



2023 STRATEGIC PLANNING SUMMARY

September 2023

Prepared for

THE MONTANA TEACHERS' RETIREMENT SYSTEM

Communication and Management Services, LLC
Jim Kerins, Managing Consultant

629 Helena Ave
PO Box 1251
Helena, MT 59624

Tel: (406) 442-4934
Fax: (406) 442-9573
Email: jkerins@cmsmontana.net

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Introduction

The Montana Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) Board met on August 10th, 2023, to evaluate and update the agency's strategic plan.

The Board assessed and confirmed the TRS mission, vision, and guiding principles.

The planning session included review of previous strategic planning efforts, evaluation of progress on strategic goals and objectives, and discussion of federal regulatory issues, potential actuarial changes, and state legislation. The Board carefully considered survey responses and input from members, affiliate organizations (i.e., the School Administrators of Montana, Montana Retired Educators Association, Montana Rural Education Association, Montana Federation of Public Employees, and Montana Association of School Business Officials), and TRS staff and leadership. The Board updated the agency operational and environmental assessment and established strategic goals and objectives for 2023 – 2025.

The following participants attended the 2023 strategic planning meeting:

- Kari Elliott Board Chair (active member)
- Daniel Chamberlin Vice Chair (public member)
- Dee Brown Board Member (retired member)
- Daniel Trost Board Member (public member)
- Shawn Graham Executive Director
- Tammy Rau Deputy Executive Director
- Nolan Brilz Accounting/Fiscal Manager
- Darla Fitzpatrick Communications Manager
- John Noble Information Technology Manager
- Denise Pizzini Chief Legal Counsel
- Larry Crowder Executive Director, Montana Rural Education Association
- Marilyn Hamer Executive Director, Montana Retired Educators Association
- Jim Kerins Communication & Management Services, LLC, Facilitator

Background

The TRS Board invests in an established and ongoing process of identifying goals and objectives. Strategic planning efforts and achievements include:

Timeframe	TRS Board Efforts	Achievements
2009	Initial strategic planning	Completed an operational and environmental assessment, defined the mission statement and guiding principles, and established goals and objectives.
2010 - 2013	Plan implementation	Implemented outreach program, evaluated system design alternatives to ensure long-term system stability, hired an Executive Director, and developed staffing plans.
2014	Strategic plan update	Updated the operational and environmental assessment, affirmed the mission and guiding principles, developed a vision statement, and updated goals and objectives.

Background (continued)

Timeframe	TRS Board Efforts	Achievements
2015 - 2016	Plan implementation	Implemented Governmental Accounting Standards Board requirements and a disaster recovery and business resumption plan, improved workplace efficiency, and developed information systems including M-Trust.
2017	Strategic planning	Created new overarching goals including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain an actuarially sound qualified retirement plan. • Sustain a high-performance workforce through staff and Board development, innovative leadership and management strategies, and expanded organizational capacity. • Expand system communication efforts to increase member and employer knowledge and involvement, to educate stakeholders, and to foster support.
2017 - 2019	Plan implementation	Transitioned to new facility and improved operations, workflow, services, outreach, customer service and recordkeeping.
2019	Strategic planning	Affirmed the previously established operational and environmental assessment and goals and developed 2019 - 2021 objectives.
2019 - 2021	Plan implementation	Completed Risk Report and tax qualification review, continued M-Trust enhancement, implemented online member services, sold former TRS building, implemented clarifying legislation, and expanded member outreach and education.
2021	Strategic planning	Considered progress and discussed federal regulatory issues, potential actuarial changes, and recent state legislation to develop 2021 – 2023 strategic objectives.
2021 - 2023	Plan implementation	Participated in legislative pension study, completed tax qualification review and experience study, completed online withdrawal application, initiated online member services, increased external communication, continued member surveys and promotion of online services.
2023	Strategic planning	Considered regulatory and actuarial practice changes; state legislation; legislative initiatives; stakeholder and member input; communication, outreach, and documentation needs; online member service initiatives; and other contemporary issues to develop the summary and objectives documented herein.

