



CRS Report for Congress

U.S. Postal Service Workforce Size and Employment Categories, 1986-2006

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Summary

This report provides data from the past two decades on the size of the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) workforce, the number of persons employed by USPS by employment categories, and the number of persons employed by USPS under time-limited contracts. It also analyzes the most salient aspects of these employment data. USPS employs over 784,000 persons. USPS's workforce declined about 1% during the past two decades, and nearly 12% in the past five years. The number of career employees declined over 6% since 1986, and the number of non-career employees increased more than 62%. Clerks, who staff retail counters at post offices and manually sort mail, dropped about 26%. Rural mail delivery employees, however, grew more than 84%, and three categories of employees directly involved in the transportation of mail prior to its delivery grew between 8.9% and 26.9%. This report will be updated in the first session of each Congress to include the most recently available data.

Data Source

Each year, the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) issues an *Annual Report* (herein, the *Report*) that includes data on its workforce. The *Report* categorizes employees as either "career employees" or "non-career employees." According to USPS, the career employees category includes persons with permanent positions at USPS, part- and full-time. The non-career employees category includes all persons hired under time-limited contracts.¹ The *Report* also provides breakdowns of the number of workers by employment category (e.g., regional offices personnel, clerks, and nurses). The **Appendix**

¹ The data on non-career employment do not include persons carrying out postal functions outsourced to private firms. For example, USPS no longer has a fleet of cargo aircraft. Today, the Postal Service contracts with United Parcel Service and other private firms for the transportation of mail by air. The persons who fly and maintain these planes are excluded from the non-career employees data.

of this report contains brief descriptions of these employment categories. This report provides workforce data drawn from the *Reports* covering 1986 through 2006.²

Data Analysis

Workforce Size. USPS's workforce declined 1.1% during the past two decades, from 793,474 to 784,835 employees (**Table 1 and Figure 1**). Recent years have been marked by a more precipitous decline. Since 2001, the decrease has been almost 12%, from 891,005 to 784,835. Clerks fell from 269,792 to 213,920 (20.7%); city delivery carriers declined from 240,295 to 224,400 (6.6%); and supervisors/managers decreased from 38,754 to 33,201 (14.3%).

Career Employees vs. Non-Career Employees. The number of career employees decreased 6.4% between 1986 and 2006, from 731,735 to 684,774, while non-career USPS employees increased 62.1%, from 61,739 to 100,061 (**Table 1**). Moreover, half of the 18 career employee categories had fewer employees in 2006 than in 1986 (e.g., the number of postmasters/installation heads declined 7.0%).³ Meanwhile, all five of the non-career employment categories had more employees than in 1986.

Despite these declines, career employees constituted the vast majority (>85%) of USPS's workforce during the past two decades (**Table 2, Figure 1**). The percentage of USPS's workforce consisting of career employees did decline from 92.2% to 85.9% between 1986 and 1996, but it then increased to 87.1% in 2001 and 87.3% in 2006.

Employment Categories. While the size of each employment category shifted over the past 20 years, three trends are marked. First, the "rural" employment categories grew significantly. Full-time rural delivery carriers rose from 35,938 to 66,344 (84.6%), and rural substitute carriers/rural carrier associates/rural carrier relief carriers/auxiliary carriers (rural subs/RCA/RCR/AUX) increased from 31,808 to 59,087 (85.8%). In contrast, the number of city delivery carriers was almost the same in 1986 and 2006, but it dropped 6.6% in the past five years.

Second, three categories of USPS employees directly involved in the transportation of mail prior to its delivery grew between 8.9% and 26.9% since 1986. Casuals increased 8.9%, from 20,675 to 22,518; mail handlers rose 18.8%, from 48,095 to 57,158; and motor vehicle operators climbed 26.9%, from 6,866 to 8,715. (Vehicle maintenance personnel, who play a supporting role in mail transportation, increased 22%, from 4,526 to 5,521.)

² U.S. Postal Service, *Annual Report of the Postmaster General* (Washington: USPS, 1985-1995); and U.S. Postal Service, *Annual Report of the U.S. Postal Service* (Washington: USPS, 1996-2006).

³ Two of these career employment positions, regional office employees and special delivery messengers, were eliminated.

