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Reference: A) [21 State 10876](#)
B) [21 State 28978](#)
C) [20 State 117274](#)
Subject: The Retirement Process: Retirement Planning One Year Out

Key Points:

- This is the third in a series of annual notices concerning the retirement process.
- The Employment Retirement Portal (ERP) has comprehensive Foreign Service and Civil Service retirement information and provides annuity estimates, a variety of job aids, eSeminars, and tutorials that you may find helpful.
- Your retirement service computation date (SCD) is different from the leave SCD listed on your SF-50 forms.
- If you had federal civilian or military service prior to joining the Department of State, you must apply for prior service credit for retirement purposes because it is not automatically added to an employee's retirement SCD.
- For Civil Service employees, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) determines and administers former spouse retirement benefits.
- For Foreign Service employees, the Bureau of Global Talent Management's Office of Retirement (GTM/RET) determines and administers qualified former spouse retirement benefits.
- Review the administrative section of your Official Personnel File to ensure it contains your prior civilian and/or military service records.
- You should review your beneficiary designations forms in your Electronic Official Personnel Folder (eOPF) to ensure the forms are completely filled out and represents your current retirement plan.
- Employees are advised to financially plan for the first few months after retirement because the payable benefits may take several weeks to receive.
- Schedule a consultation with your retirement counselor for a comprehensive discussion of retirement procedures and benefits.
- Retiring employees may enroll in the Retirement Planning Seminar (RV101) and Job Search/Transition Program (RV102) through the Foreign Service Institute.

OVERVIEW

1. As retirement nears, employees need to take a number of steps to ensure that this key life transition goes smoothly. This message lists a timeline and steps that apply to most Foreign Service and Civil Service employees at the Department of State.

THINGS TO REVIEW ONE YEAR BEFORE RETIREMENT:

2. Employment Retirement Portal (ERP): Comprehensive Foreign Service and Civil Service retirement information is on the Employee Retirement Portal (ERP) within [HR Applications](#). ERP has a variety of job aids, eSeminars, and tutorials. There are also additional resources available from the Menu drop-down in the Help section. In addition, the ERP Resources page provides some basic guidance and resources that you may find helpful. OPM administers Civil Service retirement programs, so Civil Service employees may also consult [OPM's](#) website for retirement information. Foreign Service retirement information is available on GTM/RET's [Retirement Network \(RNet\)](#).

3. Annuity Estimate: Use the ERP software to generate an individualized estimate of your annuity benefit. For employees in the FSPS or FERS retirement systems, ERP can also estimate the annuity supplement for those who retire before age 62. Use the [Social Security Administration](#) website to generate an individualized estimate of Social Security benefits. Finally, use the [Thrift Savings Plan](#) website to generate estimates of post-retirement TSP withdrawals under different scenarios. Employees can determine if their retirement income will match their projected post-retirement expenses.

4. Prior Service: If you had federal civilian or military service prior to joining the Department of State, you can increase your annuity by obtaining credit for that service. Employees must apply for prior service credit for retirement purposes -- a process that is distinct from the process by which prior service time is automatically added to a new employee's Service Computation Date (SCD) for leave accrual purposes. Your retirement SCD is different from the leave SCD listed on your SF-50 forms if you had prior service for which you have not applied for retirement credit. In most cases, credit is obtained by making a deposit to cover the employee retirement contributions (plus interest) that were not made originally. While no deposit is required to transfer Civil Service retirement credit to the Foreign Service retirement fund (or vice

versa), employees must proactively request that transfer. To submit a prior service application for military buyback, deposit or redeposit service, submit the request to HRSC@state.gov. Employees should resolve their prior service issues at least one year before they retire and keep copies of all documentation. Additional information on applying to buy back prior service credit can be found in [21 STATE 10876](#).

5. Civil Service Divorce: A court order can divide a civil service retirement benefit as a result of a divorce, legal separation or annulment of marriage. For Civil Service employees, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) reviews and administers Civil Service court-ordered benefits. Civil Service employees should download Pamphlet RI 84-1 titled "[Court Ordered Benefits for Former Spouses](#)" from OPM's website or view OPM's [Court Ordered Benefits](#) presentation on YouTube.

