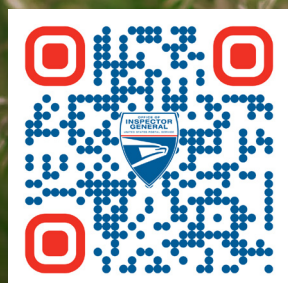


The Role and Value of the U.S. Postal Service in Rural America

RISC REPORT

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Executive Summary

For more than 250 years, the U.S. Postal Service has served as an essential lifeline for rural communities, connecting residents, sustaining local commerce, and providing vital access to government services. While rural communities rely heavily on the Postal Service, serving low-density, remote regions creates higher operational costs. These higher costs, however, come alongside important social and economic benefits that reflect the Postal Service's broader Universal Service mission to provide essential connectivity and infrastructure to rural communities. As discussions regarding the Postal Service's long-term financial sustainability continue, understanding the value it provides to rural Americans offers useful context.

This paper focuses on one specific dimension of the Postal Service's universal mission: the social value it brings to rural Americans. Social value is the positive, non-financial impact of a program or service on areas such as health, education, the economy, and overall public well-being. To assess the social value USPS delivers to rural America, this paper provides a framework that includes a selection of metrics to capture and communicate its non-financial contributions to rural communities.

These metrics are organized into four thematic categories: 1) community, 2) economy, 3) health and safety, and 4) government services and civic participation. Together, these categories help tell the story of the USPS's social value in rural America.

- **USPS as a Rural Community Hub.** The post office serves as an anchor of community identity and civic pride. It functions as a type of social commons, where neighbors run into each other, local information is posted, and community news is shared.
- **USPS Offers Access and Affordability for Rural Economies.** The Postal Service guarantees affordable, universal connectivity for rural Americans that private providers cannot replicate. The Postal Service absorbs high operational costs,

ensuring that rural residents and businesses can participate in the ecommerce economy.

- **USPS Supports Rural Access to Health Information and Services.** The Postal Service is an essential avenue for health access in rural communities, where populations are statistically older and suffer more chronic health conditions. The postal network ensures these residents (including a high concentration of veterans) receive critical medications and secure health communications.
- **USPS Provides Access to Government Services and Civic Participation.** For rural Americans, the Postal Service serves as a foundational infrastructure that bridges physical distances and digital divides to guarantee basic civic inclusion. It secures democratic participation through mail-in voting, delivers vital federal benefits like Social Security, and provides the addressing framework necessary to establish a formal legal identity.

Other international postal operators regularly measure and communicate their social value to demonstrate public benefit beyond profit. In contrast, the U.S. Postal Service does not currently publish a dedicated report or use a standardized process to showcase this impact, despite having a robust data infrastructure and substantial internal data. Consequently, public and media narratives tend to focus primarily on financial metrics, leaving external organizations to shape the conversation around the agency's broader social role. Moving forward, the Postal Service has several strategic opportunities to improve how it articulates its social value, ranging from immediate-impact communication initiatives to data-driven measurement tools:

- **Increase Opportunities to Communicate Social Value:** The Postal Service could share real-world stories of rural businesses and seniors via its podcast and social media using concise, visual content. It could also feature rural-focused

sessions at the National Postal Forum and partner with outside organizations to amplify its data.

- **Host the Message on a Permanent Platform:** The Postal Service could centralize its rural statistics, maps, and stories on a permanent platform, like a dedicated "Rural America" section on its website. Launching an annual rural service report would maintain year-round visibility for policymakers and stakeholders.
- **Build a Framework to Standardize Quantitative Evidence:** USPS could track specific rural metrics every few years. This could include monitoring pharmacy delivery volumes, home business parcel trends, post office foot traffic, and drive times to demonstrate impact on rural health and economies.

- **Maintain a Composite Social Value Index:** The Postal Service could develop a single, weighted index combining all qualitative and quantitative indicators. This tool would provide year-over-year comparisons, measurement of how network changes impact rural communities, and concrete metrics to guide strategic decisions.

Measuring and communicating its social value could help USPS highlight the significance of its service for rural residents and businesses — a central component of its mission and universal service obligation — and ensure that this value remains visible to policymakers, stakeholders, and the public. Providing this context can support operational and policy decisions that incorporate broader considerations alongside financial metrics.

Observations

Introduction

For over 250 years, the Postal Service has been an essential lifeline for rural communities, connecting residents and providing access to government services, and the broader economy. While rural and remote areas rely to a greater extent on the Postal Service than urban ones, they are more costly to serve. For example, nearly two-thirds of rural post offices operate at a deficit, compared to around seven percent of urban ones. These higher operational costs, however, come alongside important social and economic benefits that reflect the Postal Service's broader Universal Service mission to provide essential connectivity and infrastructure to rural communities.

Social value is the positive, non-financial benefit of a program or service. This can include impacts on health, education, economy, and overall well-being.

As discussions on the Postal Service's long-term financial sustainability continue, understanding the value it provides to

rural Americans offers useful context for ongoing conversations about the organization's future.

This paper focuses on this specific dimension of the Postal Service's universal mission: the social value it brings to rural Americans, defined as the positive, non-financial impact of a program or service on areas such as health, education, the economy, and overall public well-being. The paper outlines the role of the Postal Service in rural and remote areas and provides a framework for assessing its social value. It also examines existing metrics that the Postal Service uses to demonstrate its impact in rural communities and considers additional metrics that help clearly capture and communicate its non-financial contributions to rural communities.

To conduct this study, the OIG used a mixed-methods approach comprising desk research, data review, and targeted stakeholder interviews. To identify rural areas, we used the Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) codes, a U.S. Department of Agriculture classification based on population density, urbanization, and commuting patterns.¹ This classification differs from USPS's operational designations of City Delivery and Rural Delivery routes, which do not necessarily correspond to geographic rurality.² The full project methodology can be found in [Appendix A](#).

Three Pillars of USPS's Rural Presence

The Postal Service's presence in rural America relies on three interconnected pillars that support essential services, community connection, and local economic activity. These pillars are rural mail delivery, the rural post office network, and the rural postal workforce.

Rural mail delivery. Congress permanently authorized Rural Free Delivery in 1902, ensuring rural populations would receive the same service as urban residents. This authorization marked a major step in the evolution of rural mail delivery, connecting isolated communities to the broader American economy and laying the foundation for modern infrastructure. Rural Free Delivery enabled the launch of Parcel Post in 1913, which allowed the mailing of large packages. This allowed rural families unprecedented access to national commerce via mail-order catalogues and spurred indirect benefits such as road improvements to ensure passable roads for mail carriers. Today, rural delivery operates at a significant scale, reaching approximately 21 million rural delivery points across 49,351 rural routes. In 2025, USPS delivered an estimated 1.9 billion packages to rural areas.

The rural post office network. The rural retail network serves as an important anchor for community and economic stability for local businesses and consumers. There are currently over 18,000 post

¹ Some external data sources used in our analysis use an alternate rural definition (such as Metropolitan Statistical Area [MSA] and non-MSA), which is documented in Appendix C.

² For a history of rural routes, see: U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General (USPS OIG), *Rural and Urban Origins of the U.S. Postal Service*, Report No. RISC-WP-19-007, August 26, 2019, <https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-01/RISC-WP-19-007.pdf>.

offices in rural ZIP Codes.³ According to 2026 data, 77 percent of rural post offices operate in leased facilities (compared to 42 percent of urban facilities), channeling rental income into the local economy.

The Postal Service Rural Network

- 18,000 rural post offices*
- Over 21 million rural delivery points (2020)⁺
- 49,351 rural routes (2020)⁺
- 1.9 billion packages delivered to rural areas (2025)*

*Rural definition based on RUCA codes.

+Rural definition based on 2020 OIG analysis which organized locations into High Density, Medium Density, and Low Density (rural proxy) areas based on specific characteristics, such as delivery point density.

The rural postal workforce. In 2024, the Postal Service employed more than 130,000 personnel in rural areas⁴, offering competitive wages and benefits. Full-time carriers earn a median annual salary of about \$57,000, higher than the national average salary of \$48,360 in 2024 for U.S. workers without a college degree. Unlike city carriers, rural carriers are compensated based on a predetermined salary rate for their route (rather than an hourly rate), receive overtime only if they work over a certain hour threshold, may use their own vehicle, and cover large geographic areas.

Balancing Financial Sustainability with Rural Service

Maintaining rural mail service is inherently costly, and USPS faces statutory constraints that limit its ability to modify its physical network for cost savings. By law, the Postal Service cannot close a post office solely because it operates at a deficit.⁵ Most rural post offices do not generate enough revenue to cover

their costs.⁶ This restriction guarantees a service network, by balancing a public service mission with financial sustainability.

To offset the cost of rural service, Congress permits the Postal Service to request an annual subsidy of \$460 million. However, management has not exercised this option since fiscal year 1982, forgoing a total of \$20.2 billion. USPS told the OIG this decision was likely made due to a better financial condition at the time — it is after 2006 that total costs exceeded total revenue every year.⁷

Because the fixed \$460 million amount is not adjusted for inflation, its real value has eroded over time. While a source of relief, the Postal Service argues that it still would not be enough to pay for the cost of providing the universal service obligation in rural areas. For context, the Postal Regulatory Commission estimated the cost of just maintaining small post offices in areas the Postal Service would not otherwise serve at \$840 million in FY 2024.⁸

Even when the rural network is not the direct target of cost-cutting, broader efficiency efforts can still impact these communities disproportionately. For example, in 2025, the Postal Service implemented the Regional Transportation Optimization (RTO) initiative to reduce underutilized transportation trips. This eliminated same-day collection at post offices far from regional hubs, which disadvantages remote areas where long distances from regional hubs are more common. An OIG audit found this change to collection schedules resulted in disproportionately longer delivery timelines in rural areas.⁹ Consequently, rural communities face longer delivery timelines and wider service disparities.

This tension illustrates how finding solutions that preserve vital rural service while supporting institutional financial stability remains a complex challenge.

³ Rural definition based on RUCA codes.

⁴ Rural definition based on RUCA codes.

⁵ See: USPS OIG, *The Evolution of the Postal Network*, Report No. RISC-WP-25-006, September 25, 2025, [The Evolution of the Post Office Network | Office of Inspector General OIG](#).

⁶ Previous OIG research found that 63 percent of rural post offices do not cover their costs, compared to only 7 percent of urban post offices. See: USPS OIG, *Focus On: The Importance of the Postal Service in Rural Areas*, April 18, 2022, <https://www.uspsoig.gov/focus-areas/focus-on/importance-postal-service-rural-areas>.

⁷ Additionally, when asked the same question in 2020, the Postal Service argued there was no guarantee that Congress would provide the funds in full or in part.

⁸ Postal Regulatory Commission, *Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Report to the President & Congress*, January 28, 2026, [AR_DesignFY25_finalversion_1.pdf](#).

⁹ U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General, Audit Report, *Network Changes: Local Transportation Optimization*, Report Number 24-142-R25, December 18, 2024. [24-142-r25.pdf \(SECURED\)](#).

Measuring the Postal Service's Social Value

To measure the social value of the Postal Service in rural communities, the OIG developed a social value framework.¹⁰ We selected a foundational framework that is widely used for measuring social value, adapted the framework for this project, conducted desk research to identify international methodologies for measuring postal social value, and validated the framework through extensive refinement sessions with internal and external postal experts.

This framework identified representative metrics to assess the specific social and economic benefits provided by the Postal Service. The goal was not to develop an exhaustive list of indicators and metrics, but rather to identify key components that help tell the story of the USPS's role in rural America. By focusing on these representative indicators, the framework provides a lens through which to view the essential social and economic functions of the Postal Service in rural areas.

Social Value Framework Design

The framework is structured to drill down from broad categories into specific, measurable data points. The resulting data can be used as a snapshot, and as a year-over-year comparison to inform ongoing decisions around network operations and broader efficiency considerations. The framework is structured as follows:

- **Theme:** Category of social value provided by the Postal Service in rural America.
- **Outcomes:** The positive results achieved by the Postal Service (e.g., the preservation of social infrastructure and rural identity).
- **Indicators:** Representative concepts that demonstrate those outcomes. For instance, "Access to and use of physical post office locations" serves as a primary indicator of the agency's importance to rural infrastructure.
- **Metrics:** One or two specific data points used to quantify an indicator, such as "Average drive time to the closest post office."

