

Example 1. Employer X maintains a section 401(l) plan, Plan A, that uses maximum permitted disparity. Plan A is amended to increase the benefits of all former employees in pay status. The percentage increase for each former employee is reasonably comparable to the adjustment in social security benefits under section 215(i)(2)(A) of the Social Security Act since the former employee commenced receipt of benefits. Plan A does not fail to satisfy this paragraph (b) merely because of the amendment.

Example 2. The facts are the same as in *Example 1*, except that the amendment provides an across-the-board 20 percent increase in benefits for all former employees in pay status. The cost of living has increased at an average rate of three percent in the two years preceding the amendment, and some HCEs have retired and become former HCEs during that period. Because this amendment increases the disparity in the plan formula beyond the maximum permitted disparity adjusted for any reasonable approximation of the increase in the cost of living since the HCEs retired, Plan A discriminates significantly in favor of former HCEs, and thus does not satisfy this paragraph (b).

Example 3. The facts are the same as in *Example 1*, except that Plan A is only amended to increase the benefits of former employees in pay status who terminated employment with Employer X after attaining early retirement age. The determination of whether the amendment causes Plan A to fail to satisfy this paragraph (b) must take into account the relative numbers of former HCEs and former NHCEs who have terminated employment with Employer X after attaining early retirement age.

(c) *Nondiscrimination in availability of benefits, rights, or features.* A plan satisfies section 401(a)(4) with respect to the availability of benefits, rights, and features provided to former employees if any change in the availability of any benefit, right, or feature to any former employee is applied in a manner that, under all of the relevant facts and circumstances, does not discriminate significantly in favor of former HCEs. For purposes of demonstrating that a plan satisfies section 401(a)(4) with respect to the availability of loans provided to former employees, an employer may treat former employees who are parties in interest within the meaning of section 3(14) of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 as employees.

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§ 1.401(a)(4)-11 Additional rules.

(a) *Introduction.* This section provides additional rules for determining whether a plan satisfies section 401(a)(4). Paragraph (b) of this section provides rules for the treatment of the portion of an employee's accrued benefit or account balance that is attributable to rollovers, transfers between plans, and employee buybacks. Paragraph (c) of this section provides rules regarding vesting. Paragraph (d) of this section provides rules regarding service crediting. Paragraph (e) of this section, regarding family aggregation, and paragraph (f) of this section, regarding governmental plans, are reserved. Paragraph (g) of this section provides rules regarding the extent to which corrective amendments may be made for purposes of section 401(a).

(b) *Rollovers, transfers, and buybacks—*
(1) *Rollovers and elective transfers.* The portion of an employee's accrued benefit or account balance under a plan that is attributable to rollover (including direct rollover) contributions to the plan that are described in section 402(c), 402(e)(6), 403(a)(4), 403(a)(5), or 408(d)(3), or elective transfers to the plan that are described in §1.411(d)-4, Q&A-3(b), is not taken into account in determining whether the plan satisfies the nondiscriminatory amount requirement of §1.401(a)(4)-1(b)(2).

(2) *Other transfers.* [Reserved]

(3) *Employee buybacks—*(i) *Rehired employee buyback of previous service.* An employee's repayment to a plan of a prior distribution from the plan (including reasonable interest from the time of the distribution) that results in the restoration of the employee's accrued benefit under the plan (or the service associated with that accrued benefit) that would otherwise be disregarded in determining the employee's accrued benefit in accordance with section 411 on account of the distribution is not treated as an employee contribution for purposes of §§1.401(a)(4)-1 through 1.401(a)(4)-13.

(ii) *Make-up of missed employee contributions.* If a contributory DB plan gives all employees who did not make employee contributions for a prior period the right to make the missed contributions at a later date (including reasonable interest from the time of

the missed contributions) and, once the contributions have been made, determines benefits under the plan by treating the employee contributions (excluding the interest) as if they were actually made during that prior period, then those contributions must satisfy § 1.401(a)(4)-6(c) as if they were employee contributions actually made during that prior period. Thus, for example, § 1.401(a)(4)-6(c)(2) is not satisfied for the current plan year if the employee contribution rate (within the meaning of § 1.401(a)(4)-6(b)(2)(ii)(A) but determined without regard to the interest) for the employees making up missed contributions is different than the employee contribution rate applicable to other employees during the prior period. The rule in this paragraph (b)(3)(ii) may be extended to employees who did not make employee contributions for a period of service that is or would otherwise have been credited under the plan and that preceded their participation in the plan.

(c) *Vesting*—(1) *General rule.* A plan satisfies this paragraph (c) if the manner in which employees vest in their accrued benefits under the plan does not discriminate in favor of HCEs. Whether the manner in which employees vest in their accrued benefits under a plan discriminates in favor of HCEs is determined under this paragraph (c) based on all of the relevant facts and circumstances, taking into account any relevant provisions of sections 401(a)(5)(E), 411(a)(10), 411(d)(1), 411(d)(2), 411(d)(3), 411(e), and 420(c)(2), and taking into account any plan provisions that affect the nonforfeitability of employees' accrued benefits (e.g., plan provisions regarding suspension of benefits permitted under section 411(a)(3)(B)), other than the method of crediting years of service for purposes of applying the vesting schedule provided in the plan.

(2) *Deemed equivalence of statutory vesting schedules.* For purposes of this paragraph (c), the manner in which employees vest in their accrued benefits under the vesting schedules in section 411(a)(2) (A) and (B) are treated as equivalent to one another, and the manner in which employees vest in their accrued benefits under the vesting schedules in section 416(b)(1) (A)

and (B) are treated as equivalent to one another.

(3) *Safe harbor for vesting schedules.* The manner in which employees vest in their accrued benefits under a plan is deemed not to discriminate in favor of HCEs if each combination of plan provisions that affect the nonforfeitability of any employee's accrued benefit would satisfy the nondiscriminatory availability requirements of § 1.401(a)(4)-4 if that combination were an other right or feature.