6. Foreign Service Divorce: The Foreign Service Act provides a statutory entitlement if a former spouse was married to a Foreign Service employee for at least 10 years of his/her creditable federal service (at least 5 of those 10 years must have occurred while the employee was a member of the Foreign Service) and the former spouse did not remarry prior to age 55. Unfortunately, sometimes state court orders fail to meet federal standards or one party contends that the order has a different meaning than its plain meaning. To check in advance for such issues, Foreign Service employees should email a certified copy of the divorce decree including all attachments to the HR Service Center at HRSC@state.gov or email that address asking for mailing instructions. GTM/RET will review the documentation and provide the employee and their former spouse with a divorce determination letter. Unfortunately, the ERP system does not include former spouse entitlements when issuing estimated annuity calculations. Foreign Service employees who have received a determination letter from GTM/RET may request an annuity estimate reflecting the division of the annuity by sending an inquiry to HRSC@state.gov and specify your request for an estimate from the divorce consultants.

7. Official Personnel File: Review the administrative section of your Official Personnel File (accessible via eOPF within [HR Applications](#)) to ensure that it contains complete and accurate records documenting the following: the beginning and ending dates of each period of creditable civilian service; the effective dates for each promotion or within grade increase during service that might be used to compute the high-3 average salary; and documentation of any creditable military service. If the eOPF is incomplete, send a copy of the prior agency documentation to U.S. Department of State, Records and Information Management Division, GTM/EX/RIM, SA-1 H-804, 2401 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20522-0108, FAX 202-663-1862, for scanning into your eOPF. If you do not have a copy of the prior agency documentation, email opf@state.gov to request that

GTM/EX/RIM obtain the prior service records from the previous agency or the National Archive's National Personnel Records Center.

8. Designated Beneficiaries: Are your beneficiary designations up-to-date for life insurance, lump sum salary payment, and TSP savings? If you are not sure, check your e-OPF to see if the beneficiary forms that you may have signed years ago reflect your current wishes. The most recent forms are the ones currently in effect, as previous copies are not deleted from your eOPF. You are responsible for ensuring the designation of beneficiary forms are correct for your current retirement system. Incorrect forms may not qualify as valid, even if they are in the eOPF. The forms are: retirement benefits (SF-3102 for FERS, SF-2808 for CSRS, or DS-5002 for FSPS and FSRDS), Federal Employees Government Life Insurance (SF-2823), and unpaid compensation (SF-1152). TSP beneficiary designations are maintained by TSP, so contact TSP on 1-877-968-3778 or submit a new designation (TSP-3) if you are unsure of what is currently on file. If any forms are incorrect or missing, submit new designation forms to HRSC@state.gov. New TSP-3 forms should be sent directly to TSP as explained on the form. Additional information on designated beneficiaries can be found in [21 STATE 28978](#).

9. TSP: Employees are encouraged to set their TSP contributions to reach the IRS annual ceiling for contributions to tax-deferred accounts or as close to that ceiling as their finances permit. Employees who have reached age 50 and are contributing at a rate that will reach the IRS maximum by the end of the year may make additional "catch-up" contributions. The Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board has implemented a new method for TSP catch-up contributions called the "spillover" method so anything over the elective deferral limit will automatically start counting toward the catch-up limit. Additional information on TSP can be found in [20 STATE 117274](#).

10. Annual Leave: You will receive a lump sum payment for all of the accrued annual leave to your credit at the time of your retirement. If you have annual leave in excess of your maximum carryover ceiling and you retire prior to the end of the current leave year, you will receive a lump-sum payment for all of your accrued annual leave, even if it exceeds your leave ceiling. For example, if you are a domestic employee with a 240 hour leave ceiling but have 300 hours of annual leave when you retire on December 31, 2021, and the leave year ends on January 3, 2022, you will receive a lump-sum payment for your total balance of accrued annual leave (300 hours) at that time. However, if you plan to retire on January 31, 2022, you will be paid a lump-sum annual leave payment for the accrued annual leave remaining to your credit at the time of retirement (e.g., the leave

remaining to your credit subsequent to the application of the use-or-lose leave rules on January 3, 2022).

11. Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA): By IRS law, annuitants cannot participate in flexible spending accounts. The FSA ends on the date of your separation. You will not receive the balance in your account as a refund. However, any health care expenses incurred prior to the date of separation will still be reimbursable but those incurred after the date of separation will not.

12. Health Savings Accounts (HSA): Annuitants can still contribute to a High Deductible Health Plan (HDHP) with an HSA provided they are not a dependent on someone else's federal tax return and not enrolled in Medicare. Withdrawals from an HSA are not taxed if they are used to pay for qualified medical expenses. For more information, please review [Healthcare Savings Accounts](#) on OPM's website.

13. Retirement Savings: It is important to plan ahead for the first few months after retirement and remember that many of the payable benefits are not immediate and may take several weeks to months before you receive them. For example, employees should not assume immediate access to TSP savings or the lump sum payment for unused annual leave. After retirement, it typically takes six weeks before TSP funds are available and 12 to 14 weeks before the lump sum annual leave payment is made.

-New Civil Service retirees receive a reduced interim annuity during their first months of retirement until OPM completes the adjudication of their application. Thus, prior to retirement, they should build up savings to cover living expenses during that period.

-New Foreign Service retirees, whose applications are processed entirely inside the Department of State, should submit their retirement applications 90 days prior to retirement in order to avoid delays in receiving their annuities. In most cases, Foreign Service retirees receive their first annuity check on the first day of the month following the date the annuity begins to accrue. For example, in the case of a Foreign Service employee who retires on April 30, the annuity will begin to accrue on May 1 and the first annuity check will be paid on June 1.

SIX MONTHS BEFORE RETIREMENT:

14. Retirement Meeting: Civil Service and Foreign Service employees may find it useful to schedule a telephone consultation with their retirement counselor for a comprehensive discussion of retirement procedures and benefits. To schedule a telephone consultation, email HRSC@state.gov. At the meeting, the retirement counselor will:

- Provide an estimate of your retirement annuity.
- If you have prior service for which you have not made a deposit or redeposit, advise you about the effect of payment or nonpayment on your annuity.
- Check for other unresolved issues that might delay processing if not corrected.
- Explain the retirement application and related forms and the important decisions that you must make while completing them.
- Determine your eligibility to continue health benefits and life insurance coverage after retirement.
- Discuss your retirement date.
- Explain the implications of electing or not electing a survivor benefit for a spouse.
- Discuss the forms that require original signature.

15. Foreign Service Institute (FSI) Courses: Register for the FSI Job Search/Transition Program: To participate in the FSI Career Transition Center's Job Search/Transition Program (RV102) immediately prior to retirement (or during the 12 months following your retirement date), register through your Career Development Officer (Foreign Service) or Bureau Training Officer (Civil Service). You may do so as soon as registration is opened, but to start the course you must have submitted your retirement application through the Employee Retirement Portal (ERP) at least 90 days prior to your retirement date. Retiring employees may also consider taking the four-day Retirement Planning Seminar (RV101) if they have not done so in the last several years. For employees who enroll in the Job Search/Transition Program in paid status, their retirement date must coincide with the last day of enrollment in the program.

16. Taxes: Retirement counselors cannot provide tax advice, so all employees with questions about the taxation of retirement benefits should consult [IRS Publication 721](#), Tax Guide to U.S. Civil Service Retirement Benefits.

THREE MONTHS BEFORE RETIREMENT:

17. Transmit Retirement Application: Employees should complete and transmit the retirement application at least 90 days prior to retirement in order to facilitate receiving their first annuity payment on time. Department of State employees must submit their retirement applications using the Employee Retirement Portal (ERP). ERP asks questions based on the employee's specific retirement system and then uses the answers to fill in the required forms which are transmitted electronically to GTM/RET. The employee will receive an email acknowledgement from GTM/RET that the application has been received. For Civil Service, the employee's Bureau's Executive Office is notified of the employee's retirement date. For Foreign Service employees, an email is sent to CDA so the employee can be paneled for retirement and be issued travel orders.

