

SUMMARY OF PROJECT – NAGDCA 2025 LEADERSHIP RECOGNITION AWARD
CATEGORY: HOLISTIC FINANCIAL WELLNESS

**EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT SYSTEM OF TEXAS (ERS®) –
MONEY MATTERS FINANCIAL LITERACY INITIATIVE FOR ACTIVE EMPLOYEES**

Plan Profile:

The Employees Retirement System of Texas (ERS) administers health and retirement benefits that contribute to the well-being of employees of Texas state agencies and higher education institutions, elected officials, law enforcement and custodial officers, and judges. The ERS Retirement Trust Fund, which holds assets for the mandatory pension, has approximately \$40 billion in assets. The optional Texa\$averSM 401(k) / 457 Program has more than \$5.8 billion in total combined assets held by about 280,000 total participants.

Background:

ERS communicates benefits-related information through digital newsletters and social media, tracking open and click-through rates to assess member engagement. Our primary communication tool, the *News About Your Benefits* (NAYB) monthly newsletter, serves as the central hub for delivering key benefits updates to active employees who participate in our plans.

In reviewing newsletter engagement data, we consistently observed that financial topics generated the highest click rates. In 2024, articles covering optional income-related benefits—such as the Texa\$aver 401(k) / 457 Program, and the Discount Purchase Program—were among the most engaging content.

Additionally, ERS conducted a wellness **survey asking members about financial stress and its impact on their overall well-being**. The results were telling:

- **40.6%** of respondents reported that financial stress was negatively affecting their health, job or personal relationships.
- When asked what tools would help reduce their financial stress, members identified **retirement planning (24.7%)**, **investment planning (24%)**, and **cash and debt management support (18.3%)** as their top needs.
- Additionally, **57%** of members expressed a desire to learn more about improving their financial health.

In response to this clear need—and the strong interest in financial literacy resources—ERS launched a new newsletter and podcast focused specifically on financial wellness. These offerings deliver tailored content related to State of Texas retirement benefits and voluntary savings programs offered through ERS. The goal is to help members understand the full value of their employer-sponsored benefits and how they can support long-term financial security, both during employment and in retirement.

To meet our diverse membership's needs, we prioritized creating content that is accessible, engaging and easy to understand. Our members represent a wide range of demographics, salary and education levels, and career stages. Therefore, we diversified our delivery channels to reach them where they are most comfortable—whether that be email, social media, SMS or our website.

Our new initiatives include:

- *Money MattERS*, a digital newsletter focused entirely on financial wellness.
- *Money Talks*, a podcast hosted by the newsletter's editors and featuring a rotating roster of guests including internal experts, representatives from state agencies and third-party administrators of our benefit plans.
- The *Monthly Tip Jar*, a dedicated section of the newsletter linking to short educational videos and Brainshark content provided by Empower, the administrator of Texa\$aver.

Through these innovative formats and strategic outreach, ERS continues to empower members to take control of their financial futures and get the most value from their state benefits.

Goals included:

- Informing employees about the importance of retirement planning, even if they have pensions
- Highlighting quick tips to improve financial literacy
- Providing educational resources and online budgeting tools available through our Texa\$aver administrator.
- Breaking down complex retirement benefit information into an easy-to-understand format.
- Providing new avenues for obtaining ERS benefits information.

"In response to the growing need for financial literacy among state employees, ERS staff identified an opportunity and responded with innovation—combining storytelling, design, and subject matter expertise to create a compelling digital newsletter called *Money MattERS* and the *Money Talks* podcast. These resources break down complex financial topics, such as retirement eligibility, into clear, engaging content. By embracing new formats like podcasting, the team expanded their reach and deepened engagement, receiving positive feedback from members. With measurable success and a growing audience, the initiative not only promotes financial literacy but reinforces ERS's commitment to support our members' retirement income security during their careers and into retirement."

- **Angelica Harborth, Assistant
Director of Benefits
Communications**

WRITTEN JUSTIFICATION – NAGDCA 2025 LEADERSHIP RECOGNITION AWARD
CATEGORY: Holistic Financial Wellness

EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT SYSTEM OF TEXAS (ERS®) –
MONEY MATTERS FINANCIAL LITERACY INITIATIVE FOR ACTIVE EMPLOYEES

