TEAM PROGRAM

TRS Enterprise Application Modernization

Employer Advisory Group Meeting Agenda & Minutes

Date: 10/23/2024
Start Time: 2:00 PM
End Time: 4:00 PM
Location: Microsoft Teams

Type of meeting: Quarterly Meeting
Meeting called by: **David Green**
Minutes by: *David Green*
Invitees: ~~Barbie Pearson~~, *Mark Chi*, *Katie Tucker*, ~~Ashley Conrad~~, *Brandi Gardner Nathan Farmer*, *Jennifer Almanza*, *Catarina Saucedo*, ~~Nicholas Gonzalez,~~ ~~Kevin Wakley~~, *Leslie Barron*, ~~Chris Cutler~~, ~~Erica Villarreal,~~ *Jennifer Gasior*, *Megan Van Winkle*

Roll Call: Present= *Italics* **Absent=** ~~Strikethrough~~ **Total in attendance:** (32)

EAG Members and designated participants:

Amanda Babcock	University of Texas		*Kay Johnson*	Stephen F Austin	
~~Annel Perez~~	South TX College		~~Kim Ray~~	UTMB Galveston	
~~Ashly Hester~~	UT at Austin		~~Lisa Roberts~~	Judson ISD	
~~Becky Bunte~~	TASBO		*Lori Johnson*	Hutto ISD	
Betty Butler	Dallas Community		~~Lynn Nicholson~~	Mason ISD	
Brittany Heim Sgarlat	San Jacinto College		~~Mary Ramon~~	Northside ISD	
~~Christian Hiner~~	TX State University		*Mickey Smith*	Crandall ISD	
Christine Okanla	ACC		*Misty Sanders*	Texas Tech ISD	
~~Christine Porter~~	Spring Branch ISD		~~Nancy Wiggins~~	Maypearl ISD	
Claudia Alba	Pflugerville ISD		*Rachel Jimenez*	Conroe ISD	
Claudia Wilko	Northside ISD		~~RL Richards~~	Mulshoe ISD	
~~Ginger Gamble~~	North East ISD		~~Sherry McGraw~~	Sulphur Springs ISD	
~~Greta Graham~~	North East ISD		~~Tammy Cunningham~~	ESC Region 8	
~~Jeffrey Coats~~	North East ISD		*Tera Harris*	Spring Branch ISD	
~~Judy Como~~	Judson ISD		*Theresa Zlotopolski*	Clint ISD	
Karen McDade	TX A&M		~~Tiffany Yarbrough~~	Clint ISD	
Kathy Rice	Midwestern State		*Tonya Davis*	TASBO	

Other Attendees not listed: *Laci Cramer* (Texas Tech University); *Eric Kennedy (Austin CC); Scarlet Mcelyea* (Clint)*; Dena Carlson* (SJCD);*Taylor Williamson* (TTU); *Elena Ochoa* (TRS)

Purpose of Meeting: Respond to questions, address concerns, and share information with members of the EAG. Members of this group represent REs from all over the State and all types of employers. They serve as the collective “voice” of all REs.

Expected Outcome: Questions and concerns expressed by members of the EAG will be addressed. EAG members are expected to share information with other employers in their region and bring questions and concerns from those employers to this group.

Please…

- ✓ *Mute your speaker to avoid sharing background noise*
- ✓ *Do not put this call on hold*

AGENDA

- **Questions / topics from EAG members (Jenn):**
  - From Lori Johnson (Hutto ISD):
    - *1. I still received a few inquiries from retirees or employees wanting to withdraw funds, but their certification from the district has not been submitted yet. The employee indicates that TRS told them "We are still waiting for confirmation of the final contribution from the district. Please provide an update of completion." Can TRS mention to the employee that they must receive their final check from the district before the certification can be completed? The way this is presented sounds like the district has just not completed the form. That is almost never the case in my district. It has always been recommended to wait until the final pay is processed before these forms are completed. To fill this request would only strengthen the relationship between TRS and districts.*
    - *We continue to have internal discussions between the departments to develop information that will provide our members with an update on the status of their request without our Reporting Employers being implicated. Such as this elaboration that a retirement certification must be completed after the final check has been paid and when the report will be due. You are correct that for Reporting purposes, the Retirement certification should not be submitted until the final compensation amount and final member contribution has been paid. Refund Certifications can be submitted once an RE can confirm the termination date and final report month, which may align with the final check.*
    - *2. Error 045 appears to be an incorrect Social Security Number. However, the error message reads "demographic data matches another TRS participant". The error manual offers the same message. The error message is too vague. I had to submit an email to my coach to understand the message.*
    - *Within the last fiscal year, TRS reviewed all error messages to help identify where edits were needed to help make the error message easier to understand for Reporting Employers. The edits were implemented into the RE Portal.*
    - *With that being said, we are limited on what information can be provided in the message itself. Error code 045 reads as: The Employee Identification number is not found in the TRS system. If reporting the employee for the first time, submit an ED20". This error message is stating that the employee has not been reported to TRS and an ED20 is needed to officially enroll this employee with your employer in the TRS system. We also have error code 042 that states: "The demographic data matches another TRS participant with a different Employee Identification Number.*

