

# Guide to Death Benefits for Beneficiaries of Non-Retired Members



TRS has prepared this guide to explain the major steps involved in filing for death benefits and to provide some general information about TRS death benefits. Please visit our website for more specific information.

## TYPES OF DEATH BENEFITS

Beneficiaries may be due benefits under TRS' Qualified Pension Plan (QPP), our Tax-Deferred Annuity (TDA) Program, or both. (The QPP is a defined-benefit plan that provides members a monthly retirement allowance; the TDA Program is an optional retirement savings plan.) QPP and TDA death benefits are determined and paid separately.

Members may designate different beneficiaries under the QPP and the TDA Program. If TRS does not have a valid beneficiary designation on file, any death benefit due would generally be paid to the member's estate.

## QPP DEATH BENEFITS

Benefits are generally determined based on the member's tier and membership status in TRS, as noted below:

**Members who died while in active service or on a leave of absence:** A benefit that is calculated according to the member's tier status in TRS would be payable. There are five tiers of membership; in most cases, tier status depends on when the member last joined TRS.

**Members who died while separated from service:** A benefit of a refund of the member's QPP account balances would be payable.

## TDA DEATH BENEFITS

If the member had a balance in the TDA Program, this balance would be payable to the member's beneficiaries.

The amount payable would equal the member's TDA balance as of one day prior to the date of death. (Interest and/or investment return stop accruing on the member's TDA balance as of the date of death, or as of the date membership expired, if applicable.)

## AFTER THE DEATH OF A MEMBER

Any individual can contact TRS to report the death of a member—by phone or by letter.

TRS requires an original death certificate or a certified copy in order to process any benefit payments that are payable. We will contact all beneficiaries (or legal representatives) individually about the benefits payable and provide instructions for claiming the benefits.

(See "Steps in the Death Benefit Process" on page 3 for more information.)

## FILING A DEATH BENEFIT CLAIM

After receiving a benefit notification letter from TRS, beneficiaries or legal representatives file claims online, using the secure death benefit claim feature on TRS' website. The feature provides estimates of the

benefit amounts, along with any available distribution options. It also guides claimants through all required steps and includes an upload feature to submit required documentation/forms online.

(See “Steps in the Death Benefit Process” on page 3 for more information.)

### **SPOUSAL RIGHT OF ELECTION**

If you are the spouse of a TRS member, you may be eligible under New York State law to elect a share of your deceased spouse’s estate even if you were not named as a beneficiary. Benefits from TRS’ QPP and TDA accounts are included in calculating the net estate. If TRS has not yet distributed the benefits payable upon the death of a retiree or beneficiary, we will refrain from making a payment or transfer to the named beneficiaries of the death benefits upon being served with a certified copy of a court order instructing us to do so.

### **INQUIRIES ABOUT YOUR BENEFIT**

If you need assistance, you can call our Member Services Center at 1 (888) 8-NYC-TRS. When you do, please have the following information available: The last four digits of the member’s Social Security number and the member’s TRS membership number.

It’s important to keep in mind that death benefits cannot be paid immediately or automatically upon notification of a member’s death. TRS must take

certain administrative steps before calculating and disbursing benefits. (For example, when a non-retired member is deceased, TRS must first obtain the member’s complete service and salary history from all previous employers in order to calculate the benefit. This step unfortunately can take several weeks.)

The steps in the claim process are listed on page 3, but please note the following:

- **No benefits can be paid unless TRS has received the member’s death certificate or certified copy.**
- **Benefits cannot be paid to a claimant unless TRS has received the claimant’s online claim, any required documentation/forms, AND notarized proof of the claim submission.**

TRS appreciates your assistance and patience during this time.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

You can learn additional details about TRS death benefits by accessing the **Beneficiaries** FAQs on our website at [www.trsnyc.org](http://www.trsnyc.org). Here you will find information on the benefits payable under various payment options, types of death benefits, taxes withheld from benefits, and more.

Please note that death benefits and processing are different if the member died while collecting retirement benefits. Our brochure *Guide to Death Benefits for Beneficiaries of Retired Members* provides that information.

## **STEPS IN THE DEATH BENEFIT PROCESS**

### **(if the deceased was a non-retired member of TRS)**

The major steps involved in benefit processing are indicated below. Please be aware that promptly providing TRS with the deceased member's death certificate and any other required documentation will help us to process benefits in a timely manner.

- 1. Death Notification:** Any individual notifies TRS of the member's death by calling or writing TRS. The member's name, TRS membership number, the last 4 digits of the member's Social Security number, and date of death must be provided. Individuals reporting the death must also provide their name and contact information.
- 2. Death Certificate:** TRS must receive an original death certificate or certified copy before any benefits can be paid. If a death certificate was not provided upon death notification, TRS sends a letter requesting the certificate to all beneficiaries or legal representatives on file with TRS.
- 3. Benefit Notification Letter:** In most cases, TRS sends the beneficiaries or legal representatives a benefit notification letter four weeks after we are notified of a member's death **AND** we obtain all required information (e.g., service/salary history from employers and beneficiary contact information). The letter provides information on benefits payable and a unique claim code to use to register for access to TRS' website.
- 4. Online Claim:** Once registration for TRS' website is completed, claimants create a username and password and log in to the death benefit claim feature. If the claim cannot be completed in one session, claimants can save their entered information and log in as needed to complete their claim.
- 5. Claim Summary and Attestation:** After all the required online claim steps are completed, claimants print a summary receipt for their records. They must also print the "Attestation and Notarization for Online Death Benefit Claim," have it notarized, and return it to TRS along with any required documents and/or forms not uploaded.
- 6. Benefit Payment Disbursement:** In most cases, TRS issues payments two months after the online claim is filed **AND** the following are received: all required documentation and/or forms and the "Attestation and Notarization for Online Death Benefit Claim."  
*(If TRS does not receive these items, benefit payments cannot be disbursed.)*

For your convenience, TRS forms and publications are available on our website.  
If you require additional assistance, please contact our Member Services Center at 1 (888) 8-NYC-TRS.

*This publication should not be solely relied upon, as it is based on currently available information that is subject to change.  
In all cases, the specific provisions of the governing laws, rules, and regulations prevail.*



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