Table 1: Abridged Social Value Framework

Theme	Outcome	Indicator
Community	Preservation of social infrastructure and rural identity	• Access to and use of physical post office locations • Access to local information resources • Historic preservation of post office buildings with historic designation
	Rural residents are satisfied with USPS service	• Satisfaction scores
Economy	Competitive market access for rural businesses	• Participation in ecommerce via USPS products and services • USPS Marketing Mail
	Connecting rural customers to nation – and world-wide businesses	• Package delivery through Negotiated Service Agreements • Participation in the broader economy by reliably receiving packages
Health and Safety	Reduction in total cost of care by ensuring access to essential medication	• Medication delivery
	Supported rural safety and security	• Seniors' social interaction at local post office
Government and Civic Participation	Disaster resilience	• Continuity of services during federally-declared disasters
	Increased access to election infrastructure	• Voting by mail
	Access to government services	• Submission of federal tax forms and passport applications via mail • Participation in In-Person Proofing (IPP) program
	Improved nationwide statistics	• Completion of crucial federal data collection activities such as the Census

¹⁰ A social value framework is a methodology for understanding a broader definition of value (beyond financial value) such as social, environmental, and economic. It is used to assess the importance of a program or organization in a community.

Table 1 provides an overview of the social value framework themes, outcomes, and indicators. Specific metrics of interest are incorporated into the sections below. See **Appendix C** for the completed framework and additional data tables.

The four sections below present findings on the social value of the Postal Service in rural America, organized by the four thematic framework sections: community, economy, health and safety, and government services and civic participation.

USPS as a Rural Community Hub

In rural America, the post office often serves as an anchor of community identity and civic pride. The post office functions as a type of social commons, where neighbors run into each other, local information is posted, and community news is shared. USPS also provides an indispensable lifeline for seniors and residents with disabilities, bridging retail and digital divides through consistent service.

Fostering Community Identity and Civic Pride

In rural communities, the post office may serve as a physical representation of the town's identity and local pride. A 2025 survey of customers and small businesses conducted by the Postal Service found that 83 percent of rural consumers agree that USPS is an "important part of my community."¹¹ This concept was recently discussed in the U.S. House of Representatives in a 2026 hearing, with testimony stating, "A Post Office can serve as the beating heart of a rural community, especially when banks, pharmacies, general stores, and other local businesses have long shuttered their doors."¹²

The Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP)¹³ told the OIG that many rural residents "see their postal offices as an identity symbol. You drive by their communities and see the community's name on the post office."¹⁴ A former rural post office worker told the OIG that "having a physical post office and dedicated ZIP Code is a vital indicator of a town's existence and status as a community." For unincorporated

communities (which lack a local city government and are instead governed directly by the county or state), it may be the only physical location where the community name is displayed. Many post offices have a connection to local history as well. According to USPS facilities data, 1,373 USPS facilities across the country are in historic buildings in rural communities.

Figure 1: Eucha Post Office in Unincorporated Eucha, Oklahoma



Source: Google Maps

Beyond the community importance of the building itself, rural residents also value the human connection provided by postal staff, viewing them as part of the community rather than anonymous government employees. Prior OIG research¹⁵ found that more than half of rural customers know either their postmaster, clerk, or carrier by name (56 percent of rural customers, compared to 44 percent non-rural).¹⁶ Many rural postmasters and carriers come from families with long postal histories, embedding the Postal Service within the heritage of small communities.

Hub for Socializing and Local Information

The rural post office functions as a social and communication nexus where neighbors interact, community news is distributed, and local information is shared. A local Chamber of Commerce president

¹¹ Rural definition based on Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).

¹² Testimony of Ashley E. Poling, Commissioner, Postal Regulatory Commission, before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on Government Operations, June 4, 2026, <https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Poling-Written-Testimony.pdf>.

¹³ RCAP is a national network of nonprofit partners that provides technical assistance, training, resources, and support to rural communities across the country.

¹⁴ USPS stated that ZIP Codes were developed to streamline mail and parcel processing. Any other benefits such as serving as an identity symbol are ancillary and unintended.

¹⁵ USPS OIG, *Addressing the Diverse Needs and Wants of Rural America*, Report No. RISC-WP-19-009, September 16, 2019, [RISC-WP-19-009.pdf](https://www.usps.gov/omail/ruralservice/RISC-WP-19-009.pdf).

¹⁶ A recent article tells the story of a small rural post office facing closure that residents 'saved' by devising a plan to construct a new facility to house both the post office and the town's first café in decades. Annie Gowen, A small Kansas town comes up with a unique way to save its post office, *Washington Post*, June 12, 2026.

told the OIG that “post offices serve as vital community gathering places.”

In small towns, residents often run into and interact with neighbors in the post office. A 2019 OIG survey found that rural customers are more likely to talk with friends at the post office compared to non-rural customers (37 and 23 percent, respectively). A researcher at the Urban Institute told the OIG that customers often know what time mail is delivered to PO Boxes every day, showing up to the post office at that time and creating an “impromptu community gathering.”

Rural post offices are also channels for distributing local information, including community news, church bulletins, and civic alerts (such as wanted criminals or missing children). According to a 2019 OIG survey,¹⁷ rural customers show a higher interest

in these non-transactional activities like viewing information on bulletin boards (31 percent, compared to 26 percent of non-rural customers). As the CEO of RCAP told the OIG: “In many of our rural communities, the post office is really the central place. Often, it’s the only community space utilized not only for receiving and sending mail, but also as a communication hub.”

Similarly, rural residents receive more periodical mail (a category which includes magazines and newspapers) compared to urban residents, suggesting they receive a greater portion of their information from hard copy media. According to the USPS Household Mail Survey, even as periodical volume has declined over the past ten years, this trend has not changed.¹⁸ Instead, the rural-urban gap continues to grow.

Table 2: Rural Households Receive 43 Percent More Periodicals than National Average

	2015	2020	2025	Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) 2015-2025
Large MSA	40.3	28.7	18.7	-7.4%
Other MSA	37.1	27.0	22.4	-4.9%
Non-MSA (rural)	49.9	43.0	31.3	-4.6%
All Households	40.0	29.6	21.9	-5.8%

Source: Postal Service, HMS Diary Sample, [Filing 139604 – Postal Regulatory Commission](#).

Lifeline for Vulnerable and Isolated Populations

For vulnerable rural residents facing geographic isolation or mobility limitations due to age or disability, the Postal Service is a reliable link to essential goods and a consistent, informal point of social contact.

For seniors and individuals with disabilities in rural areas, USPS provides a way to receive medicine and essential household goods (see the section below on rural access to health information). According to a recent internal USPS study on rural consumers and small businesses, the population most impacted by service gaps like inconsistent delivery or missed mail

are “older, low-income consumers reliant on USPS for bills, medicines, essentials.”

This reliance is exacerbated by geographic divides. An Urban Institute report found that for many rural residents, the post office may be their only retail option within a 15 – to 30-minute drive.¹⁹ This is supported by USPS data, which shows that 88 percent of rural addresses are within a 15-minute drive of a USPS post office. (See the section below on rural economies for more information on drive time.)

In this context, the Postal Service often becomes a vital social link. According to research from the Urban Institute, in these situations the “mail carrier is a source of social contact for isolated populations.

¹⁷ USPS OIG, Addressing the Diverse Needs and Wants of Rural America.

¹⁸ This study used Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) to define urban and rural.

¹⁹ Note this report did not state how “rural” was defined, but references to “metro areas” suggest MSA was used. See: The Urban Institute, *Measuring the Social Value of Postal Services: Progress Report and Results*, June 2011, [412414-Measuring-the-Social-Value-of-Postal-Services-Progress-Report-and-Results.PDF](#).

Rural carriers may be a person's only daily contact."²⁰ Some postal carriers voluntarily go an extra step for customers with disabilities, by delivering mail directly to the homes of residents who are physically unable to reach a roadside mailbox.

This level of service extends to outgoing shipments as well. Free pickup offered by USPS mail carriers is a particularly important service for customers who cannot easily travel to a post office or a private shipper due to lack of transport or physical restrictions, a challenge which is exacerbated in rural areas where distances between retail options may be longer.²¹ By providing these services, the USPS makes it significantly easier for rural seniors and those with disabilities to stay in their own homes and maintain active connections with the outside world.

Another challenge for rural populations is the digital divide. In rural areas where broadband is limited or unavailable, residents remain highly dependent on the Postal Service for critical communication. For example, rural residents without broadband rely more heavily on the Postal Service for bill-paying and other First-Class Mail needs.

In 2024, almost 28 percent of rural households lacked broadband access that meets FCC speed benchmarks. More recently, the Center on Rural Innovation's (CORI)²² analysis of June 2025 FCC data concluded that ten percent of rural ZIP Codes still had less than half of broadband serviceable locations (BSL)²³ with 100/20 Mbps coverage. About four percent of rural ZIP Codes have even lower coverage.²⁴

While access to the Postal Service is clearly important in areas with limited broadband access, this does not mean that higher broadband access reduces the value of the Postal Service. As discussed in the section below, communities with greater access to post offices have higher levels of small business activity.

USPS Offers Access and Affordability for Rural Economies

USPS functions not merely as a delivery mechanism, but as a critical equalizer preserving the baseline viability and economic resilience of rural American communities by guaranteeing affordable, universal connectivity that private competitors cannot replicate.

Affordable, Accessible Service for Rural Residents and Businesses

USPS is legally mandated to provide affordable, accessible service for rural residents and businesses

thanks to price parity, last-mile delivery, at-home pickups, and its widespread retail presence.

Price parity. For many products, the Postal Service provides uniform, flat-rate pricing across the country, which protects residents and businesses from the expensive "area surcharges" that private carriers impose for rural delivery.²⁵ In September 2024, USPS introduced higher delivery rates for shippers sending packages to certain ZIP

codes; however, these rates only apply to shippers using discounted merchant rates, not individual customers.

"With the USO, we give everybody the same service, the same price... regardless of where they live. So, there's a huge value in that that I can't emphasize enough."

– Don Maston, National Rural Letter Carriers' Association (NRLCA) President

20 The Urban Institute, *A Framework for Considering the Social Value of Postal Services*, February 2, 2010, [412097-a-framework-for-considering-the-social-value-of-postal-services.pdf](#).

21 In addition to mail, USPS mail carriers pick up packages of less than 70 pounds from residences at no charge during their regular routes.

22 CORI is a national nonprofit which partners with local leaders to build the tech economy in rural communities.

23 100/20 Mbps (100 Mbps download speed and 20 Mbps upload speed) is the FCC's national benchmark for high-speed fixed broadband. A broadband serviceable location is "a business or residential location in the United States at which mass-market fixed broadband Internet access service is, or can be, installed." See: Federal Communications Commission, *About the Fabric: What a Broadband Serviceable Location (BSL) Is and Is Not*, July 31, 2025, [About the Fabric: What a Broadband Serviceable Location \(BSL\) Is and Is Not – BDC Help Center](#).

