Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What factors are used to compute my retirement allowance?

A. Your allowance is based on your age at retirement, final average monthly compensation, years of service credit and benefit tier.

Q. How is the final average monthly compensation period computed?

A. Average compensation for retirement purposes includes base pay plus other items of cash compensation paid to you. Certain items of pay, however, are excluded from final compensation for retirement purposes. Excluded items include overtime pay and certain lump sum payments made at retirement, such as payouts for accrued annual leave or accrued overtime. Your final compensation for retirement purposes may therefore be different from the compensation you actually received. Final average monthly compensation, for Tier I and Tier II, is your highest 365 consecutive day's average compensation during your employment with a covered employer. Final average monthly compensation for Tier III is three (3) independent consecutive 365 day periods with the highest of average compensation during your employment with a covered employer.

Q. **What can I do to maximize the service credit to calculate my retirement allowance?**

A. Certain types of prior public service, previous county/district employment or leaves of absence may be purchased to increase your retirement service credit.

Q. When is the best time to retire?

A. That depends on your personal situation. Generally, good times to retire are your birthday, your membership anniversary, March 31st or one year after your last salary increase.

   a. The benefit calculation uses your age as of your last full quarter-year of your birth. Each full quarter-year of age increases your retirement allowance. For example, if you plan to retire on December 14th, but you will be a quarter-year older on January 1st, you may wish to postpone your retirement date until January 1st.
   b. Retiring *before* March 31st makes you eligible to receive any cost of living granted by the Board that year. However, it might be advantageous for you to retire *after* April 1st, if a COLA will not be granted that year due to a negative Consumer Price Index (CPI) from the prior calendar year.

Q. Which is the best retirement option to choose?

A. That is a personal decision that only you can make. However, the Unmodified Option pays the highest monthly amount and provides a 60% continuance to an eligible spouse or domestic partner upon your death at no cost to you. But, depending on your individual circumstances, it may be to your advantage to select one of the other retirement options. These options are designed to be financially equivalent for the membership as a whole.

Q. How does my FCERA retirement affect my Social Security benefits?

A. While you have choices on how to receive your FCERA retirement benefits, your FCERA pension *has no impact on your Social Security benefits.* You are entitled to whatever level of Social Security benefits for which you qualify regardless of your FCERA pension.

a. However, if you are eligible for a public retirement benefit from an agency that does not participate in Social Security, your Social Security may be impacted.

Q. What is Temporary Annuity Option (TAO)?

A. Temporary Annuity is an option that is intended to “level out” your total retirement income, including Social Security payments, should you retire prior to age 62.

Q. Who is eligible for the Temporary Annuity Option (TAO)?

A. Members who retire for service before age 62 and who are integrated with Social Security are eligible to choose the Temporary Annuity Option (TAO). Members who are granted a disability retirement are not eligible for this option.

Q. How does Temporary Annuity work?

A. The Temporary *Annuity* will apply to whichever retirement option you choose, except Option IV. With the Temporary Annuity Option, your FCERA benefits are increased by a pre-determined Temporary Annuity amount until you reach age 62. At that time, your FCERA benefit is reduced, and you should apply for your Social Security benefit to “level out” your retirement income. The reduction to your benefit will occur whether you elect to delay your Social Security entitlement or even if your entitlement is less than the estimate used to determine your FCERA benefit.

Q. Does Temporary Annuity affect my beneficiary?

A. No. The Temporary Annuity Option does not affect survivor continuances. Survivor continuances will be based on your base retirement benefit allowance without respect to adjustments for Temporary Annuity.

Q. How do I receive an estimate for Temporary Annuity?

A. You must obtain an estimate of your Social Security benefits from the Social Security Administration and provide this document to FCERA. We will then provide a retirement estimate that includes the Temporary Annuity Option (TAO).

Q. Can I change my option election after I retire?

A. The option you choose for retirement is irrevocable once you cash your first FCERA payment. Your choice is permanent for the rest of your life and for the life of your spouse and/or beneficiary.