(4) *Examples.* The following examples illustrate the rules in this paragraph (c):

Example 1. Plan A provides the six-year graded vesting schedule described in section 416(b)(1)(B). In 1996, Plan A is amended to provide the five-year vesting schedule described in section 411(a)(2)(A). To comply with section 411(a)(10)(B), the plan amendment also provides that all employees with at least three years of service may elect to retain the prior vesting schedule. The manner in which employees vest in their accrued benefits under Plan A does not discriminate in favor of HCEs merely because the prior vesting schedule continues to apply to the accrued benefits of electing employees, even if, at the time of the election or in future years, the prior vesting schedule applies only to a group of employees that does not satisfy section 410(b).

Example 2. The facts are the same as in *Example 1*, except that, for administrative convenience in complying with section 411(a)(10)(B), the plan amendment automatically provides all employees employed on the date of the amendment with the higher of the nonforfeitable percentages determined under either schedule. The manner in which employees vest in their accrued benefits under Plan A does not discriminate in favor of HCEs merely because, for administrative convenience in complying with section 411(a)(10), the amendment exceeds the requirements of section 411(a)(10). The result would be the same if the plan amendment automatically provided the higher of the nonforfeitable percentages only to those employees with at least three years of service.

Example 3. (a) Employer Y maintains Plan B covering all of its employees. On January 1, 1996, Employer Y sells Division M to Employer Z, and all of the employees in Division M become employees of Employer Z. Employer Y obtains a determination letter that the resulting cessation of participation by these employees in Plan B constitutes a partial termination. Therefore, in order to satisfy section 411(d)(3), Plan B fully vests the accrued benefit of each of the employees of Division M whose participation in Plan B

ceased as a result of the sale on January 1, 1996.

(b) The manner in which employees vest in their accrued benefits under Plan B does not discriminate in favor of HCEs merely because, in order to satisfy section 411(d)(3), the accrued benefits of all employees affected by the partial termination become fully vested. This is true even if the affected group of employees does not satisfy section 410(b).

Example 4. (a) The facts are the same as in *Example 3*, except that Employer Y does not obtain a determination letter that the sale of Division M to Employer Z will cause a partial termination. Instead, based on its reasonable belief that the sale will cause a partial termination, and in order to ensure that Plan B will satisfy section 411(d)(3), Employer Y amends Plan B to vest fully the accrued benefit on January 1, 1996 of each of the employees it reasonably believes to be an affected employee.

(b) The manner in which employees vest in their accrued benefits under Plan B does not discriminate in favor of HCEs merely because, based on Employer Y's reasonable belief that the sale will cause a partial termination, Plan B is amended to vest fully the accrued benefits of each of the employees it reasonably believes to be an affected employee.

(d) *Service-crediting rules*—(1) *Overview*—(i) *In general.* A defined benefit plan or a defined contribution plan does not satisfy this paragraph (d) with respect to the manner in which service is credited under the plan unless the plan satisfies paragraph (d)(2) of this section. Paragraph (d)(3) of this section provides rules for determining whether service other than actual service with the employer may be taken into account in determining whether a defined benefit plan or a defined contribution plan satisfies §1.401(a)(4)-1 (b)(2) or (b)(3). (However, for purposes of cross-testing a defined contribution plan, only years in which the employee benefited under the plan may be taken into account in determining equivalent accrual rates. See §1.401(a)(4)-8(b)(2)(i).) The rules of this paragraph (d) apply separately to service credited under a plan for each different purpose under the plan, including, but not limited to: application of the benefit formula (benefit service), application of the accrual method (accrual service), application of the vesting schedule (vesting service), entitlement to benefits, rights, and features (entitlement service), ap-

plication of the requirements for eligibility to participate in the plan (eligibility service).

(ii) *Special rule for pre-effective date service.* A plan is deemed to satisfy this paragraph (d) with respect to service credited for periods prior to the effective date applicable to the plan under §1.401(a)(4)-13 (a) or (b) under a plan provision adopted and in effect as of February 11, 1993 (and any such service may be taken into account for purposes of satisfying §1.401(a)(4)-1 (b)(2) or (b)(3)), if the plan satisfied the applicable nondiscrimination requirements with respect to the service that were in effect for all relevant periods prior to the applicable effective date.

(2) *Manner of crediting service*—(i) *General rule.* A plan satisfies this paragraph (d)(2) if, on the basis of all of the relevant facts and circumstances, the manner in which employees' service is credited for all purposes under the plan does not discriminate in favor of HCEs.

(ii) *Equivalent service-crediting methods.* For purposes of this paragraph (d)(2), a service-crediting method used for a specified purpose that is based on hours of service, as provided in 29 CFR 2530.200b-2, and a service-crediting method used for the same purpose that is based on one of the equivalencies set forth in 29 CFR 2530.200b-3, are treated as equivalent if the service-crediting methods are otherwise the same.

(iii) *Safe harbor for service-crediting.* The manner in which service is credited under a plan for a specified purpose is deemed to satisfy this paragraph (d)(2) if each combination of service-crediting provisions applied for that purpose would satisfy the non-discriminatory availability requirements of §1.401(a)(4)-4 if that combination were an other right or feature.

(iv) *Examples.* The following examples illustrate the rules in this paragraph (d)(2):

Example 1. (a) Plan A covers both salaried employees and hourly employees. All of the HCEs in Plan A are salaried employees. For administrative convenience, salaried employees in Plan A (none of whom are part-time) have their years of service calculated in accordance with the elapsed time provisions in §1.410(a)-7. Hourly employees in Plan A (most of whom are scheduled to work 2,000 hours in a year) have their hours of service calculated in accordance with 29 CFR

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2530.200b-2 and are credited with a year of service for each plan year in which they complete 1,000 hours of service.

(b) Plan A does not fail to satisfy this paragraph (d)(2) merely because different service-crediting provisions are applied to salaried and hourly employees for administrative convenience. The service-crediting provisions for hourly employees in Plan A are reasonably comparable to the service-crediting provisions for salaried employees. This is because the amount of service credited to hourly employees who complete fewer than 1,000 hours of service before termination of employment (i.e., quit, retirement, discharge, or death) during the plan year (and are treated less favorably than the salaried employees with the same period of employment during the plan year) is balanced by the amount of service credited to hourly employees who complete more than 1,000 hours of service before termination of employment during the plan year (who are treated more favorably than the salaried employees with the same period of employment during the plan year).