18. Career Achievement Awards: Retiring employees may submit Form DS-5079 to their retirement counselor to order their career achievement (retirement) awards. GTM/RET will forward this form to your Bureau awards coordinator who will arrange for the delivery of a certificate from the Secretary (employees with 25 or more years of service) or the Director General (employees with fewer than 25 years of service). The form must be submitted at least 90 days in advance if the awards are needed for a pre-retirement ceremony.

19. Time and Attendance: It is important for your timekeeper to know when you retire in order to prevent an overpayment of your salary.

20. Retirement ID: Employees who expect to frequently visit the customer service areas of the Harry S. Truman Building or Columbia Plaza after retirement may obtain a retiree ID card by completing Form DS-1838 and scheduling an appointment to appear in person at GTM/RET. For badge issuance, you will need schedule an appointment with the Diplomatic Security ID unit in SA-9 (former Red Cross building). A signed Form DS-1838

is valid for 10 business days after GTM/RET signs it. Additional information on obtaining a Retirement ID is available on GTM/RET's [Retirement Network \(RNet\)](#) website.

21. Other Final Administrative Matters: Employees must complete other actions before retirement, including: obtaining Post Assignment Travel Authorization (TMFOUR), scheduling a separation medical examinations, turning in diplomatic passports and building access badges, resolving outstanding travel advances or other debts to the government, and submitting financial disclosure forms if in the senior Foreign Service. The TMFOUR is valid for travel and shipment of effects for 12 months after retirement.

AFTER RETIREMENT:

22. Employee Express Password: Employee Express is available for 18 months after you retire, but you must log on at least once every 90 days to maintain access. It allows you to view and print pre-retirement Earnings and Leave Statements and W-2 Forms. After retirement you cannot reset your Employee Express password using the challenge questions, so it is important to retain your password. After you retire, OPM will send you a different password so you can access the annuitant section of Employee Express.

23. Post Assignment Travel: Foreign Service employees have one year from their last day in pay status to complete their post assignment travel. These orders need to be approved and issued prior to retiring. For questions that arise about the TMFOUR after retirement, contact GTM's PCS Customer Service at GTM-EX-IDSD@state.gov.

24. Lump Sum Payment of Annual Leave: Lump-sum payments for unused annual leave can take 12 to 14 weeks after retirement to process. Calculation of the payment is based on your salary and is subject to deductions for federal, state and local income taxes (if applicable), Medicare, and Social Security (if applicable). For questions regarding lump-sum annual leave payments, please email Payroll Customer Support at PayHelp@state.gov or call them on 1-800-521-2553.

25. TSP Withdrawal: If you wish to make a partial or full TSP withdrawal, submit the appropriate form to TSP 30 days after you retire (it typically takes 45 days after retirement before TSP is ready to process withdrawal requests and those requests expire after 30 days if received before TSP is ready to process them). Under the current law, if you leave your money in the TSP, when you reach age 72 you must arrange for required minimum distributions to be taken out of your account each year; otherwise, TSP will send

a check to the participant for the minimum withdrawal payment required by IRS law. For details, go to [TSP](#)'s website or call TSP on 1-877-968-3778.

26. Contact Information: After retirement, GTM/RET will send a letter to retirees that includes contact information on pensions and other matters. To update your address or direct deposit information, Foreign Service retirees should utilize Annuitant Employee Express at www.employeeexpress.gov after OPM has sent a password that enables access. If you have trouble accessing Annuitant Employee Express, send an email to EEXHELP@OPM.gov with the following information: your full name, your affiliation (Foreign Service Annuitant), your phone number, and a detailed description of your problem. Civil Service retirees may update their address and direct deposit information via OPM's [Retirement Services Online](#) website.

27. Annuitant Newsletter: Foreign Service Annuitants should review the Annuitant Newsletter each year to ensure they stay up to date with contact information, cost of living adjustments, health care benefits and various other important announcements related to your benefits. The newsletter is posted each November to [RNet](#). Hardcopies can be requested by sending an email to HRSC@state.gov.

28. Questions: If questions remain after reviewing this message, please contact HRSC@state.gov.

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