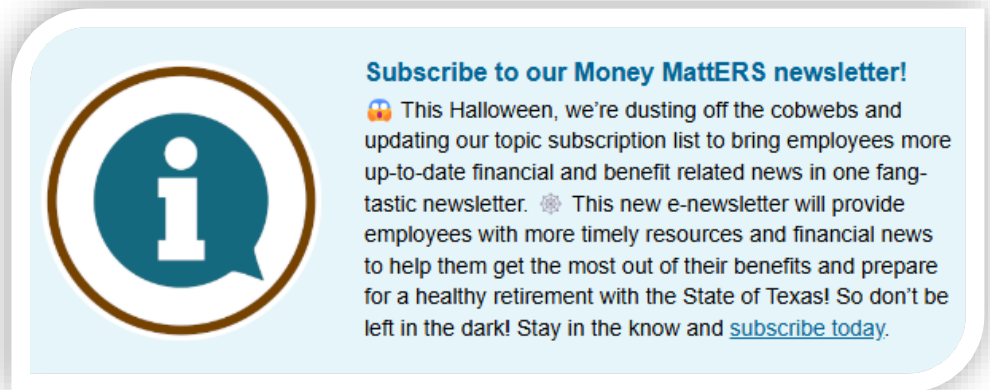
Project Description

To address growing interest in financial literacy resources among its members, ERS launched a monthly digital newsletter called *Money MattERS*, along with a companion podcast titled *Money Talks*. These new communications feature tailored content focused on State of Texas retirement benefits and the optional voluntary savings programs ERS oversees. The primary goal is to help members understand the full value of their employer-sponsored benefits and how they can use them to build and maintain financial security throughout their careers and into retirement.

ERS partnered with Empower, the administrator for Texa\$aver, to provide members with reliable financial education tools and short-form videos. To boost engagement and distinguish this initiative from existing benefits communications, ERS employed new visual branding. Our internal graphic designer developed a custom logo, while the digital communication team created custom vector images aligned with the new color scheme. We wrote the articles to make complex financial topics—like debt management and retirement eligibility—more approachable and relatable for employees across a wide range of backgrounds.

October 2024 Prelaunch Communications:

- **Targeted Emails:** ERS re-engaged a dormant email list of members subscribed to financial wellness topics. The email served a dual purpose: to clean up outdated list segments and to promote the upcoming **Money MattERS** newsletter, including a call to action to subscribe.
- **Newsletter Callouts:** We ran teasers in the existing News About Your Benefits newsletter, featuring emojis (a first for ERS) and Halloween-themed tie-ins to capture attention and create excitement.
- **Social Media Promotion:** We shared the same messaging on Facebook to extend reach and drive subscriptions.



January 2025 Launch: Thanks to the prelaunch campaign, ERS gained **2,555 new opt-in subscribers** leading up to the initial distribution. The inaugural issue of [Money MattERS](#) launch in January 2025 and received overwhelmingly positive engagement, achieving a **50% open rate** and **21% click rate**. The first issue included:

- Four engaging articles on timely financial topics
- A welcome episode of the [ERS Money Talks podcast](#)
- The [Monthly Tip Jar](#), featuring a Brainshark video provided by Empower

Distribution tactics included direct email bulletins to subscribers, social media posts on LinkedIn and Facebook, and a dedicated webpage accessible from the ERS.texas.gov homepage.

This multifaceted project modernized ERS's approach to financial education, delivering high-quality, accessible content that meets the evolving needs of our diverse membership.

The Results (January – March 2025):

Since their January 2025 launch the monthly *Money MattERS* newsletter and *Money Talks* podcast continue to **see positive engagement and a growing audience month-over-month**. The content is developed based on current events and podcast guests range from plan administrators, internal staff and representatives from other state agencies.

January Content

The January issue of *Money MattERS* included: five news articles, *ERS Money Talks* podcast: *Welcome episode*, *Monthly Tip Jar: How to establish a budget and emergency savings fund*

- **49.7%** unique email open rate
- **20.8%** unique click rate
- **2,555** Opt in subscribers
- **62** podcast listens
- **LinkedIn – 676 impressions, 4 comments, 22 reactions and 4 reposts**

February Content

The February issue of *Money MattERS* included: four news articles, *ERS Money Talks* podcast: *State of Texas Retirement with Jennifer Thompson*, *Monthly Tip Jar: Answering your questions on market volatility*

- **47.9%** unique email open rate
- **19.8%** unique click rate
- **5,897** Opt in subscribers
- **78** podcast listens

March Content

The March issue of *Money MattERS* included: four news articles, *ERS Money Talks* podcast: *Get a Glimpse of future you with a Texa\$aver Retirement Plan Advisor*, *Monthly Tip Jar: Take 90 seconds to slay your debt*.

- **47.6%** unique email open rate
- **18.5%** unique click rate
- **6,069** Opt in subscribers
- **80** podcast listens
- **LinkedIn – 711 impressions, 1 comment, 19 reactions and 2 reposts**

Relative Significance of Improvement/Perspective for the Change

The information presented in the Money MattERS initiative is significant as it addresses the larger issue of the need for financial resources during employment. Financial literacy is the basis for financial wellness and without a foundational understanding of key financial principles, people may struggle with mounting financial stress, excessive debt and lack of emergency savings. Education can help simplify financial concepts and make managing finances less intimidating. This empowers people to effectively budget, manage debt, invest wisely and ultimately plan for a financially secure retirement.

Feasibility of Use by Other Governments

ERS was able to implement this initiative using internal resources and partnering with the Texa\$aver administrator for informational resources like videos and Brainsharks. Other plans can leverage their existing internal communications staff as well as work with their deferred compensation administrator to highlight website tools, videos and other relevant resources.