Please see pages 15 – 16 for a glossary of terms and a guide to acronyms relevant to the summary.

Mission, Vision, Guiding Principles

The Board affirmed the following Mission, Vision, and Guiding principles:

Mission

Our mission is to promote long-term financial security for our members while proactively maintaining the stability of the system.

Vision

The Montana Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) is the trusted partner for retirement services and security. TRS strives to earn the respect of our members, the public education community, and citizens of Montana. We accomplish this by communicating effectively to our constituents, being responsive to their needs, and employing an effective and empowered professional staff and board well-versed in state and national issues impacting our members.

Guiding Principles

To earn the respect and trust of our members, we adhere to the following values:

- High ethical standards
- Honesty, integrity, and impartiality
- Dignity, respect, and mutual support
- Service excellence

Operational and Environmental Assessment

The Board reviewed and updated the 2021 Operational and Environmental Assessment by identifying and considering internal strengths and challenges as well as external opportunities and challenges.

Internal Strengths

Qualities enabling TRS to address issues and opportunities in a determined and effective way include:

Staff

- Employees are respected, experienced, dedicated, and knowledgeable.
- Staff retention rates are good due to the work environment, workforce development, and pay rates.
- Management and staff quickly adapt to meet system needs and to improve capacity and service.
- TRS provides cross-training within departments and positions are interrelated resulting in a strong understanding of others' roles within the organization.

Culture

- The Board and staff demonstrate integrity and willingness to make tough decisions in the best interest of the system.
- Leadership is effective and values succession planning.
- Staff enjoy working with teachers and receive positive feedback.
- Board members have strong institutional knowledge.

Communication

- TRS maintains excellent internal and external communication and effectively addresses problems.
- M-Trust is improving operational efficiency and member services.
- Staff provide prompt and courteous customer service.

Internal Strengths (continued)

Training

- TRS provides effective training for employers at Montana Association of School Business Officials (MASBO) events and by request.
- High quality training is available for Board members and staff including the National Council on Teacher Retirement (NCTR), the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), Public Retirement Information System Management (PRISM), the Public Pension Financial Forum (P2F2), and the National Association of Public Pension Attorneys (NAPPA).
- Training is available for members at all stages of their career, including “TRS 101” for early- and mid-career members, and “Ready, Set, Retire!” for those approaching retirement.

Infrastructure

- TRS systems include full redundancy and backup capacity for disaster recovery using the state data center.
- Information Technology (IT) staff adhere to technology replacement and support plans.
- TRS has an effective workspace with individual offices.

Member Benefits and Plans

- Members don’t have to manage their own investments (defined benefit).
- TRS is a qualified plan that meets Internal Revenue Service (IRS) rules and is certified by the GFOA.
- Two membership tiers help ensure the retirement system remains sound.
- TRS maintains automated processes to generate introductory letters and communication at key milestones, yearly statements, newsletters, etc.

Partnerships

- TRS leverages the expertise of outside agencies, organizations, and consultants including accountants and actuaries.
- The Board and staff collaborate with other boards including the Montana Board of Investments (MBOI) and the Montana Public Employees Retirement Administration (MPERA).
- TRS receives support from the Montana Legislature.
- The Board of Investments provides investment management and over time has provided an estimated rate of return of 7.7%.
- TRS benefits from collaboration with organizations such as the Montana Association of School Business Officials (MASBO), the National Council on Teacher Retirement (NCTR), the National Institute on Retirement Security (NIRS), and the National Association of State Retirement Administrators (NASRA).

Internal Challenges

Vulnerabilities and limitations that are regarded as disadvantageous where TRS can leverage strengths to predict challenges and solve current problems include:

Staff

- Retirements and turnover could disrupt operations or impact our knowledge base.

Communication

- It is challenging to reach all constituents to ensure they are adequately educated about the system.
- Benefits and programs are undervalued by legislators, members, and taxpayers due to a lack of understanding of the economic benefits of the plan to the State.
- Communicating our mission is an ongoing challenge.
- Members may not engage and take advantage of opportunities to educate themselves about the system (e.g., information on the website or webinars).
- Active, inactive, and retired members have differing communication needs.