Example 2. (a) The facts are the same as in *Example 1*, except Plan A requires hourly employees to complete 2,000 hours of service in order to be credited with a full year of service, with a pro rata reduction for hourly employees who complete fewer than 2,000 hours of service.

(b) Plan A does not fail to satisfy this paragraph (d)(2) merely because different service-crediting provisions are applied to salaried and hourly employees for administrative convenience. The service-crediting provisions for hourly employees in Plan A are reasonably comparable to the service-crediting provisions for salaried employees. This is because the amount of service credited to hourly employees whose employment terminates (i.e., quit, retire, are discharged, or die) during the plan year is reasonably comparable to the amount of service credited to salaried employees whose employment is terminated during the plan year with the same period of employment during the plan year.

(3) *Service-crediting period—(i) Limitation on service taken into account—(A) General rule.* Except as otherwise provided in this paragraph (d)(3), service for periods in which an employee does not perform services as an employee of the employer or in which the employee did not participate in the plan may not be taken into account in determining whether the plan satisfies § 1.401(a)(4)-1 (b)(2) and (b)(3). In addition, in determining whether a plan satisfies § 1.401(a)(4)-1 (b)(2) and (b)(3), no more than one year of service may be taken

into account with respect to any 12-consecutive-month period (with adjustments for shorter periods, if appropriate) unless the additional service is required to be credited under section 410 or 411, whichever is applicable.

(B) *Past service.* Notwithstanding paragraph (d)(3)(i)(A) of this section, service for periods in which an employee performed services as an employee of the employer and did not participate in a plan, but in which the employee would have participated in the plan but for the fact that the plan (or the plan amendment extending coverage to the employee) was not in existence during that period, may be taken into account in determining whether the plan satisfies § 1.401(a)(4)-1 (b)(2) and (b)(3). This is because service for such periods generally would have been credited for the employee but for the timing of the plan establishment or amendment, and the timing of the plan establishment or amendment must satisfy § 1.401(a)(4)-5(a).

(C) *Pre-participation and imputed service.* Notwithstanding paragraph (d)(3)(i)(A) of this section, to the extent that a plan treats pre-participation service and imputed service as actual service with the employer, such service may be taken into account in determining whether the plan satisfies § 1.401(a)(4)-1 (b)(2) and (b)(3) if the service satisfies each of the requirements in paragraph (d)(3)(iii) of this section taking into account, in the case of imputed service, the additional rules in paragraph (d)(3)(iv) of this section.

(D) *Additional limitations on service-crediting in the case of certain offsets.* Notwithstanding paragraphs (d)(3)(i)(B) and (C) of this section, if a plan credits benefit service or accrual service under paragraph (d)(3)(i)(B) or (C) of this section for a period before an employee becomes a participant in the plan, but offsets the benefits determined under the plan by benefits under another plan (whether or not qualified or terminated) that are attributable to the same period for which that service is credited, then that service may not be taken into account for purposes of determining whether the first plan satisfies § 1.401(a)(4)-1 (b)(2) or (b)(3) unless the offset provision applies on the same

basis to all similarly-situated employees (within the meaning of paragraph (d)(3)(iii)(A) of this section).

(ii) *Definitions*—(A) *Pre-participation service*. For purposes of this section, pre-participation service includes all years of service credited under a plan for years of service with the employer or a prior employer for periods before the employee commenced or recommenced participation in the plan (other than past service described in paragraph (d)(3)(i)(B) of this section).

(B) *Imputed service*. For purposes of this section, imputed service includes any service credited for periods after an employee has commenced participation in a plan while the employee is not performing services as an employee for the employer (including a period in which the employee performs services for another employer, e.g., a joint venture), or while the employee has a reduced work schedule and would not otherwise be credited with service at the level being credited under the general terms of the plan.

(iii) *Requirements for pre-participation and imputed service*—(A) *Provision applied to all similarly-situated employees*—(1) *General rule*. A plan provision crediting pre-participation service or imputed service to any HCE must apply on the same terms to all similarly-situated NHCEs. Whether two employees are similarly situated for this purpose must be determined based on reasonable business criteria, generally taking into account only the circumstances resulting in the employees being covered under the plan or being granted imputed service and on the situation of the employees (e.g., the plan in which the employees benefit or the employer by which they are employed) during the period for which the pre-participation service or imputed service is credited. For example, employees who enter a plan as a result of a particular merger and who participated in the same plan of a prior employer are generally similarly situated. As another example, employees who are transferred to different joint ventures or different spun-off divisions are generally not similarly situated.

(2) *Examples*. The following examples illustrate the rules in this paragraph (d)(3)(iii)(A):

Example 1. Employer X maintains defined benefit Plans A and B and defined contribution Plan C. Plan A covers all employees who work at the headquarters of Employer X. Plan B covers some employees in Division M of Employer X, and Plan C covers the other employees of Division M. Plans B and C have not been aggregated for purposes of satisfying section 401(a)(4) or 410(b) for the period for which service is being credited. Plan A provides that, whenever an employee covered by Plan B transfers from Division M to the headquarters, the employee's service credited under Plan B is credited under Plan A, and the employee's benefit under Plan A is offset by the employee's benefit under Plan B. However, Plan A provides for no similar recognition of service or offset for employees covered by Plan C who transfer from Division M to the headquarters. Plan A does not fail to satisfy this paragraph (d)(3)(iii)(A) merely because it credits service for employees transferring from Plan B but not from Plan C, because it is reasonable to treat employees participating in different plans that have not been aggregated as not being similarly situated.

Example 2. The facts are the same as in *Example 1*, except that Employer X acquires two trades or businesses from different employers. Employees of the acquired trades or businesses become employees of Division M and become covered by Plan B. In addition, Plan B is amended to credit service with one of the trades or businesses but not the other. Plan B does not fail to satisfy this paragraph (d)(3)(iii)(A) merely because it credits service for one acquired trade or business but not another, because it is reasonable to treat employees of one acquired trade or business as not similarly situated to employees of another acquired trade or business.

(B) *Legitimate business reason*—(1) *General rule*. There must be a legitimate business reason, based on all of the relevant facts and circumstances, for a plan to credit imputed service or for a plan to credit pre-participation service for a period of service with another employer.

