

2016 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

VOLUNTARY EARLY RETIREMENT AUTHORITY (VERA)

- 1. What is VERA?** is commonly referred to as “early out” or “early retirement,” and that’s exactly what this authority allows. It expands the normal retirement eligibility to allow employees to voluntarily retire, with an immediate annuity, before they would otherwise be eligible. There are some basic eligibility criteria under the law. You must also meet NOAA criteria. An early retirement may have an effect on your annuity. The VERA is separate from the Voluntary Separation Incentive Payment (VSIP). The VSIP is also called the buyout authority. A VERA or VSIP are not dependent or contingent on the other. An agency can offer one and not the other.
- 2. Who is eligible for a VERA?** If you are covered by the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS), you must have served in a position covered by the CSRS for at least 1 year out of the 2 years immediately before retirement. For employees covered by the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS), this rule does not apply.

You must be at least 50 years of age with 20 years of service or have 25 years of service at any age. At least 5 years must be civilian service, whether retiring under CSRS or FERS. In addition, you:

- Must be in a position covered by the VERA granted by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM);
- Must not be serving under a time limited appointment;
- Must not be serving in a position covered by direct hire;
- Must have been on the agency’s rolls at least 30 days prior to the date of application to OPM for VERA approval;
- Must not have been notified that you will be involuntarily separated for misconduct or unacceptable performance; and
- Must have a retirement date on or before the authorization expires, and within the window established by the agency.

- 3. Does the VERA eligibility change the eligibility for regular optional retirement?** No. If you are under CSRS or FERS and are eligible for optional retirement, you can retire voluntarily at any time. See enclosed Fact Sheets for CSRS and FERS.
- 4. If I retire under VERA, can I take a job in another Federal agency?** Yes; however, you will come back as a reemployed annuitant which means your annuity is subtracted from the salary you earn in the new position.
- 5. Leaving Federal Service under VERA is supposed to be voluntary. What if I am offered a VERA but do not choose to leave?** Early Retirement is for **voluntary** separations. **Coercion is prohibited.**

6. **What if I'm eligible for VERA but I am on military duty during the authority time limit?** Employees on military duty are treated as though they were still on the job and are not disadvantaged because of their military service. Therefore, if you met the eligibility criteria during the offer period, you would have 30 days following your return to duty with NOAA to either accept or reject an offer of VERA.
7. **What does a "time limited appointment" mean?** An employee on an appointment with a time limit works only until a specified date and then goes off the rolls. The employing agency sets the ending date when it hires the individual and/or when it extends the appointment. For example, temporary and term employees serve with a time limit, so they are not eligible for an early out retirement. Career and career conditional employees and permanent employees in the excepted service have no time limit so they may be eligible.
8. **What does "continuous service" mean?** To be eligible for early retirement, you must have been on NOAA's rolls 30 days prior to the request for the VERA, with no breaks in service. Leave without pay (LWOP), permanent seasonal employment (PSE) off tour time, and other non-pay status during an appointment are NOT considered breaks in service.
9. **I haven't been enrolled in the federal employees' health benefits (FEHB) program for a full 5-year period and I accept a VERA, do I lose my FEHB?** No, OPM has granted pre-approved waivers to employees who have been covered under the FEHB Program continuously since the beginning date of the agency's approved VERA and retire under the VERA.
10. **I haven't been enrolled in the federal employees' life insurance (FEGLI) program for a full 5-year period. Do I lose my life insurance when I retire under VERA?** Most likely, yes, but you could be eligible under certain circumstances or you might be able to convert your coverage. You should ask your Retirement Specialist what are your options.
11. **If I take early retirement, is my annuity reduced?** It varies depending on your retirement system.
 - Employees with only FERS service will not have their annuities reduced under voluntary early retirement.
 - CSRS employees who retire under the voluntary early retirement authority will have a reduction in their annuity of 2 percent per year for each year they are under age 55 (The reduction is 1/6 of 1 percent for each full month.) This is a permanent reduction in annuity.
 - Employees with both CSRS and FERS service will have a reduction only for the CSRS portion of their annuity if under age 55.

- 12. How do I know if I have enough time in service to meet the requirements to retire?** Although you can check your retirement service computation date (SCD) on your yearly statement of benefits from NFC; or on NFC's Employee Personal Page (EPP), you should still check with your retirement specialist BEFORE you make a decision on accepting a VERA. They can provide you with a retirement calculation and verify that your retirement SCD is correct. Different types of appointments; types of federal service; or if you owe a deposit/redeposit can make a difference in your SCD. The rules are complicated and different depending on the retirement system you're covered under. ***Don't just assume all your service time is creditable.***
- 13. Where can I go to get an estimate of my annuity?** Request an estimate by emailing Enclosure 5 to the Human Resources Office at WMFO.Benefits@noaa.gov.
- 14. Where can I get more information on retirement benefits?** Click at the web address [_https://www.opm.gov/retirement-services/](https://www.opm.gov/retirement-services/)_more information.
- 15. What is the effective date of my retirement/separation?** You may select the date of your retirement/separation, but it must be effective after the date of the VERA authorization and no later than the closing date of an established time period. You may not delay your retirement beyond that date. ***Commencing Date of CSRS/CSRS Offset Annuity*** –If the employee retires on the 1st, 2nd, or 3rd day of a month, annuity begins the following day. Otherwise annuity begins the first day of the month following retirement. ***Commencement Date of FERS Annuity*** – Annuity begins the first day of the month following retirement.
- 16. Why does my application need to be approved and who makes that determination?** Although all eligible employees may submit an application, verification of eligibility will be made by WMFO Benefits and Retirement Staff. HR staff will validate your eligibility and you will receive a notice of approval.