Training

- It is difficult to provide training for school boards about the advantages of a defined benefit pension plan. TRS maintains a dedicated school board webpage which may be underutilized.
- Members do not always understand the need for financial planning or the fact that their pension plan provides guaranteed benefits.
- There is limited discussion about Teachers' Retirement among school boards. School boards are concerned about retention and TRS is a significant retention factor.

External Opportunities

External opportunities suited to TRS strengths exist within situations or conditions that are favorable for goal attainment and advancement of the organization.

External Partnerships

- Maintain relationships with committed, valuable external partners as well as a large, engaged constituency that can be activated.
- Develop constituent group resources and connections in partnership with the Montana Federation of Public Employees (MFPE), the American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL/CIO), the Montana School Boards Association (MTSBA), School Administrators of Montana (SAM), Montana Association of School Superintendents (MASS), the Montana Retired Educators Association (MREA), and the Montana Rural Education Association (MREA).
- Encourage Superintendents to bring information from MASS meetings to their boards.
- Engage stakeholders who have the capacity to collaborate and support the system.
- Send more Board members to formal training on topics related to public pensions to support development and create consistency.

Training

- Use resources such as NASRA, NCTR, and NIRS websites, reports, documents, etc. for Board and staff training.
- Develop training for school board trustees and consider virtual delivery.

External Opportunities (continued):

Infrastructure

- Improve or expand IT systems, access to new software and hardware, and develop operational efficiencies within the M-Trust system.
- Develop data validation and audit processes.
- Increase capacity through contracting and staffing.
- Establish agreements and contracts for system support, modification, enhancement, and process/system documentation.
- Streamline workflow, redefine business processes, and redefine roles to better utilize staff time.
- Ensure strategic plans address changing demographics and funding requirements.
- Initiate an online retirement application system (business analysis).
- Increase use of My TRS including encouraging employers to distribute information to members and encouraging members to set up individual My TRS accounts (including sending a letter to new members encouraging participation).

Communication

- Communicate to employers the value of TRS in attracting and retaining quality teachers. School boards are concerned about retention and TRS is a significant retention factor.
- Encourage members to use online resources; expand website information and webinars.
- Build on the quality communication program and expand public relations (e.g., meeting with regional superintendent groups and school board members with Board members).
- Maintain a national advocacy presence with agencies including the IRS and Social Security.
- Identify and discuss competing ideas regarding retirement in the political environment and address organizations that provide inaccurate information regarding defined benefit pensions.
- Advocate for appropriate and enhanced regulatory requirements.
- Encourage the University System to adequately fund its participation in the program.
- Educate employees and members about online security threats.
- Survey members to engage individuals and elicit feedback for service improvements.
- Manage perceptions to ensure public assumptions reflect reality and encourage trained representatives to perform local outreach.
- Incentivize the teaching profession by creating a greater understanding of the value of defined benefits through career fairs and information to educational institutions.
- Electronic information addressing misconceptions (informing new teachers that the system isn't taking 8% of their wages; it is providing an opportunity to participate in a quality retirement plan).
- Make internet-based resources available to members.
- Share and illustrate the positive aspects and benefits of TRS on the state and local economy (e.g., during fiscal year 2022, TRS paid out over \$400 million in benefits, with the bulk of that amount – over \$347 million – paid to 14,212 recipients living in Montana).
- Regularly attend SAM and MASBO meetings.
- Strive for more clear and concise communication with members.
- Educate employers to mitigate individual efforts to manipulate the system for personal gain.
- Educate members about deferred compensation programs as an opportunity to enhance their financial security.

External Challenges

Disadvantageous limitations where TRS can leverage strengths to preemptively address issues:

Advocacy

- Legislation could adversely affect the system.
- Inadequate funding for teacher wages puts pressure on TRS to provide additional benefits or to use the System as a supplemental plan.
- When membership or salaries do not increase, TRS falls behind in amortizing current unfunded liabilities.
- Actual volatility may impact funding levels, unfunded liabilities, funding requirements, and investment returns.
- Perceived volatility may impact public or policymakers' perception.
- The economic climate and market volatility are outside of TRS's control.
- Shifting demographics are resulting in longevity (retirees living longer) beyond current actuarial assumptions.
- Increases in property values and cost of living make it difficult for new teachers to afford housing or to live in Montana.