(2) *Relevant facts and circumstances when crediting service with another employer*. The following are examples of relevant facts and circumstances for determining whether a legitimate business reason exists for a plan to credit pre-participation or imputed service for a period of service with another employer as service with the employer: whether one employer has a significant ownership, control, or similar interest in, or relationship with, the other employer (though not enough to cause the

two employers to be treated as a single employer under section 414); whether the two employers share interrelated business operations; whether the employers maintain the same multiple-employer plan; whether the employers share similar attributes, such as operation in the same industry or the same geographic area; and whether the employees are an acquired group of employees or the employees became employed by the other employer in a transaction between the two employers that was a stock or asset acquisition, merger, or other similar transaction involving a change in the employer of the employees of a trade or business. Other factors may also be relevant for this purpose, such as the plan's treatment of service with other employers with which the employer has a similar relationship and the type of service being credited (e.g., vesting service as compared to benefit service or accrual service). A legitimate business reason is deemed to exist for a plan to credit military service as service with the employer.

(3) *Examples.* The following examples illustrate the rules in this paragraph (d)(3)(iii)(B):

Example 1. Twenty unrelated employers jointly sponsor a multiple-employer plan that covers all employees of the employers. From time to time, employees transfer employment among the employers. There is a legitimate business reason for a disaggregated portion of the plan that benefits the employees of one of the employers to treat service with any of the other employers as service with the employer.

Example 2. Employer X owns 20 percent of the outstanding stock of Employer Y. From time to time, employees transfer from Employer X to Employer Y at the request of Employer X. Employer X maintains defined benefit Plan A. Plan A provides that years of service include an employee's years of service with Employer Y. There is a legitimate business reason for Plan A to credit service with Employer Y because Employer X, through its 20-percent ownership interest, benefits from the service that the transferred employees provide to Employer Y.

Example 3. Employer Z manufactures widgets and belongs to the National Widget Manufacturers' Association. From time to time, Employer Z hires employees from other widget manufacturers. Employer Z maintains a defined benefit plan, Plan B, which credits pre-participation service for periods of service with all other members of the As-

sociation located in the western half of the United States as service with Employer Z. There is a legitimate business reason for Plan B to treat service with other members of the Association as service with Employer Z.

(C) *No significant discrimination—(1) General rule.* Based on all of the relevant facts and circumstances, a plan provision crediting pre-participation or imputed service must not by design or in operation discriminate significantly in favor of HCEs.

(2) *Relevant facts and circumstances.* The following are examples of relevant facts and circumstances for determining whether a plan provision crediting pre-participation service or imputed service discriminates significantly in favor of HCEs: whether the service credit does not duplicate benefits but merely makes an employee whole (i.e., prevents the employee from being disadvantaged with respect to benefits by a change in job or employer or provides the employee with benefits comparable to those of other employees); the degree of business ties between the current employer and the prior employer, such as the degree of ownership interest or other affiliation; the degree of excess coverage under section 410(b) of NHCEs for the plan crediting the service, taking into account employees who are credited with pre-participation service; whether the other employer maintains a qualified plan for its employees; the existence of reciprocal service credit under other plans of the employer or the prior employer; the circumstances underlying the employee's transfer into the group of employees covered by the plan; the type of service being credited; and the relative number of employees other than five-percent owners or the most highly-paid HCEs of the employer (determined without regard to the one-officer rule of section 414(q)(5)(B)) who are being credited with pre-participation service or imputed service. The relative number referred to in the last factor is determined taking into account all employees who have been over time, or are reasonably expected to be in the future, credited with such service.

(3) *Examples.* The following examples illustrate the rules in this paragraph

(d)(3)(iii)(C). It is assumed that facts not described in an example do not, in the aggregate, suggest that the relevant plan provision either does or does not discriminate significantly in favor of HCEs.

Example 1. (a) Employer U maintains defined benefit Plans A and B. Plan A covers all employees who work at the headquarters of Employer U. Plan B covers all employees of Division M of Employer U. Plan A provides that, whenever an employee transfers from Division M to the headquarters, the employee's service credited under Plan B is credited under Plan A, and the employee's benefit under Plan A is offset by the employee's benefit under Plan B. Employees, including a meaningful number of NHCEs, are periodically transferred from Division M to the headquarters of Employer U for bona fide business reasons.

(b) The Plan A provision crediting service under Plan B does not discriminate significantly in favor of HCEs. The provision is designed only to prevent employees from being disadvantaged by being transferred from Division M to the headquarters, and a meaningful number of NHCEs can be expected to benefit from it.

Example 2. (a) The facts are the same as in *Example 1*, except that the only employees transferred from Division M to the headquarters of Employer U are HCEs (but not the most highly-paid HCEs of Employer U).

(b) Employer U determines that Plan A would have satisfied sections 401(a)(4) and 410(b) for the period for which the transferred employees are being credited with pre-participation service had the employees participated in Plan A during that period. This determination is based on test results under sections 401(a)(4) and 410(b) for the current year, taking into account significant demographic changes over this period.

(c) The Plan A provision crediting service under Plan B does not discriminate significantly in favor of HCEs in the current year. This conclusion is based on the fact that the circumstances underlying the transfers indicate that they were made for bona fide business reasons, that Plan A would have satisfied sections 401(a)(4) and 410(b) had the transferred employees participated in Plan A during the period for which the pre-participation service is credited, and that the transferred employees are not the most highly-paid HCEs of Employer U.

Example 3. (a) The facts are the same as in *Example 1*, except that the only employee who is transferred from Division M to the headquarters of Employer U is Employee P, who is among the most highly-paid HCEs of Employer U. Plan A provides an unreduced early retirement benefit at age 55 for employees with 20 years of service, but Plan B's

early retirement benefits are not subsidized. Employee P is transferred to the headquarters with 20 years of service credited under Plan B and shortly before attainment of age 55. Employee P is expected to retire upon reaching age 55.

(b) The Plan A provision crediting service under Plan B discriminates significantly in favor of HCEs in the year of the transfer. This is because the circumstances underlying this transfer (i.e., its occurrence shortly before Employee P's expected retirement and the fact that the transfer significantly increased Employee P's early retirement benefits) indicate that Employee P was transferred to the headquarters primarily to obtain the higher pension benefits provided under Plan A.