Please contact TRS. If you feel the reported information related to this error is correct, please contact TRS.". The purpose of this error is for TRS to do a final verification of the members' information being reported against the information we have on file. This allows us to identify inconsistencies within our member data and correct them as they are identified. This error does require an override and a copy of the employee's SSN card and DL will be needed for auditing purposes.

- *Clarification on question from Employer Lorinda Johnson:* The SSN was incorrect. This was the error message on the screen from TRS
- *What could we provide that we haven't in past. Reach out. Help Reporting Entities better understand error messages.*

- From Brittany Heim Sgarlat (San Jacinto College):
  - *If an institution uses a third party/employer of record for its employees who live out of the state of Texas, are they subject to the TRS eligibility requirements? The only thing we have seen is regarding return to work retirees being subject to the limits and surcharges but do not find anything on non-retirees. If the individuals are not directly employed by San Jacinto College and are employees of the third-party entity, these individuals would not be reported to TRS unless the third-party entity is a TRS covered employer. For TRS Retirees, if the position is not 100% outsourced then you would need to report the retiree on the ER report.*
    - ***Brittany****-makes sense. Retirees-not 100%.*
    - ***Jennifer Almanza-****for not 100% outsourced 3rd party, still needs to be reported on ER report.*
    - ***Brittany****-if all adjuncts [for example] were outsourced, then we wouldn't report them. Out of state doesn't earn service?*
    - ***Jennifer Almanza****-correct*

- **Information from TRS**.
  - Updates made through Maintenance Cycle Releases (**Katie**):
    - Retirement certification:
      - Added download option for retirement certifications. This allows REs to download their retirement certification *before* certifying to TRS. Please note that once you click "Certify" the download option is no longer available.
      - Also please be aware that the retirement team may be re-initiating certifications with additional questions or action needed from the RE in the comments section of the certification. If you receive a certification in your worklist for an employee that was previously submitted, please review the comments portion of the certification before resubmitting it.
    - Validation Updates: as we mentioned earlier, we reviewed our current validations to help identify where edits were needed and determine which validations can be removed. The purpose of this review was to help reduce the total number of overrides needed to assist REs in completing their monthly reports.

- Removed validation 543 from ER25 & ER27 records. This error message was related to prior year adjustments for Employment After Retirement corrections.

- Consolidated validations 415, 428, 636, and 805 to allow validation 428 to cover all scenarios. This should help reduce the total number of errors appearing in your monthly reports.

- Updated validation 163, 463, and 427 to increase the timeframe before the error triggers from 1 month to 2 months. These errors are related to time worked being reported for a TRS eligible employee but zero TRS eligible compensation being reported.

- If they have identified a large number of overrides for a specific error and would like for us to review, please share that information with us.

▪ SCP:

- We have identified a new defect related to Service Credit Purchase and an error is triggering stating "*Service Credit Purchase deduction is not allowed if the member does not have a service credit purchase installment agreement. If you feel the reported information related to this error is correct, please contact TRS*". If you receive this error, please do not remove the SCP amount from the RP record and reach out to your TRS coach since an override may be needed until we can get a fix scheduled. The goal is to have this defect fixed by December release.

▪ December Release Enhancement:

- RE Portal search reports for the prior 5 fiscal years, currently only 2 years.

- Year End update (Jenn):

  ▪ For the 2023-2024 fiscal year, we were able to reach 100% report completion prior to our Annual Member statement process.

  ▪ As a reminder, in addition to completing all fiscal year 2023-2024 TRS reports, we asked that you also review your RE ledger balances and reconcile your financial reports to confirm no additional balances were owed to TRS. We completed the outreach for FY2024 and required follow up. Please continue to review the RE Ledger balances each month after the reports complete to make sure there are no balances owed to TRS. The balances due to TRS are represented by a negative amount in the contribution account.