Workforce

- Teachers moving out of state or working in private or online schools can reduce the workforce contributing to TRS.
- Education is being decentralized (e.g., digital academy, sanctioned education from 3rd party contractors/administrators, education cooperatives). Certain educators may not be TRS employees which could reduce member contributions.
- Charter schools may or may not be public schools and teachers may or may not be eligible to participate in TRS which could reduce TRS membership. Status may vary from entity to entity. Determinations will include whether the Charter Schools are established as Public Charter Schools. State law and IRS code will govern determinations.
- Teacher shortages will continue to increase pressure on TRS to reduce working retiree limitations.
- Factors such as retirement, illnesses and disabilities, school, and family care may lead to workforce shortages.

Operations

- Evaluate utilization of external consultants to ensure the plan complies with applicable state and federal law and administrative rules to reduce the risk of failure to comply.
- Continue to evaluate needs of staffing requirements in the TRS system to ensure we cover and have backups for key functions.
- Assess business processes to ensure continuity of operations in the face of external challenges.

Training

- Take advantage of educational opportunities to maintain adequate Board training.
- Provide staff training on policy compliance to reduce risk.

Goals and Objectives

2021 – 2023 Goals Assessment

The Board evaluated the 2021 – 2023 overarching organizational goals and determined they remain appropriate and capture current Board initiatives and direction:

1. Maintain an actuarially sound “qualified” retirement plan in compliance with the Montana State Constitution and State and Federal laws and regulations governing such plans.
2. Sustain a high-performance work culture and service excellence through staff and board development, innovative leadership and management strategies, and expansion of organizational capacity.
3. Continue and expand communication and outreach efforts to increase member and employer knowledge of and involvement with the system, to educate and inform other stakeholders about the system, and to foster support for the system.

2021 – 2023 Objectives Assessment

The Board evaluated the 2021 – 2023 Strategic Planning Commitment Worksheet and determined TRS met several key objectives including but not limited to:

- Participating in the interim study of Montana’s defined benefit public retirement systems (House and Senate joint resolution 8).
- Completing the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 tax qualification review documenting compliance of TRS law with federal tax qualification standards.
- Implementing TRS’ “housekeeping bill” (House Bill 88) providing clarification of cash paid in lieu of benefits, making other clarifications and technical corrections to existing TRS law, and implementing an IRS law affecting required minimum distributions.
- Implementing enhanced security features for My TRS users.
- Completing the online withdrawal application.
- Hiring, training, and cross-training qualified staff.
- Updating the pay plan.
- Developing processes and metrics to assess potential information technology enhancements and effectively manage enhancement projects.
- Planning the implementation of the online retirement application.
- Identifying and gaining Board approval of a responsive web design concept.
- Implementing business process and workflow improvements.
- Implementing automated status-oriented communication to members.
- Conducting member surveys and promoting the use of online services.
- Hiring an Auditor to develop internal and external audit capacity.
- Improving outreach efforts, including staff attendance at conferences, member outreach, improved M-Trust communication.

In addition to achieving the preceding strategic objectives, TRS staff responded to several regulatory issues that arose between 2021 and 2023. These efforts include:

- Implementing IRS regulatory changes including the Secure Act 2.0. Efforts related to maintaining compliance with IRS regulations are ongoing (e.g., treating spouse as a member, surviving beneficiary).
- Addressing new Actuarial Standards of Practice (ASOP) 4 Low-Default-Risk Obligation Measure (LDRM) requiring the calculation of liability at the low-risk default rate.

The Board considered the fact that the requirement to implement regulatory or actuarial changes in a short short-time frame may impact strategic objectives. The Board considered the need to respond to regulatory and actuarial changes when planning and implementing strategic objectives (i.e., organizational capacity impacts).