Q. Can I rescind my retirement at a later date?

A. You may rescind your retirement application any time prior to cashing your first FCERA payment. Whether you can continue employment after rescinding your retirement is up to your employer.

Q. What if I am disabled before I retire?

A. If you are permanently disabled and unable to perform the duties of your job, you may apply for a disability retirement. If your disability is job-related, you are eligible on your first day of employment. If your disability is not job-related, you must have at least five years of retirement service credit to be eligible. If you become disabled, contact the FCERA office for additional information.

Q. Who is an eligible spouse?

A. An eligible spouse is the person to whom you were married for at least one year prior to your retirement date. OR someone to whom you were married to for two (2) years at the time your death AND your spouse is at least age 55 at the time of your death.

Q. Who is an eligible domestic partner?

A. An eligible domestic partner is the person with whom you have entered into a registered domestic partnership for at least one year prior to your retirement date. OR someone to whom you were registered for two years at the time of your death AND is at least age 55 at the time of your death.

Q. Who should be my beneficiary?

A. A married member normally names his/her spouse as beneficiary because of the community property laws in California and the substantial survivorship benefits available to a spouse in the event of the member's death. The name of the beneficiary may be changed by the member at any time prior to retirement. Forms are available at www.fcera.org or in the FCERA office.

Q. Can I change a beneficiary after retirement?

A. It depends. You may change your beneficiary designated to receive a lump sum benefit after retirement. You may not change your beneficiary designated to receive a continuance of your benefit under Options 2, 3 and 4. If you remarry or enter a registered domestic partnership after retirement, your new spouse or partner can be named as beneficiary to receive a continuance under the Unmodified Option as long as the new spouse or partner meets eligibility requirements. See "who is an eligible spouse" or "who is an eligible domestic partner" above. Beneficiary change forms are available at www.fcera.org or in the FCERA office.

Q. What will happen to my contribution if I were to die while still working?

A. A death benefit is payable to your beneficiary upon your death before retirement. The basic death benefit consists of your accumulated contributions, interest, one-twelfth (1/12) of your last year of compensation earnable multiplied by your completed years of service (excluding any public service credit purchased), but not to exceed six years. If you have completed at least 5 years of service, your surviving spouse or dependent children may elect to receive, in lieu of the basic death benefit, a continuing benefit.

Q. What will happen to my retirement after my death?

A. The amount of your retirement and survivor benefits will depend upon the option you chose during your retirement process.

Q. Do I have to come to the retirement office to sign my final retirement papers?

A. No, retirement papers can be processed through the mail. However, we strongly encourage members to come in and speak with a Retirement Coordinator.

Q. Can FCERA withhold other voluntary deductions from my retirement benefit?

A. With written authorization, FCERA will withhold deductions from your retirement benefit for the Retired Employees' of Fresno County (REFCO) dues, County of Fresno Health Insurance, State and Federal withholding taxes, and support/alimony garnishments.

Q. What about health insurance coverage after retirement?

A. Retiree health insurance programs are available through Personnel Services Department, (559) 600-1810.

Q. Can I cancel or change my voluntary deductions?

A. Yes, you must notify Retired Employees' of Fresno County (REFCO) dues and/or County of Fresno Health Insurance, Personnel Services Department of the changes you wish to make. These agencies will then notify FCERA. To make changes to your State and/or Federal withholding taxes, contact FCERA directly.

Q. When will I receive my first payment?

A. Generally, option forms and tax forms must be received by the first day of the month in order to receive a check during that month. However, if you are planning on retiring after the 15th of the month, you can expect to receive your first check by the end of the month following your retirement.

Q. What if I change my address?

A. Notify the FCERA office immediately by mail or in person. Address change forms are available at www.fcera.org or in the FCERA office. For your protection, all requests for address changes must be made in writing. If you have health insurance or REFCO dues being deducted, you will need to contact these agencies to notify them of your change of address.