

Estate Planning for Retirement Benefits 2026-2
May 2026
Under SECURE (2019), final Treasury Regulations (2024),
SECURE 2.0 (2022), and Proposed Treas. Regulations (2024)

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PRELIMINARY MATTERS

What this Outline covers

This Outline explains how to do estate planning for clients' retirement benefits, and how to compute "required minimum distributions" (RMDs) for inherited retirement benefits, in 2026, in light of the changes made by the SECURE Act of 2019; the Treasury's final regulations issued July 2024 ("Final Regulations"), restating the minimum distribution regulations and incorporating SECURE's changes, and proposed regulations (also issued July 2024) interpreting/applying "SECURE 2.0" [2022] ("Proposed Regulations"); and IRS Notices 2022-53, 2023-54, and 2024-35 granting RMD relief for some beneficiaries.

This Outline assumes the reader is generally familiar with the "minimum distribution rules" of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 as amended (the "Code") and regulations thereunder. For fuller explanations, see the applicable sections (indicated by the "¶" symbol) of the author's book *Life and Death Planning for Retirement Benefits* (8th ed. 2019; www.ataxplan.com; for electronic edition, visit www.retirementbenefitsplanning.us). *The book is not yet updated for the new developments covered in this Outline*, but most basic RMD concepts (such as how to compute life expectancy payouts, account balance, etc.) have stayed the same.

Matters not covered in this Outline

The following matters related to the above subjects and dealt with in the Final and Proposed Regulations and/or SECURE or SECURE 2.0 are not covered in this outline or are covered only briefly to mention changes:

- QDROs
- QLACs
- Defined benefit plans
- Varying effective dates for the two statutes and rules contained in the final and proposed regulations.
- TEFRA 242(b) elections
- The applicability of SECURE and SECURE 2.0 to annuities and defined benefit plans.
- How the minimum distribution rules apply to an annuity contract purchased inside an IRA or other defined contribution plan account.
- Lifetime RMDs; only post-death RMDs are covered
- Treatment of nonvested amounts in the employee's account
- Rollovers
- Parts of the minimum distribution rules that appear not to be modified from the existing regulations, such as how to compute the account balance

About the Author: Natalie B. Choate, JD, is a nonpracticing estate planning lawyer. Her profession now is explaining the tax treatment of retirement accounts to other estate planning professionals via writing and lectures. Her book *Life and Death Planning for Retirement Benefits* (8th ed. 2019) is a leading resource for tax and investment professionals who advise clients regarding the tax treatment of their retirement accounts. She contributes to Leimberg Information Services and Ed Slott’s IRA Advisor. She has lectured in all 50 states, and received the Distinguished Accredited Estate Planner designation and the Hartman Axley Lifetime Service Award from the National Association of Estate Planners and Councils. For information about Natalie’s publications and upcoming seminars, or to book a seminar, or contact Natalie for any reason, visit her website www.ataxplan.com.

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PART 1: ABBREVIATIONS, SYMBOLS, AND TERMS USED IN THIS OUTLINE

The following symbols, terms and abbreviations are used throughout this Outline; not all are “official” terms (defined by statute or regulations).

- § Refers to a section of the Code, unless preceded by “Reg.” (for Treasury regulation) or “Prop. Reg.” (for proposed Treasury regulation).
- ¶ Refers to a section of the author’s book *Life and Death Planning for Retirement Benefits* (8th ed. 2019). The book can be purchased in print form at www.ataxplan.com or in electronic format via subscription (ebook version) at www.retirementbenefitsplanning.us. The book is not yet updated for SECURE. This Outline substitutes for an update to the book for now.

5-year rule. See PART 3, #2.

10-year rule. See PART 3, #3.

Accumulation Trust. A See-through Trust that is not a conduit trust. See PART 4, #2.

AD; Applicable Denominator. The number that is divided into the prior year-end account balance to produce the RMD for the current year. Formerly (and sometimes still) called the “Applicable Distribution Period.” See PART 2, #3.

ADP. Applicable Distribution Period; this term has mostly been replaced by “Applicable Denominator.”

ALAR Rule. “At least as rapidly” rule. See PART 3, #3(C-E).

AMBT. Applicable multi-beneficiary trust. § 401(a)(9)(H)(v). See PART 3, #7(D-F).

Annual distributions track. Not an official term. The annual RMDs (if any) required after the death of the participant, in contrast to the final year in which 100% of the account must be distributed, which is called the Required Terminal Distribution in this Outline.

Applicable Age. The age at which a participant becomes subject to lifetime RMDs from traditional IRAs and (generally) also from employer retirement plans. See PART 2, #1(B).

BDOT. Beneficiary deemed owner trust. Not an official term. See PART 9, Case #3(G).

Beneficiary. A person or entity who inherits an IRA or other retirement account upon the death of the Participant (the original owner; the person for whom the account was created).

BFD. Beneficiary Finalization Date. Not an official term. September 30 of year after year of participant’s death. See PART 7, #2.

Code. Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended through April 30, 2026.

Conduit trust. See PART 4, #2.

Countable beneficiary. Not an official term. A beneficiary or potential beneficiary of a trust who is “countable” in determining whether the trust qualifies as a DBT. See PART 4, #3.

DAF. Donor advised fund. See PART 9, Case #7.

DB; Designated Beneficiary. See PART 3, #1(B).

DBT; Designated Beneficiary Trust. Not an official term. A see-through trust whose countable beneficiaries are all DBs. See PART 4, #11.

D/CI individual. A beneficiary who is an EDB by virtue of being a disabled or chronically ill individual within the meaning of § 401(a)(9)(E)(ii)(III), (IV). See PART 3, #7.

Distribution Year. Called a “Distribution Calendar Year” in the regulations, a year in which a distribution is required to be made from the retirement account under § 401(a)(9) of the Code. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(a)(2).

DRAC. Designated Roth account. A Roth account “inside” a 401(k) plan. § 402A; ¶ 5.7.

EDB. Eligible designated beneficiary as defined in § 401(a)(9)(E)(ii). See PART 3, #4.

EDB Treatment. In this Outline, “EDB treatment” refers to a trust named as beneficiary, and indicates that the trust in question is entitled to a life expectancy payout of some type attributable to one or more EDBs who is or are beneficiary(ies) of the trust. See PART 5, #1.

Funding trust; also called “**administrative trust.**” Not official terms. A trust that is named as beneficiary of a retirement account but will be required, upon the participant’s death, to transfer such benefits to one or more individuals or subtrusts. See PART 4, #4.

Ghost life expectancy. Not an official term. What would have been the remaining life expectancy of a participant who died after his RBD. See PART 3, #2.

IRA. Individual retirement account or individual retirement trust under § 408.

IRS. Internal Revenue Service.

Life expectancy payout. Not an official term. A way of determining annual RMDs based on the life expectancy of a beneficiary. See PART 3, #1(D).

NoMoTTY. Not an official term. A person who is an EDB by virtue of being not more than 10-years-younger than the deceased participant. See PART 3, #8.

Non-DB. A beneficiary who is not a Designated Beneficiary. See PART 3, #2.

Participant. Not an official term. Used in this Outline to mean the worker/earner from whose compensation the IRA or qualified plan account was created. The Code and regulations refer to this person as the “employee” (with reference to qualified retirement plans and other “workplace” retirement plans) and “the IRA owner” or “the individual” with respect to IRAs.

PODB. Plain old designated beneficiary. A beneficiary who is a “designated beneficiary” but not an “eligible designated beneficiary.” See PART 9, Case #1.

Potential beneficiary. Not an official term. See PART 4, #8.

Primary (trust) beneficiary. A trust beneficiary who is entitled, or eligible, to receive distributions as a result of the death of the participant, without being required to wait until after the death of some other beneficiary. Compare “residuary beneficiary.” See PART 4, #9.

PLR. IRS private letter ruling.

Prop. Reg. Proposed Treasury Regulation.

QRP. Qualified retirement plan under § 401(a), such as a 401(k) plan. An employer-created retirement plan that meets the more than 30 requirements of § 401(a).

RBD. Required beginning date. The date by which the participant must commence taking lifetime RMDs from the retirement account. See PART 2, #1(A); PART 3, #1(A).

Reg. Treasury Regulation.

Required Terminal Distribution. Not an official term. The year in which (under Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)) the RMD is 100% of the account..

Residuary beneficiary. Not an official term, but used in the regulations to refer to a trust beneficiary who is not a “primary beneficiary.” See PART 4, #9.

RMD. Required minimum distribution from a retirement plan under § 401(a)(9).

SECURE. The SECURE Act of December 2019. See PART 2, #2, for citation.

SECURE 2.0. Enacted at the end of 2022 with various effective dates. See PART 2, #2.

See-through Trust. A trust that complies with rules in Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(2). See PART 4, #7.

Separate accounts. See PART 6, #1.

SNT. Supplemental Needs Trust. See PART 9, Case #4.

Trusteed IRA. See PART 9, Case #2(E).

PART 2: INTRODUCTION TO THE RMD RULES

Tax-favored retirement accounts covered in this Outline include individual retirement accounts (IRAs) under § 408, including Roth IRAs under § 408A, defined contribution plans that are “qualified” under § 401(a) (such as 401(k) plans), and to some extent “403(b)” accounts. These accounts cannot hold tax-deferred funds forever. § 401(a)(9) and § 408(a)(6) dictate that distributions must commence to the account owner (called the “employee” in the regulations, which are aimed at qualified employer plans, or the “IRA owner” when applied to IRAs; in this Outline, “participant” is used to cover both categories) at a certain point in time. § 401(a)(9) also dictates that distributions must be made from the account after the participant’s death to the beneficiaries of the account.

Preface: Background; SECURE, et seq.

Once upon a time, estate planners had a wonderful surprise gift for clients. When the client showed up with a large IRA asset, an “ugly duckling” that came laden with the indebtedness for unpaid income taxes, the planner could turn the asset into a swan. The swan was called the “stretch IRA”—deferring those taxes for decades after the client’s demise with a “life expectancy payout” to the client’s children or grandchildren. And the client and the family and the estate planner lived happily ever after.

The rest of this Outline contains the horror story about the monster that took away the happy ending: The SECURE Act (and its successor developments). Signed into law December 20, 2019, SECURE radically changed the estate planning landscape for clients’ retirement benefits. This was accomplished primarily by amending § 401(a)(9) of the Internal Revenue Code. Except for a few types of beneficiaries, the life expectancy payout is abolished, replaced by a maximum 10-year post-death payout period for most retirement benefits. Planners’ new message for clients: You shouldn’t have accumulated so much money in your retirement plans. Your children will be punished for this mistake. In the meantime, you will be paying me for damage control.

IRS early-2022 proposed regulations under SECURE made things even worse in some respects but also restated the entire set of RMD regs in a mostly positive way, making planning easier for practitioners and clients. In December 2022, “SECURE 2.0” threw lots of changes into the mix making the RMD rules even more tangled and complicated, while also providing new tax-reduction and deferral opportunities. In July 2024 the IRS issued FINAL regulations under SECURE (clearing up many vexing RMD problems) and proposed regulations under SECURE 2.0 (that look pretty likely to become final).

Where we are now: Unless Congress throws another curve ball, we now have 99% settled RMD and trust rules. Unfortunately the RMD rules are now incredibly complicated. For most of the snarly complications there is no good policy reason. But they are at least (mostly) clear. It’s time for planners to help clients navigate those rules and come up with the estate plans that will best achieve the client’s goals.

1. Estate planning for retirement benefits: The new landscape

Planners and their IRA-owning clients did not welcome the drastic changes to the minimum distribution rules made by SECURE, eliminating the life expectancy payout for most beneficiaries that so many had counted on. But it appeared at first that SECURE might have one possible silver lining: By imposing a 10-year rule for most beneficiaries (for participant deaths either before or after the “required beginning date” or RBD), maybe at last the rules would get a little....simpler?

No such luck. Instead the opposite happened. The rules have gotten much more complicated than before—while the potential rewards for complying with them shrank.

A. Death before or after RBD matters more than ever

Though SECURE *seemed* to reduce the differences between the RMD rules for “death before the Required Beginning Date (RBD)” and “death after the RBD” (the “10-year rule” is decreed to apply to both situations) the Treasury regulations continue and even increase that difference. For example:

- A designated beneficiary who is subject to the 10-year rule does not have to take any annual RMDs in years 1-9, just a 100% distribution in Year10, if the participant died before his RBD. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(3). But if the participant died on or after the RBD, such beneficiary DOES have to take annual RMDs (in 2025 and later years) over his life expectancy in years 1-9. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1). See Part 3, #3(C).
- If the participant dies before his RBD, leaving the account to an EDB, the 10-year rule may apply to the EDB instead of the life expectancy payout, if so elected by the plan, the participant, or the beneficiary. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(5)(ii), (iii). SECURE did not require or even suggest that wrinkle. But that option is not available for the EDB of a participant who died after his RBD. See Part 3, #4(C).

B. The “Applicable Age”: When lifetime RMDs must begin

An individual’s required beginning date (RBD) is *generally* April 1 of the year after the year in which he reaches his “Applicable Age”; for the RBD for *each type of retirement account*, see PART 3, #1(A). An individual’s “Applicable Age” depends on his birth date. § 401(a)(9)(C)(v); Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-2(b)(2).

- * Born before 7/1/1949: April 1 of year after the year the participant turned age 70½
- * Born 7/1/1949–12/31/1950: April 1 of year after the year the participant turned age 72
- * Born in 1951–1958: April 1 of year after the year the participant turned/turns age 73

- Born in 1959: In the Code, Congress managed to place 1959 babies into both the “age 73” Applicable-Age group (they will attain age 73 before 2033) and in the “age 75” Applicable Age group (they will attain age 74 after 2032). The IRS proposes to resolve this by placing them in the age 73 group. Prop. Reg. 1.401(a)(9)-2(b)(2)(v).
- Born after 1959: April 1 of year after the year the participant turns age 75.

2. Where to find the law

SECURE Act: See § 401, in TITLE V—REVENUE PROVISIONS of “DIVISION O” (“SETTING EVERY COMMUNITY UP FOR RETIREMENT ENHANCEMENT”) of the “Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020,” Pub. L. 116–94. § 401(a) of this TITLE V [confusingly numbered, since the existing minimum distribution rules are in § 401(a) of the *Tax Code*] adds new subparagraph (H) to § 401(a)(9) of the Code and adds new definitions in § 401(a)(9)(E). § 401(b) of TITLE V provides the effective date of the new provisions—and contains some more minimum distribution rules which cannot be found in the Code itself.

SECURE 2.0: SECURE 2.0 is “Division T” of the Consolidated Appropriations Act 2023, enacted 12/29/2022. Pub. L. 117–328.

Proposed regulations (SECURE): On February 23, 2022, the Treasury issued a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking regarding required distributions from IRAs and certain other retirement plans. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/02/24/2022-02522/required-minimum-distributions> The 275-page Notice provides a complete proposed restatement of the Treasury regulations dealing with required minimum distributions (RMDs) from defined contribution plans (not just the sections changed by SECURE), and provides guidance on other retirement plan issues more or less related to RMDs such as rollovers, as well as matters primarily of interest to plan administrators. Some of the changes are in the form of a proposed amendment to an existing regulation; others would replace an existing regulation.

Final regulations (SECURE): July 2024: 26 CFR Parts 1, 31, and 54.

Proposed regulations (SECURE 2.0): July 2024: 26 CFR Part 1 RIN 1545-BQ66.

Notice 2002-53: 2002-2 CB 187, 7/26/2022.

Notice 2003-54, 2023-31 IRB 382, 7/14/2023.

Notice 2024-35, 2024-19 IRB 1051, 04/16/2024.

3. Important definitions and terminology

The regulations provide definitions for some of SECURE’s important terms, including “reaches majority” (see PART 3, #6(A)) and other elements of the “eligible designated beneficiary” category. They also adopt and define some already-widely-used terms, including “see-through trust,” “conduit trust,” and “accumulation trust,” for the first time; see PART 4, #2; and change some existing terms: For example, the terms “applicable distribution period” and “divisor” would mostly be replaced with “applicable denominator” or just “denominator.” See, *e.g.*, Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d).