2023 Contemporary Issues and Surveys

The Board also evaluated the following information to develop objectives for the coming biennium:

1. Federal regulatory issues including the Secure Act 2.0, Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) changes (increased age for RMD, required programming and testing to modify letters), and other IRS regulations (e.g., treating a spouse or surviving beneficiary as a member).
2. Actuarial Standards of Practice (ASOP) 4 Low-Default-Risk Obligation Measure (LDRM) requiring the calculation of liability at the low-risk default rate.
3. Recent state legislation such as:
 - 2023 House Bill (HB) 117, introduced at the request of the TRS Board, relaxing certain restrictions on working retirees to provide additional hiring flexibility for TRS employers.
 - 2023 HB 135, the TRS "housekeeping bill," making several language clarifications and technical fixes in TRS law. It also provided a more stringent process for TRS employers to establish that an individual is an independent contractor (effective July 1, 2024).
 - 2023 Senate Bill (SB) 18 inserting a benefit policy statement to each pension system requiring that any future benefit addition must be fully funded. TRS supported this policy change as it mirrored the TRS Board's own Funding and Benefits Policy.
 - 2023 Senate Joint Resolution (SJ) 4 requesting another interim study of TRS and PERS Defined Benefit plans to develop recommendations for a long-term, strategic approach to funding. TRS supported this joint resolution to increase lawmakers' understanding of defined benefit pensions and the consequences of legislative funding decisions.
 - Recent changes to layered amortization on safety systems (this may be considered part of SJ4).
 - Required revisions to the public information process and policy to reflect substantial changes in the law (e.g., public right to know statutes).

4. Survey input from the following stakeholders and partners:
- School Administrators of Montana Dr. Rob Watson
 - Montana Retired Educators Association Marilyn Hamer
 - Montana Rural Education Association Larry Crowder
 - Montana Rural Education Association Dennis Parman
 - Montana Assoc. of School Business Officials Shelley Turner
 - Montana Federation of Public Employees Amanda Curtis
 - Teachers' Retirement System Board
 - Teachers' Retirement System Staff

A sample of survey findings considered by the Board include:

“Keeping a [Defined Benefit (DB)] plan is so important in a state like ours with some of the lowest salaries in the country!” – Active Member Survey Response

“A DB plan is a huge retention incentive and if you get rid of it, we will lose good teachers – even more than we already are.” – Active Member Survey Response

“The TRS benefits are outstanding for those who commit to stay in the system. I believe as graduates come out of college and take that first teaching job, retirement is not really on their mind. School districts and TRS could do a better job of explaining the advantages of a defined retirement benefit. A guaranteed retirement benefit is not common in today's world, and it should really be something to be proud of, which makes it a huge potential advantage or strength for TRS.” – Affiliate Survey Response

“[We can better serve our customers through] more community outreach for teachers relating to the importance of retirement planning....” -Board Survey Response

“I think we do a wonderful job serving our customers. I know they would appreciate more online avenues to complete forms. I know we have projects in place for that to come.” – Staff Survey Response

“M-Trust is a great pension administration system. TRS has quality leadership and staff with good industry knowledge.” – Staff Survey Response

Organizational Goals and Objectives

The TRS Board established or updated the following objectives and goals based on the operational and environmental assessment, evaluation of organizational accomplishments, and consideration of contemporary issues and surveys:

Goal 1: Maintain an actuarially sound “qualified” retirement plan in compliance with the Montana State Constitution and State and Federal laws and regulations governing such plans.

Objectives:

- Conduct periodic tax qualification reviews and maintain qualified plan status by ensuring the plan complies with the Federal Internal Revenue Code, state and federal law, and the Montana State Constitution.
- Proactively address legislative initiatives through risk analysis, active participation in legislative studies and dissemination of accurate system information.
- Eliminate the unfunded actuarial accrued liability and establish a stabilization reserve.
- Provide a comprehensive annual financial report prepared in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) and applicable Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) standards.
- Conduct an experience study for the five-year period ending July 1, 2026.

Goal 2: Sustain a high-performance work culture and service excellence through staff and board development, innovative leadership and management strategies, and expansion of organizational capacity.

