

plan year. In the case of a section 401(l) plan described in § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b)(4) (i.e., a fractional accrual plan), an employee's employee benefit percentage with respect to that plan may be deemed equal to the rate at which the excess or gross benefit, whichever is applicable, accrues for the employee in the plan year, taking into account the plan's benefit formula and the employee's projected service at normal retirement age. The use of this simplified method will be treated as an imputation of permitted disparity. See paragraph (d)(6) of this section for a restriction on multiple use of permitted disparity.

(B) *Other plans.* Under the simplified method of this paragraph (e)(4)(ii), an employee's employee benefit percentage with respect to a plan described in § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b)(3) that is not a section 401(l) plan and that is not imputing permitted disparity may be deemed equal to the employee's benefit rate in the plan year under the plan's benefit formula. In the case of a plan described in § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b)(4) that is not a section 401(l) plan and that is not imputing permitted disparity, an employee's employee benefit percentage with respect to that plan may be deemed equal to the rate at which the benefit accrues for the employee in the plan year, taking into account the plan's benefit formula and an employee's projected service at normal retirement age.

(5) *Three-year averaging period.* An employee's employee benefit percentage may be determined for a testing period as the average of the employee's employee benefit percentages determined separately for the testing period and for the immediately preceding one or two testing periods (referred to in this section as an averaging period). Employee benefit percentages of a particular employee that are averaged together within an averaging period must be determined on a consistent basis for all testing periods within the averaging period.

(6) *Alternative methods of determining compensation.* Employee benefit percentages may be determined on the basis of any definition of compensation that satisfies § 1.414(s)-1(d) (without regard to whether the definition satisfies § 1.414(s)-1(d)(3)), provided that the

same definition is used for all employees and it is reasonable to believe that the definition does not result in an average benefit percentage that is significantly higher than the average benefit percentage that would be determined had employee benefit percentages been determined using a definition of compensation that also satisfies § 1.414(s)-1(d)(3).

(f) *Special rule for certain collectively bargained plans.* A plan (as determined without regard to the mandatory disaggregation rule of § 1.410(b)-7(c)(5)) that benefits both collectively bargained employees and noncollectively bargained employees is deemed to satisfy the average benefit percentage test of this section if—

(1) The provisions of the plan applicable to each employee in the plan are identical to the provisions of the plan applicable to every other employee in the plan, including the plan benefit or allocation formula, any optional forms of benefit, any ancillary benefit, and any other right or feature under the plan, and

(2) The plan would satisfy the ratio percentage test of § 1.410(b)-2(b)(2), if §§ 1.410(b)-6(d) and 1.410(b)-7(c)(5) (the excludable employee and mandatory disaggregation rules for collectively bargained and noncollectively bargained employees) did not apply.

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§ 1.410(b)-6 Excludable employees.

(a) *Employees—(1) In general.* For purposes of applying section 410(b) with respect to employees, all employees of the employer, other than the excludable employees described in paragraphs (b) through (i) of this section, are taken into account. Excludable employees are not taken into account with respect to a plan even if they are benefiting under the plan, except as otherwise provided in paragraph (b) of this section.

(2) *Rules of application.* Except as specifically provided otherwise, excludable employees are determined separately with respect to each plan for purposes of testing that plan under section 410(b). Thus, in determining whether a

particular plan satisfies the ratio percentage test of § 1.410(b)-2(b)(2), paragraphs (b) through (i) of this section are applied solely with reference to that plan. Similarly, in determining whether two or more plans that are permissively aggregated and treated as a single plan under § 1.410(b)-7(d) satisfy the ratio percentage test of § 1.410(b)-2(b)(2), paragraphs (b) through (i) of this section are applied solely with reference to the deemed single plan. In determining whether a plan satisfies the average benefit percentage test of § 1.410(b)-5, the rules of this section are applied by treating all plans in the testing group as a single plan.