Third, clerks, who staff the retail counters at post offices and manually sort mail, decreased 26.3% in the past two decades, from 290,225 to 213,920.⁴

Table 1. Number of USPS Employees by Employment Category, 1986-2006 (Five-Year Intervals)

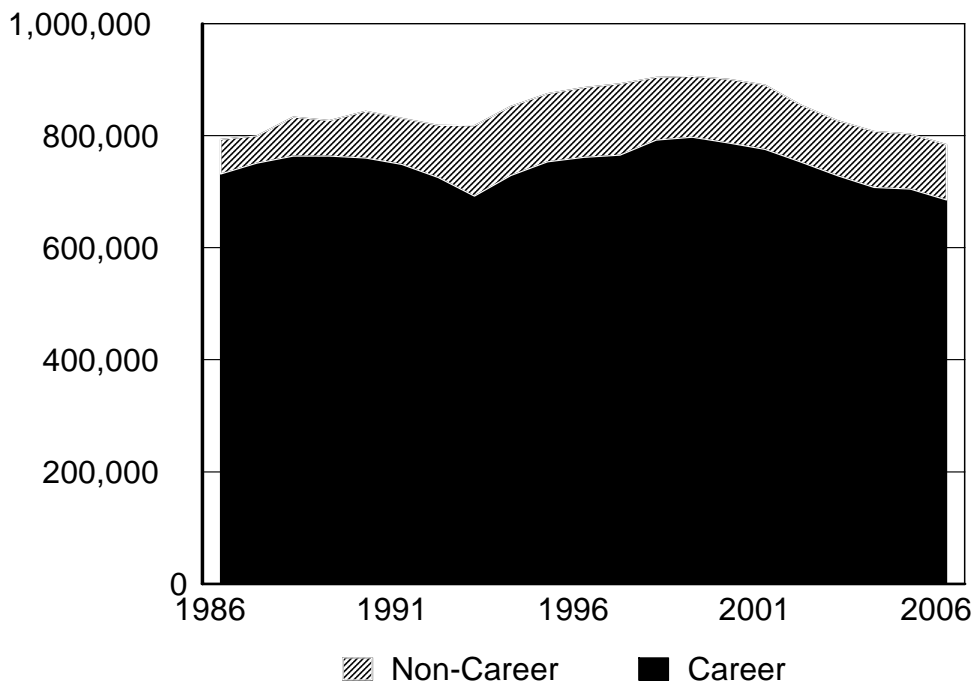
Employment Category	1986	1991	1996	2001	2006	Change 1986-2006	Change (%) 1986-2006
Career Employees							
Headquarters	2,000	2,408	1,951	1,836	2,761	761	38.1%
Headquarters — Related Field Units	5,552	5,715	4,020	5,653	4,402	-1,150	-20.7%
Inspection Service — Field	4,262	4,316	4,432	4,047	3,130	-1,132	-26.6%
Inspector General	0	0	0	713	1,071	1,071	—
Area Offices Personnel	0	0	1,541	1,377	1,395	1,395	—
Regional Offices	595	559	0	0	0	-595	-100.0%
Postmasters/ Installation Heads	27,352	27,100	26,489	26,113	25,429	-1,923	-7.0%
Supervisors/ Managers	40,723	43,801	35,282	38,754	33,201	-7,522	-18.5%
Prof. Admin. and Tech. Personnel	8,717	9,888	11,035	9,764	8,539	-178	-2.0%
Clerks	290,225	280,918	276,964	269,792	213,920	-76,305	-26.3%
Nurses	328	296	188	180	166	-162	-49.4%
Mail Handlers	48,095	50,770	58,305	60,102	57,158	9,063	18.8%
City Delivery Carriers	224,106	232,182	238,370	240,295	224,400	294	0.1%
Motor Vehicle Operators	6,866	7,265	8,429	9,325	8,715	1,849	26.9%
Rural Delivery Carriers — Full-Time	35,938	42,876	48,340	59,790	66,344	30,406	84.6%
Special Delivery Messengers	2,295	1,870	1,463	0	0	-2,295	-100.0%
Bldg. and Equip. Maint. Personnel	30,155	34,166	39,272	42,604	39,986	9,831	32.6%
Vehicle Maintenance Personnel	4,526	4,831	4,882	5,558	5,521	995	22.0%
Subtotal	731,735	748,961	760,963	775,903	684,774	-46,961	-6.4%

⁴ Postmasters and postmaster replacements also perform retail activities in some instances.