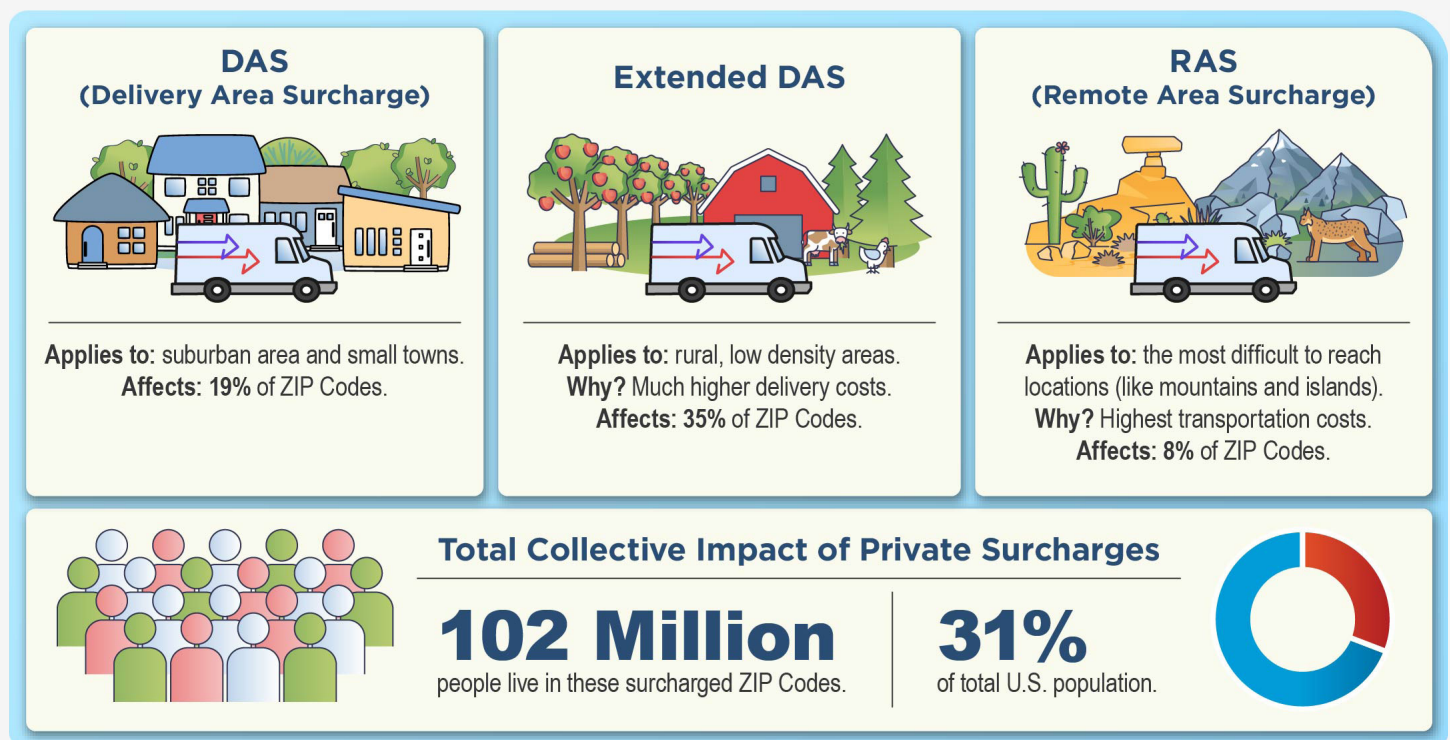
24 Analysis of June 2025 FCC National Broadband Map data completed by CORI. Speed tier and fiber coverage reflect terrestrial fixed broadband technologies only (satellite is excluded).

25 While some USPS products (including Priority Mail, Priority Mail Express, and Ground Advantage) have zonal pricing, it is based on distance of the delivery rather than whether the package is going to or from an urban or rural area.

Depending upon customer location, private companies like FedEx and UPS charge a delivery area surcharge (DAS), extended DAS, or remote area surcharge (RAS). These are extra fees for specific ZIP Codes based on delivery costs.²⁶ The Institute for Policy Studies calculates that these surcharge areas are home to approximately 31 percent of the U.S. population (102 million people). In other words, private carriers charge a third of Americans more based on where they live, while the Postal Service serves them for the same price as any other community.

To illustrate the extent to which geographic surcharges add expenses to rural shipments, the OIG compared pricing for a single 2 lb, 8" x 6" x 4" package sent from Washington, D.C. to five randomly selected rural ZIP Codes, using the "ground" (2-day) shipping option for FedEx, UPS, and USPS. This calculation used the retail price available to non-commercial customers. The difference between the average shipping price for FedEx and USPS is \$40.37, and the difference between the average shipping price for UPS and USPS is \$16.65.²⁷ The largest overall difference found (among these five randomly selected ZIP Codes) was \$52.14.

Figure 2: Private Carrier Surcharges:



Source: Institute for Policy Studies, *Who would pay the biggest price for postal privatization*, Policy Brief, April 2025, https://ips-dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Who-Would-Pay-the-Biggest-Price-for-Postal-Privatization_.docx.pdf, p.3.

²⁶ For customers, USPS generally has a lower price for parcel delivery in rural areas than its private competitors. See: Speed Commerce. "UPS vs FedEx vs USPS - 2026 Shipping Rates, Changes, What's Cheaper," January 7, 2026, [UPS vs Fedex vs USPS - 2026 Shipping Rates, Changes, What's Cheaper | Speed Commerce](https://www.speedcommerce.com/ups-vs-fedex-vs-usps-2026-shipping-rates-changes-whats-cheaper/).

²⁷ Amazon Shipping, which is only available for commercial shippers and not available for retail customers, has a minimum price of \$11.99 shipping per package (1-lb or less) up to 150 miles, before any rural surcharges are added. See: [Get Rates For Ecommerce Shipping - Amazon Shipping](https://www.amazon.com/shipping/rates).

Table 3: Comparison of Average Published Retail Prices to Ship a 2-lb Package from Washington, DC to a Rural ZIP Code

ZIP Code	56048 (Janesville, MN)	84716 (Boulder, UT)	62992 (Ullin, IL)	97410 (Azalea, OR)	53156 (Palmyra, WI)	Average
FedEx price	\$47.22	\$65.01	\$47.22	\$50.76	\$47.22	\$51.49
UPS price	\$24.92	\$36.35	\$24.92	\$27.75	\$24.92	\$27.77
USPS price	\$9.95	\$12.87	\$9.95	\$12.87	\$9.95	\$11.12

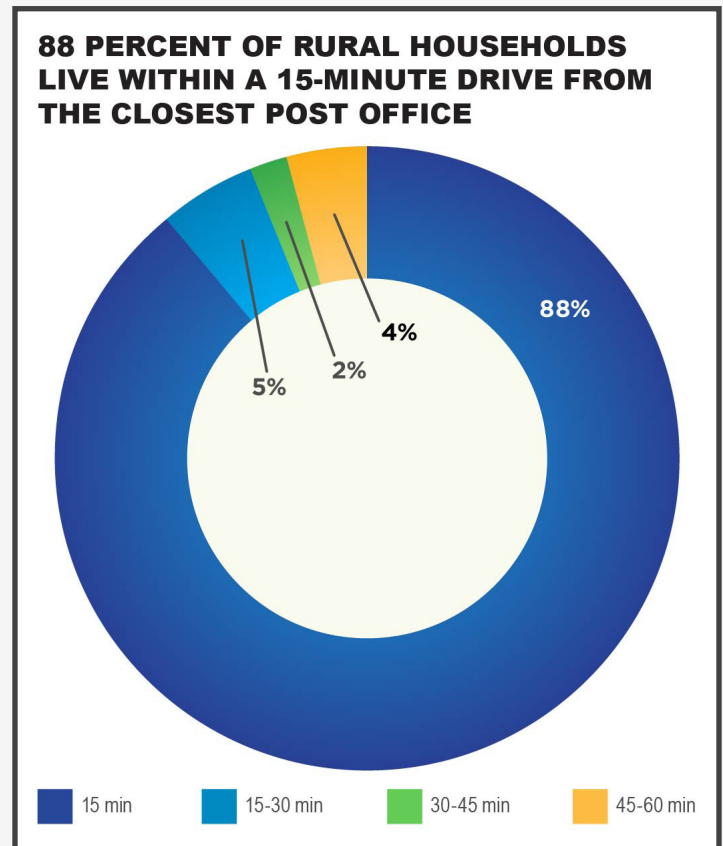
Source: OIG analysis of FedEx, UPS, and USPS web sites, conducted in May 2026.

Last-mile delivery. Because the Postal Service delivers to all Americans, it is the only delivery entity serving residents in some rural or remote locations. In these areas, USPS delivers packages for private carriers like FedEx and UPS, who use the Postal Service's last mile to lower the high costs of remote rural deliveries. In FY 2025, 28 percent of all USPS packages were delivered in rural areas. Private carriers have flexibility to exclude some remote locations due to higher delivery costs, but USPS does not have this option as it operates under a mandate to provide nationwide service.

For example, USPS operates the Alaska Bypass program as a logistical lifeline for 239 dispersed islands and remote regions across the state. Established by Congress in 1972 to ensure reliable delivery to communities without road access, the program allows Alaskans to receive pallets of essential goods (such as food, household supplies, and paper goods) at affordable Preferred Ground Parcel Post prices. Because these shipments are transported by private airlines, the Postal Service subsidizes the difference between the ground postage paid by shippers and the significantly higher cost of air transportation to remote Alaska.

At-home pickups. As discussed above, the Postal Service's daily delivery routes provide a unique logistical advantage for collecting outgoing packages and ecommerce returns directly from homes and businesses free of charge, a convenience for which private carriers charge premiums. This benefits rural businesses and consumers alike, enabling them to send products or mail returns without traveling long distances to the nearest post office.

Figure 3: Rural Addresses by Drive Time to the Closest Post Office



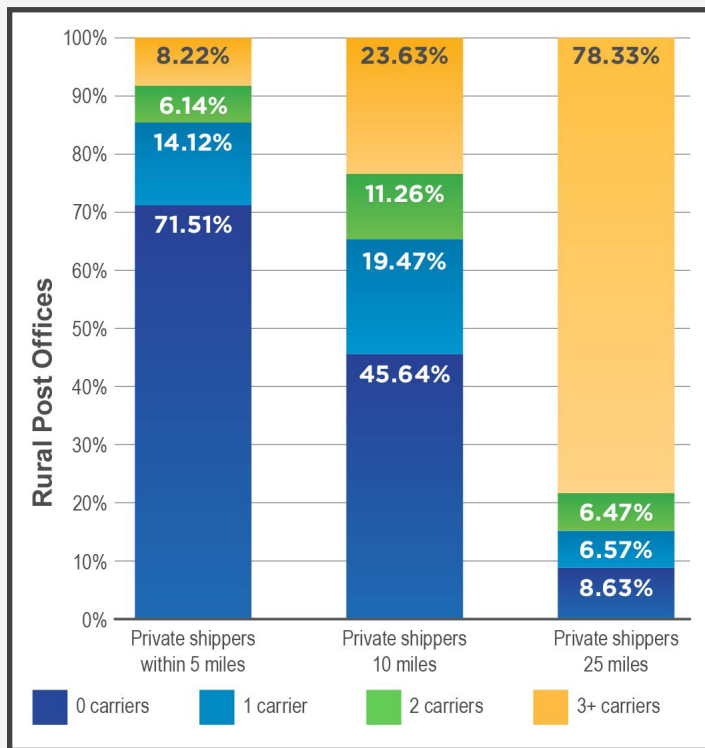
Source: USPS.

Widespread retail presence. The Postal Service maintains a dense retail presence that has remained consistent over time given the restrictions on closing post office locations solely based on financial considerations. These locations serve as a primary access point that reduces travel time and operational friction for residents and businesses. Even in rural areas, most residents live within a short drive of a post office (Figure 3), which is crucial in

food, health, and financial deserts without other retail options.

In many rural areas, the post office may be the only shipping and logistics retail option within a 15–30-minute drive. Figure 4 shows the number of private shipping carriers (both drop boxes and retail locations, for FedEx, UPS, or DHL) that are located within 5, 10, or 25 miles of a rural post office. Over 70 percent of rural post offices have no access to private carriers within five miles, and about 45 percent have no private carriers within 10 miles of the post office.

Figure 4: Number of Private Carriers (FedEx, UPS, or DHL) Located Near Rural Post Offices



Source: ADVAN Research

In 2024 and 2025, an average of just over 364 million retail transactions²⁸ were made at postal retail locations with rural ZIP Codes.²⁹ These rural transactions represent 25 percent of all postal retail transactions across the country, illustrating that

physical post offices offering in-person transactions remain key infrastructure for rural Americans.

Connecting Small Businesses to the Economy

The Postal Service provides the foundational infrastructure for rural small businesses to reach customers and compete in the national market despite their distance from urban economic hubs. In addition, recent research shows that rural counties with greater access to post offices have higher levels of small business activity.^{30, 31}

According to a 2025 USPS Survey, small and medium businesses in rural areas are more likely to report that their location makes it “harder to access” shipping services.³² In the same survey, 48 percent of the small and medium rural businesses that were surveyed reported they rely on USPS as their primary shipping provider. Eighty-three percent of these businesses agree USPS is an important part of their company’s business operation. Overall, rural small businesses visit post offices more frequently than non-rural (61 percent visiting weekly compared to 50 percent, respectively).