(b) *Minimum age and service exclusions*—(1) *In general.* If a plan applies minimum age and service eligibility conditions permissible under section 410(a)(1) and excludes all employees who do not meet those conditions from benefiting under the plan, then all employees who fail to satisfy those conditions are excludable employees with respect to that plan. An employee is treated as meeting the age and service requirements on the date that any employee with the same age and service (including service permitted to be taken into account for purposes of non-discrimination testing under § 1.401(a)(4)-11(d)(3)) would be eligible to commence participation in the plan, as provided in section 410(b)(4)(C).

(2) *Multiple age and service conditions.* If a plan, including a plan for which an employer chooses the treatment under paragraph (b)(3) of this section, has two or more different sets of minimum age and service eligibility conditions, those employees who fail to satisfy all of the different sets of age and service conditions are excludable employees with respect to the plan. Except as provided in paragraph (b)(3) of this section, an employee who satisfies any one of the different sets of conditions is not an excludable employee with respect to the plan. Differences in the manner in which service is credited (e.g., hours of service calculated in accordance with 29 CFR 2530.200b-2 for hourly employees and elapsed time calculated in accordance with § 1.410(a)-7 for salaried employees) for purposes of applying a service condition are not taken into account in determining whether multiple

age and service eligibility conditions exist.

(3) *Plans benefiting certain otherwise excludable employees*—(i) *In general.* An employer may treat a plan benefiting otherwise excludable employees as two separate plans, one for the otherwise excludable employees and one for the other employees benefiting under the plan. See § 1.410(b)-7(c)(3) regarding permissive disaggregation of plans benefiting otherwise excludable employees. The effect of this rule is that employees who would be excludable under paragraph (b)(1) of this section (applied without regard to section 410(a)(1)(B)) but for the fact that the plan does not apply the greatest permissible minimum age and service conditions may be treated as excludable employees with respect to the plan. This treatment is available only if the plan satisfies section 410(b) and § 1.410(b)-2 with respect to these otherwise excludable employees in the manner described in paragraph (b)(3)(ii) of this section.

(ii) *Testing portion of plan benefiting otherwise excludable employees.* In determining whether the plan that benefits employees who would otherwise be excludable under paragraph (b)(1) of this section (applied without regard to section 410(a)(1)(B)) satisfies section 410(b) and § 1.410(b)-2, employees who have satisfied the greatest permissible minimum age and service conditions with respect to the plan are excludable employees. In addition, if the plan being tested applies minimum age and service conditions and those conditions are less than the maximum permissible minimum age and service conditions, employees who have not satisfied the lower minimum age and service conditions actually provided for in the plan are excludable employees. Thus, for example, if the plan requires attainment of age 18 and 3 months of service, employees who have not attained age 18 or 3 months of service with the employer are excludable employees.

(4) *Examples.* The following examples illustrate the minimum age and service condition rules of this paragraph (b). In each example, the employer is not treated as operating qualified separate lines of business under section 414(r).

Example 1. An employer maintains Plan A for hourly employees and Plan B for salaried

employees. Plan A has no minimum age or service condition. Plan B has no minimum age condition and requires 1 year of service. The employer treats Plans A and B as a single plan for purposes of section 410(b). Because Plan A imposes no minimum age or service condition, all employees of the employer automatically satisfy the minimum age and service conditions of Plan A. Therefore, no employees are excludable under this paragraph (b) in testing Plans A and B for purposes of section 410(b).

Example 2. An employer maintains three plans. Plan C benefits employees in Division C who satisfy the plan's minimum age and service condition of age 21 and 1 year of service. Plan D benefits employees in Division D who satisfy the plan's minimum age and service condition of age 18 and 1 year of service. Plan E benefits employees in Division E who satisfy the plan's minimum age and service condition of age 21 and 6 months of service. The employer treats Plans D and E as a single plan for purposes of section 410(b). In testing Plan C under the ratio percentage test or the nondiscriminatory classification test of section 410(b), employees who are not at least age 21 or who do not have at least 1 year of service are excludable employees under paragraph (b)(1) of this section. In testing Plans D and E, employees who do not satisfy the age and service requirements of either of the two plans are excludable employees under paragraph (b)(2) of this section. Thus, an employee is excludable with respect to Plans D and E only if the employee is not at least age 18 with at least 1 year of service or is not at least age 21 with at least 6 months of service. Thus, an employee who is 19 years old and has 11 months of service is excludable. Similarly, an employee who is 17 years old and has performed 2 years of service is also excludable.

