



County of Los Angeles 457(b) Horizons and 401(k) Savings Plans

Ready, Set, Communicate!

A strategic communications approach to keep participants focused and informed



Participant Education and Communication Category

Project Summary

Plan Profile

The County of Los Angeles offers employees the 457(b) Horizons and 401(k) Savings Plans. As of April 23, 2021, the combined asset size is \$19.6B with 134,391 participants with a balance (457(b) Horizons—\$15.5B and 116,248 participants; 401(k) Savings—\$4.1B and 18,143 participants). The County of Los Angeles partners with Empower Retirement, which provides administrative, recordkeeping, communication and investment education services for both Plans.

Background

While many employers scaled back operations at the onset of the pandemic and struggled to define a “new normal,” the County recognized that this could be detrimental to the retirement progress employees had made to date. Instead of settling for complacency, the County decided to double down on its participant communication strategy and outreach.

Goals

In March 2020, the County responded by adopting the *Ready, Set, Communicate!* approach to communication and education. This meant pivoting to a virtual engagement model with the goals of protecting the health and safety of participants and Plan representatives, increasing the frequency and scope of communications, communicating in a more efficient and targeted way and helping participants improve retirement outcomes. The ultimate goal was to instill positive changes in participants' retirement wellness.

Outcomes

Results from each of the initiatives below vastly exceeded the County's expectations. Positive outcomes demonstrated that even during the pandemic, individuals engaged and took significant action for their financial futures.

- **We're Here for You campaign** – This multifaceted campaign was designed to reassure participants that even though we could not be there in person, the County and Empower were going strong and are always here for the participants. Email: 60% open rate (three times the financial services industry standard) and 3.7% click-thru rate. Website banner and flier: 7,541 and 7,214 clicks respectively.
- **News and updates** – To accommodate participants' changing communication preferences and further promote the County's digital first approach, the quarterly newsletter was discontinued and the County created a “News and updates” section on countyla.com and promoted newly posted content via email. Since the transition, clicks to the News and updates section of the website have exceeded newsletter activity by more than 1,000%.
- **Low-limit contribution campaign** – Realizing there was a population of participants who opted to defer under a lower annual limit of \$8,500 and needed to save more for a financially secure retirement, this campaign notified this group that the low limit had been removed and encouraged contribution increases and comprehensive account reviews. Email: 59% open rate (more than two times industry standard) and 35% click-thru rate (11 times industry standard). An outstanding 12% of targeted participants increased their contribution rates.
- **Webinars** – Despite the lockdown, the County continued with a full — and fully virtual — retirement education curriculum that accommodated participants still eager to engage, though not in person. March 2020 announcement email: 60% open rate (more than double industry standard) and 4% click-thru rate. Website tile: 8,600+ clicks. 17,504 participants attended 323 webinars in 2020 versus 523 participants across four webinars in 2019. This represents a 3,247% increase in the number of participants attending a webinar.
- **Newly eligible enrollment campaign** – This campaign generated a 31% response rate, prompting 459 employees to enroll.
- **Participant interaction** – By transitioning to a virtual meeting format, events such as in-person benefits fairs and table service were replaced with invaluable educational webinars, one-on-one appointments and phone calls. The number of Retirement Plan Counselor touchpoints with participants in 2020 was 30,996. This was 10% higher than in 2019.
- **Net Promoter Score** – In the fourth quarter of 2020, Empower reported a Net Promoter Score of 88.5, indicating strong participant willingness to recommend the Plans to others.

“Thanks to the combined efforts of a committed team at the County and Empower, we helped participants do significantly more than get through the lockdown. We vastly increased and enhanced their options for education and support, dramatically improved their outcomes and garnered an immense response to our all-virtual strategy.”

Kimberly Burch-Garcia
Principal Analyst
County of Los Angeles



County of Los Angeles 457(b) Horizons and 401(k) Savings Plans

Ready, Set, Communicate!

A strategic communications approach to keep participants focused and informed



Participant Education and Communication Category

Project Justification

Project Description

For the County of Los Angeles' 457(b) Horizons and 401(k) Savings Plans, the County's mission has always been improving the retirement readiness of its participants. When the pandemic forced many employees to begin working remotely, the County wanted to ensure that the retirement preparations of those participants didn't go into lockdown as well.

