

Reg. Section 1.401(a)(9)-5, Q&A 4(a)

Required minimum distributions from defined contribution plans

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Q-. 4. . For required minimum distributions during an employee's lifetime, what is the applicable distribution period?

A-4. (a) General rule. Except as provided in paragraph (b) of this A-4, the applicable distribution period for required minimum distributions for distribution calendar years up to and including the distribution calendar year that includes the employee's date of death is determined using the Uniform Lifetime Table in A-2 of §1.401(a)(9)-9 for the employee's age as of the employee's birthday in the relevant distribution calendar year. If an employee dies on or after the required beginning date, the distribution period applicable for calculating the amount that must be distributed during the distribution calendar year that includes the employee's death is determined as if the employee had lived throughout that year. Thus, a minimum required distribution, determined as if the employee had lived throughout that year, is required for the year of the employee's death and that amount must be distributed to a beneficiary to the extent it has not already been distributed to the employee.

(b) Spouse is sole beneficiary.(1) General rule. Except as otherwise provided in paragraph (b)(2) of this A-4, if the sole designated beneficiary of an employee is the employee's surviving spouse, for required minimum distributions during the employee's lifetime, the applicable distribution period is the longer of the distribution period determined in accordance with paragraph (a) of this A-4 or the joint life expectancy of the employee and spouse using the employee's and spouse's attained ages as of the employee's and the spouse's birthdays in the distribution calendar year. The spouse is sole designated beneficiary for purposes of determining the applicable distribution period for a distribution calendar year during the employee's lifetime only if the spouse is the sole beneficiary of the employee's entire interest at all times during the distribution calendar year.

(2) Change in marital status. If the employee and the employee's spouse are married on January 1 of a distribution calendar year, but do not remain married throughout that year (i.e., the employee or the employee's spouse die or they become divorced during that year), the employee will not fail to have a spouse as the employee's sole beneficiary for that year merely because they are not married throughout that year. If an employee's spouse predeceases the employee, the spouse will not fail to be the employee's sole beneficiary for the distribution calendar year that includes the date of the spouse's death solely because, for the period remaining in that year after the spouse's death, someone other than the spouse is named as beneficiary. However, the change in beneficiary due to the death or divorce of the spouse will be effective for purposes of determining the applicable distribution period under section 401(a)(9) in the distribution calendar year following the distribution calendar year that includes the date of the spouse's death or divorce.

Q-. 5. . For required minimum distributions after an employee's death, what is the applicable distribution period?

A-5. (a) Death on or after the employee's required beginning date. If an employee dies after distribution has begun as determined under A-6 of §1.401(a)(9)-2 (generally on or after the employee's required beginning date), in order to satisfy section 401(a)(9)(B)(i), the applicable distribution period for distribution calendar years after the distribution calendar year containing the employee's date of death is either-

(1) If the employee has a designated beneficiary as of the date determined under A-4 of §1.401(a)(9)-4, the longer of-

(i) The remaining life expectancy of the employee's designated beneficiary determined in accordance with paragraph (c)(1) or (2) of this A-5; and

(ii) The remaining life expectancy of the employee determined in accordance with paragraph (c)(3) of this A-5; or

(2) If the employee does not have a designated beneficiary as of the date determined under A-4 of §1.401(a)(9)-4, the remaining life expectancy of the employee determined in accordance with paragraph (c)(3) of this A-5.

(b) Death before an employee's required beginning date. If an employee dies before distribution has begun, as determined under A-5 of §1.401(a)(9)-2 (generally before the employee's required beginning date), in order to satisfy section 401(a)(9)(B)(iii) or (iv) and the life expectancy rule described in A-1 of §1.401(a)(9)-3, the applicable distribution period for distribution calendar years after the distribution calendar year containing the employee's date of death is determined in accordance with paragraph (c) of this A-5. See A-4 of §1.401(a)(9)-3 to determine when the 5-year rule of in section 401(a)(9)(B)(ii) applies (e.g., there is no designated beneficiary or the 5-year rule is elected or specified by plan provision).

