

Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board



2020 Thrift Savings Plan Education Efforts



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Introduction

We are pleased to provide this summary of our education efforts in 2020 in response to the following requirement contained in the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) Open Elections Act of 2004:

The Board shall annually report to the Committee on Governmental Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Government Reform in the House of Representatives on its Thrift Savings Plan education efforts on behalf of plan participants. Pub. L. 108-469, §2, 118 Stat. 3891, 3892.

In 2020, the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board (FRTIB) engaged and educated participants through the redesigned TSP website (tsp.gov); emails to participants; multimedia assets such as videos, webinars, and a podcast; one-on-one communications; and customized trainings for participants, agency and service representatives, and military financial educators.

We are committed to delivering compelling messaging that encourages participants to save for retirement; to educating, communicating, and interacting with participants to help them make smart choices; and to creating innovative products and programs to assist participants in achieving their retirement goals.

Our education outreach efforts were again recognized this year with a prestigious Eddy Award from *Pensions & Investments*, an international publisher of money management news. The Eddy Award recognizes our participant outreach activities in the category of “ongoing investment education” for research, publications, and communications related to adding Lifecycle (L) Funds in five-year increments.

Communications

Website (tsp.gov)

In July 2020, we launched a redesign of our website with key improvements based on direct participant feedback and several years of research, focus groups, and user experience testing. Now TSP participants can more easily find the information they need with simple navigation and easy-to-understand content.

In particular, we responded to participant requests to visually represent TSP fund performance by designing a new reporting tool for rates of return. We combined data that had been spread across three webpages—summary of returns, monthly returns, and annual returns—and designed an interactive layout with charts to display each fund's performance over time. Participants can also make selections to compare TSP fund performance with common benchmark indices.

Emails

We use email to communicate news about the Plan and to perform educational outreach to participants and beneficiaries.

Emails to All Participants

In 2020, we continued emailing our electronic newsletter, the *Thrift Savings Planner* on a quarterly schedule in January, April, July, and October. We send the e-newsletter to all TSP participants with an email on record who choose to continue receiving these emails. Along with education content about funds, contributions, and investing, the e-newsletters inform participants when statements become available in My Account. We also send an electronic version of the Executive Director letter to participants in February to inform them that annual statements are available in My Account.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we began sending periodic emails with timely TSP information to keep participants informed about our continuing operations, temporary procedures to assist with physical distancing, and effects of the CARES Act on TSP accounts.

Targeted Email Campaigns

In addition to the e-newsletter, we occasionally sent emails in 2020 to targeted groups of participants. In February, we reached out to roughly 20,000 federal employees who had not contributed any of their own money to the TSP during the calendar year. We wanted to encourage them to increase their contributions. (Since eligible participants receive matching on the first 5% of salary, saving more would provide interested employees with additional matching from their agencies.) After three and a half months, all groups who received an email were more than 20% more likely to have started contributing.

We did a number of other projects with noncontributors in 2020. In the late spring, for example, we contacted roughly 7,000 federal employees who were not contributing to their TSP accounts. After three months, those who received an email were 22-33% more likely to have started contributing. In the fall, we reached out to roughly 50,000 federal employees who had not saved during the entire year. After three months, those who received an email were more than 30% more likely to have started contributing.

In the summer, we reached out to roughly 1,200 civilians and uniformed services members who were 1) eligible for matching and 2) on track to reach the IRS elective deferral limit before the end of the year. We let them know that, in most cases, if they reached the limit early, we wouldn't be able to accept any more of their contributions for the year—and that, if they weren't contributing, they wouldn't get matching. After the end of 2020, we determined that more than one-third of those who received our outreach successfully adjusted their contributions and were able to save throughout the entire year.

In late summer, we reached out to more than 3.6 million participants to introduce our newly launched Lifecycle (L) Funds, which offered target dates in five-year increments. Participants without a current L Fund investment received a message explaining how target date funds can simplify and optimize TSP investments. Participants who already had savings invested in an L Fund received a message encouraging them to consider whether a new five-year L Fund would help them more closely target when they would need their money.

Finally, in the early winter, we reached out to nearly 1.1 million active participants turning 50 or older to let them know about the changes coming to the TSP's catch-up program in 2021. We emailed the information to nearly 700,000 participants and mailed a postcard to almost 400,000 participants who didn't have an email on record.

Multimedia

In 2020, we produced educational videos for the TSP's YouTube channel TSP4gov, posted recorded webinar sessions with TSP trainers, and produced a podcast episode.

Videos

- **Update: Welcome to the TSP! Here's What You Need to Know.** If you are a new civilian federal employee, here's what you should know about the Thrift Savings Plan.
- **Update: Your TSP Investment Options: The Lifecycle Funds.** In this video, we talk about the professionally designed Lifecycle Funds, also known as the L Funds.
- **Update: Investing in Bonds.** Learn what bonds are and how you can invest in them through the TSP.

Webinars (Recorded)

- **TSP Investment Funds** provides an overview of the TSP investment funds.
- **TSP Contributions** provides an overview of the TSP contribution rules.

- **TSP Post-Service Withdrawals** helps you understand your post-service withdrawal options.
- **TSP Death Benefits** provides an overview of TSP death benefits.
- **TSP In-Service Withdrawals** provides an overview of TSP in-service withdrawal options.

Podcast

- **The Real TSP: TSP Account Security.** Protecting your account is a top priority for us, but you also play an important role in keeping your personal information safe and secure. Join Chris and Robyn as they discuss the actions you can take to ensure you're taking the right steps to protect your future income.

One-on-One Participant Communications

Our educational efforts also include one-on-one contact. We offer participants various ways to submit inquiries to the TSP including secure e-messaging, telephone calls, and written correspondence. Below are the totals in each category for 2020.



We also receive and answer general questions about the TSP via Twitter and Facebook.

Training for Agency/Service Representatives and Participants

By law (5 U.S.C. § 8350), the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is required to operate a training program for retirement counselors in employing agencies. This requirement ensures that employees are able to obtain current information and personal service in response to their retirement-related questions. Since 1987, we have worked with OPM to sustain a network of TSP agency representatives as part of this program. We conduct regular meetings to provide benefits specialists and payroll specialists with information about changes to the Plan. In 2020, we hosted a coordinators meeting webinar with 65 specialists receiving TSP updates for their HR offices.

We provide free educational sessions to federal employees and uniformed services members. To overcome challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, we offered most 2020 educational sessions online as webinars. As a result of going online, we were able to expand our educational trainings and reach larger audiences. We held more events and reached more participants than in any previous year, with 132,755 attendees to 478 events. Of those, we conducted 56 live, face-to-face events with 3,545 attendees and 422 webinars with 129,210 attendees. We also gave participants unlimited access to recordings of webinars by posting them to our YouTube channel TSP4gov.

We continued our collaboration with the Office of Personnel Management, the Securities Exchange Commission, and the Social Security Administration to conduct joint trainings for Federal Executive Boards (FEB). These trainings extend our outreach to participants that are geographically dispersed, which FEBs help us reach more easily. We held these trainings online for the first time and included FEBs for Cleveland, Portland, Seattle, Boston, Chicago, Houston, and San Antonio. We offered two virtual tracks: one for early-to-mid-career participants and one for those nearing retirement. About 4,400 federal employees attended the seven trainings.

In order to extend our educational outreach directly to more participants in uniformed services, we also collaborated with Military OneSource on two Facebook Live events in 2020. These sessions focused on how the CARES Act affected TSP participants and reached 1,527 viewers.