Objectives:

- Promote a work environment in which staff adheres to TRS principles: high ethical standards; honesty, integrity and impartiality; dignity, respect and mutual support.
- Continue to develop and expand board and staff training and education to maintain knowledgeable and proactive leadership and expertise and identify ideas and opportunities to improve the system.
- Identify, catalog, and prioritize potential information technology (IT) enhancements including a responsive web design.
- Continue business process and workflow improvements and develop procedural documentation for each team.
- Maintain formal strategic planning efforts to identify, prioritize and achieve goals and objectives that are in the best interest of the system.
- Maintain best practices in system security.
- Implement succession planning to include internal development and experiential learning opportunities for staff.
- Maintain TRS’s market and competency/performance-based pay systems to help attract, retain, and motivate competent employees who support the organization’s guiding principles.
- Meet or exceed industry best practice standards (e.g., Government Finance Officers Association Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting Program).

Organizational Goals and Objectives (continued)

Goal 3: Continue and expand communication and outreach efforts to increase member and employer knowledge of and involvement with the system, to educate and inform other stakeholders about the system, and to foster support for the system.

Objectives:

- Facilitate Executive Director and Board member attendance at school superintendent meetings and staff attendance at conferences and outreach opportunities.
- Continue external communication including promoting communication with members and employers about system functions, improvements, processes, and transactions.
- Continue with Member Surveys to inform our strategic direction, increase retirement awareness, promote engagement, and inform policymakers.
- Promote the system as a benefit to help school districts attract and retain teachers.
- Hire additional staff (one full-time equivalent) and contractors to support communication initiatives including outreach and procedural documentation.
- Research available options for TRS to support or promote a deferred compensation system for teachers.
- Provide membership with retirement seminars, periodic newsletters and memos containing pertinent information in a timely manner.
- Utilize technology to enhance communication with members and other constituents.
- Maintain communication with national organizations to stay abreast of recent and on-going pension related issues and disseminate this information to policymakers and stakeholders.
- Research retirement options and be prepared to inform policymakers on how options will impact the system and members.

Plan Implementation

The Board concluded the 2023 strategic planning session by providing guidance to staff related to the implementation of the defined goals and objectives.

Implementation steps for the upcoming biennium include:

1. Develop a written work plan to implement Board-approved goals and objectives and document the plan in a Strategic Planning Commitment Worksheet (attached).
2. Establish specific action strategies to accomplish the objectives documented in the workplan and include these actions in staff performance objectives as appropriate.
3. Provide regular updates to the Board on progress toward goals and objectives.
4. Evaluate the plan and commitment worksheet regularly and update or modify the documents as needed.

Glossary

Following is a glossary of partner organizations and terms (including acronyms) relevant to TRS and the planning summary.

American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL/CIO) – a democratically governed federation of unions, each with its own distinct membership and unique voice.

Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) – an independent nonprofit organization responsible for establishing accounting and financial reporting standards.

Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) – a common set of accounting principles, standards, and procedures issued by the FASB.

Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) – the source of generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) used by state and local governments in the United States.

Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) – an association of public finance officials aligned to advance excellence in public finance. Members are federal, state/provincial, and local finance officials who are deeply involved in planning, financing, and implementing governmental operations.

Montana Association of School Business Officials (MASBO) – a non-profit dedicated to training and supporting the people responsible for business operations in Montana schools.

Montana Board of Investments (MBOI) – an agency of state government that provides prudent investment management of state and local government funds.

Montana Federation of Public Employees (MFPE) – a union of professionals that promotes the welfare of its members by representing them to all terms and conditions of employment.

Montana Public Employees Retirement Administration (MPERA) – an agency of state government that administers eight different retirement systems including the Public Employees, Judges, Highway Patrol Officers, Sheriffs, Game Wardens and Peace Officers, Municipal Police Officers, Firefighters, and Volunteer Firefighters' Compensation Act systems as well as the State's Deferred Compensation Plan.

Montana Rural Education Association (MREA) – an organization which is concerned about all aspects of the K-12 public education system in rural Montana.