Example 3. An employer maintains three plans. Plan F benefits all employees in Division F (the plan does not apply any minimum age or service condition). Plan G benefits employees in Division G who satisfy the plan's minimum age and service condition of age 18 and 1 year of service. Plan H benefits employees in Division H who satisfy the plan's minimum age and service condition of age 21 and 6 months of service. In testing the employer's plans under the average benefit percentage test provided in § 1.410(b)-5, Plans F, G, and H are treated as a single plan and, as such, use the lowest minimum age and service condition under the rule of paragraph (b)(2) of this section. Therefore, because Plan F does not apply any minimum age or service condition, no employee is excludable under this paragraph (b).

Example 4. An employer maintains Plan J, which does not apply any minimum age or service conditions. Plan J benefits all employees in Division 1 but does not benefit employees in Division 2. Although Plan J has

no minimum age or service condition, the employer wants to exclude employees whose age and service is below the permissible minimums provided in section 410(b)(1)(A). The employer has 110 employees who either do not have 1 year of service or are not at least age 21. Of these 110 employees, 10 are highly compensated employees and 100 are nonhighly compensated employees. Five of these highly compensated employees, or 50 percent, work in Division 1 and thus benefit under Plan J. Thirty-five of these nonhighly compensated employees, or 35 percent, work in Division 1 and thus benefit under Plan J. Plan J satisfies the ratio percentage test of section 410(b) with respect to employees who do not satisfy the greatest permissible minimum age and service requirement because the ratio percentage of that group of employees is 70 percent. Thus, in determining whether or not Plan J satisfies section 410(b), the 110 employees may be treated as excludable employees in accordance with paragraph (b)(3)(i) of this section.

(c) *Certain nonresident aliens*—(1) *General rule.* An employee who is a nonresident alien (within the meaning of section 7701(b)(1)(B)) and who receives no earned income (within the meaning of section 911(d)(2)) from the employer that constitutes income from sources within the United States (within the meaning of section 861(a)(3)) is treated as an excludable employee.

(2) *Special treaty rule.* In addition, an employee who is a nonresident alien (within the meaning of section 7701(b)(1)(B)) and who does receive earned income (within the meaning of section 911(d)(2)) from the employer that constitutes income from sources within the United States (within the meaning of section 861(a)(3)) is permitted to be excluded, if all of the employee's earned income from the employer from sources within the United States is exempt from United States income tax under an applicable income tax convention. This paragraph (c)(2) applies only if all employees described in the preceding sentence are so excluded.

(d) *Collectively bargained employees*—(1) *General rule.* A collectively bargained employee is an excludable employee with respect to a plan that benefits solely noncollectively bargained employees. If a plan (within the meaning of § 1.410(b)-7(b)) benefits both collectively bargained employees and noncollectively bargained employees for a

plan year, § 1.410(b)-7(c)(4) provides that the portion of the plan that benefits the collectively bargained employees is treated as a separate plan from the portion of the plan that benefits the noncollectively bargained employees. Thus, a collectively bargained employee is always an excludable employee with respect to the mandatorily disaggregated portion of any plan that benefits noncollectively bargained employees.

(2) *Definition of collectively bargained employee*—(i) *In general.* A collectively bargained employee is an employee who is included in a unit of employees covered by an agreement that the Secretary of Labor finds to be a collective bargaining agreement between employee representatives and one or more employers, provided that there is evidence that retirement benefits were the subject of good faith bargaining between employee representatives and the employer or employers. An employee is a collectively bargained employee regardless of whether the employee benefits under any plan of the employer. See section 7701(a)(46) and § 301.7701-17T of this chapter for additional requirements applicable to the collective bargaining agreement. An employee who performs hours of service during the plan year as both a collectively bargained employee and a noncollectively bargained employee is treated as a collectively bargained employee with respect to the hours of service performed as a collectively bargained employee and a noncollectively bargained employee with respect to the hours of service performed as a noncollectively bargained employee. See § 1.410(b)-7(c) for disaggregation rules for plans benefiting collectively bargained and noncollectively bargained employees.

