

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT YOUR RETIREMENT



This publication has been developed by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA).

To view this and other publications, visit the agency's Website at **www.dol.gov/ebsa**.
To order publications, or to speak with a benefits advisor, contact EBSA electronically at **www.askebsa.dol.gov**.
Or call toll free **1-866-444-3272**.

This material will be made available in alternative format to persons with disabilities upon request:

Voice phone: (202) 693-8664
TTY: (202) 501-3911

This booklet constitutes a small entity compliance guide for purposes of the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996.

► CHAPTER 3: PLAN INFORMATION TO REVIEW

If you have a question about your retirement plan, you can start by looking for an answer in the information that the plan provides. You can request this information from your **plan administrator**, the person who is in charge of running the plan. Your employer can tell you how to contact your plan administrator.

INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE RETIREMENT PLAN

Each retirement plan is required to have a formal, written **plan document** that details how it operates and its requirements. As noted previously, there is also a booklet that describes the key plan rules, called the **Summary Plan Description (SPD)**, which should be much easier to read and understand. The SPD also should include a summary of any material changes to the plan or to the information required to be in the SPD. In many cases, you can start with the SPD and then look at the plan document if you still have questions.

In addition, plans must provide you with a number of notices. Some of the key notices are described in Table 5 on page 12.

For example, **defined contribution plans**, such as **401(k) plans**, generally are required to provide advance notice to employees when a “blackout period” occurs. A blackout period is when a participant’s right to direct investments, take loans, or obtain distributions is suspended for a period of at least three consecutive business days. Blackout periods can often occur when plans change recordkeepers or investment options.

Some plan information, such as the Summary Plan Description, must be provided to you automatically and without charge at the time periods indicated below. You may request a Summary Plan Description at other times, but your employer might charge you a copying fee. You must ask the plan if you want other information, such as a copy of the written plan document or the plan’s Form 5500 annual financial report, and you may have to pay a copying fee. See Table 5 on page 12 and Table 6 on page 14. Many employers provide benefit information on a Website.

In some cases, plans provide information more frequently than required by Federal law. For instance, some plans allow participants to check their statements online or by telephone.

The plan’s annual financial report (Form 5500) is also available. You can find the report online at www.dol.gov/ebsa or by contacting the U.S. Department of Labor, EBSA Public Disclosure Facility, Room N-1513, 200 Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20210, telephone: (202) 693-8673. There is a copying fee if the report is over 100 pages. In addition, if your plan administrator does not provide you, as a participant covered under the plan, with a copy of the Summary Plan Description automatically or after you request it, you may contact the Department of Labor electronically at www.askebsa.dol.gov or by calling toll free 1-866-444-3272 for help.

TABLE 5: Key Information Your Plan Administrator Must Provide Automatically

What	Description	When
Summary Plan Description (SPD)	A summary version of the plan document and other important plan information, in easier-to-understand language.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Within 90 days of becoming a participant in the plan; and ▶ An updated copy every 10 years (5 years if the plan has been amended).
Automatic Enrollment Notice	For plans with automatic enrollment, a description of the automatic enrollment process, the percentage of salary being deferred, the default investment used for automatic contributions, your right to opt out of the plan, your right to change deferral percentage and investments, and how to find information about the plan's other investments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Generally, at least 30 days before you are eligible to participate; and ▶ At least 30 days before the beginning of each subsequent plan year.
Individual Benefit Statement	Statement providing information about your account balance and vested benefits. Depending on the type of plan you have, the statement may also include the value of the investments in the account and information describing your right to direct investments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ At least quarterly for participant-directed defined contribution plans; ▶ At least annually for non-participant-directed defined contribution plans; or ▶ At least every 3 years for defined benefit plans.
Annual Funding Notice	Basic information about the funding status and financial condition of the defined benefit pension plan, including the plan's funding percentage; assets and liabilities; and a description of the benefits guaranteed by the PBGC.	Within 120 days of the end of the plan year.
Plan and Investment Information for Participant - Directed Plans	Plan and investment related information, including information about fees and expenses, so participants can make informed decisions to manage their individual accounts. The investment related information must be	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Before a participant can direct investments for the first time; ▶ At least annually thereafter; and ▶ At least quarterly for fees and expenses actually paid.