PART 3: THE RMD RULES FOR ONE BENEFICIARY

1. The RMD rules: Basics

A. Is death before or after the RBD? This matters a LOT

Step one in determining RMDs to the beneficiary of an inherited retirement account is determining whether the participant died before or after his “Required Beginning Date” (RBD). The RBD is the deadline for starting to take RMDs from a traditional retirement account during the account owner’s lifetime. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-2(a)(1). **YOU CANNOT DETERMINE POST-DEATH RMDs FOR ANY BENEFICIARY UNTIL YOU KNOW WHETHER THE PARTICIPANT DIED BEFORE OR ON/AFTER THE RBD.**

Unfortunately, the RBD is a moving target and is different for different types of retirement accounts. Not only is the “Applicable Age” different for people born in different years (see PART 2, #1(B)), an individual can have different “RBDs” for his various retirement accounts—one for his traditional IRA (strictly age-based), another for his Roth IRA (there is no RBD for Roth IRAs), and another for his 401(k) plan (where he is still working past the “Applicable Age” and does not own more than 5% of the employer). A DRAC may have either of two RBDs!

- For a traditional IRA, the RBD is April 1 of the year after the IRA owner reaches his Applicable Age. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-2(a)(1), § 1.408-8(a)(1). For definition of Applicable Age, see Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-2(b)(2) and PART 2, #1(B).
- For a traditional account in a qualified retirement plan (such as a 401(k) plan) the RBD is the same as for an IRA *if* the participant owns more than 5% of the employer (“5% owner”). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-2(b)(3). See ¶ 1.4.03, ¶ 1.4.04 for definition of “5% owner.”
- For a non-5%-owner, it is April 1 following the *later of* [1] the year the employee reaches his Applicable Age or [2] the year the employee retires from the employer that sponsors the plan. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-2(b)(1).
- **Special weird rule for DRACs:** If an employee who owns a designated Roth account (DRAC) *also* owns a “traditional” account in the same retirement plan, then his “RBD” will be the same for the DRAC as it is for the traditional account—but **ONLY** for the purpose of determining whether the employee died before or after his RBD for purposes of determining post-death RMDs. Lifetime RMDs are not required from a DRAC (for 2024 and later years); so this rule is using the “RBD” concept solely for purposes of determining post-death RMDs (whether employee died before or after “RBD”), **NOT** for purposes of actually compelling any lifetime distributions from the DRAC. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(b)(3); Prop. Regs. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(g)(2)(iii), § 1.402(c)-2(f)(3). See SECURE 2.0, s. 325.

- If an employee who owns a designated Roth account (DRAC) does not own any “traditional” account in the same retirement plan, then his death will always be “before the RBD,” just as is the case with a Roth IRA. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(a)(2). This rule is SOLELY for the purpose of determining whether he died before or after his RBD for the applicable retirement plan; see explanation in preceding subparagraph.
- Roth IRAs have no RMDs during the account owner’s life so death is *always before the RBD* regardless of age.

For more details and citations regarding the RBD, see Chapter 1 of *Life and Death Planning for Retirement Benefits* (but substitute “the Applicable Age” for age 70½); regarding designated Roth accounts see Chapter 5, ¶ 5.7.

B. Designated beneficiary (DB) vs. Non-DB; “PODB” vs. “EDB”

The Code mandates different RMDs for the beneficiary who inherits a retirement account based on whether the beneficiary is or is not a “designated beneficiary.” The Code defines “designated beneficiary” (DB) as “any *individual* designated as a beneficiary by the employee.” § 401(a)(9)(E)(i). Emphasis added. The IRS must work within that requirement and that definition. The Regulations define DB as “an individual who is a beneficiary designated under the plan.” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(a)(1).

If the beneficiary of the decedent’s account is not an “individual” (for example, if it is a charity), the decedent has “no designated beneficiary.” A non-individual beneficiary is called in this Outline a Non-DB. The participant’s own estate is always a Non-DB, according to the IRS.

Within the DB category, some are “Eligible” Designated Beneficiaries (EDBs; see PART 3, #4). The rest are “plain old designated beneficiaries” (PODBs; see PART 3, #3).

C. Required annual distributions; Required Terminal Distribution

The Regulations provide, for each type of beneficiary, in effect, an annual distributions track and a final payout year. To determine RMDs for any beneficiary you must determine both the annual distributions track and the final payout year (“Required Terminal Distribution”). For example:

- Under the 5-year rule for non-DBs and 10-year rule for PODBs, in case of participant death prior to the RBD, there are no annual RMDs—just a Required Terminal Distribution.
- An EDB generally takes annual distributions over his/her life expectancy as long as it lasts (or until his/her earlier death), but there are many exceptions to that simple rule: For a minor child EDB, the LE payout does not last for life (see PART 3, #6). If participant’s death was before his RBD, the EDB might be subject to the 10-year rule instead of the life expectancy payout, so no annual distributions. See PART 3, #4(C).

- For 2024 and later years, if the surviving spouse (an EDB) is the sole beneficiary of the account, his/her life expectancy will be determined under the Uniform Lifetime Table (i.e. using a JOINT life expectancy) instead of the Single Life Table. See PART 3, #5. See PART 3, #5, regarding this change (made by SECURE 2.0), which is a radical shift in post-death distribution requirements.
- Whenever the surviving spouse is the sole designated beneficiary, his/her life expectancy is “recalculated annually.” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(3)(iv). The life expectancy of other beneficiaries (and of the spouse, if the spouse is just the oldest of multiple countable beneficiaries) is determined once, at the time of the account owner’s death. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(3)(iii). In both cases the beneficiary’s initial life expectancy is determined based on his/her age as of his/her birthday in the year after the year of the participant’s death.
- If the participant died after his RBD, and the beneficiary is older than the participant, annual distributions are determined by the *participant’s* life expectancy, a/k/a the “ghost life expectancy” rather than the EDB’s life expectancy (“greater of rule”; see PART 3, #4(D)).

A “life expectancy payout” normally keeps paying out until the end of the life expectancy (unless the account is depleted earlier through extra distributions or investment losses). So the opening bid for the “final payout year” is the last year of the applicable life expectancy.

However, under SECURE and the Regulations, there is another, separately-determined, “final payout year” (called the “Required Terminal Distribution”—not an official term—in this Outline) and when that arrives, it overrides any life expectancy payout then in progress and thus may cut short that life expectancy payout. For each type of beneficiary, there may be different rules not only for the annual payout requirements but also for the Required Terminal Distribution—with both being different depending on whether the participant died before or after his RBD!

Of course the life expectancy could run out before the overriding “Required Terminal Distribution” arrives...And under two payout rules that may apply if the participant dies before his RBD (the “5-year rule” and the “10-year rule”) there are no annual distributions prior to the Required Terminal Distribution, so the annual payout track is “zero” per year.

In the Required Terminal Distribution year, Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e) imposes a “notwithstanding anything else” provision—that regardless of what the schedule of annual payments is, the payouts must be completed and end in a certain year—100% distribution is required in that final year. Here is an overview of certain “Required Terminal Distribution” requirements:

For an EDB who is an EDB solely because he or she is the child of the employee who had not reached majority (“minor child-EDB”), the Required Terminal Distribution is the tenth calendar year following the year the beneficiary reaches majority, i.e., it is the calendar year of his/her 31st birthday (or the 10th anniversary of his death, if he dies before his age 21-birthday year). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(4). The minor-child EDB is the ONLY EDB who faces a “Required Terminal Distribution” while he is still living—i.e., the year he/she reaches age 31. As applied, it means the calendar year that contains the earlier of [1] the 10th anniversary of the minor’s death or [2] the minor’s 31st birthday. So for the minor child him/herself, the Required Terminal Distribution

is the year he/she reaches age 31. For the successor beneficiary of a minor child-EDB, the Required Terminal Distribution is the year the child would have reached age 31, or, if earlier, the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the minor child's death. See PART 9, #3, case study for how to interpret and apply the “minor beneficiary” EDB rules.

For all other EDBs, the general Required Terminal Distribution is the final year of the EDB's life expectancy or (if later, and if the participant died after his RBD, the final year of the participant's life expectancy). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(ii); (e)(3). [This is new in the final regs; it was not in the proposed regs.] The override to this annual payout stream is, (if earlier) the tenth calendar year following the calendar year of the EDB's death. In other words the 10-year Required Terminal Distribution concept generally *does not apply to the EDB himself*, it applies to the successor beneficiary of the EDB. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(3). (The exception is a minor-child EDB; see above).

NOTE FOR YEARS 2022-2024: This 10-year limit for successor beneficiaries of a deceased EDB was somewhat unclear in the statute, and some people interpreted it to mean that, upon the death of the EDB, the life expectancy payouts would stop and the payout period would “flip” to a 10-year rule, with no further distributions required until the 10th year after the EDB's death. **That interpretation was INCORRECT.** The annual RMDs to the EDB must continue until the “greater of” distributions run out (or until the EDB dies if earlier)...and the same annual RMDs must continue to the EDB's successor beneficiary, but face a 100% RMD in the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the EDB's death.

Because the Proposed Regulations' interpretation of the statute was a surprise to some and/or unclear, the IRS has issued several notices, announcing that, for years prior to 2025, it will NOT enforce the excise tax for missed RMDs (§ 4974) against the successor beneficiary of an EDB who died in 2020–2024. See “F” below (PART 3, #1(F)).

D. The life expectancy payout: Then and now

A life expectancy payout refers to a method of calculating RMDs: The annual RMD is determined by dividing the prior year-end account balance by the remaining life expectancy of the individual from the applicable table (see Appendix). For a young beneficiary, the method produces small RMDs because the divisor is so large. For an old beneficiary, the opposite is true. Either way, annual RMDs tend to get larger over the years as the beneficiary's life expectancy (formerly called the divisor, now called the Applicable Denominator) gets smaller. See the (new—effective for 2022 and later years) IRS life expectancy tables in the Appendix of this Outline. If computing life expectancy for the DB of a pre-2022 decedent, see “E” below.

Prior to SECURE the life expectancy payout method was utilized in estate planning by making a client's retirement benefits payable to a young designated beneficiary. SECURE took away that option for most clients, as explained throughout this Outline. However, the “old” life expectancy payout method still exists for disabled beneficiaries, surviving spouses, and other “EDBs” as well as (strangely) for PODBs for the first nine years after the participant's death if the participant died after his RBD. For how to calculate RMDs using the life expectancy payout method, see ¶ 1.2 of *Life*

and *Death Planning for Retirement Benefits* and “transition rule to the new tables” in the following subsection.

E. IRS tables revised in 2022; how to transition if needed

The IRS updated its tables for determining life expectancy for RMD purposes effective for 2022 and later years. See Appendix for current tables. Anyone computing RMDs in 2022 or later for a participant who is over the Applicable Age, or for the surviving spouse-sole beneficiary of a deceased participant, or for the designated beneficiary of a decedent who died in 2021 or later, will simply use the new tables to compute the RMD for the applicable year.

However, in computing the RMD for the nonspouse designated beneficiary of a participant who died before 2022, or the successor beneficiary of a beneficiary who died before 2022, it will be necessary to apply a transition rule to determine the RMD for 2022 and later years. There is a one-time reset of the payout period: You go back to the original year-after-participant’s [or original designated beneficiary’s] death and determine what WOULD HAVE BEEN the such beneficiary’s life expectancy in such year-after-death under the NEW tables. Then deduct one year for each year that has passed since then, and apply that as your Applicable Denominator for 2022. Continue to deduct one year from that new adjusted remaining life expectancy in each following year. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-9(f)(2).

For example, suppose the IRA of a 2014 decedent is being paid out to Junior, the designated beneficiary. The life expectancy payout started in 2015, the year after the participant’s death. Junior turned 35 in 2015, so his applicable distribution period (ADP) (starting in 2015, under the old table) was 48.5 years. This is reduced by one each year, so under the old rules, the divisor for 2022 would be 41.5 (48.5 minus 7 years). Under the regulation’s one-time reset, we go back to 2015 and look up what Junior’s life expectancy would have been under the *new* table and find it would have been 50.5 years. Now deduct the 7 elapsed years from that and we get a 2022 divisor of 43.5. His RMD for 2022 will be the 12/31/2021 account balance divided by 43.5. For 2023, the RMD will be the 12/31/22 account balance divided by 42.5. For subsequent years Junior will just keep deducting one more year from the prior year’s divisor get each subsequent year’s divisor.

Note: Junior is using the life expectancy payout, even though he is not disabled, minor, etc., just a “PODB,” because he is the designated beneficiary of a *pre-2020 deceased participant*. His payout is “grandfathered” from the SECURE changes. See PART 8, #1A-#1E.

F. RMD penalty waived on certain 2021-2024 RMDs

If a participant or beneficiary fails to take an RMD by the applicable deadline, the Code imposes an excise tax on the missed amount. § 4974(a). For how to compute the excise tax, see Reg. § 54.4974-1. The IRS has announced it will not enforce this tax (popularly referred to as a “penalty”) for CERTAIN missed RMDs from INHERITED retirement accounts in the years 2021–2024. So if one of these specially protected beneficiaries failed to take any or all of those years’ RMDs, he now does not have to take them. They can just be left in the account and ignored. There will be no penalty. These distributions are still RMDs...but since there will be no penalty for not taking them, they are....nonrequired RMDs. See IRS Notices 2022-53, 2023-54, and 2024-35.

Note: In the year 2020, due to the covid epidemic, ALL RMDs were waived FOR EVERYBODY. There were no “RMDs” in 2020. The IRS Notices do NOT apply to all RMDs!

An extremely important point about these IRS Notices is that, contrary to the impression created to some individuals, these IRS notices did NOT waive RMDs for ALL inherited retirement accounts. In fact they have absolutely no effect on most beneficiaries! Here are the ONLY beneficiaries entitled to “skip” RMDs for 2021–2024 under these Notices:

- A “plain old designated beneficiary” who inherited from a participant who died [1] after his RBD and [2] in 2020–2023. See PART 3, #3(C). Such PO DB must take the year-of-death RMD payable to the participant, if the participant had not taken it prior to death. And the PO DB must also take annual distributions over the PO DB’s life expectancy for years one through nine AFTER the participant’s death, *except for the years 2021–2024*. The PO DB can simply skip annual payouts for those years.
- The successor beneficiary of an EDB, where the EDB inherited from a participant who died after 2019 and the EDB later died in 2020–2023. This successor beneficiary must take the year-of-death RMD payable to the now-deceased EDB (based on the EDB’s life expectancy), if the EDB had not taken it prior to death, and must *also* take annual distributions over the EDB’s remaining life expectancy *except he can skip 2021-2024*. The PO DB must resume taking RMDs over the EDB’s remaining life expectancy in 2025 (with such payout ending in the final year of that remaining life expectancy, or in the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the EDB’s death, whichever comes first).
- The successor beneficiary of the designated beneficiary of a pre-2020 decedent where such “grandfathered” DB died in 2020–2023. See PART 8. Such successor beneficiary must take the year of death RMD (to the extent the “grandfathered” DB had not taken it), and then continue taking RMDs over the life expectancy of the original DB until the earlier of the end of such DB’s life expectancy or 10 years after the death of such DB whichever comes first—except he can skip 2021-2024 with respect to these post-year-of-death RMDs.

The following beneficiaries are NOT exempted from taking any life expectancy (or other) RMDs in 2021-2024:

- ◆ The EDB of any post-2019 deceased participant, regardless of whether participant died before or after his RBD. EDBs knew they were subject to the life expectancy payout, there was no confusion about that, therefore they are NOT excused from taking ANY RMDs.
- ◆ For the same reason the Notices do not apply to the designated beneficiary of a participant who died before 2020, and:
- ◆ It does not apply to any beneficiary of a participant who died before his RBD.

For the beneficiaries who are “excused” from taking their RMDs in 2021-2024, there is no need to file form 5329 or any other report about the missed distribution, no need to request a waiver, and no need to take any “makeup” distribution: From the Preamble to final regulations, “This relief does not require taxpayers to make up missed required minimum distributions nor does it permit taxpayers to extend the 10-year deadline by which a full distribution is required to be made. For example, if an employee died in 2020, then in 2025 there are six years remaining in the 10-year period without regard to whether the designated beneficiary took distributions in 2021, 2022, 2023, or 2024. In 2030, the designated beneficiary must take a distribution of the remaining account balance.” RMDs for 2025 and later are to be calculated as usual—using the prior year-end account value divided by the Applicable Denominator, with no “adjustments” of any type for the missed years.

Someone who already took the RMD for any of the years 2021–2024 cannot put it back in to the account however. The distribution he took was not an eligible rollover distribution.

