Leave Sharing Programs

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## 1. What is a Leave Bank?

A [Leave Bank](https://hr.nih.gov/benefits/leave/leave-bank) is a pooled fund of donated annual and restored annual leave. Eligible members draw leave from the bank to cover approved time out of the office due to personal or family medical emergencies. To utilize Leave Bank leave, the employee must exhaust their available paid leave.

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## 2. What is the Voluntary Leave Transfer Program (VLTP)?

Under the [Voluntary Leave Transfer Program (VLTP)](https://hr.nih.gov/benefits/leave/vltp/voluntary-leave-transfer-program-vltp), a covered employee may donate annual leave directly to another employee who has a personal or family medical emergency who has exhausted their available paid leave.

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## 3. What is the difference between the Leave Bank and the VLTP?

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| **Leave Bank Program** | **VLTP** |
| Donations go into the bank and are distributed by the Leave Bank Board to eligible members with an approved personal and/or family medical emergency. | Requires a direct donation from the donor(s) to the recipient. |
| Membership is required to receive leave from the Leave Bank. | No membership requirement to receive leave through the VLTP. |
| There are caps on how much leave may be drawn out of the Leave Bank depending on the type of medical emergency:* 480 hours for personal.
* 480 hours for family.
* 720 hours for combined.
 | There is no limit on the amount of leave that can be donated to a requesting employee, but the amount of leave that an employee may receive is based on what is medically supported. |
| Leave transfers are made immediately upon approval.  | Recipients must wait for donors to donate leave directly to them. |
| The medical emergency under the Leave Bank is confidential and reviews are based on a medical verification process. | Recipients provide a voluntary disclosure in an effort to receive donations and the decision of use is based on medical documentation (recipient processes can vary). |
| Any excess leave goes back to the Leave Bank. | Any excess leave is returned to the donors on a prorated basis. |

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## 4. Why do we need a Leave Bank in addition to the VLTP?

Under the VLTP, an employee whose medical emergency results in a period of unpaid absence has to rely solely on friends and co-workers to donate annual leave. In some cases, a recipient is new to the agency and has not established acquaintances and/or solicitations for donations go unanswered. Under the Leave Bank, a reserve of leave hours is held in a central Leave Bank and is available to all Leave Bank members who are approved to be a leave recipient.

Additionally, employees may prefer the Leave Bank because the program does not disclose medical emergencies outside of the Leave Bank Office and/or medical consultant. This is especially important to those with very personal conditions.

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## 5. Can an employee apply to be a recipient in both the Leave Bank and the VLTP?

Yes; however, since the Leave Bank provides 100 percent of the medical need up to the [annual hourly cap](https://hr.nih.gov/benefits/leave/leave-bank/recipient-information)s, the only time a recipient would need leave under VLTP, in addition to the Leave Bank, is if they exceed the cap.

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## 6. Can a recipient, approved by both the Leave Bank and the VLTP, receive leave from both programs?

Yes.

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## 7. What happens if someone is under dual enrollment, and the medical documentation under the VLTP is not consistent with the Leave Bank medical review?

The Leave Bank Office will send the medical documentation (received from the employee) to the medical consultant for consultation with the employee’s medical provider about the discrepancy. In the interim, the medical review supersedes the medical documentation.

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## 8. Who is eligible to become a member of Leave Bank?

Full-time and part-time federal civilian employees of the NIH.

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## 9. How can an employee enroll to become a member of the Leave Bank?

To become a [Leave Bank member](https://hr.nih.gov/benefits/leave/leave-bank/becoming-member), eligible employee can enroll using the [Integrated Time and Attendance System (ITAS](https://itas.nih.gov/)) or via a paper form during an open enrollment period. A membership contribution of one pay period’s accrual of annual leave is required unless eligible for a waiver.

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## 10. If an employee is unable to make the membership contribution, are they unable to join?

If the applicant does not have sufficient leave to make the membership contribution or if they are a current Leave Bank and/or VLTP recipient, the membership contribution will automatically be waived for the leave year.

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## 11. When can I enroll to become a member of the Leave Bank?

There is an annual open enrollment period each year, from mid-November through mid-December. The open enrollment period will last for at least 30 calendar days. New employees also have a personal open enrollment period that runs 60 calendar days from their enter-on-duty date as an NIH federal employee.

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## 12. How much leave must I contribute to join the Leave Bank?

To join the Leave Bank, there will be a minimum annual leave contribution amount required. The yearly contribution amount will be one pay period’s worth of annual leave accrual based on the employee’s annual leave category as follows:

* 4 hours for those with less than 3 years of federal service;
* 6 hours for those with 3 or more, but less than 15, years of federal service; and
* 8 hours for those with 15 or more years of federal service.

This minimum contribution requirement also applies to part-time employees.

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## 13. What period of time is covered by joining the Leave Bank during an open enrollment period?

One leave year, which starts with leave period one of the upcoming leave year and ends with the last leave period of the applicable leave year. If a new employee joins during their individual enrollment period, the membership will follow the entry on duty date through the last day of the last leave period of that year.

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## 14. Will I need to join the Leave Bank each year to continue my membership?

Once you join the Leave Bank, you will automatically be re-enrolled each year unless you take action in [ITAS](https://itas.nih.gov/) to opt out during the annual open enrollment period, which runs from mid-November to mid-December. If you chose to opt out during open enrollment, you will be opted out for the upcoming membership year, not the current membership year.

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## 15. Can I join the Leave Bank if I am currently an approved leave recipient in the VLTP?