(c) Life expectancy.(1) Nonspouse designated beneficiary. Except as otherwise provided in paragraph (c)(2), the applicable distribution period measured by the beneficiary's remaining life expectancy is determined using the beneficiary's age as of the beneficiary's birthday in the calendar year immediately following the calendar year of the employee's death. In subsequent calendar years, the applicable distribution period is reduced by one for each calendar year that has elapsed after the calendar year immediately following the calendar year of the employee's death.

(2) Spouse designated beneficiary. If the surviving spouse of the employee is the employee's sole beneficiary, the applicable distribution period is measured by the surviving spouse's life expectancy using the surviving spouse's birthday for each distribution calendar year after the calendar year of the employee's death up through the calendar year of the spouse's death. For calendar years after the calendar year of the spouse's death, the applicable distribution period is the life expectancy of the spouse using the age of the spouse as of the spouse's birthday in the calendar year of the spouse's death, reduced by one for each calendar year that has elapsed after the calendar year of the spouse's death.

(3) No designated beneficiary. If the employee does not have a designated beneficiary, the applicable distribution period measured by the employee's remaining life expectancy is the life expectancy of the employee using the age of the employee as of the employee's birthday in the calendar year of the employee's death. In subsequent calendar years the applicable distribution period is reduced by one for each calendar year that has elapsed after the calendar year of the employee's death.

Q- 6. . What life expectancies must be used for purposes of determining required minimum distributions under section 401(a)(9)?

A-6. Life expectancies for purposes of determining required minimum distributions under section 401(a)(9) must be computed using the Single Life Table in A-1 of §1.401(a)(9)-9 and the Joint and Last Survivor Table in A-3 of §1.401(a)(9)-9.

Q- 7. . If an employee has more than one designated beneficiary, which designated beneficiary's life expectancy will be used to determine the applicable distribution period?

A-7. (a) General rule. (1) Except as otherwise provided in paragraph (c) of this A-7, if more than one individual is designated as a beneficiary with respect to an employee as of the applicable date for determining the designated beneficiary under A-4 of §1.401(a)(9)-4, the designated beneficiary with the shortest life expectancy will be the designated beneficiary for purposes of determining the applicable distribution period.

(2) See A-3 of §1.401(a)(9)-4 for rules that apply if a person other than an individual is designated as a beneficiary and see A-2 and A-3 of §1.401(a)(9)-8 for special rules that apply if an employee's benefit under a plan is divided into separate accounts and the beneficiaries with respect to a separate account differ from the beneficiaries of another separate account.

(b) Contingent beneficiary. Except as provided in paragraph (c)(1) of this A-7, if a beneficiary's entitlement to an employee's benefit after the employee's death is a contingent right, such contingent beneficiary is nevertheless considered to be a beneficiary for purposes of determining whether a person other than an individual is designated as a beneficiary (resulting in the employee being treated as having no designated beneficiary under the rules of A-3 of §1.401(a)(9)-4) and which designated beneficiary has the shortest life expectancy under paragraph (a) of this A-7.

(c) Successor beneficiary. (1) A person will not be considered a beneficiary for purposes of determining who is the beneficiary with the shortest life expectancy under paragraph (a) of this A-7, or whether a person who is not an individual is a beneficiary, merely because the person could become the successor to the interest of one of the employee's beneficiaries after that beneficiary's death. However, the preceding sentence does not apply to a person who has any right (including a contingent right) to an employee's benefit beyond being a mere potential successor to the interest of one of the employee's beneficiaries upon that beneficiary's death. Thus, for example, if the first beneficiary has a right to all income with respect to an employee's individual account during that beneficiary's life and a second beneficiary has a right to the principal but only after the death of the first income beneficiary (any portion of the principal distributed during the life of the first income beneficiary to be held in trust until that first beneficiary's death), both beneficiaries must be taken into account in determining the beneficiary with the shortest life expectancy and whether only individuals are beneficiaries.

