

PERA: Just the Basics

Welcome! Whether you are a new or returning member, we are pleased to have you participate in the Public Employees Retirement Association (PERA).

As a **Coordinated Plan** member of PERA, you are part of Minnesota's largest public pension plan. Today the Association serves over 160,000 public employees from approximately 2,100 cities, counties and school districts across the state. We currently pay benefits to over 90,000 retirees, disabled members and survivors of deceased members.

PERA is a traditional pension plan

Recognizing the need for a retirement program for employees of county and local governments, the Minnesota Legislature created PERA in 1931, four years prior to the creation of Social Security.

Unlike most retirement plans today, traditional pension plans like PERA—also known as defined benefit plans—provide you with the security of a lifetime benefit.

PERA is a tax qualified plan under Section 401(a) of the Internal Revenue Code. As a result, your federal and state taxes on PERA contributions are

deferred to the time of withdrawal. Because PERA is a tax-qualified plan, there may be limits on the amount you can contribute tax deferred to an IRA. You should contact the IRS or a qualified tax advisor to find out what the limits are for you.

Eligibility

Your employer enrolled you in PERA after determining you qualified for membership. Membership is required for employees who are expected to earn a minimum of \$5,100 in a year (\$3,800 for school employees) unless their position is excluded by law.

As a Coordinated Plan member, you and your employer contribute a percentage of your gross salary to the Association. In turn, PERA invests these contributions to fund benefits for our members. Go to **MY PERA** at www.mnpera.org to check details of your contributions and membership data.

While contributions and investment earnings are critically important to the long-term funding of the Association, they do not determine the value of your individual benefit. Instead, your benefit is based on a formula that takes into consideration three factors:

Age—The closer you are to full retirement age, the larger the monthly benefit you will receive. While there are exceptions, full retirement age is typically age 65 to 66 for Coordinated members. The earliest age at which most members

can receive a benefit is 55, but this will result in a lower monthly benefit because you will be receiving a pension from PERA over a longer period of time.

Service—The longer you are employed in public service, the greater the benefit. After you are enrolled in PERA, you earn one service credit for each month in which you worked and were compensated. Once you have earned enough service credits to be vested (60 credits for members hired after June 30, 2010) you qualify for future lifetime benefits.

High-five average salary—This is the 60 consecutive months during which your earnings are the greatest. Typically, this is the five years just prior to retirement.

Retirement benefits

For members just entering public service in the Coordinated Plan, the formula looks like this:

$$(1.7\% \times \text{Years of Service}) \times \text{High-5 Salary} = \text{Annual Retirement Benefit}$$

As an example, 30 years of service would result in a benefit of 51 percent of your high-five salary at full retirement age. **MY PERA** can provide you with estimates of your future benefits at any retirement age.

Disability benefits

You may be eligible for benefits from PERA if you are unable to work, not just at your job, but any job because of a physical or mental disability. That is,

you must be totally and permanently disabled and unable to engage in any substantial gainful activity. You become eligible for disability benefits once you are vested with the Association—after three or five years of service, depending on when you first entered public service.

Alternatives for survivors

PERA also provides survivor (death) benefits for families of members who unfortunately die before receiving a retirement benefit.

Survivor benefits follow a simple succession. Should you die, any survivor benefits due would first go to your surviving spouse. If there is no spouse, benefits would then be payable to any dependent children. Finally, if there are no survivor benefits due, the balance in your account, plus interest, would be distributed to your beneficiaries. If we have no listed beneficiaries, the funds would be paid to your estate. (A form for changing your beneficiary(ies) can be found on our website in *Forms & Publications*.)

If you leave before retirement

If you terminate public employment after you have become vested (five years of service if hired after June 30, 2010), you can leave your contributions with PERA and qualify for a pension any time after reaching retirement age.

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To learn more about PERA, visit us at www.mnpera.org. Your individual information is always available by registering for **MY PERA**.



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Regardless of your length of service, you are entitled to a refund of your employee contributions plus interest, compounded annually, after your termination of public employment. Keep in mind, however, that employer contributions are not refundable and you will forfeit all future PERA benefits.

Repayment of a refund

If you were previously a PERA member who left public service and received a refund, you have the option to repay the refund to restore lost service credit with PERA after you have earned an additional six months of service credit as a member.

Combined service benefits

You may combine your service in PERA with service in other covered Minnesota public pension plans. This entitles you to a combined service pension from each of the plans in which you have service. Combined service pensions often provide a higher overall level of retirement income.

How to learn more

As this pamphlet's name implies, this is a very brief summary of your retirement plan provisions. For a more comprehensive overview, take a few minutes to visit our website at www.mnpera.org. If you visit our website, you'll find much more information about your retirement plan and PERA itself.

Register as an online member

By clicking on the **MY PERA** button at www.mnpera.org and registering as an online member, you have instant access to your individual data on file with PERA. This includes the individuals we have listed as your beneficiaries, your payroll deductions and date of membership. Check your account periodically for accuracy and to inform us if corrections need to be made. An improper delay in your PERA enrollment or an incorrect salary amount may only be corrected within a three-year period.

You can also create your own retirement, disability and survivor estimates, or register for one of our educational programs or conferences any time, day or night, at **MY PERA**.

MY PERA—your 24/7 connection to PERA.



This publication is intended to provide general information; the rights and obligations of PERA members are governed by state and federal laws, rules and regulations. The Minnesota Legislature or the federal government may change the statutes, rules and regulations governing PERA at any time. If there is a discrepancy between the law governing PERA and the information contained in this publication, the statutes and regulations shall govern.

This document is available in alternative formats to individuals with disabilities by calling (651) 296-7460 or 1 800 652-9026, or through the Minnesota Relay Service at 1 800 627-3529.

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For Coordinated
Plan Members



Who we are;
what we do

Public Employees Retirement
Association of Minnesota

January 2015