Employment Category	1986	1991	1996	2001	2006	Change 1986-2006	Change (%) 1986-2006
Non-Career Employees							
Casuals	20,675	25,666	24,696	30,317	22,518	1,843	8.9%
Non-Bargaining Temporary	309	548	654	761	1,135	826	267.3%
Rural Subs/RCA/RCR/AUX	31,808	44,020	53,768	58,134	59,087	27,279	85.8%
Postmaster Relief/Leave Replacements	8,947	12,198	12,724	12,313	12,188	3,241	36.2%
Transitional Employees	0	0	33,066	13,577	5,133	5,133	—
Subtotal	61,739	82,432	124,908	115,102	100,061	38,322	62.1%
Total Employees	793,474	831,393	885,871	891,005	784,835	-8,639	-1.1%

Source: CRS analysis of data provided by USPS.

Figure 1. Number of USPS Employees, 1986-2006



Source: CRS analysis of data provided by USPS.

Table 2. Career and Non-Career Employees as Percentage of USPS Workforce (Five-year Intervals)

Employees	1986	1991	1996	2001	2006
Career Employees	92.2%	90.1%	85.9%	87.1%	87.3%
Non-Career Employees	7.8%	9.9%	14.1%	12.9%	12.7%
Total:	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: CRS analysis of data provided by USPS.

Appendix: Brief Descriptions of USPS Employment Categories⁵

Career Employees

Headquarters: Includes persons who work in a variety of capacities at the two central offices of the U.S. Postal Service, which are located in Washington, DC, and Rosslyn, Virginia.

Headquarters — Related Field Units: Includes persons in offices administered from USPS's headquarters, but who are located elsewhere.

Inspection Service — Field: Includes persons who work for the Postal Inspection Service, which protects USPS property and employees and investigates alleged misuse of the mails for criminal purposes.

Inspector General: Includes persons who work for the USPS Office of Inspector General, which audits and investigates USPS activities.

Area Offices Personnel: Includes persons who work in the USPS administrative units that oversee postal operations in USPS's nine geographic areas throughout the United States.

Regional Offices: Included persons in the administrative unit that oversaw USPS operations within geographic regions. Regional offices were replaced with area offices.

Postmasters/Installation Heads: Includes persons who serve as managers of retail postal facilities.

Supervisors/Managers: Includes persons who supervise other persons or who manage programs or processes.

⁵ These employment categories are those used by USPS in its *Annual Report*. The definitions were composed by the author of this report in consultation with USPS.

Professional Administrative and Technical Personnel: Includes persons performing administrative assistance and technical support duties.

Clerks: Includes persons who work directly with the public in USPS retail facilities and who manually sort mail.

Nurses: Includes persons who work in USPS medical units and attend to injured employees.

Mail Handlers: Includes persons who move mail containers in mail processing centers.

City Delivery Carriers: Includes persons who deliver mail in urban and non-rural areas.

Motor Vehicle Operators: Includes persons who drive mail trucks.

Rural Delivery Carriers - Full-Time: Includes persons who deliver mail in non-urban areas.

Special Delivery Messengers: Discontinued position that employed persons to make deliveries that required expedited delivery.

Building and Equipment Maintenance Personnel: Includes persons who maintain and repair USPS facilities.

Vehicle Maintenance Personnel: Includes persons who perform preventative maintenance and repair of USPS vehicles.

Non-Career Employees

Casuals: Includes persons hired temporarily to assist USPS career employees in mail processing facilities.

Non-Bargaining Temporary: Includes persons hired temporarily to perform administrative duties in USPS offices.

Rural Subs/RCA/RCR/AUX: Includes rural substitute carriers, rural carrier associates, rural carrier relief carriers, and auxiliary carriers, all of whom provide temporary assistance to USPS in the delivery of mail in non-urban areas.

Postmaster Relief/Leave Replacements: Includes persons who serve temporarily as managers of retail postal facilities.

Transitional Employees: Includes persons who staff USPS's Remote Encoding Centers (RECs), which provide assistance to mail processing machines.⁶

⁶ If a mail processing machine cannot read the address on a mail piece, it makes an electronic image of the mail piece and transmits the image to a computer at an REC. There an employee attempts to determine the correct address for the mail piece so that it may be reentered into the mail processing stream.