Yes. If you are a VLTP recipient, you may enroll as a Leave Bank member within 60 days of becoming an NIH federal employee or during the annual open enrollment period.

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## 16. Would a pre-existing condition prevent me from joining and receiving leave from the Leave Bank and/or VLTP?

No.

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## 17. Can I donate more annual leave than the required yearly membership contribution amount to the Leave Bank?

Yes. You may [donate](https://hr.nih.gov/benefits/leave/leave-bank/leave-bank-donations) additional annual leave hours beyond your annual membership contribution using [ITAS](https://itas.nih.gov/) or via paper form.

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## 18. Who may donate leave to the Leave Bank?

Any federal civilian employee.

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## 19. Who is considered a family member for VLTP and Leave Bank purposes?

Family member means an individual with any of the following relationships to the employee:

* Spouse and parents thereof;
* Parents and spouses thereof;
* Brothers, sisters, and spouses thereof;
* Grandparents, grandchildren, and spouses thereof;
* Domestic partner and parents thereof, including domestic partners of any individual in 2 through 5 of this definition;
* Any individual related by blood or affinity whose close association with the employee is the equivalent of a family relationship.

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## 20. What are the eligibility requirements for becoming a Leave Bank recipient?

An applicant must:

1. Be a current Leave Bank member;

2. Experience a [qualifying medical emergency](https://hr.nih.gov/benefits/leave/leave-bank/nih-leave-bank-terms), which is projected to exhaust the employee’s [available paid leave](https://hr.nih.gov/benefits/leave/leave-bank/nih-leave-bank-terms) and to result in at least 24 hours of non-pay status; and

3. Complete and submit a [Leave Recipient package](https://hr.nih.gov/benefits/leave/leave-bank/recipient-information) to the Leave Bank Office no later than 30 calendar days following the termination of the medical emergency.

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## 21. What are the eligibility requirements for becoming a VLTP recipient?

An applicant must:

1. Experience a qualifying medical emergency, which is projected to exhaust the employee’s available paid leave and result in at least 24 hours of non-pay status; and

2. Complete and submit a [VLTP form](https://hr.nih.gov/benefits/leave/vltp/voluntary-leave-transfer-program-vltp) along with supporting medical documentation to the VLTP Coordinator no later than 30 calendar days following the termination of the medical emergency.

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## 22. If my Leave Bank recipient application is complete, how long will it take to be notified of a decision?

Recipient applications are processed within 10 business days if medically reviewed internally or 15 business days if medically reviewed by the medical consultant. Delays may occur for complex cases, patients with Kaiser insurance, and cases submitted during the annual open enrollment.

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## 23. What rights do applicants have if their recipient application is disapproved?

Under the VLTP, an applicant can discuss the disapproval with the [VLTP Coordinator](https://hr.nih.gov/about/hr-contacts).

Under the Leave Bank, the applicant may submit an [appeal request](https://hr.nih.gov/benefits/leave/leave-bank/request-appeal). Once appealed, the case will go to a different medical consultant for a new review. If the decision is based on the amount of leave in the Bank, the applicant may not appeal.

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## 24. What if I am an approved leave recipient and decide to apply for disability retirement?

When you discuss applying for disability retirement with your [Benefits Specialist](https://hr.nih.gov/about/hr-contacts), inform them that you are an approved leave recipient as leave donations can have a negative impact on your entitlements to retroactive pay if you are approved for disability retirement.

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## 25. As a Leave Bank recipient, what happens if I do not use all the hours I receive from the Leave Bank?

Any unused hours must be returned to the Leave Bank.

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## 26. Will employees on “leave restrictions” be allowed to apply and receive donations from the Leave Bank?

The Leave Bank Office will consult with the Employee Relations Specialist and make determinations on an individual basis.

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## 27. Can I donate sick leave to the Leave Bank or VLTP?

No, by law, sick leave cannot be donated to a Leave Bank or a recipient of the VLTP.

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## 28. Can I change my mind after I have donated leave to the Leave Bank and request to have my leave returned?

No, by law, [donations](https://hr.nih.gov/benefits/leave/leave-bank/leave-bank-donations) to a Leave Bank or to a Leave Recipient cannot be returned to the donor after the donation has been approved.

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## 29. What happens to my Leave Bank membership if I resign, retire, or transfer, etc.?

Membership is automatically cancelled when an employee resigns, retires, transfers to another federal agency, or dies. The cancellation is effective on the date of the action. There is no refund of the membership contribution or leave donation.

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## 30. How and when can I cancel my Leave Bank membership?

You may opt out during an open enrollment period using [ITAS](https://itas.nih.gov/).

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## 31. Can my Leave Bank recipient status be terminated?

Yes, a member’s recipient status can be terminated for any of the following:

* Fraud, that is, falsifying medical documentation
* Inability to verify leave used or refusal of verification
* Falsifying time and attendance information
* Using donated leave for hours unrelated to the medical emergency

**Note: Falsifying or altering any government or medical document(s) can lead to disciplinary action, including suspension from work or termination of employment.**

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## 32. I am a Leave Approving Official; do I have to approve Leave Bank leave?

Only if the employee invokes [The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)](https://hr.nih.gov/benefits/leave/family-medical-leave-act-fmla/family-and-medical-leave).

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## 33. I have an employee who is going to be out of the office for a medical emergency. This employee would like to use their annual leave for a family vacation before the medical emergency. Do I have to approve this?

No. We recommend that you discuss the case with your Employee Relations Specialist.

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