Also, if the inherited account is a qualified retirement plan, and the designated beneficiary wants to have it transferred into an inherited IRA, it would appear that the missed RMDs would have to be distributed first, because RMDs are not eligible rollover distributions. In that case the beneficiary would have to take the RMDs because he can’t do the rollover until those RMDs have been distributed. However, the IRS has not commented one way or the other on this aspect.

2. RMDs for a Non-DB: The 5-year rule and the “ghost life expectancy”

The determination of RMDs for a non-designated beneficiary (Non-DB) is unchanged by SECURE. SECURE did not change the definition of Non-DB or the payout rules for a Non-DB. The 10-year rule, all varieties of the life-expectancy-of-the-beneficiary payout, and the privilege of direct transfers of inherited benefits from a qualified plan to an IRA [Reg. § 1.402(c)-2(j)(2)(ii)] are reserved for “designated beneficiaries” (DBs) only and therefore are *never available* for a Non-DB.

Note: The final regulations extend applicability of the “ghost life expectancy”: It will now also apply for determining annual distributions to a PODB or EDB in cases of participant death after the RBD if the ghost life expectancy is longer than the beneficiary’s life expectancy—the “greater of” rule.

A Non-DB is a beneficiary who does not qualify as a DB. That would mean a beneficiary that is not an individual, such as the participant’s own estate, charities, and any trust that does not qualify as a “Designated Beneficiary Trust” (DBT). Here are the payout periods that apply to a Non-DB:

- ◆ **5-year rule.** If the participant dies before his RBD, the 5-year rule applies. All benefits must be distributed by the end of the year that contains the fifth anniversary of the participant’s date of death (or sixth anniversary, if such death occurred in the years 2015–2019). No payments are required before the final payout year. In the final year, 100% of the account becomes the RMD.
- ◆ **Ghost life expectancy.** If the participant dies on or after his RBD, the Non-DB must take annual distributions over what would have been the *participant’s* life expectancy if he hadn’t

died. This has been nicknamed the “ghost life expectancy.” For details on how to compute the ghost life expectancy, see ¶ 1.5.08 of *Life and Death Planning for Retirement Benefits*. As in all cases of participant’s death after the RBD, the beneficiary must also take the distribution for the year of death if the participant had not taken it prior to death.

3. RMDs for a Plain old designated beneficiary (PODB): The 10-year rule

A PODB is subject to the 10-year rule regardless of whether the participant died before or after the RBD. § 401(a)(9)(H)(i). The “10-year rule,” created by SECURE, is explicitly based on the “5-year rule” (applicable to non-DBs when the participant dies before his RBD). Under SECURE, it applies to any Designated Beneficiary (DB) who is not an Eligible Designated Beneficiary (EDB).

However, under the Regulations, the 10-year rule can *also* apply to an EDB in some cases if the participant died before his RBD; see PART 3, #4(C). Here is how the 10-year rule works:

A. 10-year rule distinguished from other 10-year RMD periods

The 10-Year Rule discussed here is not to be confused with other 10-year limits in the post-SECURE RMD rules, namely, the requirement that all benefits be distributed no later than 10 years after the death of an EDB (PART 3, #4(E)), or after a minor-child EDB reaches majority (PART 3, #6(B)), or after the post-2019 death of the designated beneficiary of a pre-2020 decedent (PART 8). Those 10-year periods are NOT “the 10-year rule”—they are merely time limits on a Life Expectancy Payout. In contrast, the 10-Year Rule discussed here is a separate RMD rule, applicable to PODBs, which itself (1) requires no distributions prior to the 10th year and (2) is not connected to any life expectancy payout—HOWEVER, be aware that in both respects a DIFFERENT rule, the ALAR rule explained below, requires annual life-expectancy payments within the 10-year rule period in cases of Participant death after the RBD!

B. How the 10-Year Rule works

The regulations confirm that the “10-year rule” introduced by SECURE (inserting § 401(a)(9)(H)(i) into the Code) works the same way as the 5-year rule (on which the 10-year rule is explicitly based) has always worked: No distributions are required until the 10th year at which time the entire account becomes the RMD. Reg. § 54.4974-1(c)(3). Unfortunately, the rare clarity and simplicity of this concept is erased by the IRS’s interpretation of ANOTHER RMD rule, the “at least as rapidly rule,” which (under Treasury’s interpretation) requires annual distributions during the first nine years of the 10-Year Rule payout period, in cases of death after the RBD:

C. Death after RBD: Annual RMDs combined with 10-year Rule

If the participant dies after his RBD, the 10-year rule isn’t the only RMD rule that applies. The PODB must also take annual distributions in years 1-9 after the participant’s death. This obligation derives from the “at least as rapidly” rule of § 401(a)(9)(B)(i): In cases of participant’s death after

the RBD, distributions must continue to be made (to his beneficiary) “at least as rapidly” as before the participant’s death (the “at least as rapidly” or “ALAR” rule).

Because the IRS’s interpretation (applying the “ALAR rule” to require annual RMDs under the 10-year rule, if participant died after the RBD) was a complete surprise (shock, actually) to practitioners, beneficiaries and plan administrators, the IRS has waived the excise tax (§ 4974) for any “plain old” designated beneficiary who: (1) inherited from a participant who died in 2020–2023, after his RBD; and (2) is subject to the 10-year rule, with respect to RMDs required in 2021–2024. See PART 3, #1(F).

These annual distributions must continue “until the employee’s interest is fully distributed.” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(i) (third sentence). In the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the participant’s death, the 10-year rule takes over and 100% distribution must be made no later than that year, no matter how many years may be left in the beneficiary’s life expectancy. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(i), (e)(1), (2).

If the PODB dies before year 10, such RMDs must continue “up to and including the calendar year that includes the ..[PODB’s] date of death.” The RMD for the year of the PODB’s death would be distributed to “any beneficiary of the deceased beneficiary to the extent it has not already been distributed to the deceased beneficiary.” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(i). Then what? Presumably, the successor beneficiary continues to withdraw over the deceased PODB’s life expectancy, with 100% distribution required in the year that the contains the 10th anniversary of the participant’s death.

D. Required Terminal Distribution for a PODB

If the participant died after his RBD, a PODB is subject to the ALAR Rule as explained in “C” above, meaning that annual “life expectancy” distributions are required in Years 1-9, with 100% payout required in Year 10.

Whose “life expectancy” is used to calculate these RMDs in Years 1–9? It is the “greater of” the beneficiary’s life expectancy or the ghost life expectancy [this is new in the final regs; it was not in the proposed regs]. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(ii). Thus, if the beneficiary is older than the participant, the participant’s (longer) life expectancy will be used to calculate RMDs during years 1–9 of the PODB’s payout period.

But wait: The only way the participant’s life expectancy could be longer than the beneficiary’s life expectancy is if the beneficiary is older than the participant...and if the beneficiary is older than the participant, he is not a PODB, he is an EDB (NoMoTTY; PART 3, #8)...so why are we looking at the 10-year rule at all?

Here is how it is possible for a beneficiary’s life expectancy to be shorter than the participant’s life expectancy and still have the 10-year rule apply: If the beneficiary is the SOLE beneficiary of the participant, and is older than the participant, then the beneficiary is indeed an EDB and the 10-year rule would not apply.

However, if there are multiple designated beneficiaries (typically that would mean multiple “countable beneficiaries” of a trust that is named as beneficiary), and not all of them are EDBs, the participant is treated as *not having an EDB*: “if the employee has more than one designated beneficiary, and at least one of those beneficiaries is not an eligible designated beneficiary, then the

employee is treated as not having an eligible designated beneficiary.” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(2)(i). There are (of course!) two exceptions to that rule—for AMBTs and trusts for minor-child EDBs,

Thus, our beneficiary who is older than the participant, if he were the only beneficiary, would indeed be an EDB...but if he is just one of multiple designated beneficiaries, not all of whom are EDBs, he loses his status as an EDB.

Note it is possible for the payout period to run out (100% distribution required) in LESS than 10 years after the participant’s death, if the “longer of” the two life expectancies is less than 10 years.

E. Reminder: What happens if you miss the 10-year deadline

As is true under existing regulations, if the beneficiary fails to take the 100% distribution in year 10, then that “missed RMD” will continue to be the RMD from that account every year after that until it is distributed....accruing the excise tax for missed RMDs annually. Reg. § 54.4974-1(e).

4. EDB: General RMD rules for EDBs

The Code, as amended by SECURE, provides that only an “eligible designated beneficiary” (EDB) is entitled to the “life expectancy payout” described in § 401(a)(9)(B)(iii). § 401(a)(9)(H).

The definitions of the five types of EDBs (participant’s surviving spouse or minor child, a disabled or chronically ill individual, or an individual who is none of the above and is not more than 10 years younger than the participant) are found in § 401(a)(9)(E)(ii) and Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e), and are set out in the applicable section of this Outline for each category.

This section discusses the general RMD rules for the EDB category; particular variations for each type of EDB are discussed in the Outline section for that category.

A. Background: Where does the life expectancy payout come from?

If you’re interested, carefully read § 401(a)(9) of the Code, the section that creates the “required distributions” rules applicable to qualified plans and (by extension via other Code sections) IRAs and 403(b) plans. You will see that § 401(a)(9)(A) sets out the requirement for distributions that are required *during the employee’s lifetime*, beginning on a “required beginning date” (RBD) set out in § 401(a)(9)(C).

§ 401(a)(9)(B) provides the post-death RMD rules if the employee still has money in the plan when he dies. “(B)(i)” provides the post-death RMD rule that applies if the employee dies after the RBD—the (B)(i) rule is known as the “at least as rapidly” rule, see PART 3, #3(C).

Then “(B)(ii)” provides a general rule for what happens if the employee dies *before* that RBD: “the entire interest of the employee will be distributed within 5 years after the death of such employee”—the infamous “5-year rule.” That’s a bit harsh on the aggrieved widow/er, orphaned children, and other dependents of the deceased employee, so the Code next provides a generous exception in “(B)(iii)”: If there is a designated beneficiary, benefits are to be distributed over the life expectancy of such designated beneficiary. (B)(iii) created the life expectancy payout and, for planners and clients, the entire industry of “stretch IRAs.”

As we know, SECURE stepped in to end stretch IRAs. It attempted to do so by adding a “notwithstanding”-type rule in new Code subsection § 401(a)(9)(H): (H)(ii) provides that “Subparagraph (B)(iii) [the life expectancy payout section] shall apply only in the case of an eligible designated beneficiary.” In other words, the life expectancy payout previously available under (B)(iii) to ANY designated beneficiary would now be available only to EDBs.

But the (B)(iii) exception that SECURE put restrictions on is an exception to the 5-year rule...and the 5-year rule only applies in cases of death *before the RBD*. **The life expectancy payout for any beneficiary in cases of death after the RBD is not explicitly set out in the Code at all.** It came into existence entirely through IRS regulations interpreting the “at least as rapidly rule” (§ 401(a)(9)(B)(i)) and the rule that the employee’s interest must be distributed either entirely before the RBD or, “beginning not later than the required beginning date, in accordance with regulations, over the life of such employee *or over the lives of such employee and a designated beneficiary* (or over a period not extending beyond the life expectancy of such employee or the life expectancy of such employee and a designated beneficiary).” § 401(a)(9)(A)(ii). Emphasis added.

SECURE seemed to assume that the life expectancy payout for EDBs under the “(B)(iii) exception” would apply regardless of whether death is before or after the RBD even though (B)(iii) does not apply to deaths after the RBD. The Regulations go along with that assumption.

B. RMDs for EDBs during the EDB’s life

Generally, RMDs to an EDB are calculated using the life expectancy payout, just as was done for all designated beneficiaries prior to SECURE, but there are some other options (see “C”) and variations (see “D”).

Here is the explanation of the life expectancy payout method as it applies to a nonspouse EDB: Life expectancy is calculated as a fixed term of years. The method of calculating RMDs under the life expectancy payout is not changed from before SECURE. Annual RMDs for a nonspouse EDB are computed (starting the year after the year of the participant’s death) by dividing the prior year end account balance by the life expectancy factor (“Applicable Denominator”) for the beneficiary’s age on his/her birthday in that year after the year of the participant’s death, and repeating the process annually, reducing the divisor by one each year until the factor drops to one or below. See Chapter 1 of *Life and Death Planning for Retirement Benefits* and Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(a)(i). If the surviving spouse is the sole designated beneficiary, there are totally different rules regarding when distributions start and how they are computed; see PART 3, (#5).

Example: Rita dies in 2024, before her RBD, leaving her IRA to her twin sister Lolita. Lolita is a NoMoTTY and so is an EDB. Lolita will turn 67 in 2025, the year after Rita’s death. The life expectancy at age 67 is 21.2 years, so the RMD for 2025 is [the account balance of the IRA as of 12/31/24] divided by 21.2. The RMD for 2026 will be the account balance as of 12/31/25 divided by 20.2, and so on every year until 2045 when the divisor drops to .2, requiring 100% distribution of the account in that year.

One thing that has changed since before SECURE: If the EDB dies before his life expectancy has run out, the successor beneficiary will continue to take RMDs on the same schedule the EDB

was using—that rule applied before SECURE and continues to apply. What’s changed: The successor beneficiary must withdraw 100% of the account in the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the EDB’s death even if the “life expectancy payout period” has not run out yet [though he/she can skip years before 2025; see PART 3, #1(F)]. See “E.”

C. Participant dies before RBD: 10-year rule may apply to EDB

The Code’s bare assertion is that the life expectancy payout “shall apply only in the case of an eligible designated beneficiary.” Under the regulations, however, the life expectancy payout may not be the EDB’s only option or may not even BE an option under the applicable plan! This wrinkle seems to have been entirely invented by the Treasury, there is no hint of it in the Code.

Under the regulations, the 10-year rule would apply to the EDB instead of the life expectancy payout in the following cases:

- The applicable plan document requires it: The plan can make the 10-year rule applicable with respect to all EDBs, or to EDBs of certain categories of employees, or to certain categories of EDBs. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(3), (5)(ii).
- The applicable plan document permits the participant to elect the 10-year rule for his/her EDB and the participant does so elect. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(3), (5)(iii).
- The applicable plan document permits the EDB to elect the 10-year rule and the EDB does so elect. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(3), (5)(iii).

In the case of a beneficiary election, for a non-spouse EDB, the election must be made no later than the end of the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the employee’s death (and must be irrevocable by that date). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(5)(iii). For the surviving spouse, it would be the *earlier of* the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the participant’s death or the year that the participant would have attained his Applicable Age; see PART 3, #5(A)(vi).

If the plan has no provision on this point, the “default” rule for an EDB is the life expectancy payout. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(5)(i).

If an EDB is subject to the life expectancy payout, and fails to take life expectancy RMDs, and the participant died before his RBD, the EDB may qualify for a waiver of the 25% excise tax on missed RMDs by “electing” the 10-year rule by the end of year 9 after the employee’s death; see Reg. § 54.4974-1(g)(2).

The Regulations contain provisions dealing with an EDB’s ability to transfer funds from a plan that requires the 10-Year rule to another plan or IRA that permits the life expectancy payout. **This aspect is not covered in this Outline.**

The option to elect the 10-year rule is not available to the DB of a pre-2020 decedent. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-1(b)(iii) (Example 3).

D. Participant dies after RBD: The “greater of” rule

If the participant died after his RBD, the Applicable Denominator for determining annual RMDs to an EDB is the longer of the EDB’s life expectancy or the participant’s life expectancy (the “greater of” rule). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(ii). The “greater of” rule is good news for older EDBs. They will get at least as good a “deal” as a Non-DB would get—namely, the ghost life expectancy payout.

Example: The designated beneficiary of Tommy’s IRA is his mother Lucy who is 22 years older than Tommy. If Tommy dies in his age-72 year (so, *before* his RBD), and Lucy inherits in her age-94 year, Lucy’s life expectancy at age 95 (i.e., the year after Tommy’s death) is only 4.0 years....but as an EDB [NoMoTTY], she can elect the 10-year rule and so withdraw the IRA gradually over that period of time if the plan permits that election. If Tommy dies in his age-75 year, *after* his RBD, Lucy will be 96 in the year after his death with a life expectancy of 3.7 years....and no more option to elect the 10-year rule. Under the “greater of” rule, the distribution period for Lucy will be Tommy’s “ghost life expectancy” (14.8 years at age 75).