Small businesses also benefit from USPS shipping discounts and Marketing Mail offerings for local addresses. Through Every Door Direct Mail (EDDM), local businesses can drop off their printed advertisements and coupons at the local post office for delivery on local mail routes, helping them saturate a local market. Previous OIG research has found that rural customers engage more with local mail advertisements and coupons compared to

Outside of metropolitan areas, small businesses operated 96.5 percent of establishments in 2025 and accounted for 56.6 percent of employment (2025 SBA Rural Small Business Profile).

²⁸ This number does not include Self Service Kiosk (SSK) data, which represent only a small number of transactions. At SSKs, customers can perform tasks like printing and paying for shipping labels, mailing packages, renewing a PO Box, and more. SSK data is provided in Appendix C.

²⁹ The number of retail transactions in rural locations was slightly higher in 2024 than 2025: roughly 372 million compared to roughly 357 million, respectively.

³⁰ Elena Patel, “The Postal Network as Economic Infrastructure: Evidence from Rural Small Businesses,” The Brookings Institution, January 26, 2026. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-postal-network-as-economic-infrastructure-evidence-from-rural-small-businesses/>.

³¹ Rural definition based on National Center for Health Statistics urban-rural codes.

³² Rural definition based on Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).

urban customers, making USPS a tool for targeted marketing by rural small businesses.³³

Without USPS business services like rural package delivery, post office access, and at-home pickup, businesses would be less likely to establish in rural areas, which could in turn lead to out-migration from these communities.³⁴ This can lead to a snowball effect, where decreasing population density discourages other businesses from opening, leading to further migration. In this way, as a recent Brookings Institution report stated, “the postal network functions not only as a delivery system but also as a form of shared infrastructure that shapes where small businesses operate and thrive,” supporting the sustainability of rural economies.³⁵ A rural chamber of commerce president told the OIG that during chamber meetings in the weeks before the interview, “All hands went up when I asked how many folks are still using the post office...in pretty much every meeting. Everybody still uses the post office.”

Connecting Rural Customers to the Ecommerce Economy

With the rise of ecommerce, the Postal Service acts as a connection between geographically isolated populations and commerce, bridging retail gaps caused by the closure of physical stores in rural towns. While urban package volumes have decreased since 2022, rural volumes continue to

Unlike package volumes in urban areas, USPS deliveries in rural areas grew steadily between 2022 and 2025.

increase – a possible result of a lower presence of competition in rural areas (Figure 5). Between 2022 and 2025, rural inbound package volume has increased 15%, compared to a 16% decrease in urban package volume. According to a USPS survey of rural consumers, 69 percent of rural residents

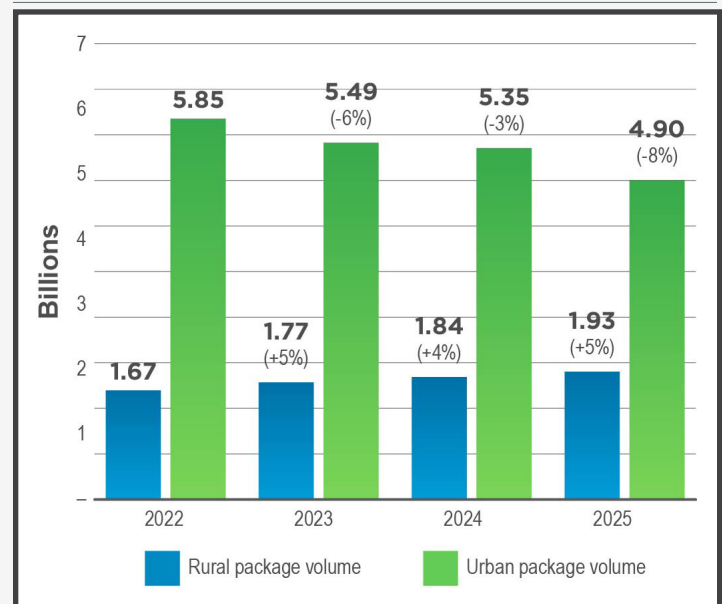
receive packages via USPS at least monthly.³⁶ Additionally, by maintaining affordable shipping prices, USPS contributes to keeping the costs of online shopping reasonable for rural residents.

A rural chamber of commerce's perception of USPS

- Local businesses prefer USPS due to its reliability, ease of use, price, and perception as more “local.”
- Many businesses rely on PO Boxes for mail, as their owners are frequently away from their brick-and-mortar locations. They frequently rely on USPS to mail checks, deposits, inventory, and invoices.
- The chamber’s president remarked it is “amazing how many people still request... visitor information... [in a] paper copy” despite the availability of digital versions. In response to these requests, they frequently send physical visitor guides through USPS to potential tourists.

– Source: USPS OIG interview

Figure 5: USPS Rural Versus Urban Package Volume Trends



Source: USPS

³³ USPS OIG, *Addressing the Diverse Needs and Wants of Rural America*, Report No. RISC-WP-19-009, September 16, 2019, [RISC-WP-19-009.pdf](#).

³⁴ Rural definition based on ZIP Codes which are subject to DAS surcharges by major parcel carriers. See: SJ Consulting Group, Inc., *Report on Measuring the Benefits of Rural Postal Service*, August 2011, [Rural_Service_Report.pdf](#).

³⁵ Elena Patel, *The postal network as economic infrastructure: Evidence from rural small businesses*, Brookings Institution, January 26, 2026, [The postal network as economic infrastructure: Evidence from rural small businesses | Brookings](#).

³⁶ Rural definition based on Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).

USPS's Presence in Rural Areas Supports Local Jobs

USPS is one of the largest civilian employers in the United States, with roughly 500,000 career employees nationwide. Census data shows that postal workers without bachelor's degrees are better compensated than many other workers with similar levels of education, experience, and work hours.³⁷

USPS Supports Rural Access to Health Information and Services

The Postal Service is an essential avenue for health access in rural communities, where populations are statistically older and suffer more chronic health conditions — challenges compounded by rural hospital and pharmacy closures.

In 2021, 84 percent of the 138 counties with no retail pharmacy were rural, and these pharmacy deserts had higher populations of older adults (65+), people without insurance, and people living below the federal poverty line. In this context, as the CEO of the National Rural Health Association told the OIG, the Postal Service “is insanely important for rural health.” The Postal Service provides access to essential medications and medical supplies, creates a community safety net through carrier interactions with older and isolated residents, and ensures a secure channel for sensitive health and government communications.

USPS Delivers Prescription and Medical Care, in Both Rural and Non-rural Communities

The Postal Service handles about 1.2 billion prescription drug shipments every year. USPS also plays an important role in delivering diagnostic tests (including COVID-19 diagnostic kits up to 2025), medical supplies (from blood testing strips to contact lenses), and personal protective equipment.

The Postal Service is a critical safety net in rural areas

More than 200 rural hospitals have closed since 2005.

Rural seniors suffer higher rates of chronic medical conditions than their urban counterparts.

“Well, it’s not an understatement to say [USPS service reductions] would directly impact life expectancy. I mean, you’re talking about mortality issues here ultimately.”

– CEO, National Rural Health Association

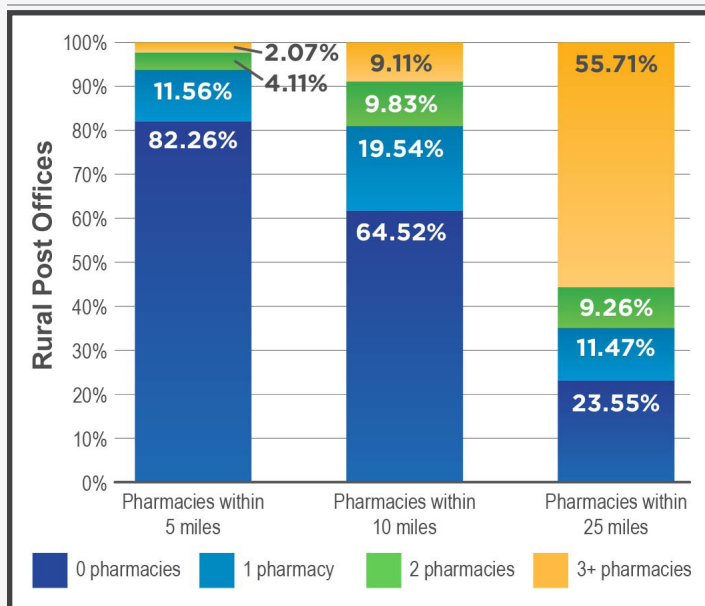
While this is true in both rural and non-rural areas, this role has an outsized importance in rural America where populations trend older, possess less household wealth, and experience higher rates of chronic health issues. Across the country, roughly 20 percent of Americans over 40 with prescriptions for a chronic condition receive their medication exclusively through the Postal Service. In fact, a recent USPS survey found that 27 percent of rural households received mailed prescriptions or healthcare-related items in the previous month.³⁸

³⁷ Monique Morrissey, Economic Policy Institute, *The war against the Postal Service*, December 16, 2020, [The war against the Postal Service: Postal services should be expanded for the public good, not diminished by special interests](#) | Economic Policy Institute.

³⁸ Rural definition based on Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).

As rural pharmacies close, USPS becomes one of the only options for receiving prescriptions. For example, in Alaska some communities are so isolated they do not have roads connecting them to necessary services like pharmacies and therefore rely on mail-order prescriptions. As shown in Figure 6, over 60 percent of rural post offices have no pharmacy within 10 miles. Because many post offices are located within downtown or central commercial areas, this illustrates the lack of local pharmacy options in rural areas.

Figure 6: Number of Pharmacies Within 5, 10, or 25 Miles of a Rural Post Office

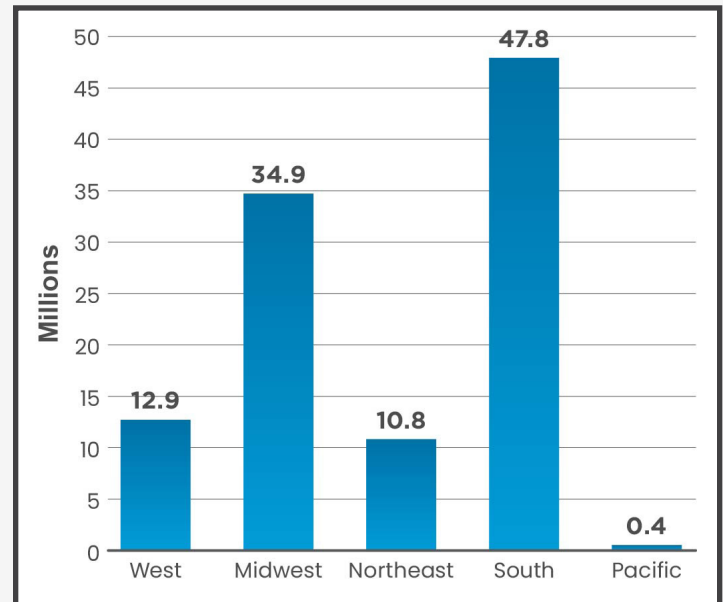


Source: ADVAN Research

Narrowing in on people with Medicare (a federal health insurance program for people aged 65 and over), rural enrollees have disproportionately higher rates of severe health conditions compared to urban residents.³⁹ They also report greater challenges affording prescriptions and other health care needs. In 2022, about 15 percent of Medicare Part D⁴⁰ enrollees lived in rural areas.⁴¹ The OIG estimates that

Medicare Part D mailed over 106 million prescriptions to rural Americans in 2023 (Figure 7).⁴²

Figure 7: Number of Medicare Part D Prescriptions Delivered by Mail in Rural Areas (2023)



Source: OIG analysis of Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) data

Studies have also shown that medication adherence is higher when medication is delivered to the home, rather than picked up at a pharmacy.⁴³ For example, a 2021 study found that mailed prescriptions result in higher medication adherence, resulting in fewer hospitalizations.⁴⁴ As researchers with the senior-focused nonprofit USAGing told the OIG: “[If you] have mobility issues and can’t get anywhere and no longer drive... the mail is a critical way for [seniors] to continue to have consistency in their medications.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, USPS worked with agencies including FEMA and HHS to deliver medical equipment such as masks and COVID-19 test kits. In 2022, the first year that Americans could request

³⁹ Rural definition based on Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).

⁴⁰ Medicare Part D is optional coverage which helps pay for prescription drugs. See: [Medicare.gov, What's Medicare Drug Coverage \(Part D\)?](https://www.medicare.gov/what-s-medicare-drug-coverage-part-d) | Medicare.