(2) If the individual beneficiary whose life expectancy is being used to calculate the distribution period dies after September 30 of the calendar year following the calendar year of the employee's death, such beneficiary's remaining life expectancy will be used to determine the distribution period without regard to the life expectancy of the subsequent beneficiary.

(3) This paragraph (c) is illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Employer M maintains a defined contribution plan, Plan X. Employee A, an employee of M, died in 2005 at the age of 55, survived by spouse, B, who was 50 years old. Prior to A's death, M had established an account balance for A in Plan X. A's account balance is invested only in productive assets. A named a testamentary trust (Trust P) established under A's

will as the beneficiary of all amounts payable from A's account in Plan X after A's death. A copy of the Trust P and a list of the trust beneficiaries were provided to the plan administrator of Plan X by October 31 of the calendar year following the calendar year of A's death. As of the date of A's death, the Trust P was irrevocable and was a valid trust under the laws of the state of A's domicile. A's account balance in Plan X was includible in A's gross estate under §2039.

(ii) Under the terms of Trust P, all trust income is payable annually to B, and no one has the power to appoint Trust P principal to any person other than B. A's children, who are all younger than B, are the sole remainder beneficiaries of the Trust P. No other person has a beneficial interest in Trust P. Under the terms of the Trust P, B has the power, exercisable annually, to compel the trustee to withdraw from A's account balance in Plan X an amount equal to the income earned on the assets held in A's account in Plan X during the calendar year and to distribute that amount through Trust P to B. Plan X contains no prohibition on withdrawal from A's account of amounts in excess of the annual required minimum distributions under section 401(a)(9). In accordance with the terms of Plan X, the trustee of Trust P elects, in order to satisfy section 401(a)(9), to receive annual required minimum distributions using the life expectancy rule in section 401(a)(9)(B)(iii) for distributions over a distribution period equal to B's life expectancy. If B exercises the withdrawal power, the trustee must withdraw from A's account under Plan X the greater of the amount of income earned in the account during the calendar year or the required minimum distribution. However, under the terms of Trust P, and applicable state law, only the portion of the Plan X distribution received by the trustee equal to the income earned by A's account in Plan X is required to be distributed to B (along with any other trust income.)

(iii) Because some amounts distributed from A's account in Plan X to Trust P may be accumulated in Trust P during B's lifetime for the benefit of A's children, as remaindermen beneficiaries of Trust P, even though access to those amounts are delayed until after B's death, A's children are beneficiaries of A's account in Plan X in addition to B and B is not the sole designated beneficiary of A's account. Thus the designated beneficiary used to determine the distribution period from A's account in Plan X is the beneficiary with the shortest life expectancy. B's life expectancy is the shortest of all the potential beneficiaries of the testamentary trust's interest in A's account in Plan X (including remainder beneficiaries). Thus, the distribution period for purposes of section 401(a)(9)(B)(iii) is B's life expectancy. Because B is not the sole designated beneficiary of the testamentary trust's interest in A's account in Plan X, the special rule in 401(a)(9)(B)(iv) is not available and the annual required minimum distributions from the account to Trust M must begin no later than the end of the calendar year immediately following the calendar year of A's death.

Example 2. (i) The facts are the same as Example 1 except that the testamentary trust instrument provides that all amounts distributed from A's account in Plan X to the trustee while B is alive will be paid directly to B upon receipt by the trustee of Trust P.

(ii) In this case, B is the sole designated beneficiary of A's account in Plan X for purposes of determining the designated beneficiary under section 401(a)(9)(B)(iii) and (iv). No amounts distributed from A's account in Plan X to Trust P are accumulated in Trust P during B's lifetime for the benefit of any other beneficiary. Therefore, the residuary beneficiaries of Trust P are mere potential successors to B's interest in Plan X. Because B is the sole beneficiary of the testamentary trust's interest in A's account in Plan X, the annual required minimum distributions from A's account to Trust P must begin no later than the end of the calendar year in which A would have attained age 70½, rather than the calendar year immediately following the calendar year of A's death.