Montana School Boards Association (MTSBA) – a private non-profit membership organization with the Core Purpose of maximizing the potential of each child in Montana's public schools through school board leadership.

My TRS – member portal to TRS online services.

Glossary (continued)

National Association of Public Pension Attorneys (NAPPA) – a professional legal, educational and information resource organization that consists exclusively of attorneys who represent public pension funds.

National Association of State Retirement Administrators (NASRA) - serves the members in managing sustainable public employee retirement systems through research, education, and collaboration.

National Council on Teacher Retirement (NCTR) – dedicated to safeguarding the integrity of public retirement systems in the United States and its territories to which teachers belong and to promoting the rights and benefits of all present and future members of the systems.

Public Pension Financial Forum (P2F2) – serves its membership through education, pension advocacy, and networking by promoting financial excellence for public pension plans.

Public Retirement Information System Management (PRISM) – provides a forum for Information Technology (IT) managers of public pension funds where they could share information, as well as their experiences, as they strive to provide “state-of-the-art” technology and systems support to the retirement funds they serve.

School Administrators of Montana (SAM) – a member-led, model education organization dedicated to developing instructional leaders advocating for student success.

TRS 2023 – 2025 Strategic Planning Commitment Worksheet

Goal/Objective	Outcome/Measure	Priority/ Timeline	Responsible party	Resources Required
<p><i>Maintain an actuarially sound qualified retirement plan.</i> Conduct periodic tax qualification reviews (every 5 years) to support our goal of maintaining an actuarially sound “qualified” retirement plan using the established process and experts. Discontinue if IRS resumes doing qualification letters.</p>	Documented compliance of plan terms with the Montana State Constitution and State and Federal laws and regulations.	Every 5 years. FY2021 complete. Next review FY2026)	Executive Director Chief Legal Counsel	Tax counsel fees.
<p><i>Maintain an actuarially sound qualified retirement plan.</i> Actively participate in the interim study (Senate Joint Resolution - SJ 4). Be responsive to Pension Study requests. Address any issues resulting from the Pension Study Group.</p>	Well-informed policy makers.	FY2024 & FY2025	Executive Director Chief Legal Counsel Board	Staff time, actuarial service fees.
<p><i>Maintain an actuarially sound qualified retirement plan.</i> Conduct an experience study for the five-year period ending July 1, 2026.</p>	Updated actuarial assumptions.	Next study starts July 1, 2025 with completion in May of 2026	Executive Director Board	Contracted actuarial service fees.
<p><i>High-performance work culture and service excellence</i> Identify, catalog, and prioritize potential information technology (IT) enhancements including periodic IT enhancement budget and planning Board sessions. The Board will provide guidance on the level of investment in the system. Establish metrics for certain enhancements where appropriate to illustrate the return on investment. <i>Maintain data for cost/benefit analyses of system enhancements and development options (e.g., utilization of online withdrawals, costs of self-provided, contracted, or Information Technology Services Division, services etc.) as needed.</i></p>	Automation and improved processes. Specific budgets and defined level of investment in IT systems. 2024 – 2025 efforts relate to member convenience and operational efficiency.	Ongoing	Board, M-Trust Steering Team	Staff time, contractor fees.
<p><i>High-performance work culture and service excellence</i> Implement online retirement application (ORA) functionality.</p>	Member ability to apply for retirement online.	FY2024 planning 2025 – 2026 implementation	M-Trust Steering Team	Staff time, contractor fees.
<p><i>High-performance work culture and service excellence</i> Implement a responsive web design (i.e., when the user accesses the website, it determines and renders itself based on the device type). Redesign is necessary to remain current with contemporary web expectations and support member convenience.</p>	Mobilize resources to implement a modern website. Position TRS to implement online retirement application (ORA).	FY2024 – FY2025 (template approved prototype to come).	Information Systems Manager and Communications Manager	Staff time, contracted services (vendor or ITSD) Budget adjustment

TRS 2023 – 2025 Strategic Planning Commitment Worksheet (continued)