⁴¹ This estimate from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services defines rural and urban based on Census MSA (Metropolitan Statistical Area) data.

⁴² Using publicly available Medicare Part D prescription data, the OIG applied the urban/rural ratio for each state from the 2023 pharmaceutical shipment data to estimate the number of rural Medicare Part D prescriptions.

⁴³ E.V. Fernandez, J.A. McDaniel, N.V. Carroll, “Examination of the Link Between Medication Adherence and Use of Mail-Order Pharmacies in Chronic Disease States,” *Journal of Managed Care & Specialty Pharmacy* 22(11), November 2016, [Examination of the Link Between Medication Adherence and Use of Mail-Order Pharmacies in Chronic Disease States – PubMed](https://doi.org/10.1895/jmcp.2016.22.11.1247), pp.1247-1259.

⁴⁴ C. Gong C, W. Dyer W, M. Yassin M, R. Neugebauer, A.J. Karter, and J.A. Schmittiel, “The effect of mail order pharmacy outreach on older patients with diabetes,” *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, March 26, 2021, “[The Effect of Mail Order Pharmacy Outreach on Older Patients with Diabetes](https://doi.org/10.1111/jam.14700)” – PMC, pp. 2028-2030.

free COVID-19 test kits through the mail, USPS mailed over 100 million tests to rural Americans.

USPS Serves as a Lifeline for Rural Veterans' Healthcare

More than a quarter of veterans live in rural⁴⁵ communities, and studies have shown that geographic distance represents a barrier to veterans' health service access.⁴⁶ According to a 2011 Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) study, rural⁴⁷ veterans travel an average of 44.5 miles to reach a VA Medical Center, with some patients traveling as far as 200 miles.⁴⁸

Veterans receive a large proportion of their prescriptions through the mail. The VA mails almost 84 percent of prescriptions through its Consolidated

Mail Outpatient Pharmacy (CMOP) system, adding up to over 117 million prescriptions annually.

Wellness Checks and Identifying Emergencies

Due to the consistent nature of their routes, mail carriers are well positioned to recognize when seniors or isolated residents might be sick or incapacitated. By monitoring when mail begins to pile up or noting a lack of activity at a residence, carriers can identify potential emergencies. As researchers with USAging told the OIG, local post offices function as the "eyes" on older adults who live alone. This process is formalized in some parts of the country through the Carrier Alert program, a free, opt-in service launched in 1982 by the Postal Service and the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) to assist seniors and customers with disabilities. Even when customers

Rural carriers describe their experiences rendering aid along their delivery routes

In 2021, folklorist Emily Hilliard conducted in-depth interviews with 24 rural mail carriers in Central Appalachia for the Library of Congress's Occupational Folklife project "Rural Free Delivery: Mail Carriers in Central Appalachia."⁴⁹ Many of these interviews included descriptions of carriers encountering injuries or medical events along their delivery routes and rendering aid. Examples include:

- "I found a man laying in the road... and he had blood — I could see blood in the top of his head and I asked him if he was okay and he said no, and I said, do you want me to call 911 and he said yes." (Teresa Taylor Hatfield)
- "I heard somebody screaming, screaming for help... She was on another little side road so I shot over there and she had a daughter, she was probably 4 years old and she was having a seizure.... And at the time I carried a water cooler with ice in it, so got her a bag and kept it right around her neck and she calmed down and finally came to and everything was good." (Doug Miller)
- "She had broken her hip and couldn't get up. She didn't have her phone with her so she trusted me to go in the house and call someone and I stayed with her." (Stephanie Endicott)
- "I saw her sitting down at the mailbox... she couldn't get up! And she had sort of fallen down... I got her up and got her to the house." (Wayne Henderson)

⁴⁵ Rural definition based on RUCA code.

⁴⁶ Buzza, Colin, et al, "Distance is Relative: Unpacking a Principal Barrier in Rural Healthcare," *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 26 Supplemental 2, November 2011, Distance is relative: unpacking a principal barrier in rural healthcare – PubMed, and Institute for Policy Studies, *Who would pay the biggest price for postal privatization*, Policy Brief, April 2025, https://ips-dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Who-Would-Pay-the-Biggest-Price-for-Postal-Privatization_.docx.pdf.

⁴⁷ No technical definition provided for "rural."

⁴⁸ Buzza, Colin, et al, "Distance is Relative: Unpacking a Principal Barrier in Rural Healthcare," *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 26 Supplemental 2, November 2011, Distance is relative: unpacking a principal barrier in rural healthcare – PubMed.

⁴⁹ *Rural Free Delivery: Mail Carriers in Central Appalachia* (folklore interviews), Library of Congress, 2021-2022, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/occupational-folklife-project/articles-and-essays/mail-carriers-in-central-appalachia/>.

are not registered program participants, this type of community support still occurs on postal routes.

Some rural carriers travel down remote roads that see little traffic, positioning them to be the first — if not only — individual on the scene during a medical emergency. Although they are not trained first responders like EMTs or firefighters, rural carriers report saving customers from choking, handling seizures, and rendering aid during traumatic injuries.

Secure Access to Sensitive Information

Even in an era of increasing digitization, USPS's infrastructure ensures safe and secure access to important information in rural America. Rural populations skew older than the national average, and seniors frequently perceive physical mail as a more secure way to receive complex healthcare and government communications than online. Researchers with USAging told the OIG, "There's a lot of fear [among seniors] ... about using online tools and using the phone for sensitive interactions... I think the mail is still a trusted way [to] get information there because of that." Hard copies provide a sense of safety and tangibility, allowing older adults to avoid phone and online fraud. Many medical and legal documents — such as explanations of benefits (EOBs), mailings about upcoming Medicare changes, Social Security notices, and legal processes — are still sent by mail.

The mail is also a key tool for the dissemination of public health information in rural communities.

According to the Natural Rural Healthcare Association, printed materials from trusted primary care physicians have been shown to be more effective at combating healthcare misinformation than digital outreach.

USPS Provides Access to Government Services and Civic Participation

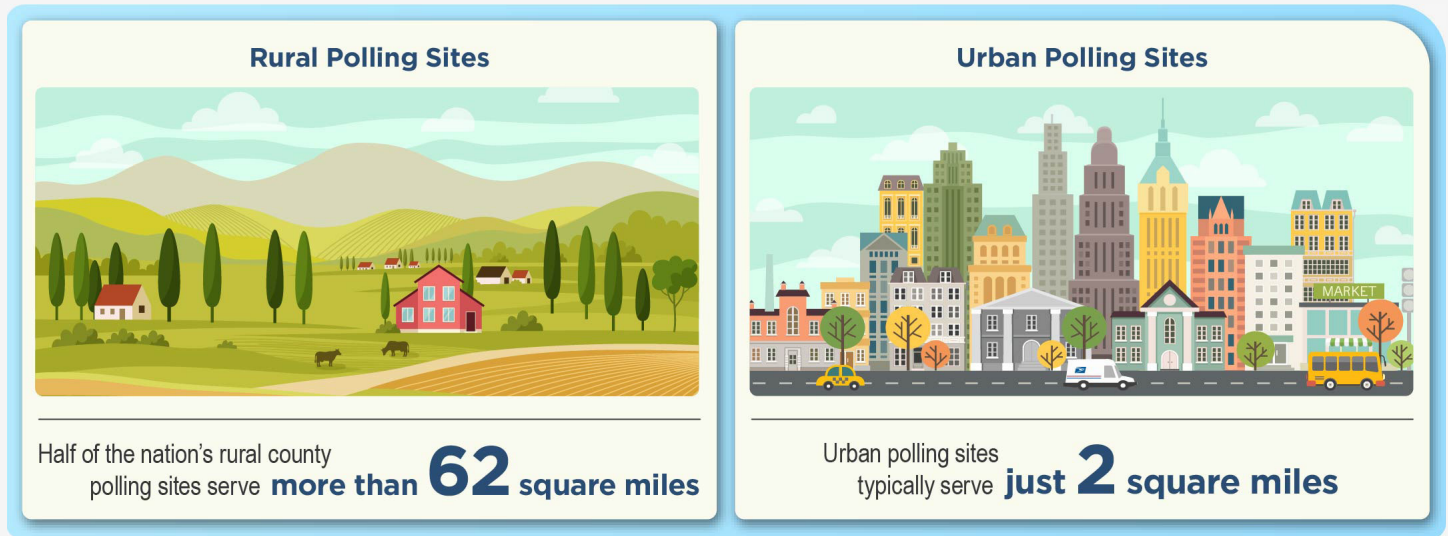
The Postal Service functions as a vital logistical link that integrates rural Americans into national civic and economic structures.

The Postal Service Helps Reduce the Barrier of Physical Distance for Rural Voters

Across the country, the Postal Service facilitates citizens' participation in elections by providing the convenience of voting by mail, where ballots are delivered to homes eliminating the logistical challenges of physically reaching a polling station. In addition, studies show that the availability of vote-by-mail increases overall turnout.⁵¹ In rural areas, mail-in voting is particularly important for seniors with limited mobility, people with disabilities, and people who lack reliable transportation, all of whom face challenges overcoming the distances between their homes and assigned polling places (Figure 8).⁵² Because rural voting precincts cover vast geographic areas, the physical distance between a voter's residence and their assigned polling station is frequently substantial. Vote-by-mail helps mitigate the impact of geographic distance on voter participation.

⁵¹ The Urban Institute, *A Framework for Considering the Social Value of Postal Services*, February 2, 2010, [412097-a-framework-for-considering-the-social-value-of-postal-services.pdf](#).

⁵² Definition of rural not provided in source.

Figure 8: Rural Polling Sites Serve Much Larger Areas Than Urban Polling Sites

In the 2024 general election, USPS delivered over 99 million ballots to and from voters across the country. Almost 12 million of those ballots were delivered to eligible voters in rural ZIP Codes.⁵³

The Postal Service Serves as a Financial Bridge for Americans Who Pay Bills and Taxes by Mail

As tax and bill pay processes increasingly move online, the Postal Service remains an essential intermediary for citizens who lack the digital skills, broadband access, or comfort level to make payments electronically.

In 2022, 14 percent of utility bills and 27 percent of government taxes and fees across the country were paid via mailed checks. In 2025, rural households reported receiving 60 percent of their bills through the mail, compared to 53 percent of bills for urban households located in large metropolitan areas.⁵⁴ Mail is the default delivery method for many tax statements (such as W-2s and 1095-series healthcare forms) sent by employers and financial institutions.⁵⁵ There is also a cost for e-filing, as private companies charge a fee to use their online services.

The Postal Service Distributes Federal Government Communication and Benefits by Mail

In many rural areas, the post office represents the face of the United States government. The

Postal Service acts as an access point for federal communications and benefits, both for everyday needs and for exceptional uses during emergencies.

The mailstream delivers important notifications from agencies like the IRS and the Social Security Administration, and acts as the primary conduit for rural seniors to receive information such as Medicare changes. USPS also delivers monthly Social Security checks, which are vital for older and disabled citizens.⁵⁶

During natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina, USPS coordinated with the Social Security Administration to deliver benefit checks early.

In many states, USPS is also a distribution platform for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) administration. For example, most states mail Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards to recipients, with the PIN delivered through the mail several days later.

The Postal Service also issues bird hunting stamps (Federal Duck Stamps) on behalf of the Department of the Interior, and rural customers are more likely than urban customers to express interest in this and in new products such as hunting and fishing

⁵³ Definition of rural not provided in source.

⁵⁴ Rural definition based on Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). Urban households are located in MSAs with 1 million or more inhabitants.

⁵⁵ The Code of Federal Regulations states that statement recipients must have "affirmatively consented to receive the statement in an electronic format" if they are delivered electronically (26 CFR § 31.6051-1(j)).

⁵⁶ Beginning in September 2025, the Social Security Administration is transitioning to electronic payments exclusively. See: Social Security Administration, *Social Security Transition to Electronic Payments—What Beneficiaries Receiving Paper Checks Need to Know*, July 14, 2025, [Social Security Transition to Electronic Payments—What Beneficiaries Receiving Paper Checks Need to Know](#) | Social Security Matters | SSA.

licenses (38 percent expressing interest, compared to 29 percent).⁵⁷

During national crises, the Postal Service acts as an indispensable arm of the federal emergency response, distributing financial relief and urgent health communications directly to American households. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, USPS delivered millions of stimulus checks and Economic Impact Payment checks to eligible Americans who did not use electronic direct deposit. In addition, the Postal Service used its Informed Delivery platform in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to send notifications to more than 20 million Informed Delivery users with critical health information about COVID-19. The Postal Service also partnered with the CDC to print and mail COVID-19 health guidelines to roughly 139 million households.