Emails

Each *Money MattERS* digital bulletin contains 4-5 articles focusing on financial topics and benefits. In addition, the bulletins contain links to the latest episode of the *ERS Money Talks* podcast and *Monthly Tip Jar*. Additionally, there are callouts for discounts and educational opportunities for financial webinars offered by the TexaSaver third party administrator.

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Money Matters provides news and insights on state benefits designed to enhance the financial security and overall well-being of state and higher education employees and their families. Stay informed with the latest updates by signing up for email and text alerts. And don't forget to check out the ERS Money Talks podcast where you'll hear engaging discussions on benefits-related financial topics.

[Subscribe to Money Matters by ERS](#)

ERS Money Talks Podcast

Group 4 Fact Check: Clearing up common misconceptions
March 25, 2025
Meet with a salaried local TexaSaverSM Retirement Plan Advisor (RPA) for a Retirement Readiness Review to look at your financial situation, talk about your retirement goals and learn ways to get on or maintain the path to achieve them. This free service is available to all TexaSaver account holders.

Why your early career is prime time for retirement saving with TexaSaver
March 25, 2025
Younger investors can make the most out of having time on their side for a comfortable retirement by saving early and often.

Member story: From \$40K debt to financial freedom
March 25, 2025
State employee Kari Karber shares how she paid off a mountain of credit card debt. If you have personal debt, these resources can help you get out from under it.

Flex like a pro: The Dos and Don'ts of the FSA debit card
February 19, 2025
Receipt requests have you feeling overwhelmed? Learn how to use your TexFlexSM debit card like a pro to help minimize the paperwork.

Romance your benefits to fall in love (or like) with tax season
February 19, 2025
Tax season might inspire passion, but not the "love" kind. But with Feb. 14 behind us and the help of your state employee benefits, you may just look forward to your next date with the IRS.

Why your early career is prime time for retirement saving with TexaSaver

March 25, 2025

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2-minute read

If you're in the early stages of your career, your retirement may be one of the last things on your mind. After all, retirement is decades away. Right now, you have skills to build, promotions to earn and bills to pay.

But the fact is that younger investors have access to two secret weapons that can help them achieve a more comfortable retirement: time and the TexaSaverSM 401(k) / 457 Program salaried local Retirement Plan Advisors (RPAs).

For our state employees in their early twenties, your investment time horizon is very long – somewhere between 40 and 50 working years if you plan to work until traditional retirement age.

Investing early and consistently can hugely pay off in the long run. The sooner you start investing, the longer you have to take advantage of compound growth potential—where any earnings your investments generate get reinvested and can generate more earnings.

In other words, not only can you save more by starting early, you also have more time to let your money work for you. It can be a powerful combination.

To get a sense of what this means, play around with the [U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission's Compound Interest Calculator](#) and [Savings Goal Calculator](#). See how your invested money can grow over time through the power of compound interest, or use the savings goal calculator to find out how much you need save to reach a specific amount.

According to the IRS, retirement can last 30 years or longer, so they say you'll need up to 80% of your annual income today to retire comfortably.

While comparison is said to be the thief of joy, it can help to get a sense of how others in your age group fare. [See what's the average retirement savings.](#)

The example below shows how, depending on your age, a \$68 monthly contribution in a TexaSaver account until age 65 can potentially grow into a higher monthly payment to yourself in retirement.

Age at which you start contributing \$68 monthly	Gross monthly payment from age 65 to 85, assuming investments yield 6% rate of return
Age 30 (\$28,560 total investment)	\$694 (\$96,880 total savings + investment earnings)
Age 40 (\$20,400 total investment)	\$338 (\$47,124 total savings + investment earnings)
Age 50 (\$12,240 total investment)	\$142 (\$19,776 total savings + investment earnings)
Age 60 (\$4,080 total investment)	\$34 (\$4,744 total savings + investment earnings)

Webpages

The [Money Matters](#) newsletter articles and resources are made available on the [ERS.texas.gov](#) website.

Social media posts

ERS created social media posts with links for each month's newsletter bulletin for reach and to drive engagement.

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Employees Retirement System of Texas

Published by GovDelivery

February 19

Planning for your financial future isn't just your retirement, it includes your taxes and FSA spending. Plan for the now and later with Money Matters.

CONTENT.GOVDELIVERY.COM

Money Matters by ERS: Navigating taxes, your FSA and the market

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Employees Retirement System of Texas

Published by GovDelivery

March 25 at 7:31 PM

Are you retirement ready? Whether you're just starting your state career or nearing retirement, now's the time to take charge of your financial future! This month's Money Matters has:

- Why your early career is the best time to save for retirement
- Tips from a fellow employee on tackling personal debt

Also, tune into this month's ERS Money Talks podcast for expert advice on preparing for a retirement review.

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Money Matters: Are you retirement ready?

Money Matters: Are you retirement ready? Employees Retirement...