Goal/Objective	Outcome/Measure	Priority/ Timeline	Responsible party	Resources Required
<i>High-performance work culture and service excellence.</i> Continue business process and workflow improvements while building online processes to achieve a paperless process with a priority on major business processes.	Automation and improved processes.	Ongoing	M-Trust Steering Team	Staff time, contractor fees.
<i>High-performance work culture and service excellence.</i> Develop procedural documentation for each team (e.g., desk manuals). Documentation will ensure business continuity and support knowledge transfer/succession planning.	Improved internal documentation and business processes.	Ongoing	Management Team (and staff)	Staff time.
<i>High-performance work culture and service excellence.</i> Continue with a formal strategic planning every 2 years.	Comprehensive and timely strategic goals.	Review 2024 Formal Planning August 2025	Management Team Board	Staff/Board time, contractor fees.
<i>High-performance work culture and service excellence.</i> <i>Maintain best practices in system security and proactively assess options.</i> <i>Pursue identity verification and e-signature options to improve member convenience while ensuring continued transaction security.</i> This will affect any online form we use (e.g., OWA).	Improved functionality and member convenience with continued system security.	Would like to implement with OWA and will be part of ORA. Determine system and develop plan in FY24	Information Systems Manager and Communication s Manager	Staff time, vendor fees, contractor fees.
<i>High-performance work culture and service excellence.</i> Succession planning – a number of key staff are retirement eligible, and we have limited options for succession planning. Consider internal development, provide experiential opportunities for staff where applicable.	Improved process documentation; knowledge transfer; cross-training.	Ongoing	Executive Director/Deputy Executive Director	Staff Time
<i>High-performance work culture and service excellence.</i> Maintain TRS Pay Plan to keep it current with contemporary practices and markets.	Contemporary pay plan.	ongoing.	Executive Director, Deputy Executive Director	Staff time.

TRS 2023 – 2025 Strategic Planning Commitment Worksheet (continued)

Goal/Objective	Outcome/Measure	Priority/ Timeline	Responsible party	Resources Required
<i>Communication and outreach (public relations).</i> Coordinate Executive Director and Board member (contingent on location and availability) attendance at School Superintendent meetings in non-legislative years.	Increased communication to Superintendents.	Spring of 2024 (ongoing)	Executive Director and Board	Executive Director and Board time and travel.
<i>Communication and outreach (public relations).</i> Continue external communications including staff attendance at the annual educator conference, legislator education and outreach, collaboration with MFPE as appropriate, and attendance at MASBO and SAM conferences.	Continued staff attendance at strategic events. (webinars are better attended than in-person).	Ongoing	Management Team & Active Team	Staff time and travel expense.
<i>Communication and outreach (member and employer communication).</i> Continue to promote communication with members and employers about system functions, improvements, processes, and transactions including using timeline and status-oriented system communications (e.g., anniversary, RMD and GABA letters).	Strategic promotion of online services.	Ongoing	Management Team Communications Manager	Staff time, mailing, etc.
<i>Communication and outreach (member communication).</i> Continue with Member Surveys to inform our strategic direction, increase retirement awareness, and promote engagement. Distribute member survey results to legislators and other interested parties (including emphasizing the powerful graphs and comments).	An informed and engaged constituency. Valuable data for interim study	2023 full results in October 2023, next survey 2025.	Communications Manager	Staff time.
<i>Communication and outreach (member communication).</i> <i>Promote the system as a benefit to help school districts attract and retain teachers.</i>	Promotional materials and information illustrating the benefits of TRS for use by employers.	Ongoing	Communications Manager	Staff time.
<i>Communication and Outreach</i> <i>Hire an additional 1 FTE Communication Professional to support outreach. Retain contracted services to develop procedural manuals.</i>	Acquire qualified staff and contractors to address communication opportunities.	Fall 2023/Spring 2024	Executive Director and Communications Manager	Staff time. FTE funding. Contracted services budget.
<i>Communication and Outreach</i> Research available options for TRS to support or promote a deferred compensation system for teachers.	Provide information and options to Superintendents at MASS Meetings.	Spring 2024	Executive Director/Chief Legal Counsel	Staff time.