

# Funding Policy for PERS

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The purpose of the funding policy is to state the overall funding goals and objectives for the Public Employees' Retirement System of Mississippi (PERS), and to document both the metrics that will be used to measure progress toward achieving those goals, and the methods and assumptions employed to develop the metrics.

The employer contribution rate for PERS will be set based on the metrics, assumptions and methods outlined in Section II and III of this policy.

## I. Funding Goals and Objectives

The objective in requiring employer and member contributions to PERS is to accumulate sufficient assets during a member's employment to fully finance the benefits the member will receive in retirement. In meeting this objective, PERS will strive to meet the following goals:

- Preservation of the defined benefit structure for providing lifetime benefits to the PERS membership,
- Contribution rate stability as a percentage of payroll (Fixed Contribution Rate – FCR),
- Maintain an increasing trend in the funded ratio over the projection period with an ultimate goal of being 100% funded,
- Require clear reporting and risk analysis of the metrics by the actuary as outlined in Section II of this policy using a “Signal Light” approach to assist the Board in determining whether increases or decreases are needed in the employer contribution rate, and
- Ensure benefit improvements are funded through increases in contribution requirements in accordance with Article 14, S 272A, of the Mississippi Constitution.

## II. Metrics

To track progress in achieving the outlined funding goals and objectives and to assist the Board in making a determination whether an increase or decrease in the employer contribution rate for PERS should be considered, certain metrics will be measured annually in conjunction with information provided in the actuarial valuation and projection report. As part of the annual valuation and projection reports, each metric will be calculated and assigned a “Signal Light” with the following definitions:

Status	Definition
Green	Plan passes metric and PERS' funding goals and objectives are achieved
Yellow	Plan passes metric but a warning is issued that negative experience may lead to failing status
Red	Plan fails metric and PERS must consider contribution increases

If any one of the metrics are in the Red Signal Light status in conjunction with the annual valuation report and the projection report, the actuary will determine and recommend to the Board an employer contribution rate increase to consider that is sufficient enough to get all three metrics back into the Green Signal Light status. The employer contribution rate increase would be effective for the July 1<sup>st</sup>, 18 months following the completion of the projection report (e.g. if the projection report in 2019 deems an increase to be considered, then it would be effective for July 1, 2021).

The following metrics will be measured:

- Funded Ratio** – Funded Ratio is defined as the actuarial value of assets divided by the actuarial accrued liability. One of the funding goals is to have an increasing funded ratio over the projection period with an ultimate goal of having a 100 percent funded ratio.

The Board sets the Signal Light definition as follows:

Status	Definition
Green	Funded Ratio above 80% in 2047
Yellow	Funded Ratio between 65% and 80% in 2047
Red	Funded Ratio below 65% in 2047

- Cash flow as a percentage of assets** – Cash flow as a percentage of assets is defined as the difference between total contributions coming into the trust and the benefit payments made to retirees and beneficiaries going out of the trust as a percentage of beginning year market value of assets. Over the projection period, this percentage will fluctuate from year to year so for Signal Light testing, the net cash flow percentage over the entire projection period will be tested.

The Board sets the Signal Light definition as follows:

Status	Definition
Green	Net Cash Flow Percentage above negative 6.00% (-6.00%) during the projection period
Yellow	Net Cash Flow Percentage between negative 6.00% (-6.00%) and negative 7.75% (-7.75%) during the projection period
Red	Net Cash Flow Percentage below negative 7.75% (-7.75%) during the projection period

- **Actuarially Determined Contribution (ADC)** – ADC is defined as the contribution requirement determined by the actuary using a contribution allocation procedure based on the principal elements disclosed in Section III of this funding policy:

1. Actuarial Cost Method
2. Asset Smoothing Method
3. Amortization Method

The calculation of the ADC will be determined during the actuarial valuation and not during the projection report. The ratio of the ADC to the fixed contribution rate (ADC/FCR) as set by this Funding Policy will be tested.

The Board sets the Signal Light definition as follows:

Status	Definition
Green	ADC ratio at or below 100% of fixed contribution rate at valuation date
Yellow	ADC ratio between 100% and 110% of fixed contribution rate at valuation date
Red	ADC ratio above 110% of fixed contribution rate at valuation date

### III. Assumptions and Methods

Each year, the actuary will perform an actuarial valuation and projection report for funding purposes. During the process, the actuary shall calculate all the metrics listed in Section II of this funding policy and PERS' Signal Light status for each metric. The following three major components of a funding valuation will be used:

- **Actuarial Cost Method** – This component determines the attribution method upon which the cost/liability of the retirement benefits are allocated to a given period, defining the normal cost or annual accrual rate associated with projected benefits. The Entry Age Normal Cost Method (EAN) is to be used for determination of the normal cost rate and the actuarial accrued liability for purposes of calculating the Actuarial Determined Contribution (ADC).
- **Asset Valuation Method** – This component dictates the method by which the asset value, used in the determination of the Unfunded Actuarial Accrued Liability (UAAL) and Funded Ratio, is determined. The asset valuation method to be used shall be a five-year smoothed market value of assets. The difference between the actual market value investment returns and the expected market investment returns is recognized equally over a five-year period.