E. Required Terminal Distribution for EDB payouts

There are the following possible Required Terminal Distribution years applicable to EDB payouts:

- (1) **10 years after death of EDB.** SECURE introduced a limit on how long a life expectancy payout can continue *after the death of the EDB*. Prior to SECURE, the designated beneficiary’s successor beneficiary would step into the shoes of the deceased DB and simply keep taking RMDs over the remaining life expectancy of the DB until it was reduced to one year or less. Even if that remaining life expectancy was 30 or 40 years!

Under the Code as amended by SECURE, that process still partly happens—the successor beneficiary of an EDB steps into the shoes of the deceased EDB and keeps taking RMDs based on the remaining life expectancy of the deceased EDB—but now there is a cap on how long that payout can continue: 100% of the account must be distributed no later than the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the death of the EDB. § 401(a)(9)(H)(iii); Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(3).

If the EDB dies more than 10 years prior to the end of his life expectancy, this limit will cap the post-death payout to the successor beneficiary at the 10th year. If the EDB dies within less than 10 years prior to the expiration of his life expectancy this 10-year limit will never come into play because the EDB’s remaining life expectancy will run out before the 10th year. Because of confusion about this rule see IRS Notices “forgiving” RMDs for 2021-2024 in certain cases, explained at PART 3(#1)(F).

- (2) **EDB’s life expectancy:** The second type of Required Terminal Distribution is the final year of the EDB’s life expectancy. Generally a “life expectancy payout” to an EDB will make its final payout in the final year of that life expectancy, even if the EDB lives beyond that year.

Note that if the “greater of” rule applies, the Required Terminal Distribution will be the last year of whichever life expectancy applies (EDB’s or ghost), or 10 years after EDB dies, whichever is earlier.

- (3) **Ghost life expectancy.** If the participant died after his RBD, and the EDB is taking RMDs based on the greater of rule over the *participant’s* life expectancy, the final year of that life expectancy would be the Required Terminal Distribution.
- (4) **10-year rule possible in rare cases (in death before the RBD situation).** If the EDB’s life expectancy was less than 10 years, but the participant died before his RBD and the 10-year rule applies—see “C” above. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(2).
- (5) **For a Minor-child EDB, 10 years after year of age-21 birthday (or of earlier death).** In the case of a minor child of the participant, EDB status ends upon reaching majority, so the payout must end in the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the earlier of such child’s death or the year in which he such child reaches majority. § 401(a)(9)(E)(iii). See PART 3(#6)(F).

5. **EDB: Participant’s surviving spouse (S/S): A good but complicated deal**

The participant’s surviving spouse (S/S) is an Eligible Designated Beneficiary (EDB) and as such entitled to a life expectancy payout. For convenience, the deceased participant is referred to as “he” and the S/S as “she.”

There are two sets of special rules for the surviving spouse. One is the minimum distribution rules, just as there are special RMD rules for other EDBs. 5(A) explains the RMD rules for the surviving spouse if the participant dies before his RBD; 5(B) covers the RMD rules if the participant dies on or after his RBD. 5(C) covers a different special deal for the surviving spouse, which is NOT a minimum distribution rule at all: The spouse’s ability to “roll over” the inherited account to her own account or elect to treat an inherited IRA as her own.

There are and always have been special RMD rules for determining how to compute life expectancy payments to the surviving spouse-beneficiary and when such payments must commence. The special rules for determining when payouts to the S/S must commence, how such payments are computed, and what happens if she dies before she is required to start taking such distributions were not significantly changed by SECURE or by the 2022 Proposed (SECURE) Regulations (except that references to age 70½ to the Applicable Age and the 10-year rule entered the picture). **However, SECURE 2.0 made substantial changes in the surviving-spouse RMD rules.** The new version is now primarily in the form of Final and Proposed Regulations issued July 19, 2024.

The following explanation is based on the Proposed Treasury regulations issued July 2024, as well as on the Code, the final regulations issued July 2024, and section 327 of The SECURE 2.0 Act of 2022 (P.L. 117-328, Div. T).

Section 327 of SECURE 2.0 “shall apply to calendar years beginning after December 31, 2023.” The Proposed Regulations are still just proposed regulations so may be modified before they become final. They propose to be effective as to all surviving spouse-beneficiaries whose first RMD

year would be 2024 or later. Prop. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(g)(3)(ii)(E); Preface, p. 10. That would mean, it is applicable to surviving spouses of participants who were born in 1951 or later and died before the end of the year they would have reached age 73. ***Note that it is effective for these surviving spouses even if the deceased employee died many years ago:***

Example: Clark, born in 1957, died in way back in 2017 at age 60, leaving his IRA to his wife Lois. He would have reached his Applicable Age (73) in 2030. If she is still holding the IRA as an inherited IRA, she will start RMDs no later than 12/31/2030 using the Uniform Lifetime Table—even though SECURE 2.0 had never even been dreamed of back when Clark died.

However it is not effective for spouses whose RMDs from their deceased spouse’s account began in 2023 or earlier:

Example: Mary died in 2017 at age 75, leaving her IRA to her husband William. Since she died after her RBD, William had to start taking RMDs in 2018, the year after her death. His RMDs are not affected by the new law and he does not get to take advantage of the SECURE 2.0 changes.

The treatment of the surviving spouse is different depending on whether the deceased spouse died before or on/after his required beginning date (RBD) under the applicable retirement plan, so the advisor must know which applies before attempting to assist/advise the surviving spouse. See PART 3, #1(A).

A. Participant died before his required beginning date (RBD)

Although the general rule is that a beneficiary who is required to take life-expectancy-based RMDs must commence such RMDs the year after the year of the participant’s death (Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(4)), there are and always have been special rules for the surviving spouse. SECURE 2.0 made substantial changes in these special rules. The good news is that the new regime is more favorable to surviving spouses than was the prior regime.

Although the following (i) through (v) describe the new version of the traditional life-expectancy-payout rule for a surviving spouse, there is a spanner thrown into the works, a different deal from left field, that MAY apply instead of the life expectancy payout rule described in (i) through (v): In some cases the 10-year rule may apply to the surviving spouse! See (vi)–(vii) for that important wild card. Subsections (i) through (v) assume the 10-year rule does NOT apply.

(i) Introduction; summary

Under the new deal, the surviving spouse can delay RMDs until the participant would have reached his Applicable Age [that part is NOT new—it has always been true, though under prior versions it was “age 70½” not “Applicable Age”] AND (this part is new) when she starts taking RMDs she will use the Uniform Lifetime Table, not the Single Life Table (SLT).

The RMD treatment described here will apply whenever the participant died before his RBD and the surviving spouse is the “sole beneficiary” of the account for RMD purposes (or of a “separate

account” within the participant’s retirement plan; see PART 6). “Sole beneficiary” means either (1) she is named as sole beneficiary outright, or (2) the named beneficiary is a “conduit trust” of which the surviving spouse is the sole life beneficiary. See Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(6)(i) [Example 1].

Under the Code and July 2024 final regulations, the spouse would need to elect to use this special spousal treatment (“surviving spouse may elect to be treated as the employee for purposes of determining” the RMD). § 401(a)(9)(B)(iv); Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(d); Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(g)(3)(i). However, under the 7/24 proposed regulations, the “spouse is treated as having made that election.” Prop. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(g)(3)(ii)(A). In other words, this is the automatic treatment (if the participant died before his RBD).

Should practitioners be upset that this “election” would be taken away from the surviving spouse by this Proposed Regulation? Presumably not: She is deemed to have elected a later starting date with smaller RMDs. The alternative is to default her into an earlier starting date with larger RMDs. Who would ever elect that treatment ?

But, CAN the spouse elect OUT of this treatment? Perhaps only by electing the 10-year rule (see PART 3, #4(C)). There is no other alternative now in the Code.

For many surviving spouse-beneficiaries there would be little reason to leave the money in the decedent’s plan—rolling over to the spouse’s own IRA would provide the same results with more control; so she can always “elect out” by rolling the account over to her own IRA. For the record, leaving benefits in the decedent’s account could be a good deal for the older surviving spouse (if decedent died long before his RBD) because it postpones the start of RMDs for her; and it can be a good deal for a young surviving spouse because if the surviving spouse is under age 59½ she can withdraw funds from the inherited account penalty-free while distributions from her own IRA would attract the 10% tax unless she qualifies for some other exception. On the other hand, a spouse who is beneficiary through a conduit trust might like to elect OUT to get larger RMD distributions.

Note: Unlike some other special spouse deals, it is NOT required (for the RMD treatment described here) that the surviving spouse have unlimited power to withdraw from the account. The special spousal RMD deals will apply even if a trust is the named beneficiary—provided it is a conduit trust for the spouse’s sole life benefit. See PART 9, Case #2. Compare “Spousal rollover or election” at (C) below.

(ii) When payments must begin

Generally, if the participant died before his RBD, an EDB using the life expectancy payout must take RMDs commencing the year after the year of the participant’s death. § 401(a)(9)(B)(iii)(III); Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(a)(4). The spouse gets a special deal—she is not required to commence distributions until the year in which the participant would have reached his Applicable Age. § 401(a)(9)(B)(iv)(II).

Though it appears the surviving spouse is getting a delayed start date, this “later start date for spouse” will produce an *actual* later start date if (and only if) the participant died two or more years before his Applicable Age-year. With the Applicable Age now being 73, and since most Americans die after that age, the delayed start date will benefit relatively few spouses.

Example: Ron was born in 1953, so his Applicable Age is 73. He will turn age 73 in 2026, so his RBD will be April 1, 2027. He dies in 2025, leaving his IRA in equal shares to his wife Linda and his sister Lucy, both age 72. Sister Lucy as an EDB (not more than 10 years younger) will have to start taking RMDs in 2026 (the year after Ron’s death). Spouse Linda can delay her RMDs until the year Ron would have reached his Applicable Age—but that is also 2026. So there is no difference. If he dies in 2026, or in 2027 (before April 1), the result is the same—both Linda and Lucy will have to start RMDs the year after Ron’s death. If Ron had died in 2024, then sister Lucy would have had to commence RMDs in 2025 (year after Ron’s death)—but spouse Linda could delay another year until 2026 (year Ron would have reached Applicable Age).

Is this delayed starting date a great deal for the surviving spouse? That may depend on how old the surviving spouse is relative to the decedent and also what kind of account it is:

- **Great deal:** Spouse Linda is much older than Ron and he died many years before his RBD...that scenario would mean she could postpone the start of RMDs until what would have been Ron’s RBD, giving her many years with no RMDs from this inherited account. If she then rolls over to her own IRA will she have to take catchup distributions? Apparently not. Compare treatment of electing 10-year rule then rolling over in year 9 (catchup distributions required) in Example at Prop. Reg. § 1.402(c)-2(j)(4)(vii).
- **Not so great deal:** Spouse Linda is much younger than Ron...In that case, Ron’s RBD would have been much earlier than Linda’s own RBD, so if she leaves the account as an inherited account she will have to take RMDs much sooner (when Ron would have reached Applicable Age) than if she rolled it over to her own IRA (her own RBD would apply).
- **Neutral deal:** Once Linda hits Ron’s Applicable Age, she has to take RMDs from the inherited account at the same rate as from her own IRA (Uniform Lifetime Table), so at that point *there is no difference between the RMDs from the inherited account vs. from her own IRA.*
- **Definitely a bad deal:** As applied to an inherited Roth IRA, this is definitely a bad deal for the surviving spouse, because if (instead of taking RMDs as beneficiary) she rolled the account over to own Roth IRA (see “C”) she would not have to take any RMDs at Ron’s Applicable Age OR her own Applicable Age, since there are no lifetime RMDs for Roth IRAs. The same is true now for Designated Roth Accounts. This is not to say SECURE 2.0 made things worse for the surviving spouse—it was always better tax-wise for the surviving spouse to become an “owner” of the deceased spouse’s Roth IRA (via rollover) than for her to keep holding the account as a mere beneficiary.

Note: § 401(a)(9)(B)(iv) as amended by SECURE 2.0 provides that the Treasury was to set “the date on which the distributions are required to begin under clause (iii)(III) [which] shall **not be earlier than** the date on which the employee would have attained the Applicable Age...” So the Treasury COULD have provided that the spouse’s starting date for RMDs from the inherited account

would be the *later of* the employee’s attaining the Applicable Age or the surviving spouse’s attaining such age. But Treasury did not go that way—the Proposed Regulation specifies the employee’s Applicable Age year will be the outer limit—RMD commencement date for the surviving spouse who has elected [or who is “deemed” to have elected] to be treated as the employee.

(iii) How RMDs to spouse are computed: ULT + recalculation

Life expectancy annual RMDs are computed by dividing the prior year end account balance (revalued annually) by a denominator (divisor). For nonspouse EDBs, the divisor for the first RMD year is the beneficiary’s life expectancy as of his birthday in the year after the year of the participant’s death. The denominator is reduced by one annually for subsequent years. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(2). The effect is that the life expectancy will run out eventually, if the beneficiary lives longer than the table predicted.

The surviving spouse as EDB gets a totally different deal. Unlike other EDBs, the surviving spouse’s life expectancy is recalculated annually. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(3)(iv). The effect of this is to extend the life expectancy, since “real” life expectancy is not reduced by one year each year; life expectancy extends as the individual lives longer. Because the S/S’s life expectancy is recalculated annually, the S/S (while living), if taking RMDs over her single life expectancy recalculated annually, would not be required to withdraw 100% of the inherited account until she reached age 120, when the life expectancy finally drops to one year or less. Thus, unlike other EDBs, the S/S cannot outlive her own life expectancy—unless she lives to age 120.

And now, thanks to SECURE 2.0, the life expectancy table she uses is not even the Single Life Table, it’s the Uniform Lifetime Table, effectively giving her the “life expectancy” of someone 10 years younger than herself. The distribution each year will be based on the joint life expectancy (recalculated annually) of the surviving spouse and a hypothetical individual who is 10 years younger than the surviving spouse.

Linda’s single life expectancy at age 73 would be 16.4 years, but the factor for age 73 under the Uniform Lifetime Table is 26.5. For a \$1 million inherited IRA, that would be the difference between an RMD for that year of \$60,965 (Single Life Table) vs. \$37,736 (Uniform Lifetime Table).

The IRS has published a Uniform Lifetime Table starting at age 10, in Notice 2022-6, 2022-5 IRB 460; it is republished in the Proposed Regulations § 1.401(a)(9)-9(c).

(iv) It’s still an inherited retirement account, so...

Under the new RMD regime described above, it will “look like” the spouse-beneficiary is now the “owner” of the account (*i.e.*, like she is the “participant”), since she will be using the Uniform Table to compute her RMDs. But that is not the case—she is still just a beneficiary, holding an inherited retirement account. That means at least these two things (see Preface to Proposed Regulations, Explanation of Provisions, (F), p. 11):

- Distributions to her from this inherited account are NOT subject to the § 72(t) 10% tax on pre-age 59½ distributions even if she is under age 59½ (distributions from an inherited plan

are not subject to that tax). This provides motivation for *not* voluntarily ending beneficiary status until she is past age 59½.

- For purposes of computing the account balance, if this is a qualified retirement plan that contains a designated Roth account (DRAC), the DRAC balance will be included in the “account balance” used in computing her RMDs. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(b)(3). This provides motivation for *ending* beneficiary status if there is a substantial DRAC balance by rolling that over to the *spouse’s own* Roth IRA (since if she holds the Roth account as “owner” there are no RMDs during her lifetime; Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(b)(3)).

(v) What happens when the surviving spouse later dies

If participant died before his RBD, and his spouse is sole beneficiary, she is now going to start RMDs in the year the participant would have reached his Applicable Age. What if she dies while there is still money in this inherited account? Since she is just holding it as a beneficiary, you would expect the applicable rule would be, the successor beneficiary (whether or not a DB) would continue to take RMDs over what was left of the deceased surviving spouse’s life expectancy (but not more than 10 years). That expectation would be correct—*if and only if* the surviving spouse dies **AFTER** the end of the year in which her deceased spouse would have reached his Applicable Age!

If she dies **BEFORE** the end of that year, however, there is a completely different result: Upon her death, the surviving spouse-beneficiary’s status instantly changes from “beneficiary” to “participant.” Here’s what happens if the surviving spouse...