Beyond federal government use, the Postal Service remains the primary delivery mechanism in rural areas for local governments' official legal and civic documents, such as jury summons. In addition to these personalized official notices, low-cost bulk mailing services (such as Every Door Direct Mail) enable the broad circulation of local materials such as civic newsletters, church bulletins, and informational pamphlets from candidates for elected office.

ZIP Codes Enable Access to Government Funds and Resources

The ZIP Code, created in 1963 by what was the U.S. Post Office Department to automate mail sorting, has evolved into a foundational piece of national infrastructure. A "rough but conservative" estimate made in 2013 suggested that ZIP Codes add close to \$10 billion annually in value across the economy.⁵⁸ The standard addressing system, managed and maintained by the Postal Service, has become a way of establishing the formal legal identity necessary to open a bank account, apply for a job, and otherwise participate in the economy. The ZIP Code is the primary tool that marketing companies use to organize consumer demographic data, allowing

them to more efficiently match products and targeted mailings with interested recipients.

Beyond commercial activity, the ZIP Code enables government agencies at the local, state, and federal levels to accurately allocate funds and resources. By sorting communities into these geographic zones, authorities can coordinate firefighting and emergency services, track epidemiological databases for public health, and plan for disaster relief. Ultimately, the ZIP Code represents a pillar for socio-economic identity, institutional coordination, and commercial targeting.

USPS Supports Federal and State Survey Collection

The Census has traditionally been conducted by mail. In 2020, field operations were paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic, making the ability of the Postal Service to reach every home by mail critical. The Postal Service handled 590 million pieces of Census mail, the single largest First-Class mailing in a 90-day period in postal history.

For 2030, the Census Bureau is currently piloting a new program through which postal workers can collect Census responses while they deliver the mail. The pilot will evaluate if the Census Bureau can "leverage postal workers' local knowledge and existing relationships with communities to collect census responses."

Additionally, state wildlife departments utilize rural mail carriers as volunteer survey administrators, leveraging their daily transit through remote natural habitats to count small game (like rabbits and quail) along their delivery routes.

Measuring and Communicating Rural Social Value

Other postal operators regularly communicate the social value they generate through their public missions. This information allows stakeholders to make decisions that go beyond just the bottom line. Additionally, this focus helps drive the operators' own operational choices. For example, the UK Post Office actively measures and promotes its £3.8 billion (about \$5.1 billion) annual social value to remind stakeholders and the public that its network is a

⁵⁷ USPS OIG, *Addressing the Diverse Needs and Wants of Rural America*, Report No. RISC-WP-19-009, September 16, 2019, [RISC-WP-19-009.pdf](#).

⁵⁸ USPS OIG, *The Untold Story of the ZIP Code*, RARC-WP-13-006, April 1, 2013, https://www.uspsig.gov/sites/default/files/reports/2023-01/rarc-wp-13-006_0.pdf.

"remarkable national asset" that should not be taken for granted or underestimated. Research in Australia estimated that the public's "willingness to pay" (i.e., the maximum amount a person would be prepared to pay in order to receive goods or services) for the broader social benefits of Australia Post's existence, such as fair access to core services nationwide, is around \$185 million per year.

While the Postal Service maintains a robust data infrastructure and substantial internal data, it does not currently publish a dedicated, comprehensive report or prominent public-facing resources to articulate its social value. Although the OIG identified relevant metrics interspersed throughout public-facing documents (such as the composite customer experience score presented in each year's Performance Report), the OIG did not find any single

document dedicated to showcasing and quantifying the social value of USPS's service in rural areas.

Instead, public and media narratives tend to focus on the agency's financial position, declining mail volumes, and high fixed operational costs in low-density areas. The narrative around USPS's broader social role has often been shaped by external research organizations — such as the Brookings Institution and the Urban Institute — and government entities such as the OIG, the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC), and the Government Accountability Office (GAO).

The Postal Service has several opportunities to improve how it communicates its social value. These opportunities, presented in Figure 9 and discussed in greater detail below, range from low-effort, immediate-impact communication initiatives to developing specific data-driven measurement tools.

Figure 9: Opportunities for Communicating USPS's Rural Social Value



Increase Opportunities to Communicate Social Value

The Postal Service could create more opportunities to clearly and frequently communicate its rural story to stakeholders — including Congress, rural communities, industry partners and the public. By capturing real-world anecdotes — similar to the "Beige Book Awards" given out by NPR's economics podcast, The Indicator from Planet Money — the Postal Service could use its Mailin' It! podcast and social media channels to highlight the rural communities, small businesses, and seniors who rely on its network every day. These narratives could be reinforced with "snackable content": using brief,

high-impact tables, and visuals to translate complex analyses into easily digestible formats to be used for stakeholder briefings. Additionally, USPS could leverage external events it already hosts, such as the National Postal Forum, to further spotlight rural value through posters, breakout sessions, and panel discussions. Finally, partnering with rural-focused organizations like those the OIG spoke with for this paper would further amplify these efforts, connecting USPS's data with collaborative research opportunities and amplified communication channels.

Host the Message on a Permanent Platform

The Postal Service could formalize its rural social value narrative by hosting these insights on a permanent platform. This would centralize its rural statistics, stories, maps, and other types of data. Options for this platform include creating a dedicated “Rural America” section within the Postal Facts webpage or mirroring the webpage devoted to the Postal Service’s Economic Impact. To reinforce the message, USPS could publish an annual report on rural service, modeled after past sustainability reports. This recurring publication would provide transparency around the USPS rural network footprint, highlight customer reliance on USPS services, and document changes that shape rural access to mail, packages, and essential goods. Ultimately, hosting this message in a stable location would ensure that the Postal Service’s rural value remains visible to policymakers, stakeholders, and the public year-round, rather than just during news cycles.

Build a Framework to Standardize Quantitative Evidence

To move from narrative to quantitative evidence, USPS could rely on a data-driven framework that captures the full socio-economic dimensions of rural service. The framework presented in this paper is intended to provide a possible foundation. To document all aspects of this topic, USPS could supplement existing internal data with new or enhanced data streams updated every few years. Examples include pharmacy and health insurance package volumes to rural ZIP Codes, parcel volume trends from small home-based rural businesses and online sellers, foot traffic estimates to understand how post offices serve as social hubs for seniors, and spatial metrics such as drive times to USPS access points. Together, these updates would form a structured framework capable of demonstrating how

USPS supports rural economies, health access, and social connection.

Develop and Maintain a Composite Social Value Index

USPS could transform social value from a descriptive concept, as presented in this paper, into an evidence-based metric through a composite social value index — a single, weighted measure that synthesizes all qualitative and quantitative indicators in the framework. A formal index would enable year over year comparisons, highlight shifts in rural reliance on USPS services (including across geographic regions), provide insights into whether network changes or service standard adjustments affect rural benefits, and provide leadership with a metric to weigh alongside traditional operational and financial considerations when making strategic decisions. The Postal Service could sustain this index — for example, on an annual or biennial basis — to establish a streamlined mechanism for demonstrating the organization’s social value in rural America.

As a follow-up to this report, the OIG is conducting work to develop a composite social value index that, based on the framework presented in this paper, could enable year-over-year comparisons and trend assessments.⁵⁹

Conclusion

For over 250 years, the Postal Service has been critical infrastructure connecting Americans across the country. Although rural communities depend more on the Postal Service than their non-rural counterparts, they are more costly to serve. However, focusing solely on financial performance of the balance sheet risks overlooking the vital, non-financial public service benefits that USPS delivers across rural America.

⁵⁹ At time of writing the USPS has not yet reviewed the composite social value index.

Figure 10: The Vital Role of the Postal Service in Rural America

Summary of Findings: The Vital Role of the Postal Service in Rural America

1. Community Identity and Connection



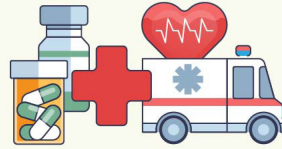
Community: The USPS is an anchor of community identity, a social hub, and a source of local news.

2. Economic Lifeline



Economy: Through the universal service obligation, the USPS is an indispensable economic lifeline for rural consumers and businesses.

3. Healthcare Delivery Bridge



Health: Rural populations trend older and suffer higher rates of chronic medical conditions, making the USPS an essential bridge for healthcare delivery.

4. Civic Participation and Government Services



Government Services and Civic Participation: For rural Americans, the USPS bridges physical and digital divides to support voting, receipt of federal benefits like Social Security, and essential public interactions.

USPS as a Rural Community Hub. The post office acts as an anchor for town identity and a social nexus, with 83 percent of rural residents viewing it as an important community asset. USPS is an indispensable lifeline for rural residents without sufficient broadband access, seniors, and individuals with disabilities.

USPS Offers Access and Affordability for Rural Economies. Under the Universal Service Obligation (USO) all Americans are guaranteed USPS service. Strict price parity requirements ensure equitable access and affordability for both rural and urban customers, while the last-mile network provides the baseline logistical infrastructure that supports rural small businesses.

USPS Supports Rural Access to Health Information and Services. Delivering 1.2 billion prescription drug shipments annually — including 84 percent of all VA mail-order medications — USPS helps bridge rural/urban healthcare divides exacerbated by rural hospital and pharmacy closures. The postal network

ensures these residents receive needed medications and secure health communications.

USPS Provides Access to Government Services and Civic Participation. For rural Americans, USPS serves as foundational infrastructure that bridges immense physical distances and digital divides to guarantee basic civic inclusion. It secures electoral participation through mail-in voting, delivers federal benefits like Social Security, and provides the addressing framework necessary to establish a formal legal identity.

Measuring and communicating social value will help USPS highlight the significance of its service for rural residents and businesses — a central component of its mission and universal service obligation — and ensure that this value remains visible to policymakers, stakeholders, and the public. Providing this context can support operational and policy decisions that incorporate broader considerations alongside financial metrics.

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Appendix A: Additional Information

Objective

The objectives of this white paper are to describe the social role and value of the U.S. Postal Service in rural communities by exploring its impact on social connectivity; economic integration; and its unique function as critical infrastructure and first – and last-mile provider. This white paper also identified existing postal metrics for social role and value and, as relevant, made suggestions regarding effective USPS rural metrics.

Scope

This project focuses on the public service role and social value that the Postal Service provides to rural and remote areas of the United States, including existing USPS metrics and methodologies for measuring its social value. The paper conclusions focus on highlighting the Postal Service's vital role in rural America, providing important context to inform conversations around financial sustainability and efforts to close USPS' financial gap.

Methodology

The OIG conducted a mixed-methods study consisting of desk research, data review, and targeted stakeholder interviews.

Defining the universe of rural ZIP Codes and post offices

ZIP Codes were defined as rural or urban ("not-rural") based on USDA Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) codes rather than USPS operational route designations. USPS route classifications govern labor contracts and carrier compensation structures rather than geographic density; as a result, "rural routes" can encompass developed suburbs, while "city routes" can cover sparse terrain. Additionally, the rural route label applies strictly to delivery carriers, omitting postmasters, retail clerks, and physical facilities in low-density areas. RUCA codes, in contrast, classify areas based on population density, urbanization, and commuting patterns. Given this study's focus on rural regions overall (including all residents, postal

facilities, and postal workers), the determination was made to use RUCA codes as an objective, demographic framework for defining rurality.

Once ZIP Codes were classified as rural or urban, the OIG reviewed the list of all 33,483 postal facilities and implemented the following exclusion criteria:

- Any facility located in a non-rural ZIP Code was excluded.
- Any facility with no retail hours⁶⁰ (and therefore never customer-facing) was excluded.
- After implementing this exclusion criteria, 18,026 postal facilities were classified as rural facilities.

Some external data sources used alternate definitions of rural, such as Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which is defined as groupings of counties that encompass large urban centers and exhibit economic integration. Alternate rural definitions are indicated as relevant throughout the paper. The definition used in each data source can be found in [Appendix C](#).