(c) Because of this conclusion, the pre-participation service credited to Employee P cannot be taken into account in determining whether Plan A satisfies § 1.401(a)(4)-1 (b)(2) and (b)(3). Thus, if Plan A credits the service, it cannot be a safe harbor plan because the benefit formula will take into account service that may not be taken into account under this paragraph (d)(3). In addition, Employee P's accrual rates under the general test in § 1.401(a)(4)-3(c) are likely to be higher than those of other employees because, while the pre-participation service may be used to determine Employee P's benefits under Plan A, the service must be disregarded in determining Employee P's testing service. Also, if Employee P's pre-participation service is used in determining Employee P's entitlement to a benefit, right, or feature under Plan A, the fact that the service must be disregarded in determining Employee P's entitlement service for purposes of § 1.401(a)(4)-4 may cause the benefit, right, or feature to be treated as a separate benefit, right, or feature that is currently available only to Employee P.

Example 4. (a) Employer V manufactures widgets and belongs to the National Widget Manufacturers' Association. Each member of the Association maintains a defined benefit plan that credits pre-participation service for periods of service with other members and offsets benefits under the plan by benefits under the plans of the other members. Employer V maintains defined benefit Plan C. Employer V periodically hires employees from other widget manufacturers who are not among its most highly-paid HCEs. In 1997, however, the only employee hired by Employer V from another member of the Association is Employee Q, who is among Employer V's most highly-paid HCEs. Employee Q receives pre-participation service credit in accordance with the terms of Plan C. Some of the plans maintained by other members of the Association credited pre-participation service to NHCEs for the same period for which the pre-participation service is credited to Employee Q.

(b) The provision of Plan C crediting pre-participation service with other members of the Association does not discriminate significantly in 1997, despite the fact that the only employee who received pre-participation service credit under the provision in that year was among the most highly-paid HCEs of Employer V. This conclusion is based on the relative number of employees other than Employer V's most highly-paid HCEs who have been credited in the past, or are reasonably expected to be credited in the future, with pre-participation service for periods of service with other members of the Association, and the fact that other employees who are NHCEs are being credited with pre-participation service under a reciprocal agreement.

Example 5. Employer W owns 79 percent of the outstanding stock of Employer X. From time to time, employees transfer from Employer W to Employer X at the request of Employer W. The only employees who have ever been transferred are HCEs. Employer W maintains a defined benefit plan, Plan D, which credits employees transferred to Employer X with imputed benefit and accrual service while employed by Employer X. Employer X maintains no qualified plan. Plan D would fail either section 401(a)(4) or section 410(b) in the current plan year if the individuals employed by Employer X were treated as employed by Employer W. In addition, Plan D would fail either section 401(a)(4) or section 410(b) in the current plan year if the portion of Plan D covering the transferred employees were treated as maintained by Employer X. The Plan D provision crediting imputed benefit and accrual service to employees transferred to Employer X significantly discriminates in favor of HCEs in the current plan year.

Example 6. The facts are the same as in Example 5, except that Plan D credits the individuals who transfer to Employer X only with imputed vesting and entitlement service. The Plan D provision crediting imputed vesting and entitlement service to individuals transferred to Employer X does not significantly discriminate in favor of HCEs in the current plan year, because there is less potential for discrimination when the only types of service being imputed are vesting and entitlement service.

(iv) *Additional rules for imputed service—(A) Legitimate business reasons for crediting imputed service—(1) General rule.* A legitimate business reason does not exist for a plan to impute service after an individual has permanently ceased to perform services as an employee (within the meaning of § 1.410(b)-9) for the employer maintaining the plan, i.e., is not expected to resume performing services as an em-

ployee for the employer. The preceding sentence does not apply in the case of an individual who is not performing services for the employer because of disability or is performing services for another employer under an arrangement (such as a transfer of the employee to another employer) that provides some ongoing business benefit to the original employer. The first sentence in this paragraph (d)(3)(iv)(A)(1) also does not apply in the case of vesting and entitlement service if the employee is performing services for another employer that is being treated under the plan as actual service with the original employer.

(2) *Certain presumptions applicable.* Whether an individual has permanently ceased to perform services as an employee for an employer is determined taking into account all of the relevant facts and circumstances. There is a rebuttable presumption for a period of up to two years that an individual who has ceased to perform services as an employee for an employer is nonetheless expected to resume performing services as an employee for the employer, if the employer continues to treat the individual as an employee for significant purposes unrelated to the plan. After two years, there is a rebuttable presumption that an individual who has ceased to perform services as an employee for the employer is not expected to resume performing services as an employee for the employer. The fact that an individual is absent to perform jury duty or military service automatically rebuts the latter presumption. Other evidence, such as the employer's layoff policy, the terms of an employment contract, or specific leave to pursue a degree requiring more than two years of study, may also rebut this presumption.

(3) *Imputed service for part-time employees.* Rules similar to the rules in paragraph (d)(3)(iv)(A)(1) and (2) of this section apply in the case of an employee whose work hours are temporarily reduced and who therefore would normally be credited with service at a reduced rate, but who continues to be credited with service at the same rate as before the reduction (e.g., an employee who continues to be credited with service as if the employee were a

full-time employee during a temporary change from a full-time to a part-time work schedule).

(B) *Additional factors for determining whether a provision crediting imputed service discriminates significantly.* In addition to the factors described in paragraph (d)(3)(iii)(C)(2) of this section, relevant facts and circumstances for determining whether a plan provision crediting imputed service during a leave of absence or a period of reduced services discriminates significantly include any employer policies or practices that restrict the ability of employees to take leaves of absence or work temporarily on a part-time basis, respectively.

(v) *Satisfaction of other service-crediting rules.* A plan does not fail to satisfy this paragraph (d)(3) merely because it credits service to the extent necessary to satisfy the service-crediting rules in section 410(a), 411(a), 413, or 414(a), § 1.410(a)-7 (elapsed-time method of service-crediting) or 29 CFR 2530.200b-2 (regarding hours of service to be credited), whichever is applicable, or 29 CFR § 2530.204-2(d) (regarding double proration of service and compensation).