- RESS (Mark):

  ▪ Resources: mentioned that it satisfied versus very satisfied. What is preventing their responses from being very satisfied. What enhancements can we make to the current resources. Is there anyone on the EAG that would like to test the new website?

- Responses: Based on current resources, what kind of resources do you find helpful and what improvements could be made?
    - **Brittany Heim Sgarlat**-not for website necessarily, we have trouble with—in higher ed and community colleges, employees that work at ISDs—years of service, ready to retire, some of the years are ISDs and ERS won't count that. ERS email—they can see something in recent employments portal, but coordinators can't see that in MyTRS portal…example college and ISD. **Need something where coordinators can see what ERS can see.** Helpful for employees and for employers. We send them to TRS, ERS sends them back to us. Need to know when they meet requirements for ERS.
    - **Mark Chi** reply—may be challenging to know what requirements are for ERS, we don't know their requirements. We can give additional information that we are privy to. What does TRS have that we can display without getting into another pension system's requirements?
    - **Brittany HS**-what I see in RE portal, this person purchased military service, and has employment at college, and "recent employment" shows general military service purchase and San Jacinto college. That shows years of service…we think they're eligible, but ERS says they're not eligible because years at ISD didn't count. A great length of time could have passed since ISD employment. Information needs to be viewable.
    - **Mark** reply- ERS has partial access to our portal. MyTRS only lists total years of service, not by institution. For this particular employee, it might be useful to know how the years break down by type of institution.
    - **Brittany HS**-ERS has changed how they interpret the law, your ISD time doesn't count towards eligible years for ERS. Not meeting rule of 80, yet. Would be helpful if somebody could see it besides ERS…either us, the employer or employee.
    - **Mark** reply- sees value, check with legal to provide to members for sure.
    - **Lori Johnson**- TRS has provided many resources. I'd add: if there's a deadline of the 6th, and there is a weekend or a holiday or down for maintenance. Give us the next work day, like the IRS. [Claudia Wilko, Claudia Alba and Misty Sanders agree].

- **Mark Chi**-talking to legislature possibly, we've collected similar requests in meetings with employers.

- **Lorinda**-Also, when we add records—40, 90—also have to add SSN and birthdate, system knows what those fields should be, it starts to auto populate after we start typing the information in, if the system recognizes the participant…if TRS could populate all of those fields, that would help speed up the amount of time.

- **Mark**-Back to resources, we have noticed resources aren't utilized—are employers unaware or just not using them? How do we advertise these resources, would a presentation be helpful, e-learning?

- **Lorinda**-They are advertised well. No one has enough time to read them.

- **Claudia Wilko**- (with Mary Ramon, Veronika)—overwhelming at end of year, September…less time to finish the year. Very big district here in Northside…trying to finish on time, maintenance every day 7-10PM, we're still working. Maintenance windows—can they be later, 11 or midnight, during sleeping hours? We don't know what type of maintenance is being performed-- if it's manual or automatic, but if it can be delayed that would be better for us, this is especially needed at end of the fiscal year.

  - Also, August reports need to be completed because of statements…reminder needs to be completed by "mid-september"…what does that mean? We need a more specific date/cut off. Asked this question to coach, but she wouldn't put the date in writing…on phone confirmed they were on time…our overrides were completed, but one error was closed too early. She apologized, said it was on TRS' side, but it took a couple days, and we were at September 18…caused stress and concern in workplace. Help us with an exact specific date. Completed on the 18th and weren't issued for a week or 2 after.

- Mark-we'll make sure our coaches are more specific with the deadline…some include dates in their signatures, we'll be sure they're consistent in sharing that info with employers.

  - Year End deadlines, we understand it's a stressful time. Depending on finalizations and jobs, we know there's a window for extensions for REs on the cusp.

  - Maintenance—we are still working out of 2 systems, the bridging that happens in the evening time must finish at midnight. Jobs can take hours and have to finish before a certain time for the next batch to trigger. Right now, because of two systems and the bridging, we have not found a good solution with IT. We are looking to go live with one system by the end of 2025 or early 2026, but until then this will continue. There will be no more bridging after we're in one system and, at that point, we can look at extending the window. We continue to pursue solutions with IT in the interim.

- Jennifer Almanza—system down after due date. We try to never schedule those on the weekend of actual due date or the weekend after that due date or the following week. The system went down during the annual process irregularly.