While many employers scaled back operations during the pandemic and struggled to define a "new normal," the County decided to double down on its participant communication strategy and outreach. In March 2020, the County adopted the *Ready, Set, Communicate!* approach to communication and education. This meant pivoting to a virtual engagement model with the goals of protecting the health and safety of participants and Plan representatives, increasing the frequency and scope of communications, communicating in a more efficient and targeted way and helping participants improve retirement outcomes.

Timeline and Tactics

The County partnered with its service provider, Empower Retirement, to develop a comprehensive program that consisted of the following elements:

- **We're Here for You campaign** - The top priority for the County was to reassure participants that the Plans were open for business. With that in mind, on March 20, 2020, the County launched a comprehensive campaign with the theme of "We're Here for You!" Through email, a website banner and a custom electronic flier, the campaign highlighted how the Plans were continuing operations and promoted the availability of virtual one-on-one appointments, educational webinars, and the recently launched online and call-center distribution options. As retirement-related provisions of the CARES Act (such as the waiver on loan fees and RMD suspension) came into effect, the County extended the campaign to keep participants up to date.
- **News and updates** - In July 2020, the County quickly recognized that the way people access and consume information had changed and that its online quarterly Plan newsletter had become outdated. To keep participants updated and further promote the County's digital first approach, the County created a "News and updates" section on countyla.com and promoted newly posted content via email. Participants now access the latest news and information as soon as it becomes available — versus waiting for the publication of a quarterly newsletter.
- **Low-limit contribution campaign** - Due to regulatory changes in the early 2000s, a subset of longtime participants was subject to a contribution limit lower than that standard 2020 annual limit of \$19,500 to allow them to receive the maximum employer matching contribution with the lowest possible deferral rate. In November 2020, the County notified these participants via letter, email, website message, and a News and updates article that the lower limit had been removed and those participants were encouraged to save up to the standard annual limit. Empower's Retirement Plan Counselors called each participant to notify them of the change, further encourage them to defer more and to set up a one-on-one comprehensive account review to ensure they were on track for a comfortable retirement.
- **Webinars** - The Plans' educational programs continued unabated throughout 2020, with the shift to online-only sessions. Beginning in spring 2020 and continuing through the rest of the year, the County held 323 webinars on top-of-mind topics such as market volatility, "Investment 101," making the most of the Plans, financial fitness and retirement readiness. Each month, the County emailed more than 100,000 participants to build awareness and drive participation. As part of the enhanced webinar experience, the County offered a new slate of quick 20-minute "mini webinars" designed for participants to attend during breaks or lunch. Furthermore, a new content tile was added to the website to provide easy access to a monthly interactive webinar schedule that included embedded registration links. Finally, Empower Retirement showed additional support for the County and its participants as they provided assistance to the County's Defined Benefit (DB) provider. Empower invited the DB provider to join

webinars until they could establish their own webinar platform. This partnership proved beneficial to participants who now have webinars that speak to the Defined Contribution and Defined Benefit plans and how they complement each other in retirement.

- **Newly eligible enrollment campaign** - Because newly hired employees didn't have the opportunity for a conventional orientation, the County used a "Get in the Game" campaign to encourage enrollment. The baseball-themed email and postcard highlighted the advantages of the Plans and the ease of online enrollment. Coincidentally, the campaign ran in October 2020, during the championship run of the L.A. Dodgers.
- **Participant interaction** – By transitioning to a virtual meeting format, events such as in-person benefits fairs and table service were replaced with invaluable educational webinars, one-on-one appointments and phone calls.

Significance of Project

During a time when many people felt more isolated, the County demonstrated that they meant what they say about caring for participants and their goals. The program clearly showed that even though participants may be separated from their co-workers, the Plans were still hard at work helping participants working toward the retirement future they desired. Recognizing that any pause in saving and investing could significantly impact participants' future retirement income, the County helped participants maintain momentum by letting them know they weren't alone and that they could take advantage of the same service and support they were accustomed to.

As participants and Plan representatives adapted to remote engagement, the County also found that it had greater reach in connecting with participants. Communications became more efficient, focused, timely and actionable. Plan representatives had more time for one-on-one engagements. All of this afforded participants greater flexibility with service and support options, enabled them to engage at their convenience, and take action to help improve their retirement outcomes.