(e) *Family aggregation rules.* [Reserved]

(f) *Governmental plans.* [Reserved]

(g) *Corrective amendments—(1) In general.* A corrective amendment that satisfies the rules of this paragraph (g) is taken into account for purposes of satisfying certain section 401(a) requirements for a plan year, by treating the corrective amendment as if it were adopted and effective as of the first day of the plan year. These rules apply in addition to the rules of section 401(b). Paragraph (g)(2) of this section describes the scope of the corrective amendments that are permitted to be made. Paragraph (g)(3) of this section specifies the conditions under which a corrective amendment may be made. Paragraph (g)(4) of this section provides a rule prohibiting a corrective amendment from being taken into account to the extent that it does not have substance. Paragraph (g)(5) of this section discusses the effect of the corrective amendments permitted under this paragraph (g) under provisions other than section 401(a).

(2) *Scope of corrective amendments.* For purposes of satisfying the minimum coverage requirements of section 410(b), the nondiscriminatory amount requirement of § 1.401(a)(4)-1(b)(2), or the nondiscriminatory plan amendment requirement of § 1.401(a)(4)-1(b)(4), a corrective amendment may retroactively increase accruals or allocations for employees who benefited under the plan during the plan year being corrected, or may grant accruals or allocations to individuals who did not benefit under the plan during the plan year being corrected. In addition, for purposes of satisfying the nondiscriminatory current availability requirement of § 1.401(a)(4)-4(b) for benefits, rights, or features, a corrective amendment may make a benefit, right, or feature available to employees to whom it was previously not available. A corrective amendment may not, however, correct for a failure to incorporate the pre-termination restrictions of § 1.401(a)(4)-5(b).

(3) *Conditions for corrective amendments—(i) In general.* A corrective amendment is not taken into account prior to its adoption under this paragraph (g) unless it satisfies each of the requirements of paragraph (g)(3) (ii) through (vii) of this section, whichever are applicable. Thus, for example, if any of the applicable requirements are not satisfied, any additional accruals arising from an amendment adopted after the end of a plan year are not given retroactive effect and, thus, are tested in the plan year in which the amendment is adopted.

(ii) *Benefits not reduced.* Except as permitted under paragraph (g)(3)(vi)(C)(2) of this section, the corrective amendment may not result in a reduction of an employee's benefits (including any benefit, right, or feature), determined based on the terms of the plan in effect immediately before the amendment.

(iii) *Amendment effective for all purposes.* For purposes of determining an employee's rights and benefits under the plan, the corrective amendment must generally be effective as if the amendment had been made on the first day of the plan year being corrected. Thus, if the corrective amendment is made after the close of the plan year

being corrected, an employee's allocations or accruals, along with the associated benefits, rights, and features, must be increased to the level at which they would have been had the amendment been in effect for the entire preceding plan year. Accordingly, such increases are taken into account for testing purposes as if the increases had actually occurred in the prior plan year. However, to the extent that an amendment makes a benefit, right, or feature available to a group of employees, the amendment does not fail to satisfy this paragraph (g)(3)(iii) merely because it is not effective prior to the date of adoption and, therefore, the benefit, right, or feature is not made currently available to those employees before that date.

(iv) *Time when amendment must be adopted and put into effect—(A) General rule.* Any corrective amendment intended to apply to the preceding plan year must be adopted and implemented on or before the 15th day of the 10th month after the close of the plan year in order to be taken into account for the preceding plan year.

(B) *Determination letter requested by employer or plan administrator.* If, on or before the end of the period set forth in paragraph (g)(3)(iv)(A) of this section, the employer or plan administrator files a request pursuant to § 601.201(o) of this chapter (Statement of Procedural Rules) for a determination letter on the amendment, the initial or continuing qualification of the plan, or the trust that is part of the plan, the period set forth in paragraph (g)(3)(iv)(A) of this section is extended in the same manner as provided for an extension of the remedial amendment period under § 1.401(b)-1(d)(3).

(v) *Corrective amendment for coverage or amounts testing—(A) Retroactive benefits must be provided to nondiscriminatory group.* Except as provided in paragraph (g)(3)(v)(B) of this section, if the corrective amendment is adopted after the close of the plan year, the additional allocations or accruals for the preceding year resulting from the corrective amendment must separately satisfy section 401(a)(4) for the preceding plan year and must benefit a group of employees that separately satisfies section 410(b) (determined by applying

the same rules as are applied in determining whether a component plan separately satisfies section 410(b) under § 1.401(a)(4)-9(c)(4)). Thus, for example, in applying the rules of this paragraph (g)(3)(v), an employer may not aggregate the additional accruals or allocations for the preceding plan year resulting from the corrective amendment with the other accruals or allocations already provided under the terms of the plan as in effect during the preceding plan year without regard to the corrective amendment.

(B) *Corrective amendment to conform to safe harbor.* The requirements of paragraph (g)(3)(v)(A) of this section need not be met if the corrective amendment is for purposes of conforming the plan to one of the safe harbors in § 1.401(a)(4)-2(b) or § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b) (including for purposes of applying the requirements of those safe harbors under the optional testing methods in § 1.401(a)(4)-8 (b)(3) or (c)(3)), or ensuring that the plan continues to meet one of those safe harbors.

(vi) *Conditions for corrective amendment of the availability of benefits, rights, and features.* A corrective amendment may not be taken into account under this paragraph (g) for purposes of satisfying § 1.401(a)(4)-4(b) for a given plan year unless—

(A) The corrective amendment is not part of a pattern of amendments being used to correct repeated failures with respect to a particular benefit, right, or feature;

(B) The relevant provisions of the plan immediately after the corrective amendment with respect to the benefit, right, or feature (including a corrective amendment eliminating the benefit, right, or feature) remain in effect until the end of the first plan year beginning after the date of the amendment; and

(C) The corrective amendment either—

(I) Expands the group of employees to whom the benefit, right, or feature is currently available so that for each plan year in which the corrective amendment is taken into account in determining whether the plan satisfies § 1.401(a)(4)-4(b), the group of employees to whom the benefit, right, or feature is currently available, after taking into account the amendment, satisfies the

nondiscriminatory classification requirement of §1.410(b)-4 (and thus the current availability requirement of §1.401(a)(4)-4(b)) with a ratio percentage greater than or equal to the lesser of—

(i) The safe harbor percentage applicable to the plan; and

(ii) The ratio percentage of the plan; or

(2) Eliminates the benefit, right, or feature (to the extent permitted under section 411(d)(6)) on or before the last day of the plan year for which the corrective amendment is taken into account.

