

Understanding SCERA's Approach to COLAs

One of the most frequent questions SCERA receives from its members is "Why don't we get a Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) on our Retiree benefits?" The way COLAs work in our retirement system is different from other counties. Here is some background to help explain where things stand today.

A Look Back: How COLAs Began

In the mid-1960s, the County Employees Retirement Law (CERL) was updated to include two new Articles that allowed counties to offer automatic Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs) for retirees.

These automatic COLAs were tied to changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) – a measure of inflation. When the CPI increased beyond a certain point, retirees' benefits automatically went up to help keep pace with rising costs.

To pay for these automatic COLAs, both employees and employers contributed a little extra into the county retirement systems over time. This meant that the money for those future COLAs was built up gradually and ready when needed.

Most CERL counties — 19 out of 20 — adopted this type of automatic, CPI-driven COLA program. After the passage of the Public Employees' Pension Reform Act (PEPRA) some of the other counties removed the COLA from their PEPRA tiers but kept them intact for their pre-PEPRA tiers.

Sonoma County Took a Different Path

Sonoma County chose not to adopt the automatic CPI-based COLA program. Instead, the County decided to take what's called an "Ad hoc" approach.

Under the Ad hoc COLA program, the County and SCERA worked together to decide if and when to grant a COLA, and how to fund it. These COLAs weren't automatically triggered, and they weren't pre-funded through regular payroll contributions like the automatic ones were.

For many years, this approach worked well. The County and SCERA evaluated the economy, the retirement fund's performance, and retirees' needs to determine when a COLA could

be granted and how it could be funded. Once it was determined that a COLA could be granted and funded, SCERA would recommend it to the Board of Supervisors, as they have the ultimate authority to grant the benefit.

The 2008 Financial Crisis Changed Things

Then came the Great Recession of 2008, which caused major investment losses for SCERA and serious budget challenges for the County. Because of those losses, SCERA's reserves were depleted and the fund began tracking a large deficit, so there were no longer excess earnings to fund new COLAs.

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SCERA Board of Retirement

Travis Balzarini, Chair
Neil Baker, Chris Coursey,
Amos Eaton, Jared Gonce,
Greg Jahn, Erick Roeser,
Mark Walsh, Bob Williamson

Board of Retirement Meetings

Meetings are generally held at 9:00 a.m.
on the third Thursday of the month in
the SCERA Board Room.

Executive Staff

Julie Wyne
Chief Executive Officer

Jim Failor
Chief Investment Officer

Cristina Hess
Assistant Chief Executive Officer/
Chief Legal Counsel

The SCERA Times is published for
members of the Sonoma County
Employees' Retirement Association.

SCERA

433 Aviation Boulevard, Suite 100
Santa Rosa, CA 95403
Phone: (707) 565-8100

Email: retirement@sonomacounty.gov
Website: scretire.org

This Newsletter is not intended or designed
to be financial advice, tax advice, or legal
advice. Please consult with your financial,
tax, and legal advisors regarding your
personal circumstances.

This Newsletter was prepared by SCERA
staff to help members understand issues
surrounding many aspects of their
retirement benefits. Every effort has
been made to ensure the accuracy of the
information provided. However, you should
not rely solely on the information contained
in the newsletter. If there is any discrepancy
between information in this newsletter and
legal requirements under State and Federal
law, the law will govern.

Understanding SCERA's Approach to COLAs *Cont. from front page.*

The last COLA granted was in 2008, and it was a "purchasing power COLA."

This type of COLA is meant to help restore retirees' benefit value when inflation has reduced their purchasing power. In that year, the COLA brought benefits back up to 80% of their original value.

Where Things Stand Today

In recent years, SCERA and the County of Sonoma have been working together to find ways to bring back cost-of-living increases in a sustainable way.

- SCERA has updated its policies to make it easier to recommend COLAs to the County.
- The County has also adopted a legislative platform that supports flexibility in how COLAs can be considered and funded in the future.
- SCERA and the County will be working together to develop legislation and shepherd it through the legislative process.

These are important steps toward rebuilding the ability to offer COLAs that help protect retirees' purchasing power over time.