- Dies “before distributions have commenced” (i.e., before the last day of the year in which the deceased spouse would have reached his Applicable Age...if she lives past that date, this subparagraph doesn’t apply even if she dies before what would have been the first spouse’s RBD). In this case, the RMD rules will be applied *as if she were the participant and died before her RBD*. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(e)(1). So if she hasn’t named a designated beneficiary, the 5-year rule will apply to whoever succeeds to ownership of the account!
- If she dies *on or after* the last day of the year in which the deceased spouse reached or would have reached his Applicable Age, the rules will be applied in the “normal” way for RMDs after the death of an Eligible Designated Beneficiary who was taking a life expectancy payout: Distributions will continue (starting the year after the year of the surviving spouse’s death), in annual instalments over the spouse’s remaining (single) life expectancy, not recalculated, with the final payment due in the last year of such life expectancy or in the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the surviving spouse’s death, whichever comes first. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(e)(3), -5(e)(3).

This “guess what, you’re the participant now!” treatment of the surviving spouse-DB upon her death (but only if she dies before her required commencement date) makes the following two steps extremely important:

1. As soon as possible after the participant's death, the spouse should name a designated beneficiary to inherit the account if she dies before her required commencement date. For example, if she designates her adult children as outright beneficiaries, they will be subject to the 10-Year Rule upon her death. If she does not designate any beneficiary, the default beneficiary under the plan document (*e.g.* the IRA agreement) will be "the" beneficiary. Often the default beneficiary is the spouse's estate (resulting in the 5-year rule).
2. As she approaches the required commencement date (if not before) she should consider rolling over the account to her own IRA so she can name a designated beneficiary that will get the 10-year rule (or better) even if she lives beyond the required commencement date.

Last tidbit here: What if the surviving spouse remarried before her required commencement date? I'm glad you asked! This is not too likely, so you can probably skip this paragraph, but: If the surviving spouse remarries and then dies before the end of the year the participant would have reached his Applicable Age, *i.e.*, before the deceased surviving spouse reached HER required commencement date, the delayed commencement date under § 401(a)(9)(B)(iii)(III) "is not available to" the new surviving spouse. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(e)(2). Thus, the surviving spouse's surviving spouse (if he is her designated beneficiary) must start RMDs the year after the deceased surviving spouse's death just like all other EDBs. Though he doesn't get a new required commencement date, however, he apparently does get the "use the ULT instead of the SLT" deal because: If the original surviving spouse dies before she is required to start RMDs from the deceased participant's account, she is treated for RMD purposes as the "employee" and the payout to her designated (or non-designated) beneficiaries is determined based on the rules for death before the RBD.

(vi) But wait...The 10-year rule might apply!

When the participant dies before his RBD, the regulations provide three pathways by which the 10-year rule may apply to an EDB after all: The IRA plan document may impose the 10-year rule on all or some categories of EDBs; or may permit the participant (the employee or IRA owner) to elect to impose the 10-year rule on his/her EDBs; or may permit the EDBs themselves to elect it. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(5)(ii), (iii).

At this time we don't know what any plan or IRA will do about this subject.

If the 10-year rule applies, 100% of the account must be distributed to the spouse by the end of the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the participant's death. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(3). The delayed starting date for the surviving spouse that applies to a life expectancy payout does not apply to the 10-year rule. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(d).

A participant who plans to leave his account to a conduit trust for the benefit of his surviving spouse (or any other EDB) presumably does not want to have the 10-year rule apply to the conduit trust. The whole point of the conduit trust is to keep the IRA in the trust for the EDB's lifetime, with the EDB limited to RMDs plus whatever additional amounts the trust instrument directs the trustee to withdraw from the IRA. Thus for opens the participant will not want his retirement benefits to be in a plan that *requires* the 10-year rule for EDBs.

If the retirement account is payable to a trust, and all countable beneficiaries of the trust are EDBs, then the election in or out of the 10-year rule (if the election is available under the applicable retirement plan) would be in the hands of the trustee. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(6), Examples 2, 3, 5.

The cited examples deal with a trust that has multiple EDB-beneficiaries, and all countable beneficiaries are EDBs, and the trust is not a conduit trust. The one example dealing with a conduit trust for one single EDB does not mention who makes the election. The regulation permits the plan to allow the “employee” to forbid the election of the 10-year rule; if the applicable plan permits this, the participant should take advantage of that to prohibit use of the 10-year rule for the account payable to the conduit trust.

Beware of unexpected 10-year rule!

If a participant is planning to leave his retirement account to a conduit trust for his spouse or any other EDB, the participant will need to be sure that either the applicable retirement plan prohibits the 10-year rule option for EDBs, or, if the plan allows the participant to elect out of it, that the participant DOES elect out of it, or if the plan imposes the 10-year rule for all EDBs, that the participant moves his account to a different company! This is not a concern once the participant is past his RBD, since the election applies only in cases of death before the RBD...but remember the participant may be over the “Applicable Age” but still “before” his RBD in some retirement plans, for example a Roth IRA and/or a company retirement plan where he has not yet retired and is not a 5% owner.

(vii) How (and if) spouse can get out of the 10-year rule

If the 10-year rule is imposed on the surviving spouse either by the plan document or (presumably unlikely) by the deceased spouse’s direction, can the surviving spouse do anything to resurrect her life expectancy payout? Or, if she herself elected the 10-year rule, can she change her mind and switch back to the life expectancy payout?

Generally, if she is the sole outright beneficiary of the account she has the right to roll over or transfer that account to another plan more to her liking, i.e., one that permits the life expectancy payout. She can roll over or arrange transfer to an IRA still in her name as beneficiary of the decedent. Reg. § 1.408-8(d)(1)(ii). Or she can roll over or transfer to her OWN IRA (or elect to treat an inherited IRA as her own); see generally (C), below, for this spousal option.

There are several particular issues involved in using the rollover to her own IRA, or election to treat an inherited IRA as her own IRA, to escape from the 10-year rule:

- A required minimum distribution (RMD) is not an eligible rollover distribution. Reg. § 1.402(c)-2(c)(2)(ii). Accordingly, once year 10 of the 10-year rule arrives, it is too late—nothing can be rolled over because for an account subject to the 10-year rule, the entire account is an RMD in that year. Reg. § 1.402(c)-2(j)(3)(i)(D).
- In year 9 or before, she can roll over the entire amount to her own IRA provided such step is taken BEFORE the year in which the surviving spouse has reached her own Applicable

Age. Thereafter, RMDs will be determined based on her being the “owner” beginning the year she reaches her Applicable Age.

- However, if the rollover is made in the year the surviving spouse attains her Applicable Age or later, she will have to take “catchup” or “makeup” distributions that cannot be rolled into the new account. These nonrollable distributions will be, the RMDs the surviving spouse would have had to take from the inherited account in Years 1-9 if the account had not been subject to the 10-year rule. Reg. § 1.402(c)-2(j)(4), § 1.408-8(c)(1)(iv). In other words she can’t use the 10-year rule to skip RMDs when she is at or above her Applicable Age, then roll over to her own IRA in year 9 to get back on the life expectancy payout track. Reg. § 1.402(c)-2(j)(4). See Example at Prop. Reg. § 1.402(c)-2(j)(4)(vii) for how to calculate the “make-up” distribution of missed RMDs.

For exactly what types of plans she can roll (or transfer) benefits into, and whether such recipient retirement account will be in her name as owner as beneficiary, see (C) below.

B. If the participant dies on or after his RBD (a little simpler)

The spouse’s options in case of participant death after his RBD are the same as applied for participant death before the RBD, except without the 10-year rule wild card, without a complicated question of when distributions to the spouse begin (they begin right away), and without the automatic “election” of the “treatment as employee.”

Meet the Death-after-RBD RMD regulation structure

Required minimum distributions (RMDs) in case of participant’s death BEFORE the required beginning date (RBD) get their own regulation, Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3, “Death before the required beginning date.” But there is no regulation titled “Death AFTER the required beginning date.” In the IRS view, the beneficiary who inherits a retirement account from a participant who died after his RBD is merely continuing the decedent’s RMDs (though at a different rate), not starting a new payout. The post-death RMD rules are accordingly contained in Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5 [-5(d)(1)], “Required minimum distributions from defined contribution plans.”

The participant’s RMDs continue through the year of his death. If at the time of his death he had not yet taken the full RMD for the year of his death, completing that distribution will be the first RMD the beneficiary must take (whether the beneficiary is the spouse or someone else). See Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(i).

The year after the year of the participant’s death is when the beneficiary must start taking RMDs based on whatever is his/her status as beneficiary. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(i). There is no delayed starting date for the spouse. The surviving spouse as beneficiary has two options with respect to RMDs. The first is the same as other EDBs—a life expectancy payout based on the greater of her life expectancy or the decedent’s. The second is the special spouse-only deal added by SECURE 2.0.

And of course the surviving spouse (if named as outright beneficiary) has non-RMD options—the spousal rollover or election-to-treat-as-own (see C).

- **First RMD option:** Because the surviving spouse is an eligible designated beneficiary (EDB), she can take a life expectancy payout, beginning the year after the year of the participant's death. § 401(a)(9)(B)(i), (E)(i), (ii)(I); Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1). The "life expectancy" would be the spouse's life expectancy (recalculated annually) or the decedent's remaining life expectancy ("ghost life expectancy," not recalculated), whichever is longer. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(i), (ii); (3)(iv). Note that if the decedent was younger than the surviving spouse, so the ghost life expectancy is the longer one, the surviving spouse's annually recalculated ("redetermined") life expectancy will eventually be longer than the deceased spouse's fixed "ghost" life expectancy...if she lives that long, she will switch over to her own life expectancy at that time.
- **Second RMD option.** Alternatively, the surviving spouse can elect "to be treated as the employee." § 401(a)(9)(B)(iv); Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d), (g)(3). In this case (as laid out in the proposed regulations) the election is truly an election, i.e., she can elect that treatment or NOT elect that treatment (compare death before the RBD where the spousal election is to be automatically applied so it's not really an election). However, the "elective" treatment could be the default provision under the plan, meaning, unless some affirmative action is taken, treatment "as the employee" will be automatic. Prop. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(g)(3)(ii)(B).

Treatment "as the employee" means the spouse would use the Uniform Lifetime Table to determine her RMDs as the employee's beneficiary, instead of the greater-of-his-or-hers single life expectancy described at #1 above, so RMDs would be based on the joint life expectancy of the surviving spouse and a hypothetical 10-years-younger designated beneficiary (recalculated annually). As intended by SECURE 2.0, the surviving spouse gets this benefit of the "spousal rollover" without having to actually do the spousal rollover.

Why would spouse elect in, or not? Conduit trust issue: As with participant death before the RBD, it's not clear why the spouse would ever elect not to use the "treatment as employee" option, except in one situation: A surviving spouse who inherited *through a conduit trust* might like to elect it if she would thereby get larger annual distributions: For example, if the trust terms limit the surviving spouse to receiving only the annual RMD, the spouse would presumably NOT want to elect "treatment as employee" because the election would reduce her annual payout (annual RMDs payable to her would be larger if her single life expectancy is used to compute the RMDs rather than the Uniform Lifetime Table). Because of this possibility, some drafters recommend (for the client who wants to be sure the "election" is made) either using a trustee IRA under which the trust/IRA document (i.e., the "plan document") specifies that the election is deemed made, or including in the terms of the conduit trust financial incentives to the spouse to make the election.

Weird effects if much younger spouse dies first? If the first-to-die spouse (the participant) was much more than 10 years younger than the surviving spouse, the deceased participant's fixed-term "ghost life expectancy" would be longer (at least for a while) than the Uniform Lifetime Table-life expectancy of the surviving spouse and her hypothetical 10-years younger beneficiary! Not to worry—in that case, the Proposed Regulations say the "greater of" rule will apply (i.e., the

surviving spouse's RMD will be determined by the ghost life expectancy as long as it stays longer than her Uniform Lifetime Table expectancy). Prop. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(g)(3)(ii)(C), last sentence.

When the good deal ends (abruptly) upon surviving spouse's death. As shown above, when the participant dies after his RBD, the annual distributions "deal" is pretty good for the surviving spouse, if she elects this "treatment as employee" (or the plan document requires it), as long as she lives. However, once she dies, there is no possibility of "flipping" over to a new designated beneficiary—the payout to spouse's successor beneficiary will be the same as it would have been under pre-SECURE-2.0-rules, namely, the remaining single life expectancy of the spouse but not more than 10 years. The Uniform Lifetime Table applies only through the year of the surviving spouse's death. Prop. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(g)(3)(ii)(C). Thereafter, annual distributions are made to the successor beneficiary over the spouse's remaining (single) life expectancy (not recalculated), through the earlier of the last year of such life expectancy or the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the surviving spouse's death, at which time 100% of the account must be distributed. Prop. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(g)(3)(ii)(D)(1); Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d), (e).

Suppose the sole beneficiary of the account is a conduit trust for the surviving spouse. Can the trustee make the election in or out of "treated as owner" status for RMD purposes? Or is that option only available to the surviving spouse personally? The regulations do not explicitly answer this question. It seems wise to assume the spouse personally would make the election; the only way to shut off that option altogether for a conduit trust would be to use a trustee IRA (so the participant can specify the election must

Conclusion: The "new (B)(iv) rule" definitely gives the surviving spouse, or a conduit trust for the spouse, a longer payout period (smaller RMDs) during the surviving spouse's "overlife." So if that is the only consideration, the difference between a rollover vs holding as an inherited account is small to nil in many cases. After the surviving spouse's death, however, there can be substantial differences between the payout period for a "successor beneficiary" to spouse vs. a payout period to a "designated beneficiary of spouse." Thus, whether the account is left outright to spouse or to a conduit trust for spouse, planning for what happens upon the surviving spouse's later death should be considered as early as possible in the planning stage.

C. Spouse can change from "beneficiary" to "owner" via rollover or election

The surviving spouse has more options than other beneficiaries to move the inherited retirement account to another retirement account. Within limitations,

- The surviving spouse can elect to treat an inherited IRA as her own IRA, thus changing her status from beneficiary to owner. See C(ii).
- She can roll over amounts from an inherited account into her own retirement account, changing her status from "beneficiary" to "owner."

- Or, she can transfer or “roll” the inherited account to an “inherited” IRA in the name of the decedent payable to her as beneficiary. Reg. § 1.408-8(d)(1)(ii).

(i) Why would a surviving spouse want to do this?

Since, as a result of SECURE 2.0, the surviving spouse’s RMDs are determined as if she were the owner of the account (i.e., using the Uniform Lifetime Table based on her age as “owner”), why would she want to bother to change ownership so she actually IS the owner? Here are several reasons:

- If the participant died before his RBD, and the plan the spouse inherited makes her subject to the 10-year rule [see 5(A)(vi) above], she may wish to get OUT of that plan and move the funds into one that permits life expectancy payouts.
- As beneficiary, she must start withdrawals no later than the year the deceased spouse would have reached his Applicable Age (or the year after his death, if later). If she is younger than the decedent she may get a later (even much later) starting date by becoming *owner* of the account instead of mere beneficiary. *E.g.*, Romeo dies in 2025 in his age-75 year, after taking his RMD for 2025, leaving his IRA to his spouse Juliet, who is in her age 60-year at his death. Since Romeo had reached his Applicable Age, Juliet as beneficiary would have to start RMDs the year after his death (her age-61 year). By becoming owner instead of beneficiary she can postpone the start of RMDs altogether until she reaches her own Applicable Age.
- If the inherited account is a Roth IRA or a designated Roth account in the decedent’s 401(k) plan, she must take annual RMDs as beneficiary—whereas if she held the account as owner there would be no RMDs during her lifetime. [NOTE: At least one RMD expert disagrees with this statement, having concluded that being treated as the employee means that the surviving spouse can now totally eliminate RMDs on an inherited Roth account until her own death, just as the participant was exempt from RMDs during his life.]
- If the inherited account is a designated Roth account (DRAC) within the decedent’s 401(k) again, there will be RMDs to her as beneficiary, just as with an inherited Roth IRA—RMDs that could be postponed until after her death if she transfers this account to her own Roth IRA. [See “NOTE” in preceding paragraph]

(ii) Election to treat inherited IRA as spouse’s own IRA.

The surviving spouse’s right to elect to treat an IRA inherited from her spouse as her own IRA is created by the regulations. See Reg. § 1.408-8(c). It does not appear in the Code. The election is available whether the first spouse died before or after his RBD.

