



STATE OF WISCONSIN
Department of Employee Trust Funds
 Robert J. Conlin
 SECRETARY

Wisconsin Department
 of Employee Trust Funds
 PO Box 7931
 Madison WI 53707-7931
 1-877-533-5020 (toll free)
 Fax 608-267-4549
 etf.wi.gov

Correspondence Memorandum

Date: March 5, 2020

To: Employee Trust Funds Board
 Teachers Retirement Board
 Wisconsin Retirement Board

From: Anne Boudreau, Deputy Administrator
 Division of Retirement Services

Subject: Retirement and Customer Service Update

This memo is for informational purposes only. No Board action is required.

This document provides information about current activities in the Division of Retirement Services, including workload demand, customer feedback, and process improvement projects.


Workload Demand

- **Retirement Estimates, Applications, Annuities Started**

The number of retirement estimate requests and retirement applications received both increased in the fourth quarter of 2019, as compared to the same quarter in 2018.

	2018	2019	Change
Q4			
Retirement Estimates Requested	4,902	6,160	+ 25.7%
Retirement Applications Received	2,936	3,195	+ 8.8%
Retirement Annuities Started	1,350	1,344	0%

Comparing the fourth quarter of 2019 to the fourth quarter of 2018, the average turnaround time for a retirement estimate decreased from 11 days to 6 days—even though the volume of retirement estimate requests increased by more than 25%. This better turnaround time is due in large part to the retirement estimate process improvements mentioned at previous board meetings. A new staffing model is also having a positive impact.

Reviewed and approved by Matt Stohr, Administrator, Div. of Retirement Services
 Electronically Signed 3/9/20

Board	Mtg Date	Item #
ETF	03.26.20	6I

- **Call Center**

	2018	2019	Change
Q3			
Calls	48,322	47,417	-1.9%
Email	3,675	4,079	+30.9%
Total	51,997	51,496	-1.0%

The average speed of answer in the fourth quarter of 2019 was 1 minute and 42 seconds, compared to 3 minutes and 43 seconds in the fourth quarter of 2018. The volume of calls was not significantly different; however, members are enjoying the callback feature in our new call routing system. This translates to less wait time for our members and more effective call handling.

Customer Feedback

- **Compliments for Staff**

Here are a few of the compliments staff received during the fourth quarter of 2019:

Member Rhonda M. described the staff person who helped her as “a breath of fresh air.” She said,

“The Trust Funds Specialist was so knowledgeable and answered all of my questions with such professionalism. She is a gem for customer service!”

Another member, Heidi L., called to say how awesome the Trust Funds Specialist was.

“I wish she was part of our family so we could treat her to things. She was amazing!”

Member Mary T. sent a note thanking the Trust Funds Specialist for helping her understand her benefits.

“You are a professional who is terrific at follow up and working with those who reach out to you for help. My mental health issues have been a lot to deal with. I only wish everyone treated people dealing with the same issues with such care, grace, & dignity. Thank you for your help!”

Process Improvement Projects

Here are a few brief updates on projects going on in the Division of Retirement Services.

Annual Reconciliation

Between January 1 and April 15 each year, the Department of Employee Trust Funds (ETF) reconciles data that employers have submitted for their employees. Each member account is reconciled to ensure all contributions have been paid and the appropriate amounts of service and earnings have been credited. If there are data discrepancies, ETF contacts the employer and assists in identification and resolution. This process is a prerequisite to generating *Annual Statements of Benefits*, which is one of the most important ways ETF shares information with members each year.

As of March 5, the Employer Services Section has successfully completed annual reconciliation for 2019. Staff reconciled the data of 1,547 WRS employers and more than 260,000 active Wisconsin Retirement System (WRS) employees. There was a 22% increase in employer accounts that arrived in balance. This is attributable to more time expended for employer training, monthly training reminders sent to employers, and diligent case management by staff. In addition, annual reconciliation was accomplished with no staff overtime this year. Last year we used 100 hours of overtime.

Appointment Scheduling Software

Implementation of appointment scheduling software is under way. This will allow for more automated and flexible scheduling of appointments; eventually, members will be able to select their own appointments online. We anticipate going live with this new system on April 6 and will have further updates at the next quarterly board meetings. In spring we typically see a significant increase in requests for retirement sessions, as teachers try to make decisions about whether to retire or keep working. This will be a good test for the new system.

Lump Sum Payments

For the first 8 to 10 weeks of each year, ETF holds payment on lump sums (e.g., separation benefits and death benefits) while we wait for the effective rate of interest to be established. This is for two reasons. First, it avoids having to calculate each benefit twice, that is, first the principal benefit and then the interest after the effective rate is known. Second, and perhaps more importantly, this process ensures each member or beneficiary will receive the full benefit due. State law sets a threshold, below which ETF may not issue payment. If ETF makes two payments, then the interest must exceed this threshold amount, or it may not be paid. By waiting, the interest is combined with the principle amount. Together these would typically exceed the threshold.

Since the effective rate was established about February 17, staff in the Benefit Initiation Section have been working hard to clear the backlog of lump sum payments. These are given priority because rapid resolution benefits both the member and ETF. Delays cause hardship for some members and beneficiaries, and hardship requests take significant supervisor time to manage.

Usually staff will process these within one month. This year staff are on track to clear the backlog of 1,307 lump sum payments in *less than three weeks*. This is due to several process improvements, including training more staff to calculate lump sums, using contract staff for more basic tasks so that more experienced/permanent staff are freed up for lump sum calculations, and implementing interim deadlines to spread out the calculating, auditing, and processing of these payments.

Staff will be available at the Board meeting to answer any questions.