TABLE 5 cont.: Key Information Your Plan Administrator Must Provide Automatically

What	Description	When
	provided in a format, such as a chart, that allows for comparison among the plan's investment options.	
Summary of Material Modifications	A summary of significant plan changes or changes in the information required to be in the SPD.	Within 7 months of the end of the plan year in which the changes were made.
Summary Annual Report	A summary of financial information filed by the plan on its Form 5500 Annual Return/Report. If your plan is required to provide an annual funding notice, your plan is not required to provide this report.	Within 9 months after the end of the plan year or 2 months after the annual report filing deadline.
Notice of Significant Reduction in Future Benefit Accruals	Notice of any significant reduction in the rate of future benefit accruals, or the elimination of or significant reduction in an early retirement benefit or retirement-type subsidy. Applies to defined benefit plans and certain defined contribution plans.	At least 45 days before the effective date of the plan amendment.
Blackout Notice	Notice of a period of more than 3 consecutive business days when there is a temporary suspension, limitation or restriction on directing or diversifying plan assets, obtaining loans, or obtaining distributions. Applies to most 401(k) or other individual account plans.	Generally, at least 30 days before the blackout date.
Notice to Participants of Underfunded Plan	For defined benefit plans that are less than 80% funded, the notice of the funding level of the plan and information on PBGC guarantees.	Within 2 months after the due date for filing the annual report.

TABLE 6: Key Information Your Plan Administrator Must Provide Upon Written Request

What	Description	Cost
Plan Documents	Documents that provide the terms of the plan, including collective bargaining agreements and trust agreements.	Reasonable copying charge
Annual Report (Form 5500) – most recent report	Financial information about the plan that most plans are required to file with the government within 7 months of the end of the plan year .	Reasonable copying charge

WHAT PLAN INFORMATION SHOULD YOU REVIEW REGULARLY?

If you are in a **defined benefit plan**, you will receive an **individual benefit statement** once every 3 years. Review its description of the total benefits you have earned and whether you are vested in those benefits. Also check to make sure your date of birth, date of hire, and the other information included is correct. You will also receive an annual notice of the plan's funding status.

Defined contribution plans, including 401(k) plans, also must send participants individual benefit statements either quarterly, if participants direct the investments of their accounts, or annually, if they do not. When you receive a statement, check it to make sure all of the information is accurate. This information may include:

- ▶ Salary level
- ▶ Amounts that you and your employer have contributed
- ▶ **Years of service** with the employer
- ▶ Home address
- ▶ Social Security Number
- ▶ Beneficiary designation
- ▶ Marital status
- ▶ The performance of your investments (defined contribution plan participants)
- ▶ Fees paid by the plan and/or charged to participants. (For more information, contact us electronically at www.askebsa.dol.gov or call our toll free number at 1-866-444-3272 to ask for the booklet "A Look at 401(k) Plan Fees.") Check with your plan to see if this information is included in materials on your investment options, the benefit statement, the Summary Plan Description or the plan's Annual Report (Form 5500). See Chapter 7 for more information on the fees that your employer can charge to your account.

ACTION ITEMS

- ▶ Make sure you have received the plan's Summary Plan Description and read it for information on how your plan works.
- ▶ Read other documents you receive from your plan to make sure that you keep up with any plan changes, and check that the information on your benefit statement is accurate.

-
- ▶ If you are in a defined contribution plan, ask for information on the investment choices available in the plan, and find out when and how you can change your plan account investments.
 - ▶ If you suspect errors in your plan information, contact your plan administrator or the human resources department.
 - ▶ If there have been changes in your personal information, such as a marriage, divorce or change of address, contact your plan administrator or the human resources department.
 - ▶ Keep your plan documents in a safe place in case questions arise in the future.