Requirements and mechanics. “The surviving spouse of an individual may elect, in the manner described in paragraph (c)(2) of this section, to treat the surviving spouse's entire interest as a beneficiary in the individual's IRA (or the remaining part of that interest if distributions have begun) as the surviving spouse's own IRA..... In order to make the election..., the surviving spouse must be the sole beneficiary of the IRA *and have an unlimited right to withdraw amounts from the IRA*. If a trust is named as beneficiary of the IRA, this requirement is not satisfied even if the surviving spouse is the sole beneficiary of the trust.” Reg. § 1.408-8(c)(1)(i), (ii); emphasis added. [Note: The reference in the regulation is presumably to a “conduit trust,” where the surviving spouse is entitled to all distributions taken from the retirement account during her lifetime, but the trustee controls when such distributions are taken (subject to the RMD rules and the terms of the trust). Presumably the “ban” on spousal election if a trust is named as beneficiary does not apply if the spouse has the unlimited right to demand that the trustee withdraw all of the IRA and pay it to her, but this is not stated .]

In determining whether the spouse is “sole beneficiary” of the retirement account, the separate accounts rule of Reg. § 1.408-8(a) is applied: If the spouse is just one of multiple designated beneficiaries, but separate accounts are timely established for the multiple beneficiaries per the regulation, she need only be sole beneficiary of her “separate account” in the inherited IRA, not of the entire IRA, and the election of course applies only to her separate account. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-8(a). See PART 6.

Example: Nora leaves her IRA equally to her husband Nick and her son Ned as beneficiaries. They establish separate inherited IRAs, each funded with half of Nora’s IRA, by December 31 of the year after the year of Nora’s death. RMDs to each beneficiary will be based on such beneficiary as sole beneficiary of his separate account. Nick can elect to treat his inherited separate account as his own solely-owned inherited account.

In the real world, once the spousal election is made (or discovered, in the case of an inadvertent election; see “b”), the deceased spouse’s account (“Nora, f/b/o Nick”) is closed and its assets transferred into a new account in the surviving spouse’s own name (“Nick” only), since the IRA provider can’t simply cross out the participant’s name on the old account documents and write in the surviving spouse’s name instead.

Unlike a spousal rollover, which could apply to a partial distribution, the spousal election must apply to the entire account (or the entire remaining account if distributions had been made prior to the election). Reg. § 1.408-8(c)(1).

How the election is made; when it takes effect. There are three ways the spouse can make this election—one is intentional, the other two are “deemed” elections triggered by the spouse’s action or inaction:

- The spouse can voluntarily “re designate” the account as an account in her name as owner rather than as beneficiary. Check the IRA agreement to determine if the IRA provider provides specific instructions for how to do this.

- She can fail to take an RMD she was required to take as beneficiary (for any year AFTER the year of the owner's death), thus triggering a deemed election. An RMD shortfall in the year of the first spouse's death does not trigger the deemed election.
- She can make a contribution to the account. Unless the contribution is merely a rollover contribution from another account inherited from the deceased spouse, the contribution triggers the election. Reg. § 1.408-8(c)(2).

The election is effective starting in the year it occurs—unless the election is made in the year of the first spouse's death, in which case the election doesn't apply for purposes of determining RMDs until the following year. Reg. § 1.408-8(c)(3).

Example: Nick is holding, as beneficiary, the IRA he inherited from Nora in 2025. His RMD for 2026 is \$3,678. Due to a math error, he withdraws only \$3,677 in 2026. Because of this \$1 shortfall, he is deemed to have elected to treat the inherited IRA as his own IRA. Since it occurred after the year of Nora's death, the election is effective for the year it occurs (2026) and subsequent years. Now here is the very odd effect: The RMD schedule applicable to Nick in 2026 (as beneficiary) was (as a result of SECURE 2.0) the Uniform Lifetime Table applied as if he were owner of the account (see PART 3, #5). But that's the same RMD schedule that applies to him after he makes the deemed election! So he still owes a 25% "penalty" for missing part of his RMD!

D. Spousal rollover or election

To escape the 10-year rule applicable in the plan she actually inherited, and salvage a life expectancy payout, the surviving spouse can roll over the inherited account to an IRA still in her name *as beneficiary* but to which the life expectancy payout rule applies. The general rule is that if the 10-year rule applied to the spouse in the original inherited plan, it will apply to any "inherited IRA" into which the original account is transferred or "rolled." Reg. § 1.408-8(d)(2)(i) ("Carryover of election..."). However, if the distribution being rolled over was made before the deadline that would have applied had the distributing plan allowed the spouse to elect out of the 10-year rule, the spouse can elect to have the life expectancy apply to the recipient account. Reg. § 1.408-8(d)(2)(ii). See regulation for possibly required catchup distributions in that case.

The preceding applies if the original inherited plan imposed the 10-year rule. However, if the spouse herself made the election to use the 10-year rule instead of the life expectancy payout (as opposed to having the 10-year rule imposed by the plan itself), that election becomes irrevocable at the end of the year after the year of the employee's death: "As of the last date the election may be made, the election must be irrevocable with respect to the beneficiary (and all subsequent beneficiaries) and must apply to all subsequent calendar years." Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(5)(ii)(C). Thus, a beneficiary who has *elected* the 10-year rule can't change her mind...even the spouse, who normally can roll over to another account still held as beneficiary, can't use that transfer to escape the 10-year rule.

But she has an ace up her sleeve—she can roll over to an account in her OWN name (not held as beneficiary) and thus free herself from the 10-year rule, provided she does so before year 10. The surviving spouse’s right to roll over retirement benefits payable to her from an inherited plan or IRA was not changed by SECURE. Briefly, as a reminder, the spousal rollover is not a “minimum distribution” rule; it is a totally separate Code section and concept, so it is not subject to various limitations that can arise under the minimum distribution rules.

E. Anti-Gaming provision targets delayed spousal rollovers

Suppose the surviving spouse (S/S) is approaching or past age 73 when the participant dies. If the participant-spouse died before his RBD, and the S/S elects the 10-Year Rule, then the S/S could effectively delay RMDs for about nine years, then in year 9 of the 10-year payout roll over the inherited account to the S/S’s own IRA, thus sidestepping several years of RMDs! Unfortunately the Treasury thought of this great idea. Reg. § 1.402(c)-2(j)(4) blocks this maneuver: A S/S’s rollover, if it occurs in the year she reaches her Applicable Age or any later year, must be reduced by a deemed RMD amount—the cumulative total of what would have been RMDs if the account had belonged to her during the delayed rollover period.

6. EDB: Participant’s minor child

SECURE provides that a minor child of the participant (“employee”) is an EDB. However, unlike with other EDBs, such child’s EDB status does not last for life. Instead it terminates when the child “reaches majority.” The account must be fully distributed 10 years after that point (or 10 years after the child dies, if he dies before reaching majority). § 401(a)(9)(E)(ii)(II), (E)(iii), (H)(iii).

For definition of “child of the employee” see § 152(f)(1), which includes not only the participant’s biological and legally adopted children but also stepchildren and certain foster children. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(1)(ii). This precise and expansive definition was a gift of the final RMD regulations.

A. “Reaches majority” means the 21st birthday.

SECURE left it to the IRS to define “reaches majority,” which the IRS has defined as the date the child reaches his 21st birthday. § 401(a)(9)(E)(ii)(II); Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(3). There is no need to refer to state law or educational status.

An exception is allowed for defined benefit plans that had a pre-SECURE different definition of “majority” based on an old minimum distribution regulation that rarely applied (tying “reaching majority” to completing a specified course of education but not later than age 26); these plans may continue to use that definition. This “grandfather” exception would rarely if ever be encountered by estate planners.

B. Required Terminal Distribution for minor child-EDB

A minor child-EDB has his own Required Terminal Distribution in the Code, namely 10 years after “reaching majority.” § 401(a)(9)(E)(iii). As an EDB, the minor child is ALSO subject to the 10-years-after-death-of-an-EDB deadline in § 401(a)(9)(H)(iii). The Regulations smooth out these deadlines to being *the year in which such event occurs*, not the actual birthday or death day.

So, the entire account payable to a minor child-EDB must be distributed by the end of the year that contains the minor’s 31st birthday (or 10th anniversary of date of minor’s death, if death occurred before age 21). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(3), (4). If multiple minor child-EDBs are beneficiaries of the same account, see “Steinmetz” case study, Part 9, Case #3.

C. Trusts for minor-child EDBs: pre- and post-SECURE problems

A major uncertainty for planners after enactment of SECURE has been the options for structuring a trust for minor children: How can such beneficiaries be provided with the protections of a trust (needed due to their youth) while minimizing the negative tax impacts of a trust?

The Regulations make several generous special rules for trusts for minors that ease this process. .

Under pre-SECURE rules, a protected life expectancy payout could easily be established by using a “conduit trust” for the minor, under the assumption that annual RMD payouts to the trust based on the minor’s long life expectancy would be small enough (due to the beneficiary’s extreme youth) that the trustee would have no problem distributing the annual payouts “for the benefit of” the minor beneficiary, thereby complying with the annual payout requirement of the conduit trust and also benefitting from the minor’s lower tax bracket relative to the trust’s bracket. But the conduit trust concept did not work well with enormous IRAs (annual distributions too large to be absorbed by expenditures on minor’s behalf).

There was also a problem with “accumulation trusts” for minor children: Typically the trust would hold funds until the minor reached a certain age such as 30, 35, or 40. But then the trust had to specify who would receive what was left in the trust in the (actuarially unlikely) event the minor died before reaching that age...and if this contingent remainder beneficiary were older than the minor, the remainder beneficiary’s life expectancy, not the child’s, would be the payout period. Or if the remainder beneficiary were a charity, the trust would flunk the RMD trust rules altogether because it had a countable non-individual beneficiary.

The Regulations provide a simple way to eliminate this problem for benefits left directly to a trust for a minor—just specify that the minor will receive his share outright by age 31. Any beneficiary who will take the share only if the child dies BEFORE age 31 is disregarded in applying the RMD rules to the trust, if the child is a “primary” beneficiary of the trust (see PART 4, #9). However, the “age-31-rule” does not help with this problem if the minor is a residuary beneficiary; see PART 4, #9, #10(B).

D. Life expectancy payout based on oldest DB (not oldest minor child)

If the retirement account is left to a trust of which ANY countable beneficiary is a minor child-EDB, that trust will receive “eligible designated beneficiary” treatment, which means, in Regulations-speak, that it will use a life expectancy payout (not be subject to the 10-year rule)—because the employee is deemed to have an EDB: “If any of the employee’s designated beneficiaries is an eligible designated beneficiary because the beneficiary is the [minor child of the employee]...then the employee is treated as having an eligible designated beneficiary *even if the employee has other designated beneficiaries who are not eligible designated beneficiaries.*” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(2)(ii). Emphasis added.

The Applicable Denominator for determining RMDs after the participant’s death would be based on the life expectancy of the oldest countable beneficiary of the trust—who may or may not be an EDB. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(1)(i). For example, suppose there is a trust for the participant’s children as a group, and some of the children are over 21 and some are under. The payout period is based on the oldest child’s life expectancy even though (being over age 21) she is not an EDB.

If the employee died after his required beginning date, the Applicable Denominator would be the *greater of* the life expectancy of the oldest countable trust beneficiary (oldest designated beneficiary) and the participant’s life expectancy. Note: this rule can apply only when the deceased parent of the minor child was over age 73 at death which would be unusual.

E. Required Terminal Distribution: 10 yrs after all minor-child EDBs are over 21 or deceased

The Required Terminal Distribution is the 10th year after the youngest minor child reaches age 21. In the unlikely event any minor child-EDB dies before reaching age 21, the Outer Limit would be 10 years after the earliest point at which there is no minor child-EDB living who is under age 21.

As noted, the RMD rules have a general rule under which (regardless of what annual distributions are or are not being made) 100% of the account must be distributed by a certain year (called the Required Terminal Distribution in this Outline). The Required Terminal Distribution overrides all other RMD schedules then in progress. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e). The general Required Terminal Distribution rule, if the employee has multiple designated beneficiaries, is that the Required Terminal Distribution is “applied with respect to the oldest of the employee’s designated beneficiaries.” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(2)(i). However, under Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(2)(ii), if ANY of the employee’s multiple designated beneficiaries is a minor child-EDB, then the trust gets the following special deals:

- The Required Terminal Distribution rule is based on the *youngest minor-child EDB* (not the oldest trust beneficiary). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(2)(ii). Thus, the deadline for 100% distribution of the benefits to the trust would be 10 years after the earliest point at which there is no minor child living who is under age 21 (normally, the date the youngest minor child-EDB turns age 21).

- The Required Terminal Distribution normally applicable to a PODB (i.e., the 10-year rule) does not apply even if some trust beneficiaries are PODBs or even if the oldest trust beneficiary is a mere PODB. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(2)(ii).

F. Minor child-EDB trust example

Example: Employee dies in 2024 before his RBD leaving his IRA to a trust for the benefit of his four children who are now ages 14, 16, 18, and 22. No child is disabled or chronically ill. Three of them are EDBs because they are minor (under age 21) children of the deceased participant. The trust provides that the trustee will use income and principal as the trustee deems best for the care, support, health, education and welfare of all the children, based on relative need, until there is no child living who is younger than age 35, at which time the trust will terminate and be distributed to the then living children equally, or if none is then living, to the participant’s distant cousin, who is a child now age 3.

Because at least one trust beneficiary is an EDB by virtue of being a minor child of the participant (actually three of them are), the trust gets the following special deals:

- The oldest child is age 22 so he is a PODB. Normally the Required Terminal Distribution for a trust for a PODB would be the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the participant’s death (10-year rule). That rule does not apply to this trust because the trust has a minor child-EDB as a countable beneficiary. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(2)(ii).
- Instead, the life expectancy payout will apply. The life expectancy of the oldest child (age 22) will be the Applicable Denominator, even though that child is not an EDB.
- The Required Terminal Distribution for this trust will be 10 years after all three of the minor children have either attained age 21 or earlier died. So assuming no untimely deaths, that would be 17 years from now, when the youngest child (now age 14) reaches age 31. The entire retirement account must be distributed to the trust no later than that Required Terminal Distribution deadline.

7. EDB: Disabled or chronically ill (“D/CI”) individual

Here is the what the regulations provide for qualifying for a life expectancy payout as an EDB on the basis that the designated beneficiary is disabled (§ 401(a)(9)(E)(ii)(III)) or chronically ill (§ 401(a)(9)(E)(ii)(IV)).

First, the beneficiary must meet the definition of “disabled” (there are three paths to this status; see “A”) or “chronically ill” (see “B”). In either case the status must exist as of the date of the participant’s death. A beneficiary who does not become disabled or chronically ill until some later time (even if it is only one day after the participant’s death) is not disabled or chronically ill for EDB purposes: See, e.g., the Preamble to the 2022 Proposed Regulations (p. 26), where it is stated that “the employee’s 10-year-old child who is not disabled but who becomes disabled 5 years after the

employee's death" is not "disabled" for purposes of determining EDB status **because EDB status must exist as of the employee's death**, therefore, the outer limit for payout to this minor child will be the 10th year after he or she attains age 21 (or earlier dies).

Second, the beneficiary must fulfill the "documentation requirement." See "C."

If the beneficiary passes those two tests, see "D"- "F" for favorable RMD treatment granted to certain trusts ("AMBTs") that can be created for such beneficiary.

A. Definition of disabled

One category of EDB under SECURE is a "disabled" individual, with disability defined by reference to § 72(m)(7). Since § 72's definition of disability is defined by reference to the individual's inability to "engage in any substantial gainful activity," it is not apposite for determining the disability of a young child. The regulations cure this defect by adding a different definition of "disabled" if the designated beneficiary is under age 18.

If the beneficiary has been determined to be disabled for the purpose of qualifying for Social Security disability benefits, the beneficiary does not need to separately convince the IRS or the plan administrator of his disability.

Thus, Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(4)(i) offers three paths to disabled status: "Subject to the documentation requirements of paragraph (e)(7)...an individual is disabled if, as of the date of the employee's death, the individual is described in paragraph (e)(4)(ii) or (iii) of this section, or paragraph (e)(4)(iv) of this section applies."