(ii) *Special rules for certain employees in multiemployer plans*—(A) *In general.* For purposes of this paragraph (d), in testing the disaggregated portion of a multiemployer plan benefiting noncollectively bargained employees, a noncollectively bargained employee who benefits under the plan may be treated as a collectively bargained employee with respect to all of the employee's hours of service under the rules of paragraphs (d)(2)(ii) (B)

through (E) of this section, if the employee is or was a member of a unit of employees covered by a collective bargaining agreement and that agreement or a successor agreement provides for the employee to benefit under the plan in the current plan year. For this purpose, provisions of a participation agreement or similar document are taken into account in determining whether a collective bargaining agreement provides for an employee to benefit under a multiemployer plan.

(B) *Employees who were collectively bargained employees during a portion of the current plan year.* An employee described in paragraph (d)(2)(ii)(A) of this section who performs services for one or more employers that are parties to the collective bargaining agreement, for the plan, or for the employee representative both as a collectively bargained employee and as a noncollectively bargained employee during a plan year may be treated as a collectively bargained employee for the plan year, provided that at least half of the employee's hours of service during the plan year are performed as a collectively bargained employee.

(C) *Employees who were collectively bargained employees during the collective bargaining agreement.* An employee described in paragraph (d)(2)(ii)(A) of this section who was a collectively bargained employee with respect to all of the employee's hours of service during a plan year (including employees who are treated as collectively bargained employees with respect to all of their hours of service during a plan year under paragraph (d)(2)(ii) (B) or (E) of this section) may be treated as a collectively bargained employee with respect to all of the employee's hours of service for the duration of the collective bargaining agreement applicable for such plan year or, if later, until the end of the following plan year. For this purpose, a collective bargaining agreement is applicable for a plan year if it provided for the employee to benefit in the plan and was effective for any portion of that plan year. This paragraph (d)(2)(ii)(C) does not apply unless the terms of the plan providing for benefit accruals treat the employee in a manner that is generally no more favorable

than similarly-situated employees who are collectively bargained employees.

(D) *Employees who previously were collectively bargained employees.* An employee who was treated as a collectively bargained employee pursuant to paragraph (d)(2)(ii)(C) of this section may be treated as a collectively bargained employee with respect to all of the employee's hours of service after the end of the period described in paragraph (d)(2)(ii)(C) of this section, provided that the employee is performing services for one or more employers that are parties to the collective bargaining agreement, for the plan, or for the employee representative. This paragraph (d)(2)(ii)(D) does not apply unless the terms of the plan providing for benefit accruals treat the employee in a manner that is generally no more favorable than similarly-situated employees who are collectively bargained employees, and no more than five percent of the employees covered under the multiemployer plan are noncollectively bargained employees (determined without regard to this paragraph (d)(2)(ii)(D)). In determining whether more than five percent of the employees covered under the multiemployer plan are noncollectively bargained employees, those employees who are described in paragraphs (d)(2)(ii)(B) and (C) of this section are treated as collectively bargained employees.

(E) *Transition rule.* For a plan year beginning before the applicable effective date of these regulations as set forth in §1.410(b)-10 (b) or (d), any employee described in paragraph (d)(2)(ii)(A) of this section may be treated as a collectively bargained employee with respect to all of the employee's hours of service for that plan year.

(F) *Consistency requirement.* The rules in paragraphs (d)(2)(i) and (ii) of this section must be applied to all employees on a reasonable and consistent basis for the plan year.

