

University of Colorado 401(a)

Retirement Plan Employee Guide

The university's philosophy is to do as much as it can to ensure the financial well-being of its employees in retirement. CU helps you save for retirement by enrolling each qualifying employee in a mandatory retirement plan. For more information visit the [CU 401\(a\) Retirement Plan website](#). CU generously contributes to each mandatory plan and provides you with the opportunity to increase your retirement savings with voluntary plan options. For more information on voluntary plans visit [CU Voluntary Plans website](#). This guide will help you navigate your University of Colorado 401(a) Retirement Plan.

**If you are unsure which mandatory plan you're eligible for, or already enrolled in, please see the [CU Mandatory Retirement Plan Placement Guide for Faculty and University Staff](#) or the [CU Mandatory Retirement Plan Placement Guide for Classified Staff](#).*

The University of Colorado 401(a) Plan

The University of Colorado 401(a) plan is a mandatory, defined contribution plan where each employee's retirement benefit is based solely on the money that has been contributed and the investment earnings or losses incurred (minus fees) over the lifetime of the account. Employees make their own investment elections, and employee and employer contributions are invested according to their directives.

This plan was established by the Board of Regents in 1924 and has been amended/restated over time to remain in compliance with IRS rules and adopt other administrative amendments. The value of each employee's investment increases or decreases as the market changes, and the monies are taxed when disbursed.

Enrollment

If you meet the criteria for the University of Colorado 401(a) mandatory retirement plan:

- You are automatically enrolled* on the first day of the month following your hire date.
- Your contributions will be made via automatic payroll deduction.
- Login to your account on the [TIAA website](#) at www.tiaa.org/cu to manage contributions, view your balance, name beneficiaries and allocate investments.

*You will be automatically enrolled in the CU 401(a) mandatory plan unless you have a PERA Defined Benefit retirement account through a prior employment. If you do, you will have a choice between the PERA Defined Benefit plan or the University Retirement Plans (UR). See the [Placement Guide for Faculty/University Staff](#) for more information.

Plan Features

Plan Feature	Plan Detail
Plan type	Defined Contribution Plan
Employee contributions	5% of your annual eligible compensation* through monthly pretax deductions. This means your contributions are tax deferred and they are not considered taxable income for federal and state income tax purposes until they are withdrawn. Social Security (OASDI) and Medicare taxes do apply.
Employer contributions	10% of your annual eligible compensation* is contributed monthly by CU.
Vesting	All employee and employer contributions are immediately vested.

IRS Contribution Limits

The IRS imposes two limitations on contributions for defined contribution retirement plans:

Limit on the amount of salary that can be considered for contributions:

- **For 2026** calendar year, the salary limit is \$360,000.*

Limit on the total amount of contributions by employer and employee, combined:

- **For 2026** calendar year, the total combined cannot exceed \$72,000.**

*Employees who first participated in the CU 401(a) Plan July 1, 1996 or earlier (with no break in service), the salary limit is \$535,000 for 2026.

**Under IRS Section 415(c), the aggregated contribution limit is \$72,000, meaning if the employee participates in the PERA 401(k) Voluntary Retirement Plan, the total amount aggregates with the 401(a) Mandatory Retirement Plan. This aggregated total excludes the PERA 401(k) age 50 catch-up contribution of \$8,000 and age 60-63 catch-up contributions of \$11,250. Employees nearing their CU 401(a) limit can maximize their contributions by participating in the CU 403(b) or the PERA 457.

Investments

TIAA is the single service provider, saving participant-paid administrative fees as well as management fees. The CU 401(a) Plan has a three-tier investment structure, designed to help you invest based on your personal goals or preferred investing style. Some participants may be comfortable using a mixed investing strategy that combines target-date funds, the core investment menu, and/or personally selected funds within the self-directed brokerage option. Check the investment options on the [TIAA website](http://www.tiaa.org/cu) at www.tiaa.org/cu.

Default investment: If you have not directed your investments, all contributions are automatically invested in target funds (a target-date fund based on retirement age). The University of Colorado shall not be liable for the difference between earnings in the target funds and an intended investment selection.

Financial Guidance

All employees have access to personalized, no cost, financial guidance with licensed financial planners from TIAA. Please call 1-800-732-8353 or visit [TIAA website](http://www.tiaa.org/cu) to schedule an appointment.

Distributions/Withdrawals

The availability to withdraw funds from the CU 401(a) account is dependent on your age and employment status with the university. To discuss your options, schedule an appointment with a TIAA financial consultant.

In-service distributions while employed, are allowed if employees have attained:

- 59½* years of age -for all plan participants that were active on Dec. 31, 2016
- 62 years of age -for all plan participants with a date of hire on or after Jan. 1, 2017
- To request an in-service distribution contact TIAA.