- "An individual who, as of the date of the employee's death, **is age 18 or older** is disabled if, as of that date, the individual is unable to engage in any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment that can be expected to result in death or to be of long-continued and indefinite duration." Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(4)(ii).
- "An individual who, as of the date of the employee's death, **is not age 18 or older** is disabled if, as of that date, that individual has a medically determinable physical or mental impairment that results in marked and severe functional limitations and that can be expected to result in death or to be of long-continued and indefinite duration." Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(4)(iii).
- "If the Commissioner of Social Security has determined that, as of the date of the employee's death, an individual is disabled within the meaning of 42 U.S.C. 1382c(a)(3), then that individual will be deemed to be disabled within the meaning of this paragraph (e)(4)." Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(4)(iv).

B. Definition of chronically ill

The term “chronically ill” is used in the Code, in § 7702B(c)(2), for purposes of defining qualified long-term care insurance. The insurance-related Code definition is slightly altered for purposes of establishing EDB status: A beneficiary is chronically ill for EDB status purposes if he or she is “a chronically ill individual (within the meaning of section 7702B(c)(2), except that the requirements of subparagraph (A)(I) thereof shall only be treated as met if there is a certification that, as of such date, the period of inability described in such subparagraph with respect to the individual is an indefinite one which is reasonably expected to be lengthy in nature).” § 401(a)(9)(E)(ii)(IV).

Here is the definition as expanded in the Regulations: “An individual is chronically ill if the individual is chronically ill within the definition of section 7702B(c)(2) [of the Internal Revenue Code] and satisfies the documentation requirements of paragraph (e)(7) of this paragraph. However, for purposes of the preceding sentence, an individual will be treated as chronically ill under section 7702B(c)(2)(A)(i) only if there is a certification from a licensed health care practitioner (as that term is defined in section 7702B(c)(4)) that, as of the date of the certification, **the individual is unable to perform (without substantial assistance from another individual) at least 2 activities of daily living** for an indefinite period which is reasonably expected to be lengthy in nature (and not merely for 90 days).” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(5). Emphasis added.

NOTE: Inexplicably, the Regulation definition leaves out the Code’s alternative definition of chronically ill, which is (regardless of whether the individual can perform activities of daily living) “requiring substantial supervision to protect such individual from threats to health and safety due to severe cognitive impairment,” even though this is also part of § 7702B(c)(2)(A), last sentence.

The Code’s list of “activities of daily living”: Eating, Toileting, Transferring, Bathing, Dressing, Continence. § 7702B(c)(2)(B).

The Code’s definition of “licensed health care practitioner”: “The term “licensed health care practitioner” means any physician (as defined in section 1861(r)(1) of the Social Security Act) and any registered professional nurse, licensed social worker, or other individual who meets such requirements as may be prescribed by the Secretary.” § 7702B(c)(4).

C. Documentation requirement.

It is not enough for the beneficiary to merely be disabled or chronically ill (D/CI) as of the participant’s death. To qualify as an EDB, the D/CI beneficiary must also supply “documentation” to the “plan administrator” by a certain deadline: “(7) Documentation requirements for disabled or chronically ill individuals. This paragraph (e)(7) is satisfied...if documentation of the disability or chronic illness described in paragraph (e)(4) or (5) of this section, respectively, is provided to the plan administrator no later than **October 31 of the calendar year following the calendar year of the employee’s death (or October 31, 2025, if later)**. For individuals described in paragraph (e)(1)(iv) of this section, the documentation must include a certification from a licensed health care practitioner (as that term is defined in section 7702B(c)(4)).” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(7).

The required certification “need not be overly detailed...the licensed health care practitioner merely certifies that, as of a specified date, the designated beneficiary is unable to engage in any substantial gainful activity by reason of a physical impairment that can be expected to be of long-continued and indefinite duration.” Preface to final regulations, TD 10001, Part I(D)(1)(c), “Documentation for disabled or chronically ill status.” In other words, it doesn’t have to detail the impairments, thus protecting the beneficiary’s privacy and relieving the plan administrator of responsibility for personal medical records.

D. “AMBTs” facilitate trust planning for D/CI beneficiaries

SECURE granted special dispensations to what it calls “Applicable Multi-Beneficiary Trusts.” § 401(a)(9)(H)(iv), (v). [Note: This is the only recognition *in the Code* that the beneficiary of a trust named as beneficiary of the retirement account can be a “designated beneficiary,” a concept otherwise found only in Treasury regulations.] The apparent purpose of these dispensations was to facilitate creating a “supplemental needs trust” (SNT) for a disabled or chronically ill (D/CI) beneficiary while still qualifying for the life expectancy payout granted to such beneficiary as an EDB. The provisions are very helpful for all trustors seeking leave their retirement accounts in trust to benefit D/CI individuals. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(g)(1) provides the requirements in detail.

The Code definition: An AMBT is a trust—(I) which has more than one beneficiary, (II) all of the beneficiaries of which are treated as designated beneficiaries for purposes of determining the distribution period pursuant to this paragraph, and (III) at least one of the beneficiaries of which is an eligible designated beneficiary described in subclause (III) [disabled] or (IV) [chronically ill] of subparagraph (E)(ii).” § 401(a)(9)(H)(v).

...and the Regulations’ definition: “An applicable multi-beneficiary trust is a see-through trust with more than one beneficiary and with respect to which--(i) All of the trust beneficiaries are designated beneficiaries; and (ii) the trust terms identify one or more individuals, each of whom is disabled (as defined in paragraph (e)(1)(iii) of this section) or chronically ill (as defined in paragraph (e)(1)(iv) of this section), who are described in paragraph (f)(3)(i)(A) of this section and (iii) the terms of the trust provide that no beneficiary (other than an individual described in paragraph (g)(1)(ii) of this section) has any right to the employee’s interest in the plan until the death of all of the eligible designated beneficiaries described in paragraph (g)(1)(ii) of this section.” Whew!

See PART 9, Case #4, for an example of how to use an AMBT and for comments on why, despite the special dispensations granted to AMBTs, SNTs are still generally “worse off” under SECURE than before in terms of reducing income taxes on a large IRA.

The Code contains three rules uniquely applicable to AMBTs:

- For purposes of determining the “designated beneficiary” status of an AMBT, certain charities are classified as “designated beneficiaries,” as an exception to the normal rule that only individuals can be designated beneficiaries. See “E.”
- The D/CI beneficiary is considered the sole life beneficiary of the retirement account even if he/she receives no distributions from it, as long as no one else receives benefits from the account prior to the death of the D/CI beneficiary. See “F.”

- A trust that splits into multiple subtrusts at the participant's death must be granted "separate accounts treatment" if any beneficiary is a D/CI EDB. This Code provision rule now applies to *all* trusts that split into subtrusts at the participant's death (if certain requirements are met), even if there is no D/CI EDB; see PART 6, #4.

WHY YOU DON'T NEED TO PARSE CODE DEFINITION OF AMBT

Because of this new (July 2024) IRS policy of recognizing "separate accounts" treatment for ALL trusts that divide into subtrusts at the participant's death (if certain requirements are met), the previous incredibly complicated definitions of different types of AMBTs in the Code (§ 401(A)(9)(H)(v)) and Proposed Regulations (TYPE I and TYPE II AMBTs) are now obsolete.

E. Charity can count as a "designated beneficiary"

The Code's definition of AMBT includes the requirement that "all trust beneficiaries must be designated beneficiaries." This would normally mean that all countable beneficiaries of the trust must be *individuals* (§ 401(a)(9)(E)(1)). However, for 2023 and later years, as a result of "SECURE 2.0," certain charities are deemed to be "designated beneficiaries" with respect to an AMBT, even though they are not "individuals." Specifically, for an AMBT, "any beneficiary which is an organization described in section 408(d)(8)(B)(i) shall be treated as a designated beneficiary..." § 401(a)(9)(H)(v) (second sentence).

The permitted organizations are the same as are permitted for qualified charitable donations (QCDs) from an IRA, *i.e.*, all charitable organizations for which the maximum income tax deduction of 50% of adjusted gross income is allowed (see § 170(b)(1)(A)), *other than* "donor advised funds" and "supporting organizations."

F. Benefits may be paid only to D/CI beneficiary(ies) while living

An AMBT is a trust the terms of which "identify one or more individuals" who are disabled or chronically ill and who are "entitled to benefits during their lifetime," [sic] provided that "no individual (other than...[an individual so identified]) has any right to the employee's interest in the plan until the death of all of the eligible designated beneficiaries described in...[(A)," *i.e.*, the D/CI individual(s) "identified" as receiving benefits during "their lifetime." Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(g).

By providing that no beneficiary other than the D/CI beneficiary "has any right to the employee's interest in the plan" so long as the D/CI beneficiary is living (or as long as any D/CI beneficiary of the trust is living, if there are more than one), the Code allows a trust to accumulate plan distributions received during the lifetime of the D/CI beneficiary(ies) (*i.e.*, not be a conduit trust) *and still use the life expectancy payout applicable to the D/CI EDB*, even though there are other "countable" trust beneficiaries who are not EDBs. For the annual RMDs and Required Terminal Distribution applicable to an AMBT, see PART 5, #2.

8. EDB: Not more than 10 years younger (NoMoTTY)

SECURE's fifth category of EDB is "an individual not described in any of the preceding subclauses who is not more than 10 years younger than the employee." § 401(a)(9)(E)(II)(v). This category is referred to in this Outline as NoMoTTYs (Not More Than Ten Years Younger).

To qualify as this category of EDB, the individual must meet two requirements. One, he/she does not fit into any of the other EDB categories (*e.g.*, he/she is not the participant's spouse). Two, he/she must be either *older than* the participant; or *the same age as* the participant; or *younger—but not more than 10 years younger—than* the participant.

A. Based on birth days, not birth years

The regulations define this category of EDB based on the actual dates of the parties' birth, not the *year* of birth: Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(6): "Individual not more than 10 years younger than the employee. Whether a designated beneficiary is not more than 10 years younger than the employee is determined based on the dates of birth of the employee and the beneficiary. Thus, for example, if an employee's date of birth is October 1, 1953, then the employee's beneficiary is not more than 10 years younger than the employee if the beneficiary was born on or before October 1, 1963."

B. NoMoTTY RMDs if Participant dies before RBD.

In general this category of EDB will have RMDs determined based on the life expectancy of the EDB.

If the participant died before his RBD, the Applicable Denominator will be the EDB's remaining life expectancy, with RMDs starting the year after the participant's death, and the Required Terminal Distribution would be the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the EDB's death. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(3). See PART 3, #4(E). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(4), § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(2). However, if permitted by the plan, the EDB can elect the 10-year rule instead of the life expectancy payout—or the 10-year rule may be imposed on the EDB by the plan or by the participant. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(5)(iii). If the 10-year rule applies, the Required Terminal Distribution would be the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the participant's death. See PART 3, #4(C).

C. NoMoTTY RMDs if Participant dies on or after RBD.

If the participant died on or after his RBD, the Applicable Denominator for the NoMoTTY beneficiary is the "greater of" the beneficiary's life expectancy or the participant's life expectancy. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(ii). So if the beneficiary is older than the participant, the participant's (longer) life expectancy is used to determine annual RMDs to this EDB.

The Required Terminal Distribution year will be the final year of whichever of those two life expectancies is longer, or, if earlier, the 10th year after the year of death of the EDB. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(3).

Note: This system represents a SUBSTANTIAL IMPROVEMENT in the final regulations; the proposed regulations applied a “shorter of” rule for the Required Terminal Distribution for NoMoTTYs in this situation.

9. Double qualification as EDB

What if the beneficiary qualifies as an EDB in more than one category?

This subject is addressed only once in the Code, which requires (in connection with qualifying for EDB status as a NoMoTTY) that the individual must not be “described in any of the preceding subclauses.” § 401(a)(9)(E)(ii)(V). The Regulations add no further enlightenment.

An individual could be both Disabled and Chronically Ill, presumably, but that would make no difference since both categories receive identical RMD treatment. (Presumably if the beneficiary qualifies as both Disabled and Chronically Ill, he should claim whichever status is easier for him to document.)

Therefore, it appears that the only way an EDB can “double qualify” is if he is both the surviving spouse and D/CI, or both a minor child-EDB and D/CI. Here is the apparent effect of such double qualification:

A. Minor child who is also D/CI

If the individual qualifies as both a minor child of the participant AND as D/CI, then his EDB status would not terminate at the age 21 birthday—it would last for life.

A *trust* for the benefit of this child could be an AMBT if the child is the sole permissible beneficiary (with respect to the trust’s retirement benefits) for his/her entire life. In that case the annual distributions would be based on the *child’s* life expectancy (not the life expectancy of the oldest countable trust beneficiary) because AMBT status “overrules” any other status.

If the D/CI minor child-EDB is just one of multiple (two or more) countable beneficiaries of the AMBT, all of whom are D/CI (though not necessarily minors), then the payout period is the life expectancy of the oldest countable D/CI beneficiary, and the Required Terminal Distribution would be 10 years after the death of the last surviving D/CI trust beneficiary. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(2)(iii).

If the trust does not qualify as an AMBT, then annual distributions would be based on the life expectancy of the oldest countable trust beneficiary (as always for non-AMBT trusts that have a minor-child EDB as a countable beneficiary). Similarly, the Required Terminal Distribution for an IRA payable to a trust for the benefit of a minor child-EDB (10 years after such child reaches 21 or earlier dies) would apply. In order for this trust to qualify for the later Required Terminal Distribution, the trust would have to qualify as an AMBT.

B. Surviving spouse who is also D/CI

If the surviving spouse is disabled or chronically ill, the question is whether she can somehow benefit from dual qualification. Can she use the Uniform Lifetime Table for RMDs during her life (as with a trust where she is sole beneficiary for life—a conduit trust) and at the same time have the trust

not be required to distribute anything to the spouse (as long as it's not distributed to anyone else until after spouse's death)? If you have an answer to that question and can support your conclusion with citations from the Code and regulations, please write an article for the rest of us.

PART 4: RMD RULES FOR TRUSTS; HOW TO TEST A TRUST

This PART 4 explains how to determine the RMD rules for a trust that is named as beneficiary of a retirement account.

Briefly, the regulations treat the trust as a collection of multiple beneficiaries: If your trust qualifies as a "see-through trust," you "look through" the trust to determine which of the potential beneficiaries are "countable," then simply look up the RMD payout rules that apply to the one or more "countable" beneficiary(ies) you have identified. The following quiz (bullet point questions) takes you through the process and sends you to the section of this outline that explains the distribution rules applicable to your particular trust and combination of trust beneficiaries.

1. The Test-a-Trust for RMDs Quiz

Go through the bullet point questions in order. Along the way you may need to read the cited other sections of this Outline to understand the question. When you come to the instruction "LEAVE THIS QUIZ," go to the cited section of the Outline for the RMD rules for your trust. Easy peasy!

The Appetizer

- Did the deceased participant whose retirement account funded this account die before 2020? If so, LEAVE THIS QUIZ and go to PART 8 to determine your payout requirements.
- Does the trust qualify as a see-through trust? #6. If not, you have a "nondesignated beneficiary." LEAVE THIS QUIZ; go to the payout rules for a Nondesignated beneficiary (PART 3, #2).
- Does your see-through trust divide into two or more "subtrusts" as of the death of the participant? If so, see PART 6, #4 regarding whether these subtrusts will be treated as "separate accounts" or not. If they are treated as separate accounts, the rest of these questions will apply to each subtrust separately. If they are not treated as separate accounts, the rest of these questions will apply to all the subtrusts collectively, as if they are a single trust.
- Is the trust a "Conduit Trust" (PART 4, #3) for one or multiple beneficiaries? If so, your only countable beneficiary(ies)" is/are the conduit beneficiary (or beneficiaries). LEAVE THIS QUIZ and go to PART 4, #10 to determine the distribution period for the trust based on the rules for such beneficiary(ies).

The Main Course:

These questions apply to an Accumulation Trust that (1) holds retirement benefits inherited directly from a (post-2020) deceased participant and (2) qualifies as a See-through Trust. These three questions are applied as of the participant's date of death. See The Dessert Course for changes that could occur after the participant's death that would be effective retroactive to the date of death.