- **Amortization Method** – This component prescribes, in terms of duration and pattern, the systematic manner in which the difference between the accrued liability and the actuarial value of assets is reduced. For purposes of calculating the ADC metric, the following amortization method assumptions are used:
  - I. Once established for any component of the UAAL, the amortization period for that component will be closed and will decrease by one year annually.
  - II. The amortization payment will be determined on a level percentage of pay basis.
  - III. The length of the amortization periods will be as follows:
    - a. Existing UAAL on June 30, 2018 – 30 years.
    - b. Annual future actuarial experience gains and losses, assumption changes or benefit enhancements or reductions – 25 years from the date of the valuation.
  - IV. If any future annual actuarial valuation indicates that PERS has a negative UAAL, the ADC shall be set equal to the Normal Cost.
  
- **Actuarial Assumptions** – The actuarial assumptions are used to develop the annual and projected actuarial metrics, as well as the ADC rates. The actuarial assumptions are derived and proposed by the actuary and adopted by the PERS' Board in conformity with the *Actuarial Standards of Practice*. The actuarial assumptions for this funding policy were developed using the experience for the four-year period ending June 30, 2020 (State of Mississippi Retirement Systems Experience Investigation for the Four-Year Period Ending June 30, 2020). The long-term investment return assumption adopted by the PERS' Board in conjunction with the experience investigation is 7.55 percent and, upon approval by the Board, will be reduced until it reaches the rate recommended by the actuary in the most recent experience study using investment gains based on the following parameters:
  - 2% Excess return over assumed rate, lower assumption by 5 basis points,
  - 5% Excess return over assumed rate, lower assumption by 10 basis points,
  - 8% Excess return over assumed rate, lower assumption by 15 basis points,
  - 12% Excess return over assumed rate, lower assumption by 20 basis points.

#### IV. Governance Policy/Process

Below is a list of specific actuarial and funding related studies, the frequency at which they should be commissioned by the Board and additional responsibilities related to each:

- **Actuarial Valuation (performed annually)** – The Board is responsible for the review of PERS' annual actuarial valuation report, which provides the annual funded ratio and the calculation of the ADC.

- **Projection Report (performed annually)** – The Board is responsible for the review of PERS' 30-year projection report, which will include the actuarial metrics and Signal Light status for each metric over a 30-year period.
- **Experience Analysis (performed every two years on a rolling four-year basis)** – The Board is responsible for ensuring that an experience analysis is performed as prescribed, review of the results of the study, and approving the actuarial assumptions and methodologies to be used for all actuarial purposes relating to the defined benefit pension plan.
- **Actuarial Audit (performed at least every five years)** – The Board is responsible for the review of an audit report performed by a new actuarial firm to provide a critique of the reasonableness of the actuarial methods and assumptions in use and the resulting actuarially computed liabilities and contribution rates.
- **Funding Policy Review (performed at least annually)** – The Board is responsible for the periodic review of this policy, but at least annually following the Projection Report and biennially following the Experience Analysis.

#### V. Glossary of Funding Policy Terms

- **Actuarial Accrued Liability (AAL):** The AAL is the value at a particular point in time of all past normal costs. This is the amount of assets the plan would have today if the current plan provisions, actuarial assumptions, and participant data had always been in effect, contributions equal to the normal cost had been made, and all actuarial assumptions had been met.
- **Actuarial Cost Method:** The actuarial cost method allocates a portion of the total cost (present value of benefits) to each year of service, both past service and future service.
- **Actuarial Determined Contribution (ADC):** The potential payment to the plan as determined by the actuary using a contribution allocation procedure that, if contributed consistently and combined with investment earnings, would be sufficient to pay promised benefits in full over the long term. The ADC may or may not be the amount actually paid by the plan sponsor or other contributing entity.
- **Asset Values:**
  - **Actuarial Value of Assets (AVA):** The AVA is the market value of assets less the deferred investment gains or losses not yet recognized by the asset smoothing method.
  - **Market Value of Assets (MVA):** The MVA is the fair value of assets of the plan as reported in the plan's audited financial statements.

- **Entry Age Normal Actuarial Cost Method (EAN):** The EAN actuarial cost method is a funding method that calculates the normal cost as a level percentage of pay or level dollar amount over the working lifetime of the plan's members.
- **Funded Ratio:** The funded ratio is the ratio of the plan assets to the plan's actuarial accrued liabilities.
  - **Actuarial Value Funded Ratio:** is the ratio of the AVA to the AAL.
- **Normal Cost:** The normal cost is the cost allocated under the actuarial cost method to each year of active member service.
- **Present Value of Benefits (PVB) or total cost:** The PVB is the value at a particular point in time of all projected future benefit payments for current plan members. The future benefit payments and the value of those payments are determined using actuarial assumptions regarding future events. Examples of these assumptions are estimates of retirement and termination patterns, salary increases, investment returns, etc.
- **Surplus:** A surplus refers to the positive difference, if any, between the AVA and the AAL.
- **Unfunded Actuarial Accrued Liability (UAAL):** The UAAL is the portion of the AAL that is not currently covered by the AVA. It is the positive difference between the AAL and the AVA.
- **Valuation Date:** The valuation date is the annual date upon which an actuarial valuation is performed; meaning that the trust assets and liabilities of the plan are valued as of that date. PERS' annual valuation date is June 30.

**Source:** § 25-11-119(8) and (9) | **Effective/Revised:** 10/24/2006, 10/23/2012, 4/22/2014, 2/28/2017, 6/26/2018, 10/22/2019, 08/24/2021