



Purchasing Service Credit **Fact Sheet**

Government and Nonteaching Service

Section 3307.74, Ohio Revised Code

Credit for past employment that STRS Ohio members may purchase — also known as purchasable service credit — can be used to increase a member's service credit for retirement. Most types of private or public teaching or public employment for which the member did not contribute to an Ohio public retirement system are purchasable. There are numerous types of purchasable service, each with certain eligibility requirements. Most service credit purchases increase the amount of the retirement benefit, with some having a greater impact on the amount of the benefit than others. Sometimes the purchase of service credit allows a member to meet the age and service requirements for retirement earlier.

STRS Ohio requires that the *Employer Certification* and *Retirement System Certification* forms be completed and submitted to certify teaching service in a school operated by or for the U.S. government, other paid public service, service with a governmental agency or subdivision of another state or with the U.S. government, and service for which contributions were made to a municipal retirement system in Ohio except Cincinnati Retirement System (CRS). If none of these types of service are the type of service you want to certify, or if you made contributions to CRS, please call STRS Ohio toll-free at 888-227-7877 for further instructions.

Because records are sometimes difficult to obtain, it is advisable to certify service credit as soon as possible. All of the information requested on the form is required so that eligibility for purchasing service can be determined promptly and accurately. A separate form must be completed by each employer for each service you wish to purchase.

The rest of this fact sheet gives important information about this type of purchasable service credit, such as how the cost is calculated and how much the purchase may increase your benefit at retirement.

Eligibility requirements

1. Nonteaching service rendered with the U.S. government, a governmental agency or subdivision of another state may be eligible.
2. Teaching service in a school operated by the U.S. government is eligible for purchase. An example of eligible governmental teaching service is an educator who taught at a military installation with salary paid by the U.S. government. For this service, the member should request a copy of the federal transcript of service. See the section on completing the certification form in this fact sheet for more information about requesting a transcript. Private out-of-country service does not qualify for purchase.
3. The service may be eligible if the employment was in Ohio and contributions were made to a municipal retirement system other than the Cincinnati Retirement System.



4. Credit can be purchased for full-time or regular part-time employment. All service must be at least 12 consecutive weeks with the same employer.
5. Credit may not be purchased for any service that was already used in the calculation or payment of a retirement benefit, or that is used in the calculation of a retirement currently being paid or payable in the future under any retirement program. A benefit from Social Security is permissible.
 - If participation was in a **defined benefit plan**, qualifying service may be purchased following certification by the plan administrator that there was a total withdrawal of funds and cancellation of all credit.
 - If participation was in a **defined contribution plan**, otherwise qualifying service may be purchased upon certification by the plan administrator that **the member received a total withdrawal of the account, including member contributions and any employer contributions to which the member was entitled, and is no longer eligible for benefits now or in the future.**
 - If the plan is a noncontributory plan where only employer contributions were paid to the retirement plan, the member is not eligible to purchase the service.
6. If the annual retirement benefit will exceed the limits stated in Internal Revenue Code 415(b) and 415(c), the member will be eligible to purchase service credit only with pretax funds rolled in from a traditional IRA; SEP-IRA or SIMPLE IRA; 401(a) state-sponsored retirement plan, including a 401(k); 403(b) tax-sheltered annuity or 457(b) deferred compensation plan maintained by a state or local government.

Service credit

1. The maximum credit purchasable is five years total for these types of service: out-of-state public teaching, public service in another state or for the federal government, and any other service permitted by 3307.74, R.C. For each year of purchasable credit, the member must have at least one year of service in STRS Ohio.
2. The amount of credit eligible for this service is determined based on the number of months worked within a 12-month calendar year from July through June. Credit can also be determined based on the number of hours worked within a 1,950-hour year for the same July through June period.

Cost information

A purchase of service credit can impact a member's benefit in one of the following three ways:

1. **Increase the retirement benefit** — A member who is already eligible for a retirement benefit without the purchase of credit may purchase credit to increase the amount of that benefit. For example, a member purchases one year of service credit to receive an additional 2.2% of the final average salary (FAS) every year for the member's lifetime.
2. **Eliminate or lower the early retirement reduction** — Members may retire early with an actuarially reduced benefit based on years of service credit and age at retirement. Purchasing additional credit could help the member reach eligibility for unreduced benefits or lessen the actuarial reduction the member will incur due to an early retirement.
3. **Create retirement eligibility** — A member who is not yet eligible for a retirement benefit may purchase credit to reach eligibility. For example, a member who is one year away from reaching 33 years of service and retirement eligibility buys 1.00 year of credit during the 32nd year of service to become eligible for retirement a year sooner.* This type of purchase results in the highest cost.