In Summary

- Most other CERL counties have automatic, pre-funded COLAs.
- Sonoma County's COLAs have always been Ad hoc – approved individually and funded case-by-case.
- The last COLA was granted in 2008, during a difficult economic period.
- Current efforts are focused on finding responsible, flexible ways to reintroduce COLAs in the future.

SCERA Observes National Retirement Security Month

In recognition of National Retirement Security Month in October, SCERA, in collaboration with the County of Sonoma's Deferred Compensation unit, hosted a series of educational retirement seminars. The annual observance is dedicated to raising

awareness about the importance of retirement planning.

Retirement seminars were held at three sites throughout Santa Rosa and were designed to encourage employees to review their financial savings, establish clear retirement goals, and secure their financial futures. Over one hundred members attended SCERA's Path to Retirement seminar during the three-day event.



Helping Us Stay Informed During a Difficult Time

Please be sure to notify SCERA if a member or benefit recipient passes away. You do not need to wait for a death certificate to make the report – SCERA will follow up with the reporting party to obtain any additional information needed. To report a death, please call SCERA at (707) 565-8100 or email retirement@sonomacounty.gov.

UPDATE

SCERA Staff Updates

It is with great pleasure that SCERA welcomes **Michelle Johnson** as our **Department Analyst** overseeing our newly formed Administrative Services Division. Michelle has worked for the County of Sonoma for 11 years, beginning her career with the Department of Agriculture/Weights & Measures and most recently worked with Sonoma County Public Infrastructure in the Human Resources Division. In addition to her tenure with the County, Michelle brings 14 years of private sector experience in administration and customer service.



SCERA is also pleased to welcome **Jacquelyn Reynoso** as our **Senior Office Assistant**. With over eight years of customer service experience, Jacquelyn is excited to begin her career with the County of Sonoma. We're thrilled to have her on board and look forward to seeing all that she'll accomplish.

UPDATE

SCERA Launches Enhanced Phone System for Members

SCERA is excited to share a meaningful update to our phone system that we hope will improve the experience for our members and support our team's work. As part of our ongoing efforts to use resources efficiently, we've designed a new phone tree that will provide callers with clear options to connect directly with the right team – whether they're requesting forms, seeking information about health benefits, reaching **Retiree Services** or **Member Services**, or speaking with a team member for personal assistance.

We welcome your feedback. Please don't hesitate to share any questions, comments, or insights by contacting us at (707) 565-8100 or retirement@sonomacounty.gov.

IMPORTANT DATES

Retiree Pay Dates 2025

November 26, 2025
December 31, 2025

Retiree Pay Dates 2026

January 30, 2026
February 27, 2026
March 30, 2026
April 30, 2026
May 29, 2026
June 30, 2026
July 31, 2026
August 31, 2026
September 30, 2026
October 30, 2026
November 30, 2026
December 31, 2026



County Holiday Schedule

Our office will be closed on these holidays, but we're still available at scetire.org when you need information on our programs and services. Our personalized, secure portal [MySCERA.org](https://myscera.org) lets you view your account information and conduct much of your SCERA business online at any time.

Holiday Schedule 2025

November 27, 2025: **Thanksgiving Day**
November 28, 2025: **Day After Thanksgiving**
December 25, 2025: **Christmas Day**

Holiday Schedule 2026

January 1: **New Year's Day**
January 19: **Martin Luther King Jr. Day**
February 12: **Lincoln's Birthday**
February 16: **Presidents Day**
March 31: **César Chávez Day**
May 25: **Memorial Day**

Sign up for the MySCERA portal today!

Access your SCERA account online – anytime from anywhere!

Why sign up for the MySCERA portal?

- ◆ 24/7 access to your SCERA account – view beneficiaries, track payroll transactions, register for seminars, and much more.
- ◆ Secure and easy-to-use platform – protect your personal information while managing your retirement details.
- ◆ Manage your benefits – update personal information, access online forms, and generate your own benefit estimates.

Create your MySCERA account today!

To create your account, you'll need your MySCERA enrollment code letter. Each member received an individual enrollment code to start the process.

To get started:

1. Go to MySCERA.org
2. Click "Enroll Now" to begin the registration process.

Need your enrollment code? If you've misplaced it or didn't receive it, please email SCERA.MemberServices@sonomacounty.gov to request a copy of your MySCERA enrollment code letter.