- Employer Tool Kit: not being used as much by the Reporting Employers. Gather some feedback from EAG on what they have experienced while using the toolkit or enhancements needed.
- Initiatives: e-Learnings, recorded sessions, topic-based trainings (breaking down topics even further), in person trainings for REs
  - Include a link to the virtual training schedule and info to register

- Surge personnel ending 12/31/2024 (Jenn):
  - A reminder that we are approaching the end of the Surge Personnel Exception Employment After Retirement employment type. Per SB288, the exception ends on or before 12/31/2024.
  - If your employer has reported retirees under this employment type, we ask that you please review the information, update employment dates for this employment type to end within the deadline and submit a new position record for retirees under their new employment type.
- Grace period reminders (Jenn):
  - Starting with the new fiscal year, the grace period deadline for reports has been reduced. September reports will have an additional 21 days from the due date to reach a completed status and all other report months will have an additional 14 days.
  - The grace period is based on calendar days and not business days. For example: September 2024 RP grace period deadline is this Friday 10/25/2024 and the October 2024 RP grace period deadline will be Wednesday 11/20/2024.
  - As a reminder, the grace period does *not* change the actual due date for the TEXNET and Reports as set in statute. It simply allows for additional time to complete the reports without receiving a fee. If a TEXNET payment is not remitted by the due date, penalty interest will apply.

- **RE Report Status (Jenn)**

Report Month	# Completed RP Reports	% Complete	# Incomplete RP Reports
September 2024	1245	92.77%	97

- **Questions**
  - **Claudia Wilko-** Are you going to add the download option that is currently available for the TRS-7 to the TRS-6 and TRS-8?
    - **Response from Mark**, haven't fully vetted that option. How to enhance process? Those who need access have access to retirement certification. We can work with IT to log those enhancements, based on other tickets and the implementation process. IT will have a few months working on the one system solution that prevents them from working on releases to old/current system. The least we can do is make sure these are logged. Good features to add.
  - **Tera Harris-** Stats on how many districts are meeting deadline without the grace period. Is the goal to meet the deadline without needing to use the grace period? We try to meet the original period, we appreciate the resources, but it's impossible to meet the deadline. The window seems extremely short. If there aren't many changes we can meet the deadline, but it's rare that a month goes by without many changes.
    - **Mark**-we can find out this stat and share it with the REs.
    - **Claudia Wilko agrees with Tera Harris**.
    - **Tera-**I'm the dedicated person, but it's not my job…need to know what other districts are doing re: extremely manual changes. Not sure I can delegate this difficult task to another team member.
    - **Jennifer Almanza Response-** This question is asked a lot…For some districts, HR handles a portion—ED records, as they have access to new hires…Payroll focuses on RP reports…or they have part time workers dedicated to the reporting process itself. There are others who have this responsibility in addition to other full time responsibilities, but these are some of the other strategies we've heard.
    - **Tera-**I did transition the ED records, I'd love to send others to HR, but that might be difficult.
    - **Mark-**asked the group: how do the other employers process this?
    - **Brittany HS-**we have it separated here. We're one of the 97 reporting outside of the grace period on a regular basis. We have 8 school districts that feed into our area. We have colleges, mainland…adjuncts are not our friend. Payroll takes care of pay report. We work really hard, it isn't our sole job, we're always late…we sometimes have 4 days to get the report in. Are those entities correct, is it accurate? We run

into that because it's time consuming every month to have to fix errors later. We were told to estimate, but we don't know what that means, and it causes errors. Do you see the RP25s to make corrections, later? We don't have a lot of corrections, because we don't want to have to fix them later.