**Effective Aug. 1, 2019, the eligibility requirement for an unreduced benefit is any age with 33 years of service. The required service credit increases every two years thereafter until reaching a requirement of 35 years of service on Aug. 1, 2023. A minimum age 60 requirement will be added beginning Aug. 1, 2026.*



Because purchasing credit may increase the amount of your retirement income and/or enable you to retire sooner, the amount you pay to purchase the credit reflects the additional liability to STRS Ohio resulting from your purchase.

Purchasable service at 100% liability must be purchased in whole-year increments. A member who certifies and purchases only a partial year of credit has the option to certify and purchase the balance of that year at a later time for no additional cost.

The cost for service credit is based on your salary multiplied by a factor that is based on your age and years of service credit. **For a cost estimate, go to www.strsoh.org and click on “Calculators” under Resources.**

Calculating the retirement benefit with the purchased credit

1. The benefit formula is 2.2% for all years of service and the FAS calculation is based on the average of the five highest years of earnings. There is an exception for members retiring after July 1, 2015, and eligible for a transition benefit. The transition benefit is the monthly benefit amount members would have received if they were eligible for service retirement and had retired on July 1, 2015.
2. The retirement benefit cannot exceed 100% of the FAS. Any service credit purchased that is not required for the maximum retirement benefit will be refunded to the member with no payment of interest for the time STRS Ohio held the funds.

Completing the certification form

Both the employer and retirement system certification forms need to be completed and submitted to STRS Ohio either online or by mail. Directions for submitting online or by mail are detailed in the Certification Form Instructions included with the certification forms.

1. Employer certification
 - **Part 1 must be completed by you.** STRS Ohio requires the most current contact information for our records.
 - **Part 2 must be completed by the official employer or custodian of records.** Ohio statute requires all of this information to determine the eligible amount of service credit and cost. Please ask the official employer or custodian of records to pay special attention to our fiscal year instructions under the Record of Purchasable Service section in order to obtain the maximum service credit available.
 - Members certifying federal civilian service with the U.S. government will need a copy of their federal transcript of service instead of certification by the employer. This can be obtained by contacting: **National Personnel Records Center, Annex, 1411 Boulder Blvd., Valmeyer, IL 62295.** In the request, be sure to state that the transcript is for verification of service for STRS Ohio. Do not send the application form. It may take several months to obtain records from this entity.
2. Retirement system certification
 - **Part 1 must be completed by you.** STRS Ohio requires the most current contact information for our records.
 - **Part 2 must be completed by the retirement system used by this employer at the time this service was rendered.**



- To certify federal civilian service, contact the **U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Retirement Operations Center, P.O. Box 45, Boyers, PA 16017**, to verify if retirement funds remain in the federal retirement plan. It may take several months to receive a reply from this agency.

STRS Ohio certification process and cost statement information

1. STRS Ohio will send a letter of acknowledgment to you after receiving the forms. If the forms are submitted online, an acknowledgment email will be sent within one business day of STRS Ohio receiving the forms.
2. If the forms are completed correctly, a reply will be sent to you as outlined below.
 - If the service is eligible for purchase, a cost statement will be mailed. Carefully read the notes that may be printed across the bottom of the cost statement for specific information. You will receive a lump-sum cost unless an installment payment cost is requested.
 - If the service is not eligible for purchase or if additional information is required, you will be notified in writing.
3. The determination of eligibility to purchase service credit can be delayed by any of the following:
 - The certification forms are not completed correctly.
 - STRS Ohio does not receive both forms (one from the former school employer and one from the retirement system) at the same time.
 - The federal transcript was not received (if required).
4. The service credit may be purchased within the valid period on the cost statement or another cost statement may be requested at a later date.
5. If the service credit is certified and at least one cost statement is issued before your retirement date, you may purchase service credit up to three months after the retirement effective date, as long as the benefit calculation has not been finalized. For example, if the retirement effective date is July 1, service credit must be purchased by Sept. 30.

Methods for purchasing service credit

- Lump-sum purchase made by check.
- Lump-sum purchase made with pretax rollovers or direct transfer of funds.
- A lump-sum tax-deferred payment will be accepted from an employer.
- Installment payments may be arranged with your employer. Some schools offer only pretax plans or after-tax plans, and some schools offer both plans.

More information about the methods to purchase service credit will be mailed to you with the cost statement if the service is eligible for purchase.

Contacting STRS Ohio

By phone: 888-227-7877 (toll-free) | Online: www.strsoh.org | By email: contactus@strsoh.org

Our benefits counselors can provide more detailed information with one-on-one consultation in our Columbus office, through a teleconference or during field counseling sessions held throughout the state each year. Call Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m. to schedule an appointment.