(iii) *Covered by a collective bargaining agreement—(A) General rule.* For purposes of paragraph (d)(2)(i) of this section, an employee is included in a unit of employees covered by a collective bargaining agreement if and only if the employee is represented by a bona fide

employee representative that is a party to the collective bargaining agreement under which the plan is maintained. Thus, for example, an employee of either a plan or the employee representative that is a party to the collective bargaining agreement under which the plan is maintained is not included in a unit of employees covered by the collective bargaining agreement under which the plan is maintained merely because the employee is covered under the plan pursuant to an agreement entered into by the plan or employee representative on behalf of the employee (other than in the capacity of an employee representative with respect to the employee). This is the case even if all of such employees benefiting under the plan constitute only a de minimis percentage of the total employees benefiting under the plan.

(B) *Plans covering professional employees—(1) In general.* An employee is not considered included in a unit of employees covered by a collective bargaining agreement for a plan year for purposes of paragraph (d)(2)(iii)(A) of this section if, for the plan year, more than 2 percent of the employees who are covered pursuant to the agreement are professionals. This rule applies to all employees under the agreement, nonprofessionals as well as professionals. Thus, no employees covered by such an agreement are excludable employees with respect to employees who are not covered by a collective bargaining agreement.

(2) *Multiple collective bargaining agreements.* This paragraph (d)(2)(iii)(B) is applied separately with respect to each collective bargaining agreement. Thus, for example, if a plan benefits two groups of employees, one included in a unit of employees covered by collective bargaining agreement X, more than 2 percent of whom are professionals, and another included in a unit of employees covered by collective bargaining agreement Y, none of whom are professionals, the group covered by agreement X is not considered covered by a collective bargaining agreement and the group covered by agreement Y is considered covered by a collective bargaining agreement.

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(3) *Application of minimum coverage tests.* If a plan covers more than 2 percent professional employees, no employees in the plan are treated as covered by a collective bargaining agreement. A plan that covers more than 2 percent professional employees must satisfy section 410(b) without regard to section 413(b) and the special rule in § 1.410(b)-2(b)(7) of this section (regarding collectively bargained plans). In such cases, all nonexcludable employees must be taken into account. For this purpose, employees included in other collective bargaining units are excludable employees. However, the employees who are not covered by a collective bargaining agreement and the employees who are covered by an agreement that has more than 2 percent professionals are not excludable employees.

(iv) *Examples.* The following examples illustrate the collective bargaining unit rules of this section.

Example 1. An employer has 700 collectively bargained employees (none of whom is a professional employee) and 300 noncollectively bargained employees (200 of whom are highly compensated employees). For purposes of applying the ratio percentage test of § 1.410(b)-2(b)(2) to Plan X, which benefits only the 300 noncollectively bargained employees, the 700 collectively bargained employees are treated as excludable employees pursuant to paragraph (d) of this section.

Example 2. (i) An employer has 1,500 employees in the following categories:

	Noncollectively bargained employees	Collectively bargained employees	Total
Highly compensated employees	100	100	200
Nonhighly compensated employees	900	400	1,300
Total	1,000	500	1,500

The employer maintains Plan Y, which benefits 1,100 employees, including all of the noncollectively bargained employees (except for 100 nonhighly compensated employees who are noncollectively bargained employees), and 200 of the collectively bargained employees (including the 100 highly compensated employees who are collectively bargained employees). There are no professional employees covered by the collective bargaining agreement. In accordance with § 1.410(b)-7(c)(4), the employer must apply the ratio percentage test of § 1.410(b)-2(b)(2) to

Plan Y as if the plan were two separate plans, one benefiting the noncollectively bargained employees and the other benefiting the collectively bargained employees.

(ii) In testing the portion of Plan Y that benefits the noncollectively bargained employees, the collectively bargained employees are excludable employees. That portion's ratio percentage is 88.89 percent ($[800/900] / [100/100] = 88.89\%/100\% = 0.8889$), and thus it satisfies the ratio percentage test. The portion of Plan Y that benefits collectively bargained employees automatically satisfies section 410(b) under the special rule in § 1.410(b)-2(b)(7).