(vii) *Special rules for section 401(k) plans and section 401(m) plans*—(A) *Minimum coverage requirements.* In the case of a section 401(k) plan, a corrective amendment may only be taken into account for purposes of satisfying §1.410(b)-3(a)(2)(i) under this paragraph (g) for a given plan year to the extent that the corrective amendment grants qualified nonelective contributions within the meaning of §1.401(k)-1(g)(13)(ii) (QNECs) to nonhighly compensated nonexcludable employees who were not eligible employees within the meaning of §1.401(k)-1(g)(4) for the given plan year, and the amount of the QNECs granted to each nonhighly compensated nonexcludable employee equals the product of the nonhighly compensated nonexcludable employee's plan year compensation and the actual deferral percentage (within the meaning of section 401(k)(3)(B)) for the given plan year for the group of NHCEs who are eligible employees. Similarly, in the case of a section 401(m) plan, a corrective amendment may only be taken into account for purposes of satisfying §1.410(b)-3(a)(2)(i) under this paragraph (g) for a given plan year to the extent that the corrective amendment grants qualified nonelective contributions (QNECs) to nonhighly compensated nonexcludable employees who were not eligible employees within the meaning of §1.401(m)-1(f)(4) for the given plan year, and the amount of the QNECs granted to each nonhighly compensated nonexcludable employee equals the product of the nonhighly compensated nonexcludable employee's plan year compensation and the actual contribution percentage (within the

meaning of section 401(m)(3)) for the given plan year for the group of NHCEs who are eligible employees.

(B) *Correction of rate of match.* In the case of a section 401(m) plan, allocations for a given plan year granted under a corrective amendment to NHCEs who made contributions for the plan year eligible for a matching contribution may be treated as matching contributions. These allocations treated as matching contributions may be taken into account for purposes of satisfying the current availability requirement of §1.401(a)(4)-4(b) with respect to the right to a rate of match, but may not be taken into account for satisfying other amounts testing.

(4) *Corrective amendments must have substance.* A corrective amendment is not taken into account in determining whether a plan satisfies section 401(a)(4) or 410(b) to the extent the amendment affects nonvested employees whose employment with the employer terminated on or before the close of the preceding year, and who therefore would not have received any economic benefit from the amendment if it had been made in the prior year. Similarly, in determining whether the requirements of paragraph (g)(3)(vi)(C)(I) of this section are satisfied, a corrective amendment making a benefit, right, or feature available to employees is not taken into account to the extent the benefit, right, or feature is not currently available to any of those employees immediately after the amendment. However, a plan will not fail to satisfy the requirements of paragraph (g)(3)(vi)(C)(I) of this section by operation of the provisions in this paragraph (g)(4) if the benefit, right, or feature is made available to all employees in the plan as of the date of the amendment.

(5) *Effect under other statutory requirements.* A corrective amendment under this paragraph (g) is treated as if it were adopted and effective as of the first day of the plan year only for the specific purposes described in this paragraph (g). Thus, for example, the corrective amendment is taken into account not only for purposes of sections 401(a)(4) and 410(b), but also for purposes of determining whether the plan satisfies sections 401(l). By contrast,

the amendment is not given retroactive effect for purposes of section 404 (deductions for employer contributions) or section 412 (minimum funding standards), unless otherwise provided for in rules applicable to those sections.

(6) *Examples.* The following examples illustrate the rules in this paragraph (g):

Example 1. Employer U maintains a calendar year defined benefit plan that in 1994 is tested using the safe harbor for flat benefit plans in § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b)(4). In 1996, Employer U is concerned that the plan will not satisfy the demographic requirement in § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b)(4)(i)(C)(3) for the 1995 plan year because the average of the normal accrual rates for all NHCEs is less than 70 percent of the average of the normal accrual rates for all HCEs. Provided the corrective amendment would otherwise satisfy this paragraph (g), Employer U may make a corrective amendment to the plan to increase the number of NHCEs so that the amended plan satisfies the safe harbor for the 1995 plan year. The corrective amendment need not satisfy paragraph (g)(3)(v)(A) of this section because Employer U is retroactively amending the plan to conform to a safe harbor in § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b). See paragraph (g)(3)(v)(B) of this section.

Example 2. (a) Employer V maintains a calendar year defined contribution plan covering all the employees in Division M and Division N. Under the plan, only employees in Division M have the right to direct the investments in their account. For plan years prior to 1996, the plan met the current availability requirement of § 1.401(a)(4)-4(b) because the employees in Division M were a group of employees that satisfied the nondiscriminatory classification test of § 1.410(b)-4. Because of attrition in the employee population in Division M in 1996, the group of employees to whom the right to direct investments is available during that plan year no longer meets the nondiscriminatory classification test of § 1.410(b)-4. Thus, the right to direct investments under the plan does not meet the current availability requirement of § 1.401(a)(4)-4(b) during the 1996 plan year.

(b) Employer V may amend the plan in 1997 (but on or before October 15) to make the right to direct investments available from the date of the corrective amendment to a larger group of employees and the corrective amendment may be taken into account for purposes of satisfying the current availability requirement of § 1.401(a)(4)-4(b) for 1996 if the amendment satisfies this paragraph (g). Thus, for example, the group of employees to whom the right to direct investments is currently available, after taking into account the corrective amendment,

must satisfy the nondiscriminatory classification test of § 1.410(b)-4 for 1996 using a safe harbor percentage (or if lower, the ratio percentage of the plan for 1996). In addition, the corrective amendment making the right to direct investments available to a larger group of employees must remain in effect through the end of the 1998 plan year.

(c) In order for Employer V to take the corrective amendment into account for purposes of satisfying the current availability requirement of § 1.401(a)(4)-4(b) for the portion of the 1997 plan year before the amendment, the group of employees to whom the right to direct investments is currently available, taking into account the amendment, must satisfy the nondiscriminatory classification test of § 1.410(b)-4 for 1997 using a safe harbor percentage (or if lower, the ratio percentage of the plan for 1997).