Many of the changes the County made to help participants weather the pandemic will stay in place. Participants and Plan representatives now have first-hand experience of the benefits of remote engagement. Those who may have been technology-averse before the pandemic received a crash course in virtual interaction, and many will continue to rely on those methods in the future. Balancing in-person with virtual engagement will likely result in an ongoing win for the County and its employees.

Outcomes and Measurable Benefits

The County's focused approach to communication and education during the pandemic yielded results that far exceeded the County's expectations and included the following:

- **We're Here for You campaign** - The email achieved a 60% open rate (three times the financial services industry standard) and 3.7% click-thru rate. The website banner and flier generated 7,541 and 7,214 clicks respectively.
- **News and updates** - The initial email achieved a 44.4% open rate (nearly two times the industry standard) and 3.5% click-thru rate. Since the initial email, five additional monthly emails have been sent. The average open rate is 1.5 times industry standard while the click rate is performing at industry standard. Homepage tile: 12,805 clicks. Since the transition from the newsletter, clicks to the News and updates section of the website have exceeded newsletter activity by more than 1,000%.
- **Low-limit contribution campaign** - Email: 59% open rate (more than two times industry standard) and 35% click-thru rate (11 times industry standard). An outstanding 12% of targeted participants increased their contribution rates.
- **Webinars** - March 2020 announcement email earned a 60% open rate (more than double industry standard) and 4% click-thru rate. The related website tile generated more than 8,600 clicks. 17,504 participants attended 323 webinars in 2020 versus 523 participants across four webinars in 2019. This represents a 3,247% increase in the number of participants attending a webinar.
- **Newly eligible enrollment campaign** - This campaign generated a 31% response rate, prompting 459 employees to enroll—an outstanding result that could have a significant impact on the quality of life of these future retirees.
- **Participant interaction** – The number of Retirement Plan Counselor touchpoints with participants in 2020 was 30,996. This was 10% higher than in 2019.
- **Net Promoter Score** – In the fourth quarter of 2020, Empower reported a Net Promoter Score of 88.5, indicating strong participant willingness to recommend the Plans to others.

Feasibility of Use by Other Governments of a Similar Size

This comprehensive focus on communication and education could be replicated by other similarly sized governments that adopt the *Ready, Set, Communicate!* approach. An important factor in the success of the campaign was the creativity, passion and commitment of those involved in applying innovative tactics to expand the reach of the communication initiatives.

The incredible engagement statistics, along with the outstanding results from each initiative, are a demonstration of the County's commitment to employees and why they are deserving of NAGDCA's recognition.

Supporting Documents

County of Los Angeles
DEFINED CONTRIBUTION PLANS INFORMATION AND LOGIN

We're Here For You!

Dear participant

As the world continues to respond to these unprecedented times, the County of Los Angeles 407(b) Horizons and 401(k) Savings Plans and Empower continue to be taking proactive measures to help ensure the well-being of our community. Please see below for important updates.

Passive office: The local office is operational, but will not be accepting outside visitors until further notice. If you have an existing in-person appointment, it will continue as scheduled via phone or WebEx. An Empower representative will contact you.

Market volatility: It's only natural to be concerned with the economy and how it affects your personal financial circumstances. In a volatile market there is value in being a long-term investor. To learn more, access resources in our [market volatility center](#).

Retirement planning seminars: Through the end of March, all in-person seminars will now be webinars. [Click here](#) for the updated schedule with registration links.

Please continue to visit [countyia.com](#) regularly for additional updates. **Please stay safe, be well and know that we are here for you!**

We're Here For You!

An Update About the County of Los Angeles COVID-19 Response | Market Volatility | Retirement Planning Seminars

Dear participant

As the world continues to respond to these unprecedented times, the County of Los Angeles 407(b) Horizons and 401(k) Savings Plans and Empower continue to be taking proactive measures to help ensure the well-being of our community. Please see below for important updates.

Passive office: The local office is operational, but will not be accepting outside visitors until further notice. If you have an existing in-person appointment, it will continue as scheduled via phone or WebEx. An Empower representative will contact you.

Market volatility: It's only natural to be concerned with the economy and how it affects your personal financial circumstances. In a volatile market there is value in being a long-term investor. To learn more, access resources in our [market volatility center](#).

Retirement planning seminars: Through the end of March, all in-person seminars will now be webinars. [Click here](#) for the updated schedule with registration links.