Please note: enrollment code letters can only be mailed to your mailing address or picked up at our office, located at 433 Aviation Blvd, Suite 100, Santa Rosa, CA 95403.



Scan the QR code to visit our portal!

Join SCERA in Spreading Holiday Magic

This holiday season, help spread joy by participating in the local Secret Santa program! For over 30 years, the Secret Santa program – started by local community partners – brings warmth and joy to children, teens, adults, and seniors who might otherwise go without a gift during the holidays. Beginning in November, stop by the SCERA office lobby and choose a Heart Wish from our holiday tree. Each Heart represents a real person in our community in need of a little holiday magic.

To participate:

- ◆ Select a Heart Wish
- ◆ Shop for the gift listed on the Heart
- ◆ Return the Heart and wrapped gift to our office by December 15th

There are several convenient drop-off locations throughout Sonoma County. A complete list of drop-off locations is available next to our tree.

Let's make the season brighter, one Heart at a time.

Happy holidays from all of us at SCERA

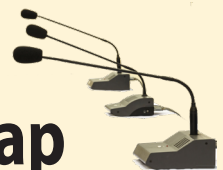


Expanding Perspectives:

SCERA's Board Educational Forum Recap

Your Retirement Board held its annual Educational Forum on October 8–9, 2025, at the DoubleTree Hotel in Rohnert Park. As is typical, they held Question & Answer sessions with the Plan's active investment managers organized by asset classes. There were panels for Equities, Fixed Income, Real Estate, Infrastructure, and Farmland. Special speakers

included **Jared Gross** of JP Morgan, **Amy Brown** of Arc Strategies, and **Vance Serchuk** of KKR. Mr. Gross reviewed the economy and the relative attractiveness of various investment markets, Ms. Brown discussed pending and recently passed legislation in Sacramento, and Mr. Serchuk presented on the current complexities of global geopolitics.



1099 Pension Tax Document and New Year Tax Withholding

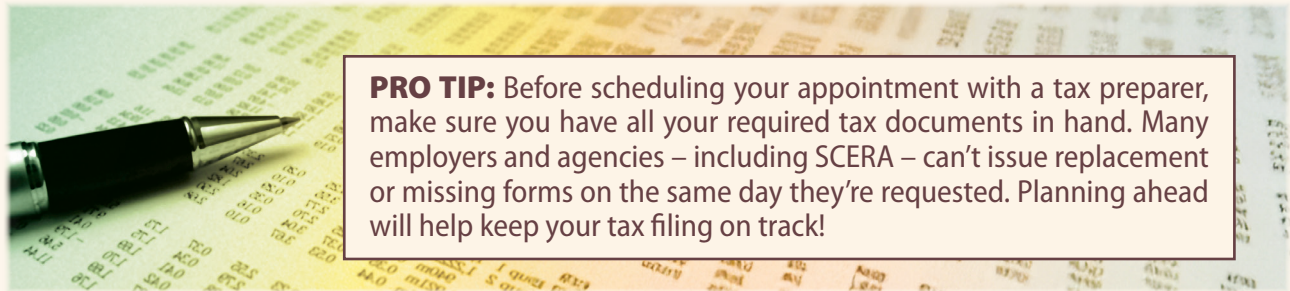
As a SCERA pension payee, if you had taxable income, you will receive a 1099R from SCERA rather than a W2, which is issued by an employer. SCERA will issue 1099Rs for 2025 no later than February 2, 2026, as required by the IRS. These will be mailed to your address on file, so please make sure your information is up to date by December 31, 2025. We will not reissue any missing 1099Rs until the week of February 16, 2026. If you request a replacement 1099R, it can be sent to the mailing address or email on file, or picked up at our office with a valid government ID.

You may also access a copy of your 1099R through your account on **MySCERA.org**.

Please check MySCERA now to ensure that you have created an account. If not, please contact SCERA to request an enrollment letter be mailed to you.

If you have an account but do not remember your login information, please use the links to recover your username or reset your password.

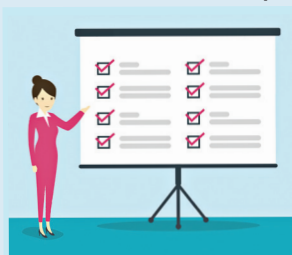
Federal and California tax withholding tables are updated each January, which may result in a change in your tax withholding and net pension check. To update your tax withholding, visit our website at scretire.org and navigate to the Retiree Forms page, print, complete, and submit the IRS W-4P and/or California DE-4P tax withholding forms to SCERA.