- **Katie-**is the delay for time worked?
- **Brittany HS-** Yes, we have time worked pay on a lag for some. We also have adjuncts paid on monthly…a lot on a schedule, but we also have hourly on a lag. Compiling all of the data correctly, and not having full information from adjuncts. Enhancements in portal have been a help some, but not knowing full information. We're always delayed in reporting we don't know until it's too late. Get rid of adjuncts reporting-wise. Do employer record for all adjuncts.
- **Katie-**employers have adjusted time keeping processes, generate reports with time worked, larger employers elected reporting time worked…Seeing a lot of employers adjusting internal processes, ready to pull into file and update before due date.
- **Brittany HS-**We've made suggestions to change payroll to leadership, but it doesn't matter if it looks like we may have a charge. Difficult when they work with so many entities. We're always in percentage that says "hey, you're not done yet".
- **Katie-**suggests one on one to learn about processes and see if they can make any recommendations.
- **Mickey Smith-** I agree. It is very time consuming and you have other daily duties as well. 4 days is not enough time. There is a lot of information we have to have and need it to be correct the first time. We just need more time.
- **Claudia Wilko-** I agree, we can hardly get the report completed within the grace period. It is impossible to get it completed by the 6th. Unless, as mentioned, we "estimate" the hours and days worked. We haven't even paid the biweekly employees by then.
- **Tera-**Larger districts struggle because the report ties pay with hours worked, and those two things are not the same. This slows down reporting, maybe break those apart. Pay at different times, that pay could be reported quickly but days and hours worked require different time and adjustments. It's hard to process by the real deadline.
- **Mark recognizes challenge.** May need to look at this down the road, with Brandee, Business analyst. How will separate reports avoid creating more challenges by creating two reports?
- **Tera-**maybe just provide the flexibility, not force everyone to have to create two reports. Pay is pay, it happens. But we need more time for time worked.
- **Mark-** If we're able to do this, we may have to create more corrections after the fact. Hours worked helps with eligibility, and separating pay from time that could

create more after-the-fact corrections. Needs more research. This option might require more reach out regarding eligibility concerns. But I encourage such conversations.

- **Tera**- agrees after the fact corrections may occur, but timeliness would improve versus the way it is right now.
- **Mark**-For example, we considered how do we get our coaches to go from one business day to same day response…but that's just one slice of a whole pie. In the past, we asked the REs if they would rather do everything correctly up front, or validate more quickly, and they said: "get it correct up front", but maybe this preference has shifted? Lessen up-front overrides, or back end additional corrections?
- **Brandi Gardner**-clarification request
- **Tera-**time worked is current month, but not the same time frame for pay. Pay can be reported right away…time worked, why is it linked? We can report that independently.
- **Amanda Babcock-** our system on 2nd run adds a 25 for all of those people.
- **Mark-**some of our employers have similar software.
- **Amanda-** originally tried to estimate, but that didn't work well. Now use exact time.
- **Brittany HS-** there's no penalty that it's coming later?
- **Mark—**not for hours or days worked.
- **Betty Butler—**I agree with Brittany about adjuncts. RP25 to add concurrent employment. Are those penalties?
- **Mark—**yes, if they're not reported, and we do consider waiver processes and requests to investigate that. Working with IT security with how much information we can provide.
- **Brittany HS-** I wouldn't mind a separate adjunct report.
- **Mark** more upfront data or backend?
- **Jennifer Almanza**—internally, we're working on things to help coaches help each other. Same colleges sharing adjuncts to identify and verify those working in eligible positions. Quicken override process to avoid waiting for verification.
- **Brittany HS-** I appreciate that. In ERS, we can see when our employees are working at another entity, but we can't see all their details, but they do share with us that it has their entity number at ERS. Why can't you tell us? They can share limited information with us. Often ERS will let us know they're still working. If TRS

can let us know where they're working, we can reach out to coaches at those entities.

- **Betty Butler-** we have to change, make corrections, once the school completes with eligible employment.
- **Mark-** regarding what Jennifer said, we're hoping this will bring a little more proactiveness on our part.
- **Betty-** appreciate it, in higher ed.
- **Mark-**recognizes challenges.
- **Betty Butler-** our legal dept said that deceased employee final pay must be held until family goes through probate. We need suggestions on how to do that prior to issuing final pay.
- **Mark**-haven't encountered that as much…will reach out to Benefit Processing. Are there other employers with a similar process?
- **Betty-**probate takes about a year, and it's too expensive for many families. SMU does pro bono works, but the courts, themselves, are backlogged preventing families from attaining court dates.
- **Mark-**is a beneficiary missing?
- **Betty-** we did have a form, but it's not allowed unless it's a surviving spouse. We can't trust wills. Need probate through court first. We know what's owed but need ideas on how to help these families.
- **Mark-**we'll take a look at this; this is likely an issue that will continue. Need to reach out to processing and get back.
- **Betty-** families are leaving the money because probate is too expensive. Surviving spouses can use affidavits.
- **Brittany HS-** we have similar experiences. We issue the check to the "Estate of" unless we receive the surviving spouse.
- **Betty-**our families don't have the W9. We have to issue T99, remove Medicare, legal shut down.
- **Final ask for comments from Jennifer and Katie.** Nothing added.
- **Mark shares appreciation.** Trying to get into a regular cadence with the EAG meetings. We'll clean up our meeting minutes and give them out.