(d) Alternatively, if Employer V adopts the corrective amendment before the end of the 1996 plan year, the corrective amendment need only remain in force through the end of the 1997 plan year, or the corrective amendment may eliminate the right to direct investments (provided that the elimination remains in effect through the end of the 1997 plan year).

Example 3. The facts are the same as in *Example 2*. In 1997, Employer V makes a corrective amendment to extend the plan to employees of Division O as well as Divisions M and N. Assume that the corrective amendment satisfies paragraph (g)(3)(v)(A) of this section, and thus, may be taken into account for purposes of satisfying the nondiscriminatory amounts requirement of § 1.401(a)(4)-1(b)(2) or the minimum coverage requirements of section 410(b). However, the employees in Division O will not be taken into account in determining whether the right to direct investments meets the current availability requirements of § 1.401(a)(4)-4(b) unless the corrective amendment meets the requirements of paragraph (g)(3)(vi) of this section. Thus, for example, the group of employees to whom the right to direct investments is made available as a result of the expansion of coverage, after taking into account the corrective amendment, must satisfy the nondiscriminatory clarification test of § 1.410(b)-4 for 1996 using a safe harbor percentage (or if lower, the ratio percentage of the plan for 1996). In addition, the amendment making the right to direct investments available to a larger group of employees must remain in effect through the end of the 1998 plan year.

Example 4. Employer W maintains a defined benefit plan that covers all employees and that offsets an employee's benefit by the employee's projected primary insurance amount. The plan is not eligible to use the safe harbors under § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b) because the plan does not satisfy section 401(l). Under the plan, the accrual rates for all HCEs determined under the general test of

§ 1.401(a)(4)-3(c) for 1998 are less than 1.5 percent of average annual compensation, and the accrual rates for all NHCEs (determined under the general test of § 1.401(a)(4)-3(c) for 1998 are two percent of average annual compensation. If Employer W adopts a corrective amendment adopted in 1999 that retroactively increases HCEs' benefits under the plan so that their accrual rates equal those of the NHCEs, the corrective amendment may not be taken into account in testing the 1998 plan year (i.e., the accruals that result from the corrective amendment are treated as 1999 accruals), because the accruals for the 1998 plan year resulting from the corrective amendment would not separately satisfy sections 410(b) and 401(a)(4). This is the case even if, after taking the amendment into account, the plan would satisfy sections 410(b) and 401(a)(4) for the 1998 plan year.

Example 5. Employer X maintains two plans—Plan A and Plan B. Plan A satisfies the ratio percentage test of § 1.410(b)-2(b)(2), but Plan B does not. Thus, in order to satisfy section 410(b), Plan B must satisfy the average benefits test of § 1.410(b)-2(b)(3). The average benefit percentage of Plan B is 60 percent. Employer X may take into account a corrective amendment that increases the accruals under either Plan A or Plan B so that the average benefit percentage meets the 70 percent requirement of the average benefits test, if the amendment satisfies paragraph (g)(3)(v) of this section.

Example 6. Employer Y maintains Plan C, which does not satisfy section 401(a)(4) in a plan year. Under the terms of paragraph (g)(2) of this section, Employer Y amends Plan C to increase the benefits of certain employees retroactively. In designing the amendment, Employer Y identifies those employees who have terminated without vested benefits during the period after the end of the prior plan year and before the adoption date of the amendment, and the amendment provides increases in benefits primarily to those employees. It would be inconsistent with the purpose of preventing discrimination in favor of HCEs for Plan C to treat the amendment as retroactively effective under this paragraph (g). See § 1.401(a)(4)-1(c)(2).

Example 7. Employer Z maintains both a section 401(k) plan and a section 401(m) plan that provides matching contributions at a rate of 50 percent with respect to elective contributions under the section 401(k) plan. In plan year 1995, the section 401(k) plan fails to satisfy the actual deferral percentage test of section 401(k)(3). In order to satisfy section 401(k)(3), Employer Z makes corrective distributions to HCEs H1 through H10 of their excess contributions as provided under § 1.401(k)-1(f). The matching contributions that H1 through H10 had received on account of their excess contributions are not forfeited, however. Thus, the effective rate of matching contributions provided to H1

through H10 is increased as a result of the corrective distributions. See § 1.401(a)(4)-4(e)(3)(iii)(G). Since no NHCE in the section 401(m) plan is provided with an equivalent rate of matching contributions, the rate of matching contributions provided to H1 through H10 does not satisfy the nondiscriminatory availability requirement of § 1.401(a)(4)-4 in plan year 1995. Employer Z makes a corrective amendment by October 15, 1996, that grants allocations to NHCEs who made contributions for the 1995 plan year eligible for a matching contribution. Employer Z may treat the allocations granted under the corrective amendment to those NHCEs as matching contributions for the 1995 plan year and, as a result, take them into account in determining whether the availability of the rate of matching contributions provided to H1 through H10 satisfies the current availability requirement of § 1.401(a)(4)-4(b) for the 1995 plan year.

[T.D. 8485, 58 FR 46813, Sept. 3, 1993]

§ 1.401(a)(4)-12 Definitions.

Unless otherwise provided, the definitions in this section govern in applying the provisions of §§ 1.401(a)(4)-1 through 1.401(a)(4)-13.

Accumulation plan. Accumulation plan means a defined benefit plan under which the benefit of every employee for each plan year is separately determined, using plan year compensation (if benefits are determined as a percentage of compensation rather than a dollar amount) separately calculated for the plan year, and each employee's total accrued benefit as of the end of a plan year is the sum of the separately determined benefit for that plan year and the total accrued benefit as of the end of the preceding plan year.

Acquired group of employees. Acquired group of employees means employees of a prior employer who become employed by the employer in a transaction between the employer and the prior employer that is a stock or asset acquisition, merger, or other similar transaction involving a change in the employer of the employees of a trade or business, plus employees hired by or transferred into the acquired trade or business on or before a date selected by the employer that is within the transition period defined in section 410(b)(6)(C)(ii). In addition, in the case of a transaction prior to the effective date of these regulations, the date by