(e) *Employees of qualified separate lines of business.* If an employer is treated as operating qualified separate lines of business for purposes of section 410(b) in accordance with § 1.414(r)-1 (b), in testing a plan that benefits employees of one qualified separate line of business, the employees of the other qualified separate lines of business of the employer are treated as excludable employees. The rule in this paragraph (e) does not apply for purposes of satisfying the nondiscriminatory classification requirement of section 410(b)(5)(B). See §§ 1.414(r)-1(c)(2) and 1.414(r)-8 (separate application of section 410(b) to the employees of a qualified separate line of business). In addition, the rule in this paragraph (e) does not apply to a plan that is tested under the special rule for employer-wide plans in § 1.414(r)-1(c)(2) (ii) for a plan year.

(f) *Certain terminating employees—(1) In general.* An employee may be treated as an excludable employee for a plan year with respect to a particular plan if—

(i) The employee does not benefit under the plan for the plan year,

(ii) The employee is eligible to participate in the plan,

(iii) The plan has a minimum period of service requirement or a requirement that an employee be employed on the last day of the plan year (last-day requirement) in order for an employee to accrue a benefit or receive an allocation for the plan year,

(iv) The employee fails to accrue a benefit or receive an allocation under the plan solely because of the failure to satisfy the minimum period of service or last-day requirement,

(v) The employee terminates employment during the plan year with no

more than 500 hours of service, and the employee is not an employee as of the last day of the plan year (for purposes of this paragraph (f)(1)(v), a plan that uses the elapsed time method of determining years of service may use either 91 consecutive calendar days or 3 consecutive calendar months instead of 500 hours of service, provided it uses the same convention for all employees during a plan year), and

(vi) If this paragraph (f) is applied with respect to any employee with respect to a plan for a plan year, it is applied with respect to all employees with respect to the plan for the plan year.

(2) *Hours of service.* For purposes of this paragraph (f), the term “hours of service” has the same meaning as provided for such term by 29 CFR 2530.200b-2 under the general method of crediting service for the employee. If one of the equivalencies set forth in 29 CFR 2530.200b-3 is used for crediting service under the plan, the 500-hour requirement must be adjusted accordingly.

(3) *Examples.* The following examples illustrate the provision of this paragraph (f).

Example 1. An employer has 35 employees who are eligible to participate under a defined contribution plan. The plan provides that an employee will not receive an allocation of contributions for a plan year unless the employee is employed by the employer on the last day of the plan year. Only 30 employees are employed by the employer on the last day of the plan year. Two of the five employees who terminated employment before the last day of the plan year had 500 or fewer hours of service during the plan year, and the remaining three had more than 500 hours of service during the year. Of the five employees who were no longer employed on the last day of the plan year, the two with 500 hours of service or less during the plan year are treated as excludable employees for purposes of section 410(b), and the remaining three who had over 500 hours of service during the plan year are taken into account in testing the plan under section 410(b) but are treated as not benefiting under the plan.

Example 2. An employer has 30 employees who are eligible to participate under a defined contribution plan. The plan requires 1,000 hours of service to receive an allocation of contributions or forfeitures. Ten employees do not receive an allocation because of their failure to complete 1,000 hours of service. Three of the 10 employees who failed to

satisfy the minimum service requirement completed 500 or fewer hours of service and terminated their employment. Two of the employees completed more than 500, but fewer than 1,000 hours of service and terminated their employment. The remaining five employees did not terminate employment. Under the rule in paragraph (f) of this section, the three terminated employees who completed 500 or fewer hours of service are treated as excludable employees for the portion of the plan year they are employed. The other seven employees who do not receive an allocation are taken into account in testing the plan under section 410(b) but are treated as not benefiting under the plan.