*If a participant terminated employment after Jan. 1, 2017, and was rehired after such date, he/she will no longer be eligible for the age 59 ½ in-service distribution, but will fall under the age 62 condition.

Example of effects on in-service distributions:

If an employee retires from the university at age 58 (no longer employed) and begins taking distributions from their University of Colorado 401(a) Retirement Plan and then is hired back to the university (now employed) they will no longer be able to take in-service distributions from their University of Colorado 401(a) Retirement Plan until they reach age 62 since their new hire date is after Jan. 1, 2017.

Working ORP Retiree – Effects on Distribution of 401(a)

When considering returning to work, it is essential that an ORP retiree understands the impact that it may have on their University of Colorado 401(a) Retirement Plan distributions. **The availability to withdraw funds from their University of Colorado 401(a) accounts while employed, as a regular employee or as a working ORP retiree, have age restrictions on distributions and must be made as in-service distributions.**

Loans and hardship withdrawals:

- No loans or hardship withdrawals are allowed.

Leaving CU

- Distributions are allowed when an employee terminates employment with the university, whether that's through resignation, retirement, disability or for cause.
- Distributions may be subject to taxes and penalties. Consult with a TIAA representative. Visit the [TIAA website](#) to schedule an appointment.

How to Request a Distribution or Rollover

1. Contact TIAA by calling 1-800-842-2252 or visit the [TIAA website](#) regarding a cash withdrawal or rollover request. TIAA will provide guidance as to how to proceed.
2. Employee Services will review and provide necessary authorization to TIAA. Expected processing time is 7-10 business days.
3. TIAA will process the distributions within five (5) business days after receiving university authorization.

Domestic Relations Order (DRO)

The term "DRO" refers to a court order that is made under a state's domestic relation law or community property law, which may involve assigning all or a portion of an employee's university retirement plan account accumulations to an alternate payee. Alternate payees are typically the employee's spouse or ex-spouse but may be another person such as a child or other dependent. A DRO may also name more than one alternate payee. The following rules only apply to the University of Colorado Retirement Plans. For PERA retirement plans, contact PERA by visiting www.copera.org or by calling 1-800-759-7372.

If the employee's retirement plan account becomes subject to a DRO, the employee will need to follow the process below:

1. The employee/retiree, alternate payee or their respective counsel should contact Employee Services Retirement regarding a need for the segregation of account(s) per a DRO.
2. Employee Services Retirement will provide a copy of the University of Colorado sample DRO template for use by the parties.
3. Upon completion of the draft DRO, the employee/retiree, alternate payee or their respective counsel should submit it to Employee Services Retirement with a copy of the Dissolution of Marriage and Separation Agreement (first page showing the parties and jurisdiction, all pages relevant to the retirement plans and last page showing applicable signatures).
4. Employee Services Retirement will review the submitted documentation to ensure that the draft meets the university's requirements. All parties involved shall be notified if the DRO will be acceptable as written upon issuance by the Court.
5. Once the Court has issued the DRO, a copy must be forwarded to Employee Services Retirement for approval by the CU DRO Committee. **Please Note:** In accordance with, *C.R.S. § 14-10-113 (6)(c)(1)*, the parties shall submit the DRO to the University **within ninety (90) days** after entry of the decree and the permanent orders regarding property distribution in the proceeding for the parties' dissolution of marriage, legal separation, or declaration of invalidity of marriage. This review typically will be completed in 1-4 business weeks.
6. Upon final approval from the university, the DRO will be forwarded to TIAA or the appropriate plan service provider/vendor for processing.

Contact Information

Plan Service Provider: TIAA

Plan: University of Colorado 401(a) Mandatory Plan

Phone Number: 1-800-842-2252

Web Address: www.tiaa.org/cu

By Mail or In Person: University of Colorado
Employee Services-Retirement
1800 Grant Street, Suite 400
Denver, CO 80203-1187

By Phone or Fax: Phone: 303-860-4200, option 3 Fax: 303-860-4299 (Attn: ES Retirement)

Definitions

In-Service Distribution - Refers to an active employee who meets a required age (typically 59 ½ or 62) who is requesting a distribution that consists of a total or partial cash withdrawal or rollover. For employees who have retired from the university and return to employment with the university, they must follow the In-Service distribution requirements.

Leaving CU - Refers to termination of employment. This includes resignations, retirement, disability, or by cause.

Required Minimum Distributions (RMD)- RMD is the minimum amount that must be withdrawn from tax deferred retirement accounts. The new age at which minimum distributions must begin for retirement plans is 72 if you were born in 1950 or earlier; 73 if born between 1951 and 1958; 75 if born in 1960 or later.

Resources

[Employee Services website](#)

[Classified Staff Mandatory Retirement Plan Placement Guide](#)

[Faculty and University Staff Retirement Plan Placement Guide](#)

[CU 401\(a\) plan documents](#)

[Voluntary Retirement Plans website](#)