

MEMBERSHIP STATUS: I'm Vested...Now What?



Audience: NERS members

Description: Identification of benefits members may qualify for as a vested member and why being vested is such a milestone for members on their path to retirement.

DISCLAIMER: This pamphlet summarizes parts of Chapter 37 of the Code of the City of Norfolk. This summary is intended to provide simplified and meaningful information that is relevant to the average member. Any information that is inconsistent with, or contradicts, Chapter 37 must be disregarded.



The NERS “Know 2 Ask” series provides basic information needed to empower you to ask important retirement-related questions. Knowing who and what to ask is key.

Overview

Once vested, a Norfolk Employees' Retirement System (NERS) member has a right to a future retirement benefit. A member may be entitled to a vested service retirement (VSR), normal service retirement (NSR), early service retirement (ESR), or a disability retirement in addition to an active death benefit. Once eligible, all of these types of retirements will entitle members to a lifetime pension.

What is a vested member?

Once a member has completed five (5) years of creditable service with the City of Norfolk, they are vested in NERS. The number of years employed by the City may differ from the number of creditable service years due to breaks in service or type(s) of employment. Not all City positions are covered NERS positions that earn creditable service.

What is an active or "in service" NERS member?

NERS members will be considered active or "in service" if the member is actively contributing to NERS and the member is earning creditable service. Members are not considered active or "in service" for certain benefits if the member is on extended (30 days or more) leave without pay and not earning creditable service.

NERS is a retirement plan, but what else should I know?

NERS is a mandatory contributory defined benefit plan providing retirement, disability, and death benefits to eligible members and their beneficiaries. Eligible members can receive a lifetime pension at retirement. The benefit is calculated using creditable years of service, average final

compensation, and a multiplier as defined in City Code Chapter 37. Not all retirement allowances are calculated the same. The rules in effect at the time of separation from NERS are applied.

❖ **Vested Service Retirement (VSR)**

If a vested member leaves active NERS membership prior to being eligible to apply for a service or disability retirement, members may be entitled to a VSR allowance in the future under the following conditions:

- Have a minimum of five (5) years of creditable service upon leaving NERS membership.
- Have not withdrawn their mandatory contributions.
- Have applied for a vested retirement at their normal service retirement age, based on the rules in effect as of their separation date.
- You are not an active member in NERS

❖ **Normal Service Retirement (NSR)**

When an active vested member retires they may be entitled to a NSR allowance under the following conditions:

- Have a minimum of five (5) years of creditable service upon leaving NERS membership.
- Became a NERS member before 7/1/2018:
 - Public Safety Members: Age 55 or the age at which 25 years of creditable service are accrued.
 - General Members: Age 60 or the age at which 30 years of creditable service are accrued.

➤ Became a NERS member after 7/1/2018:

Public Safety Members: Age 60 or age 50 with at least 25 years of creditable service.

General Members: Social Security age or combination of age + creditable service years equal to 90.

❖ Early Service Retirement (ESR)

Within five (5) years of normal service retirement eligibility.

What happens if I die while I am still an active NERS member?

If a vested NERS member dies while in active service, the member's designated beneficiary may be eligible to receive a death benefit. Death benefits vary depending on whether the death was job-related or not. Members must be in active City service to qualify. This benefit is in addition to the City paid Life Insurance for employees. The City Life Insurance benefit payment is the employee's current salary times 2.

How can I increase my NERS creditable years of service?

A NERS full-time employee who has previous active duty military service, previous NERS service years or years of previous employment from select previous employers, that has not been recognized as creditable service, may elect to purchase or port some or all of their time into NERS to increase their number of creditable service years:

- Active vested NERS members may elect to purchase up to four (4) years of previous active duty military service once they become vested.
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- The cost to purchase military service varies based upon salary, age and the number of creditable service years the member has at the time of purchase of service
- Active vested NERS members that have previous NERS creditable service years may have their time restored once the member pays back the entire amount of their refunded mandatory contributions plus interest that they received for the period of previous NERS membership.
- Active vested NERS members may elect to transfer, or port, their vested creditable service years from select previous employers. The member must be vested in both NERS and the retirement plan of a participating partner. To port service into NERS, the member must request for the transfer of service **no later than eighteen (18) months after the date they become vested in NERS.**

The following Virginia entities have a reciprocal portability of service agreement with NERS:

1. Newport News Employees' Retirement Fund (NNERF)
2. Richmond Retirement System (RRS)
3. Roanoke Pension Plan (RPP)
4. Virginia Retirement System (VRS)

Key Takeaways

- ❖ Once you have earned five (5) years of creditable service in the Norfolk Employees' Retirement System you are vested.
- ❖ Vested members are guaranteed a right to a pension benefit once reaching their normal service retirement age (this age can vary based upon the rules at the time a member terminates their NERS membership).
- ❖ Not all retirement requirements and allowances are the same.
- ❖ Active vested NERS members may be eligible for the following:
 - A death benefit to their designated beneficiary.
 - Purchase of prior active duty military service.
 - Restoration of previous NERS creditable service.
 - Portability of service from a previous employer.

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