PRO TIP: Before scheduling your appointment with a tax preparer, make sure you have all your required tax documents in hand. Many employers and agencies – including SCERA – can't issue replacement or missing forms on the same day they're requested. Planning ahead will help keep your tax filing on track!

Stay Connected - Update Your Address and Contact Details

If you are a SCERA payee and plan to move or have recently changed your mailing address, phone number, or email address, please contact SCERA as soon as possible to keep your information up to date. Keeping your contact details current ensures you continue receiving important communications without interruption. To update your information, please



log in to **MySCERA.org** or complete the **Address Change** form available at scretire.org.

SCERA routinely receives returned mail from payees, and if we are unable to contact you, your benefit may be temporarily suspended until updated information is provided.

If you move into or out of California, there may be required changes needed to your California income tax withholding. Please contact SCERA at (707) 565-8100 and select **option 3** to reach Retiree Services to discuss any changes.

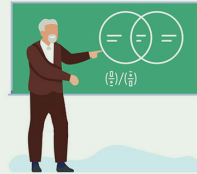
SCERA Retirement Seminars

Become an active participant in your future – attend a retirement planning seminar!

SCERA offers two seminars: Path to Retirement and Planning to Retire. Seminars are held in the SCERA Board Room.

Path to Retirement

This one-hour seminar is for members in the early-to mid-stage of your career or if more than five years away from retirement.



Planning to Retire

This two-hour seminar is for late career members who are within two years of retirement.



2026 Path to Retirement Seminars	
DATE	TIME
01/14/2026	8:30 am – 9:30 am
02/04/2026	2:00 pm – 3:00 pm
02/26/2026	3:00 pm – 4:00 pm
03/12/2026	3:00 pm – 4:00 pm
04/09/2026	2:00 pm – 3:00 pm
05/01/2026	9:00 am – 10:00 am
05/18/2026	12:00 pm – 1:00 pm
06/15/2026	2:00 pm – 3:00 pm
07/01/2026	3:00 pm – 4:00 pm
07/13/2026	8:30 am – 9:30 am
08/11/2026	2:00 pm – 3:00 pm
09/02/2026	3:00 pm – 4:00 pm
09/21/2026	8:30 am – 9:30 am
10/27/2026	2:00 pm – 3:00 pm
11/05/2026	3:00 pm – 4:00 pm

2026 Planning to Retire Seminars	
DATE	TIME
01/09/2026	2:00 pm – 4:00 pm
01/16/2026	9:00 am – 11:00 am
02/10/2026	2:00 pm – 4:00 pm
03/09/2026	2:00 pm – 4:00 pm
04/01/2026	1:00 pm – 3:00 pm
04/21/2026	2:00 pm – 4:00 pm
05/06/2026	2:00 pm – 4:00 pm
06/03/2026	2:00 pm – 4:00 pm
06/18/2026	1:30 pm – 3:30 pm
07/08/2026	2:00 pm – 4:00 pm
07/28/2026	2:00 pm – 4:00 pm
08/19/2026	1:30 pm – 3:30 pm
09/11/2026	9:00 am – 11:00 am
10/06/2026	2:00 pm – 4:00 pm
11/03/2026	12:00 pm – 2:00 pm
11/12/2026	9:00 am – 11:00 am
12/01/2026	2:00 pm – 4:00 pm

A complete description of the seminars is available at [scretire.org](https://www.scretire.org). For those considering retirement, please note attending a seminar is not a requirement. To enroll in a seminar, please log into your [MySCERA](#) account and click on [Seminar Registration](#).

Sonoma County Employees' Retirement Association
433 Aviation Boulevard, Suite 100
Santa Rosa, CA 95403-1069

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The purpose of the Sonoma County Employees' Retirement Association (SCERA) is to provide and protect retirement benefits for its members and beneficiaries.

SCERA provides retirement allowances and other benefits to the safety and general members for the following participating employers:

- County of Sonoma
- Sonoma Valley Fire District
- Superior Court of California – County of Sonoma