Please continue to visit [countyia.com](#) regularly for additional updates. **Please stay safe, be well and know that we are here for you!**

News & Updates

Exciting news! Your County of Los Angeles 407(b) Horizons and 401(k) Savings Plans newsletters are receiving an upgrade. The way people access and consume content has changed, and the quarterly newsletter format is no longer the best solution for getting you the information you need, when you need it.

You can now find the latest information and announcements by clicking on the **News & Updates** tile prominently featured on the [countyia.com](#) homepage. You are able to access content as soon as it becomes available, rather than waiting for the quarterly newsletter to be issued.

Visit the News & Updates page now to learn more about the following:

- Auto escalation
- Newsletter upgrade
- Upcoming webinars
- Digital cover for August webinar
- Fiscal year fees
- CARES Act
- Market volatility tips

Click here

Be sure to check back often as we continue to post new articles and information.

News & Updates

Read the latest news and updates to the County of Los Angeles Defined Contribution Plans.

We're Here for You Campaign

IMPORTANT: Removal of the combined low limit election for the County's Deferred Compensation Program

Our records indicate that you are currently enrolled in the combined "low" contribution limit. The combined low limit election will be automatically removed as an option under the 401(k) Savings Plan effective January 1, 2021.

Click the LEARN MORE button for more information.

Learn more

Removal of the combined low limit election for the County's Deferred Compensation Program

The low limit is \$8,500, and contributed to your 401(k) Plan. It is capped at \$8,500 ("Performance") cap of \$8,500 on the 401(k) Savings Plan.

Effective January 1, 2021, the combined low limit election will be automatically removed as an option under the 401(k) Savings Plan.

Participants who are currently enrolled in the combined low limit election will be automatically removed as an option under the 401(k) Savings Plan.

Participants who are currently enrolled in the combined low limit election will be automatically removed as an option under the 401(k) Savings Plan.

Retirement Planning Webinars 2020

Through at least the end of August, all in-person seminars will now be webinars. See below for schedule with registration links. Select the desired webinar to register (Password: RetPlan)

Pre-Retirement

Helping you make the most of your retirement

- Wednesday, June 10 12:00pm to 12:30pm
- Friday, June 19 11:00am to 2:00pm (Live and On-Demand)
- Tuesday, June 23 12:00pm to 1:00pm (Live and On-Demand)

Make the Most of Your Plans

Learn how to make the most of your retirement

- Thursday, June 25 12:00pm to 1:00pm
- Tuesday, June 16 12:00pm to 1:00pm

Market Volatility

Learn the importance of staying the course and riding out market volatility

- Monday, June 8 12:00pm to 1:00pm
- Tuesday, June 16 9:00am to 10:00am
- Monday, June 22 12:00pm to 1:00pm

Investments 101

How you choose to invest the money you save through the 407(b) Horizons and 401(k) Savings Plans is an important component of your overall retirement strategy. Attend this webinar to learn more.

- Monday, June 22 9:00am to 10:00am
- Thursday, June 25 9:00am to 10:00am

Summer Webinar Schedule Open for Registration | 1003-052626

Retirement Planning Webinars 2020

407(b) Horizons & 401(k) Savings Plans

Summer Webinar Schedule Open for Registration

Through at least the end of August, all in-person seminars will now be webinars. Register NOW for the summer selection of Retirement Planning Webinars.

Click here to register

Or visit [countyia.com](#) for more information.

Low Limit Campaign

Retirement Planning Webinar Campaign

Get in the game!

When it comes to your retirement you don't want to be caught looking at 0% this year. Now is the time to step up to the plate and enroll in the County of Los Angeles 407(b) Horizons and 401(k) Savings Plans!

Why should I enroll?

- 1 You may be missing out on the money! The County may match your contributions dollar-for-dollar up to 6% of your compensation as defined by the Plan.
- 2 On average, financial professionals estimate you'll need roughly 85% of your current income to live comfortably in retirement. Social Security and post-LACERS benefits may not be enough to meet your financial goals. Contributing to the 407(b) Horizons and 401(k) Savings Plans can help you fill a potential gap.

When it comes to your retirement you don't want to be caught looking at 0% this year. Now is the time to step up to the plate and enroll in the County of Los Angeles 407(b) Horizons and 401(k) Savings Plans!

Newly Eligible Campaign

[Click here](#) to view full versions of the supporting documents.