps even in the evening.

We could see long delays in receiving our mail: Checks will arrive late, bills will not get paid on time, and important medications could take longer to arrive.

As a result, local businesses that rely on the timely delivery of mail will suffer.

[IF APPROPRIATE] It will mean a loss of our local postmark.

These disruptions to service will have a negative effect on the local quality of life.

Now of course, the folks in Washington argue that the consolidation of TOWN’S postal facilities will lead to greater efficiency. But the fact is the Postal Service simply has been unable to offer conclusive evidence to support this.

[IF APPROPRIATE] That’s why we’re grateful to have the support of [OUTLINE ANY SUPPORT FROM POLITICIANS, LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS, ETC].

My co-workers and I are extremely concerned about the impact this plan will have. And we believe the citizens of TOWN share these concerns. That is why we are here today distributing leaflets [OR OTHER ACTIVITY].

The USPS was created to serve the interests of the American people by providing reliable and timely service. This plan will discontinue that tradition, and that is why it must be stopped.

Legal Guidelines

Several locals have raised questions about our legal right to engage in the activities described in this pamphlet, and have expressed concern about restrictions outlined in the Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM). Below is a brief outline.

For Picketing and Leafleting

- Do not block or impede public passage.
- Keep your event informational; do not block people if they do not choose to stop and talk.
- Your message should concern the impact of the proposed consolidation on the community, such as the negative effect on postal services and the loss of work in the community. This is not the place or time to air labor relations grievances against postal management.
- Stand or walk on public sidewalks or in other areas accessible to the public. If the only place to reach people is on a sidewalk on postal premises, you are entitled to the same access to the walkway as the public has.
- If postal management threatens you with discipline for any aspect of your behavior, comply with management's instructions and call APWU headquarters for support.

Applicability of the Employee and Labor Relations Manual:

- Under the ELM, employees are expected to “uphold the policies and regulations of the Postal Service,” and are not permitted to “engage in campaigns for or against changes in mail service” [ELM Sections 665.11 and 667.12]
- However, these regulations “must not be construed to infringe on the rights to participate in labor organizations.” [ELM Section 667.12.]
- You have a First Amendment right to communicate to the public about issues that are of public importance, such as the loss or degradation of postal services.

LEGISLATIVE CONTACT REPORT FORM

Your name _____

Title _____

Name of your local _____

Name of Senator or Representative visited _____

Name(s) of staff that attended the meeting _____

How would you rate this Senator or Representative on APWU issues?

Plant Closing/Consolidation

_____ 1 (strongly supportive)

_____ 2 (leaning supportive)

_____ 3 (uncommitted)

_____ 4 (leaning against)

_____ 5 (strongly against)

Please list any issue on which he/she appeared particularly supportive:

Please list any issue on which he/she appeared to disagree with the APWU position:

Did the Senator or Representative or staff offer any suggestions? _____

If so, what were they? _____

Did you provide literature, talking points, or other material? _____

If so, which ones? _____

Is follow-up needed? _____

Please mail or fax this form to:

APWU Legislative Department, 1300 L Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005

Fax 202/682-2528. Please send a copy to your regional coordinator.

Consolidation Documents and Resources

The APWU Web site, www.apwu.org, contains many useful resources for locals fighting misguided consolidations. Click on the *Consolidation* link on the home page for APWU Web news articles, official USPS notices of AMP studies, and other information.

The following documents are available on the *Resources for APWU Local Unions* link from the Consolidation pages:

PO-408 Handbook – Area Mail Processing Guidelines (AMP)

This USPS Handbook, which was revised in March 2008, outlines the rules and regulations governing consolidation. It provides a framework for challenging closings and consolidations if your facility is targeted.

Excessing: Know Your Rights

This Burrus Update, posted May 14, 2009, gives an overview of employee and union rights when excessing occurs, and provides links to a wealth of source documents.

Joint Contract Interpretation Manual

The JCIM contains extensive information about excessing.

Chapter 44 of the CSRS and FERS Handbook

Published by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), this handbook contains information about Discontinued Service Retirement.

Questions and Answers About Veterans' Preference