Framework development and validation

Framework development followed a three-phase process rooted in existing research and expert validation:

- *Foundational framework selection.* The OIG selected the Themes, Outcomes, and Measures (TOMS) framework as a foundational model for this work. The TOMS framework is widely used in the UK for measuring social value. The OIG adapted this framework from its original four themes (Work, Economy, Community, and Planet) to align with the specific benefit categories relevant to this work (Community, Economy, Health and Safety, and Government and Civic Participation).

Desk research. Initial framework drafts were informed by comprehensive desk research. This

⁶⁰ The team decided to exclude non-customer facing facilities, as the focus of this paper is the benefit of access to postal facilities in rural areas. The existence of a sorting facility where local residents cannot get a PO Box, drop off returns, or buy stamps was considered not relevant for this white paper.

included identifying international methodologies for measuring postal social value, investigating indirect economic benefits, and summarizing relevant impact indicators from global postal operators.

Expert validation. The draft framework underwent extensive refinement through 10 brainstorming and feedback sessions with internal OIG teams and external stakeholders including:

- *USPS experts* (Small Business Market Strategy, Customer Experience, and Customer Marketing), and
- *External experts:* Researchers and consultants who have conducted previous work on postal social value, including representatives from London Economics, the Brookings Institution, the Urban Institute, and the Universal Postal Union (UPU).

Data collection

Data collection was divided into two primary streams: desk research and qualitative interviews with rural stakeholders.

OIG analysts conducted desk research by reviewing literature, research studies, legal materials, and operational data. The collected materials encompassed a wide variety of source types across four core topics:

1. The Postal Service's universal service mandate
2. USPS's rural infrastructure and operations
3. Public services in rural and remote areas
4. Economic and social value benefits of access to the Postal Service

To gather qualitative data on the importance of the Postal Service within rural communities, the OIG conducted six interviews with a diverse selection of rural stakeholders:

- The National Rural Letter Carriers' Association (NRLCA)
- USAging
- The Center on Rural Innovation (CORI)
- The Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP)
- The Shenandoah County Chamber of Commerce (VA)
- The National Rural Health Association (NRHA)

The interviews were designed to gather qualitative data on the importance of the Postal Service within rural communities. The team also used a series of 24 folklore interviews with rural mail carriers in Appalachia, available online through the Library of Congress.⁶¹ (See a selection of quotes from these interviews in Appendix D.)

This research was conducted in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation. We discussed our observations and conclusions with management on September 1, 2026, and included their comments where appropriate.

⁶¹ Emily Hilliard, *Rural Free Delivery: Mail Carriers in Central Appalachia* (folklore interviews), Library of Congress, 2021-2022, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/occupational-folklife-project/articles-and-essays/mail-carriers-in-central-appalachia/>.

Prior Coverage

Title	Objective	Report Number	Final Report Date	Monetary Impact
<i>Rural and Urban Origins of the Postal Service</i>	Provide an essential historical perspective to better understand the urban-rural divide and how it is exhibited through the Postal Service's customers.	RISC-WP-19-007	August 26, 2019	\$0
<i>Addressing the Diverse Needs and Wants of Rural America: Opportunities for the U.S. Postal Service</i>	Gather insights into what rural customers across the country need and want from USPS.	RISC-WP-19-009	September 16, 2019	\$0
<i>Package Delivery in Rural and Dense Urban Areas</i>	Examine operational challenges in rural and dense urban delivery areas.	RISC-WP-20-008	September 16, 2020	\$0
<i>Revenue and Costs in the Retail Network</i>	Analyze financial data for post offices (organized into categories by population density) to explore differences in financial performance between rural and urban areas.	RISC-WP-21-003	April 12, 2021	\$0
<i>Network Changes: Local Transportation Optimization</i>	Determine the impacts to service performance, customer service, mail security, and expected cost savings from implementation of the Local Transportation Optimization initiative.	24-142-R25	December 18, 2024	\$0
<i>Maintaining Rural Retail Networks: Best Practices Abroad and Implications for the U.S. Postal Service</i>	Explore steps taken by other posts to improve the financial sustainability of their rural retail outlets, by benchmarking against six other postal providers.	RISC-WP-20-003	March 25, 2020	\$0

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Appendix C: Social Value Framework and Additional Data Tables

Table 4: Social Value Framework

Theme	Outcome	Indicator	Metric
Community	Preservation of social infrastructure and rural identity	• Access to and use of physical post office locations	• # of rural customers with a Group E PO box
		• Access to local information resources	• Delivery of local newspapers and periodicals
		• Historic preservation of post office buildings with historic designation	• # of post offices with historic designation
	Rural residents are satisfied with USPS service	• Satisfaction survey scores	• Satisfaction survey scores
Economy	Competitive market access for rural businesses	• Participation in ecommerce via USPS products services	• Drive time to USPS access point • Market share of rural small businesses' package volume
		• USPS Marketing Mail	• # of small business accounts using USPS weekly/monthly • # of small business using EDDM
	Connecting rural customers to nation – and world-wide businesses	• Package delivery through Negotiated Service Agreements (NSAs)	• # of packages delivered by USPS under NSAs
		• Participation in the broader economy by reliably receiving packages	• Package volume • Price parity vs. major carriers
Health and Safety	Reduction in total cost of care by ensuring access to essential medication	• Medication delivery	• Percentage of prescriptions delivered by mail
	Supported rural safety and security	• Seniors' social interaction at local post office	• # of monthly in-person visits to post office by seniors (age 65+)
	Disaster resilience	• Continuity of services during federally-declared disasters	Representative metrics unique to each disaster, such as the number of free COVID-19 test kits delivered
Government and Civic Participation	Increased access to election infrastructure	• Voting by mail	• # of ballots
	Access to government services	• Submission of federal tax forms and passport applications via mail	• # of tax returns filed by mail • # of rural post offices accepting initial passport applications
		• Participation in In-Person Proofing (IPP) program	• # of IPP participants
	Improved nationwide statistics	• Completion of crucial federal data collection activities such as the Census	• Census response rate by mail

Table 5: Social value metrics: data sources and rural definition

Metrics	Data source (internal USPS or external)	Rural definition
# of rural customers with a Group E PO box	Internal	USPS OIG defined: RUCA code
Delivery of local newspapers and periodicals	Internal	Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)
# of post offices with historic designation	Internal	USPS OIG defined: RUCA code
Satisfaction survey measures	Internal	N/A (no rural split available)
Drive time to USPS access point	Internal	USPS OIG defined: RUCA code
Market share of rural small businesses' package volume	External	N/A (data not currently available)
# of small business accounts using USPS weekly/monthly	Internal	Composite, data-driven classification (informed by established frameworks such as RUCA and MSA) based on geographic isolation and population characteristics at the ZIP code level
# of small business using EDDM	Internal	USPS OIG defined: RUCA code
# of packages delivered by USPS under NSA agreements	Internal	N/A (no rural split available)
Package volume	Internal	USPS OIG defined: RUCA code
Price parity vs. major carriers	External	USPS OIG defined: RUCA code
Percentage of prescriptions delivered by mail (rural vs urban)	Internal and external	N/A (no rural split available)
# of monthly in-person visits to post office by seniors (age 65)	External	N/A (data not currently available)
# of Covid test kits delivered, by ZIP Code	Internal	USPS OIG defined: RUCA code
# of ballots	Internal	USPS OIG defined: RUCA code
# of tax returns filed by mail	External	N/A (data not currently available)
# of rural post offices accepting initial passport applications	Internal	USPS OIG defined: RUCA code
# of IPP participants	Internal	USPS OIG defined: RUCA code
Census response rate by mail	External	N/A (data not currently available)

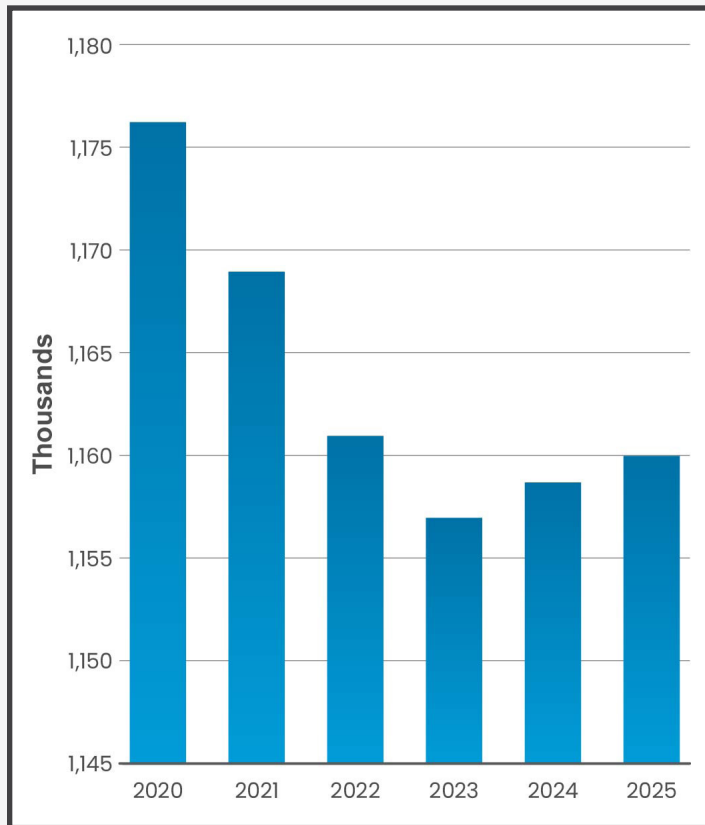
Additional data tables

This section includes metrics relevant to the social value framework which were not included in the body of the white paper.

Group E PO Boxes

Group E PO Boxes are assigned to customers whose physical addresses are ineligible for street delivery. Figure 11 shows the number of rural customers using a Group E PO Box to receive their mail.

Figure 11: Rural Customers With a Group E PO Box



Source: USPS

Customer satisfaction

USPS conducts a wide range of customer experience surveys, as summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: USPS Customer Experience Surveys

Survey name	Description
Point of Sales (POS) Survey	Samples retail customers who conduct transactions at USPS locations with retail equipment.
Business Service Network (BSN) Survey	Samples business accounts managed by the BSN that have reported service issues.
Delivery Survey	Samples both residential and small and medium size businesses.
Customer360 (C360) Survey	Samples customers that have received service resolution in connection with a case filed through the customer care center, on USPS.com, or at a local post office.
Bulk Mail Entry Unit (BMEU) Survey	Samples customers' satisfaction with their experience with the Business Mail Entry Unit.
Customer Care Center (CCC) Survey	Samples customers who call the USPS Care Center; the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) Survey only surveys customers that interact with the IVR system, and the Live Agent (LA) Survey only surveys customers who interact with a live agent.
USPS.com Survey	Samples customers' experience with the USPS.com website.
Large Business Panel (LBP) Survey	Panel survey of the customer satisfaction of businesses with more than 500 employees.

USPS calculates a composite customer experience score for each fiscal year, which weights data from seven of the eight surveys from Table 6 (the Large Business Panel Survey is not included). Currently, this composite customer experience data is not available by rural/urban split.

Table 7: USPS's Composite Customer Experience Score

	FY24	FY23	FY22	FY21
Target score	78.96	75.27	72.99	76.90
Actual score	▼77.80	▲76.93	▼72.72	▼68.49

Source: USPS

The Household Mail Survey also captures rural customers' satisfaction with the last package they sent and received through USPS, as shown in the tables below.

Table 8: Rural Customers' Satisfaction with Last Package Received by USPS (1-10 scale), FY2025

	Percent Rating 10 (Highest Satisfaction)	Percent Rating 8 or 9	Average Rating
Large MSA	70%	21%	9.2
Other MSA	73%	18%	9.3
Non-MSA (rural)	74%	19%	9.4
All Households	72%	20%	9.2

Source: Postal Service, HMS Diary Sample.

