



Oklahoma Conservation Commission

District 10-Minute Guide Series

This is one in a continuing series of informational discussion topics designed to help conservation district directors and employees become more informed and knowledgeable about their responsibilities. It is suggested that employees and board members review and have a 10-minute discussion on a selected guide during each board meeting as part of the district's commitment to continuing education for leadership and staff.

Guide No. 11 – Understanding Employee Benefits

Compensation is one of the areas of greatest interest to employees. Regardless of other factors, such as job satisfaction and good working relationships with fellow workers, employees are primarily concerned with their own welfare and that of their families. For this reason, pay and fringe benefits must be competitive if the districts are to attract and retain high quality personnel.

Employee Benefits

An employee compensation package consists of both salary and benefits. For comparability purposes, the value of benefits should be included with the salary when discussing compensation.

Core Benefits

The four core benefits for district employees are health, dental, basic life, and disability insurance. Depending on the location in which an employee works or lives, they may have multiple choices of health insurance dental insurance providers.

District employees who are regularly scheduled to work at least 1,560 hours per year and who are not classified as a temporary employee are eligible for insurance benefits.

Directors are eligible to participate in the health and dental benefits program at their own expense. If a director chooses to enroll, they must do so within 30 days of the date of their appointment or during open enrollment period each year. Participating directors are billed directly by OMES Employee Group Insurance Division (EGID) for all premiums.

Employee Benefit Allowance

OCC provides eligible employees with a monthly benefit allowance to help offset the cost of benefits. The benefit allowance is set by statute

and is provided to each eligible employee who is enrolled in the four core benefits. If an employee has a spouse or children, the employee has the option of enrolling them for benefits. If an employee does not use all the benefit allowance afforded them, the balance is added to the employee's salary. If an employee spends more than the benefit allowance, they are responsible for paying the difference. If an employee is eligible for benefits but does not enroll in the four core benefits a benefit allowance is not provided.

For example, effective January 1, 2023, an employee with no dependents will receive a benefit allowance of \$686.56 each month for benefits. If an employee only spends \$500.00 of the allowance, \$186.56 will be added to their salary each month.

Optional Benefits

Employees have the option of enrolling in additional benefits. These include supplemental life insurance, vision insurance, and AFLAC policies, as well as medical and dependent care reimbursement accounts.

Option Period

Employee insurance benefits are managed by the Oklahoma State and Employee Group Insurance

Board (OSEEGIB). Each year OSEEGIB sets the cost of the insurance premiums.

The Commission's Human Resources Specialist serves as the district employee benefit coordinator. During the month of October, employees can enroll in plans, make changes to plans, increase life insurance, and add or drop eligible family members to coverage.

The benefits employees elect are in effect from January 1 to December 31. OCC provides training and meeting opportunities to assist employees with navigating option period. Because employee benefits are so personal in nature it is very important employees utilize these trainings and meetings.

Retirement

The district employee retirement plan is managed by the Oklahoma Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS). The retirement plan is a defined benefit retirement plan. OPERS provides its members with a lifetime retirement benefit when they meet certain eligibility requirements.

An employee participates in OPERS by contributing a certain portion of their salary each month, currently 3.5%. The employer also contributes on the employee's behalf, currently 16.5%. The amount of contribution does not determine the amount of retirement benefit. The retirement benefit is determined by a formula that includes the member's salary and the number of years of credited service.

OCC contributes the employer's portion of retirement on reimbursable salaries. If a district pays an employee from local funds, the district is responsible for paying the employer's share of retirement. This includes any increases from local funds as well as one-time pay increases.

Longevity

District employees who have been continuously employed for a minimum of two years, working more than 1,800 hours a year, without a break in service are eligible for an annual longevity payment based on the schedule set by the legislature. Employees that have worked fewer

hours may be eligible for prorated payment based on promulgated rules. Eligible employees will be paid a lump sum annual payment on or following the anniversary date of their most current entry on duty date with the district.

Paid Time Off

Eligible employees are granted annual and sick leave at rates afforded to state employees. Annual and sick leave accumulation rates are based on total service with the district. Eligible employees also receive paid holidays based on the state's observed holidays each year.

Other Resources

District Employee Benefits section of the Conservation District Handbook and the District Resources section of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission website at conservation.ok.gov.

The OPERS website (www.opers.ok.gov) is a valuable resource that can assist with pre-retirement planning and questions.

For specific questions or information about employee benefits, please contact the District Services Division or the Human Resources Specialist with the Conservation Commission.