

Retirement Reality - Tough Times, Straight Talk is the theme of this year's NPEA Annual Conference. The goal of our 2009 conference is to assist you, the public pension educators, with delivering messages and educational programs that address the harsh realities of the economic, financial, and legislative challenges that are faced by our plans today.

For public employees, the retirement reality has been altered by a market collapse, unlike anything seen since the Great Depression. While most public employees still have the protections offered by our defined benefit (DB) plans, the changing landscape of our economy may threaten the very existence of DB plans in the future. With budget shortfalls and huge contribution rate increases on the horizon, plan administrators and staff are recognizing the challenges that lie ahead.

For retirees, the benefits provided by DB plans will most likely remain intact because of state and federal benefit protections. However, the market conditions over the past year have eroded a large portion of the personal wealth of this group. After years of being out of the workforce, many of our retirees find themselves in the job market again competing for any job to make ends meet. Those not yet retired are facing the daily fear of layoffs and the growing reality of working years longer just to be able to afford retirement.

In these uncertain times, our members will look to their retirement systems for information and guidance to successfully navigate these challenges. Communicating the messages of change will require straight talk and honest dialog with our members. The conference agenda (see pages 3-6) has been designed to assist our member systems with tackling these tough issues.

During the first evening of the conference, we will discuss the effects of the financial crisis on our retirement systems. This includes the continued attack on public DB plans and what's happening at the federal level that will impact our members. The next day, we'll revisit some old topics such as estate planning and returning to work after retirement, which in today's environment take on new significance. We will learn from communication experts how to craft messages that instill confidence that we are working for the best interest of our members. Systems will have the opportunity to share best practices and techniques used to reach our diverse audiences. We will continue a discussion that began at last year's conference on safeguarding information when using the latest technology. And of course, there will be time to network with colleagues in an environment suitable for sharing information and programs.

Even under these tough economic conditions, we are pleased to offer a reasonable conference and hotel rate. The NPEA Board of Director's worked very hard this year to lower the conference fee hoping to provide an opportunity for more members to attend. For those who will be unable to attend this year due to travel restrictions, we encourage you to stay connected through the NPEA website – www.npea.com. As caretakers of this organization, we continually strive to improve the services we provide to our members and to promote the organization in a manner befitting its long and esteemed history. We appreciate your continued support and hope to see you in Florida for the 2009 Annual Conference.