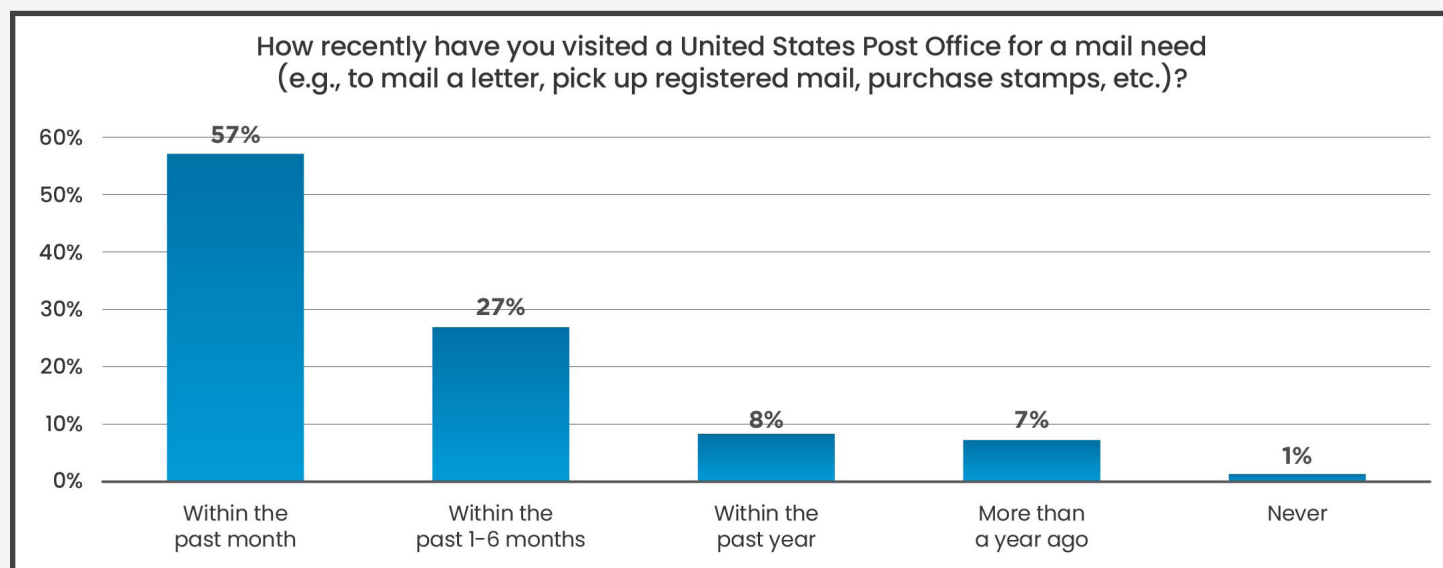
Table 9: Rural Customers' Satisfaction with Last Package Sent by USPS (1-10 scale), FY2025

	Percent Rating 10 (Highest Satisfaction)	Percent Rating 8 or 9	Average Rating
Large MSA	55%	31%	8.9
Other MSA	58%	30%	9.0
Non-MSA (rural)	62%	28%	9.1
All Households	57%	30%	8.9

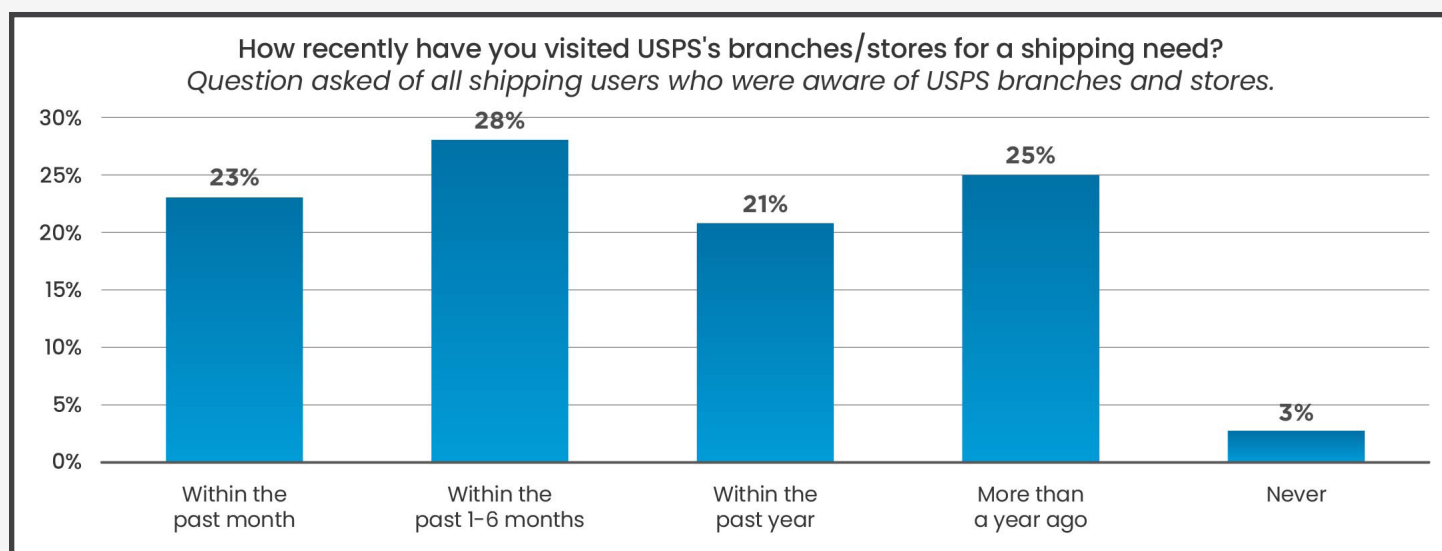
Source: Postal Service, HMS Diary Sample.

Usage frequency

The Brand Health Tracker collects data on how frequently rural customers visit USPS for shipping and mailing needs, shown in the figures below. In Q2 2026, 57 percent of respondents (rural consumers) reported visiting a USPS branch for mailing purposes within the past month. In the same time period, 23 percent visited a branch for shipping needs in the past month.

Figure 12: How Recently Rural Customers Visited USPS for Mailing Need

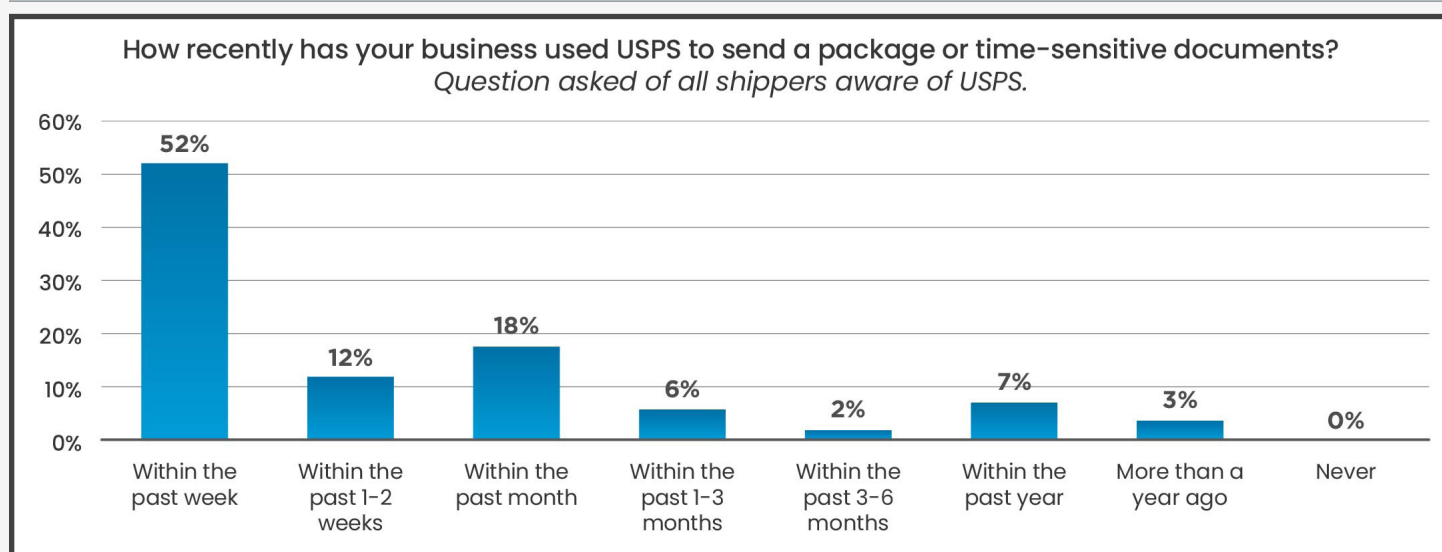
Source: USPS

Figure 13: How Recently Rural Customers Visited USPS for Shipping Need

Source: USPS

The Brand Health Tracker also collects data on commercial use in rural areas. In Q2 2026, just over half of rural businesses who received the question

reported using USPS for shipping purposes within the past week.

Figure 14: How Recently Rural Businesses Used USPS for Shipping

Source: USPS

Additional services offered in some post offices

The Postal Service offers in-person proofing (IPP) services for federal agencies, which includes collecting biometrics such as fingerprinting for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Only 47 percent of rural post offices offer IPP, compared to 81 percent of non-rural post offices. 420,520 rural residents

used IPP services in 2024, and 498,059 rural residents used IPP services in 2025.

In collaboration with the U.S. Department of State, the Postal Service enables some facilities to accept passport applications for citizens. As of 2025, passport applications were accepted at 1,661 rural post offices.⁶²

62 Based on "passport acceptance fee" transactions recorded in retail data.

Self-Service Kiosk (SSK) transactions

At SSKs, customers can perform tasks like printing and paying for shipping labels, mailing packages, renewing a PO Box, and more.

Table 10: Count of SSK Transactions

Transactions	2024	2025
Urban	159,358,911	173,172,429
Rural	4,741,949	4,899,771
Total	164,100,860	178,072,200

Appendix D: Quotes from the Library of Congress' Folklife Project "Rural Free Delivery: Mail Carriers in Central Appalachia"

This appendix presents a selection of quotes from the Library of Congress's Occupational Folklife project titled "Rural Free Delivery: Mail Carriers in Central Appalachia."⁶³ In 2021, folklorist Emily Hilliard conducted in-depth interviews with 24 rural mail carriers in Central Appalachia.

Fostering Community Identity and Civic Pride

One mail carrier whose father held the same job explained that many of his family members have also been mail carriers:

"Well there's me, and daddy — Eugene Taulbee was his name. And Harold, my oldest brother. Gary was my baby brother. And right now Joel Borsher's got it — that's my nephew. Paul, my middle-aged brother got it, had it. That's all the brothers I had!" (Roger Taulbee)

Lifeline for Vulnerable and Isolated Populations

"I've got a lot of hardship dismounts on my route, which is handicapped people or something, you know that live alone and they're not able to get out to the mailbox anymore to get their mail." (Brian Grim)

USPS Serves as a Lifeline for Rural Veterans' Healthcare

"There's just bags of medicine, bags of medicine, bags of medicine." (Jason Woodcock)

The Postal Service Distributes Federal Government Communication and Benefits by Mail

"I guess the most important thing was you brought their Social Security check to 'em every 3rd of the month, you know (laughs) that was—they would be out, they would be out to see you that day!" (Wayne Henderson)

⁶³ Rural Free Delivery: Mail Carriers in Central Appalachia (folklore interviews), Library of Congress, 2021-2022, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/occupational-folklife-project/articles-and-essays/mail-carriers-in-central-appalachia/>.

Appendix E: Management's Comments



September 29, 2026

PAOLA PISCIONERI
RESEARCH DIRECTOR
RESEARCH AND INSIGHTS SOLUTION CENTER

SUBJECT: Management Response: The Role and Value of the U.S. Postal Service
in Rural America (2026RISC006)

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Office of Inspector General's (OIG's) white paper, *Postal Applications of Artificial Intelligence*.

Management generally agrees with the statements found in White Paper 2026RISC006. It appreciates the updates made from feedback shared during September 1, 2026, Exit Conference. Management understands that a subsequent Developing a USPS Rural Social Value Index 2026RISC008 White Paper has been initiated based on this report in which OIG plans to develop an index to measure the social value and significance of USPS services for rural residents and businesses.

As the White Paper contains no recommendations requiring management action, management has no further comments at this time.

E-SIGNED by ANTHONY.A IMPRONGO
on 2026-09-29 15:02:30 EDT

Tony Improngo on behalf of Jennifer Vo
VP, Retail & Post Office Operations

E-SIGNED by JOHN.S MORGAN
on 2026-09-29 15:06:47 EDT

John Morgan
VP, Delivery Operations

cc: *Corporate Audit Response Management*

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE



Teresa Kline, Brooke Hobbie, Tristan Dreisbach, and JP Ducasse contributed to this report.

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