Example 3. An employer maintains two plans, Plan A for salaried employees and Plan B for hourly employees. Of the 100 salaried employees, two do not receive an allocation under Plan A for the plan year because they terminate employment before completing 500 hours of service. Of the 300 hourly employees, 50 do not receive an allocation under Plan B for the plan year because they terminate employment before completing 500 hours. In applying section 410(b) to Plan A, the two employees who did not receive an allocation under Plan A are excludable employees, but the 50 who did not receive an allocation under Plan B are not excludable employees, because they were not eligible to participate under Plan A.

(g) *Employees of certain governmental or tax-exempt entities precluded from maintaining a section 401(k) plan.* For purposes of testing either a section 401(k) plan or a section 401(m) plan that is provided under the same general arrangement as a section 401(k) plan, an employer may treat as excludable those employees of governmental or tax-exempt entities who are precluded from being eligible employees under a section 401(k) plan by reason of section 401(k)(4)(B), if more than 95 percent of the employees of the employer who are not precluded from being eligible employees by section 401(k)(4)(B) benefit under the plan for the plan year.

(h) *Former employees—(1) In general.* For purposes of applying section 410(b) with respect to former employees, all former employees of the employer are taken into account, except that the employer may treat a former employee described in paragraph (h)(2) or (h)(3) of this section as an excludable former employee. If either (or both) of the former employee exclusion rules under

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paragraphs (h)(2) and (h)(3) of this section is applied, it must be applied to all former employees for the plan year on a consistent basis.

(2) *Employees terminated before a specified date.* The employer may treat a former employee as excludable if—

(i) The former employee became a former employee either prior to January 1, 1984, or prior to the tenth calendar year preceding the calendar year in which the current plan year begins, and

(ii) The former employee became a former employee in a calendar year that precedes the earliest calendar year in which any former employee who benefits under the plan in the current plan year became a former employee.

(3) *Previously excludable employees.* The employer may treat a former employee as excludable if the former employee was an excludable employee (or would have been an excludable employee if these regulations had been in effect) under the rules of paragraphs (b) through (g) of this section during the plan year in which the former employee became a former employee. If the employer treats a former employee as excludable pursuant to this paragraph (h)(3), the former employee is not taken into account with respect to a plan even if the former employee is benefiting under the plan.

(i) *Former employees treated as employees.* An employer may treat as excludable employees all formerly nonhighly compensated employees who are treated as employees of the employer under § 1.410(b)-9 solely because they have increases in accrued benefits under a defined benefit plan that are based on ongoing service or compensation credits (including imputed service or compensation) after they cease to perform services for the employer.

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§ 1.410(b)-7 Definition of plan and rules governing plan disaggregation and aggregation.

(a) *In general.* This section provides a definition of “plan.” First, this section sets forth a definition of plan within the meaning of section 401(a) or 403(a). Then certain mandatory disaggregation and permissive aggregation rules are applied. The result is the definition of plan that applies for purposes of sections 410(b) and 401(a)(4). Thus, in general, the term “plan” as used in this section initially refers to a plan described in section 414(l) and to an annuity plan described in section 403(a), and the term “plan” as used in other sections under these regulations means the plan determined after application of this section. Paragraph (b) of this section provides that each single plan under section 414(l) is treated as a single plan for purposes of section 410(b). Paragraph (c) of this section describes the rules for certain plans that must be treated as comprising two or more separate plans, each of which is a single plan subject to section 410(b). Paragraph (d) of this section provides a rule permitting an employer to aggregate certain separate plans to form a single plan for purposes of section 410(b). Paragraph (e) of this section provides rules for determining the testing group of plans taken into account in determining whether a plan satisfies the average benefit percentage test of § 1.410(b)-5.

(b) *Separate asset pools are separate plans.* Each single plan within the meaning of section 414(l) is a separate plan for purposes of section 410(b). See § 1.414(l)-1(b). For example, if only a portion of the assets under a defined benefit plan is available, on an ongoing basis, to provide the benefits of certain employees, and the remaining assets are available only in certain limited cases to provide such benefits (but are available in all cases for the benefit of other employees), there are two separate plans. Similarly, the defined contribution portion of a plan described in section 414(k) is a separate plan from the defined benefit portion of that same plan. A single plan under section