- Make a list of all possible individuals or entities that could ever become beneficiaries of this trust, excluding only the following: people who died before the participant (§ 6.4.03(A)), people who don't exist yet (such as future hoped-for issue) (§ 6.4.03(B)), and potential appointees under a power of appointment that has not yet been exercised (§ 6.4.03(C)). If the disposition of trust assets may be subject to a power of appointment, ignore potential appointees; instead include the "takers in default of exercise" on your list of possible beneficiaries.
- Divide the list into "primary" and "residuary" beneficiaries. Primary beneficiaries are beneficiaries who will be entitled, or who may be eligible, to receive benefits upon the death of the participant, without having to wait for someone else to die. "Residuary" beneficiaries are all beneficiaries who will have to wait for both the participant and at least one other beneficiary to die before they will be entitled, or may become eligible, to receive benefits.
- Now make your list of "countable" beneficiaries: All the primary beneficiaries are countable. The following residuary beneficiaries are disregarded (crossed off the list); see PART 4, #8.
 - If the primary beneficiary is under age 31, and is entitled under the trust to receive the entire account no later than attaining age 31, disregard any residuary beneficiary(ies) who are entitled or eligible to inherit the trust if the primary beneficiary dies before attaining that age.
 - If, upon the death of the primary beneficiary (or the deaths of all the primary beneficiary(ies) if there are more than one), the trust will terminate and be distributed outright to one or more specified residuary beneficiaries (provided they survive the primary beneficiary(ies)), but to one or more other (different) residuary beneficiaries if those "first choice" residuary beneficiaries (although they survived the participant) fail to survive the primary beneficiary(ies), the second-choice beneficiaries are not countable.

Dessert

You now have your list of countable beneficiaries as it actually is/was as of the date of the participant's death. Determine the trust's required annual distributions and terminal distribution (PART 4, #10) based on that list, UNLESS your list is modified as a result of one of these post-death

actions (in which case use the “list” as so modified): These questions deal with events that could occur after the date of the participant’s death and be given retroactive effect to the late of death:

- In the case of a qualified plan, a “documentation requirement” must be met by the trustee no later than October 31 of the year after the year of the participant’s death. PART 4, #6. Failure to meet that deadline would eliminate the possibility of designated beneficiary status, retroactive to the date of death. In that case the trust would be a “Non-DB.”
- If “subtrusts” are to be treated as separate accounts for computing RMDs, the trustee must cause the separate accounts to be “established” no later than December 31 of the year after the year of the participant’s death. Failure to meet that deadline would mean the trust beneficiaries would all be considered beneficiaries of a single inherited retirement account. PART 6.
- If any beneficiary who was on the “countable” list as of the date of participant’s death is paid off—receives 100% of the benefits to which such beneficiary was entitled—on or before September 30 of the year after the year of the participant’s death (the “Beneficiary Finalization Date”), that beneficiary is removed from the countable list. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(c)(2)(iii).
- If, no later than the Beneficiary Finalization Date, a beneficiary makes a qualified disclaimer of all benefits to which such beneficiary would have been entitled or eligible under the trust, such beneficiary is removed from the countable list. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(c)(2)(ii).
- If a power of appointment over the benefits is “exercised” or “restricted” on or before the Beneficiary Finalization Date, the “takers in default of exercise” are removed from the list of residuary beneficiaries, and instead the takers under the exercise of the power or the group of beneficiaries to whom the power has been “restricted” become countable instead. PART 7, #7.

The rest of this PART 4 explains in detail the processes and results summarized in the “Quiz.”

2. The 2024 IRS RMD trust rules

The Code dictates that certain (generally favorable) minimum distribution outcomes are available only to a “designated beneficiary,” and that a “designated beneficiary” must be an “individual.” § 401(a)(9)(E)(i); see PART 3, #1, of this Outline.

Since a trust is obviously not an “individual,” the IRS created rules under which, if the decedent named a trust as his beneficiary, you can “see through” the trust and treat the trust beneficiaries as if they had been named directly as beneficiaries. Then, if such beneficiaries are all individuals, the decedent has a “designated beneficiary.”

Ok, but WHICH trust beneficiaries count for this “see through” process? Almost every trust has a long chain of potential beneficiaries who COULD inherit the trust property if some prior

beneficiary dies before a certain age, dies without issue, dies before some other beneficiary, etc. No problem! You *disregard* certain contingent or successor beneficiaries in making your “designated beneficiary” test. But exactly which beneficiaries can you “disregard?” Here are the details of determining the “countable beneficiaries” process that was summarized in the Quiz.

3. Definitions: See-through Trust, Conduit Trust, Accumulation Trust

The Regulations adopt as official terms See-through Trust, Conduit Trust, and Accumulation Trust. The terms “Conduit Trust” and “Accumulation Trust” have been in common use for years by practitioners (and have appeared in PLRs) to describe the types of trusts illustrated in [now superceded] Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5, A-7(c)(3), Examples 1 and 2. Though the term “See-through Trust” has also been around for years, *its meaning has changed* in the post-SECURE Regulations. Here are the current definitions in the Regulations:

- A **See-through Trust** is a trust that is “designated as the beneficiary of an employee under a plan” and which meets the requirements of Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(2) (*i.e.*, it complies with three or four “trust rules”; see PART 4, #7).

The effect of a See-through Trust is that “certain beneficiaries of the trust that are described in...[Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(3)] are treated as having been designated as beneficiaries of the employee under the plan, provided that those beneficiaries are not disregarded under...[Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(c)(2)].” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(1)(i).

Having a See-through Trust therefore is just the first step: It gets you in the door but does not guarantee that the trust will qualify for any life expectancy payout or even the 10-year rule. A trust may qualify as a See-through Trust and still not have the trust beneficiaries qualify as “designated beneficiaries.”

Also note: Even though, with a See-through Trust, the trust beneficiaries are deemed to be the beneficiaries of the retirement plan, the *trust* (not the beneficiaries) is considered the “payee” for purposes of the 25% excise tax on missed RMDs (§ 4974), so the trustee will be responsible for paying that tax. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-8(a)(1)(iii).

“The determination of which beneficiaries of a see-through trust are treated as having been designated as beneficiaries of the employee...depends on whether the see-through trust is a conduit trust or an accumulation trust.” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(ii).

- A **Conduit Trust** is a See-through Trust that provides, with respect to the deceased participant’s interest in the retirement account, that “all distributions [from such retirement account] will, upon receipt by the trustee, be paid directly to, or for the benefit of, specified trust beneficiaries.” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(1)(ii)(A).

This definition of conduit trust has not changed from the prior regulations or common understanding, though the prior regulations did not use that term; see [superceded] Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5, A-7(c)(3), Example 2. This definition provides official recognition that a conduit

trust can be for more than one designated beneficiary, a question considered unresolved under prior regulations.

Giving the “conduit beneficiary” *the right to withdraw* the IRA distributions from the trust, instead of having the trust instrument *require the trustee to immediately pay out* to (or for the benefit of) the trust beneficiary all amounts distributed out of the retirement account does NOT satisfy the definition of a conduit trust, according to the preface of the final RMD regulations issued July 2024.

- An **Accumulation Trust** is “any See-through Trust that is not a conduit trust.” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(1)(ii)(B).

4. Some trust beneficiaries are countable, some are disregarded

The payout period for RMDs after the participant’s death depends on the identity of the beneficiary of the account, as we have seen...there is one payout period for an EDB, another for a PODB, another for a Non-DB, and so forth. A trust has multiple potential beneficiaries—current beneficiaries, remainder beneficiaries, contingent beneficiaries, etc. To determine the Applicable Denominator (*i.e.*, the payout period under the minimum distribution rules) for a trust named as beneficiary of a retirement account, you need to know **which of those trust beneficiaries are “countable” (counted as beneficiaries) and which are ignored (“disregarded”) if any.**

Summarized, the regulations (found in **Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)**) analyze a trust by, first, creating a list of all potential trust beneficiaries (“all” meaning every definite or potential beneficiary identified by the trust instrument, minus certain “disregarded” categories), then dividing the list of potential trust beneficiaries into two tiers. The first tier (the “primary”) beneficiaries are always countable. Some (or in some cases all) second tier or “residuary” beneficiaries may be disregardable. By threading these rules, you end up with your list of “countable” trust beneficiaries.

And why do we care which beneficiaries are “countable?”

- Designated beneficiary status requires that all countable beneficiaries must be individuals. If a nonindividual is a potential beneficiary anywhere in the trust instrument, you will lose designated beneficiary status unless that beneficiary is “disregardable” under these rules (or unless the trust is an AMBT and the nonindividual is a qualifying charity—see PART 3, #7(E)).
- Sometimes the ages of the countable beneficiaries matter. For example, the life expectancy of the oldest countable beneficiary will be the applicable distribution period (applicable denominator) in some cases. See, *e.g.*, “Steinmetz” case study (PART 9, Case #3). Also, a beneficiary may be an EDB depending on his/her age (whether the beneficiary is a minor? Or is not more than 10 years younger than the participant?).
- Whether some or all of the “countable beneficiaries” are “eligible designated beneficiaries” (EDBs) (and if so which KIND of EDB) also may matter for determining the RMDs (see PART 5).

The rest of this PART 4 lays out the process, as contained in the Regulations, by which we analyze a trust and determine which beneficiaries are counted and which are disregarded in testing the trust. Once you determine the countable beneficiaries using these steps you can determine the distribution period (“Applicable Denominator”) for the trust based on their identity (see PART 5). Special terminology (mostly but not entirely from the regulations) is used in this testing process.

5. **But first: Which trust are you testing? Successor trusts; subtrusts**

Which trust(s) are you “testing” exactly? Even if only one trust is named as beneficiary on the beneficiary designation form, you may need to test multiple trusts:

One trust pays to another trust: If the beneficiary of the retirement account is a trust that at some point distributes to one or more other trusts, all such trusts are tested as if they were one combined trust. For example, Ann leaves her IRA to a trust for her spouse, which provides that “upon the death of my spouse, the remaining property of this trust shall be paid over to the trust dated 4/1/2017 which I previously established for my daughter Grace.” The trust for spouse and the trust for Grace are tested as if they formed one combined trust. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(4).

Subtrusts: Often, the trust named as beneficiary on the beneficiary designation form is required by its terms to divide up into separate trusts following the trust grantor’s death. A separate trust so created is called a subtrust. A “subtrust” is not in any legal or tax way different from a plain old “trust,” it’s just a convenient term to denote a trust that was created out of another trust. Once the subtrust is calved out of the “funding” trust, it’s treated just like any other trust for all legal and tax purposes.

But do you test each subtrust separately to determine the *distribution period*? Or do you test them collectively, as one single trust? If the separate subtrusts were named separately as beneficiaries *on the beneficiary designation form*, you test each subtrust separately (assuming they otherwise qualify as “separate accounts”; PART 6, #4). If the single trust is named as beneficiary on the beneficiary designation form, see PART 6, #4, for whether the subtrusts meet the requirements for “separate accounts.” See PART 6 for those requirements.

6. **Essential: Qualify as a See-through Trust**

The trust must qualify as a “See-through Trust” as the first step towards qualifying for designated beneficiary (DB) treatment. Only a DB is entitled to the 10-year rule or (if the DB is also an “eligible designated beneficiary” (EDB)) to some variety of life expectancy payout. Even if DB status for some reason does not matter to this client for purposes of required minimum distributions, DB status is essential if there are inherited benefits in a qualified retirement plan (such as decedent’s 401(k) account); these inherited benefits cannot be transferred to an “inherited IRA” owned by the trust (or any other beneficiary) unless the would-be transferee is a “designated beneficiary.”

The trust rules that a trust must pass to qualify as a “See-through Trust” are:

- Three rules for all retirement accounts: The trust is valid under state law; the trust is irrevocable as of the participant’s death; and the trust beneficiaries are “identifiable.”
- A fourth rule applies to qualified plans only (not IRAs): the “documentation requirement”: The trustee must supply to the plan administrator either a certified list of the beneficiaries or a copy of the trust. The plan administrator decides which one or the other). See Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(1)(ii)(4), (h).

These four rules are almost exactly the same as the trust rules in the pre-SECURE regulations which were adopted in 2002 and replaced by the 2024 edition. The only significant changes are, first, that the documentation requirement now applies only to qualified plans (such as a 401(k) plan) not to IRAs. Reg. § 1.408-8(b)(4).

The second change is in the meaning of “identifiable,” which now means only that it is possible to identify the beneficiaries who will or may be entitled to share in the retirement benefits through the trust: “each person eligible to receive a portion of the employee’s interest in the plan through the trust.” The 2024 Regulations use the “identifiable” requirement as a springboard to explain whether potential *post-death changes* in the identity of the trust beneficiaries (*e.g.*, via exercise of a power of appointment, or a trust reformation or decanting) will or will not affect the trust’s qualification as a Designated Beneficiary Trust (and if so how and when); see PART 7.

Under the old (2002) regulations, “identifiable” required identifying the beneficiary with the “shortest life expectancy” (*i.e.*, the oldest countable beneficiary of the trust); the oldest beneficiary’s life expectancy would be the Applicable Denominator for distributions to the trust. That step is generally no longer needed to determine the Applicable Denominator, since the 10-year rule now applies to most designated beneficiaries, and since the life expectancy payout is limited to individuals who are EDBs. However, identifying the oldest countable beneficiary is still important in some cases for determining RMDs; see PART 5.

A trust that passes these rules is called a See-through Trust. If the trust flunks any of these rules applicable to it, it is a “non-designated beneficiary” (Non-DB); see PART 5, #5 for applicable RMD rules. A trust that passes these three rules (for IRAs) or four rules (for qualified plans) is called, in the Regulations, a “**See-through Trust.**” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(1)(i), last sentence.

Note:

- Because one of the rules does not apply to IRAs, it is possible to have the trust qualify as a See-through Trust for some of its inherited accounts (the IRA(s)) and not others (the qualified plan account(s)). This would happen if the trust satisfied the first three rules (applicable to IRAs and qualified plans) but not the documentation requirement (applicable to qualified plan accounts only).
- A See-through Trust *may or may not* qualify as a Designated Beneficiary! Such qualification will depend on whether all “countable” beneficiaries of the trust (PART 4, #10) are individuals (or, in the case of an AMBT, individuals or qualifying charities).

7. The list of potential trust beneficiaries

This is the most important step in determining the RMD payout rules applicable to your trust.

If the trust qualifies as a See-through Trust (PART 4, #3) proceed to make a list of all definite and potential beneficiaries of the trust...every person or entity that could ever possibly be a beneficiary of the trust, except the following three categories; leave these OFF your list:

- Disregard individuals who predeceased the participant (even if they are named in the trust).
- Disregard individuals who do not exist (*e.g.*, potential future issue).
- Disregard potential appointees under a power of appointment; instead, include the “takers in default of appointment” in your list of potential beneficiaries.

Trap for the unwary?

According to the Preamble to the Proposed Regulations (Feb. 2022), if the “trust *could be liable* for expenses of administering and distributing the deceased employee’s estate at death,” “the decedent’s estate is treated as a beneficiary of the employee...because some portion of the employee’s interest in the plan may be used for the payment of those administration expenses, thus satisfying an obligation of the estate.” Emphasis added. Since the participant’s own estate is a nonindividual, this would be a bad thing to happen if you want the trust to be a designated beneficiary. The way to avoid that bad result, according to the Preamble to the Proposed Regulations, is for the trust to specify that retirement benefits may not be used for this purpose (or may not be so used after the Beneficiary Finalization Date).

Comment: If a trust appears to be “trapped” by this rule, i.e., the participant has died leaving an IRA to the trust and the trust allows retirement benefits to be paid to the participant’s estate for debts and expenses, do not despair. Several private letter rulings “blessed” such trusts where the executors and/or trustees showed the IRS they were bound by some form of agreement or state law provision that prohibited such use, or showed that the taxes had been paid without using the retirement benefits; and even had this not been the case, it is a fact that ALL the decedent’s assets, INCLUDING his retirement accounts, are subject to various automatic liens for federal taxes—thus theoretically NO retirement account could qualify as a designated beneficiary. In other words this apparent position of the IRS as stated in the preface to the proposed regulations is open to interpretation, negotiation or challenge.

Even though your list is made “as of” the date of death, certain events that occur between the date of participant’s date of death and various dates in the year after the year of the participant’s death are given effect retroactive to the date of death and thus can modify your “list of potential trust beneficiaries.” One is whether (with respect to inherited qualified plan benefits) the trustee satisfied the “documentation requirement” described at PART 4, #6. Another is with respect to whether “subtrusts” will qualify as “separate accounts,” because applicable requirements were or were not met by December 31 of the year after the year of the participant’s death (PART 6).

Here are potential post-death changes that would alter your date-of-death list of beneficiaries, if they **occur on or before the Beneficiary Finalization Date** (September 30 of the year after the year of the participant's death):

- Disregard any beneficiary who disclaims his interest in the benefits by means of a qualified disclaimer prior to the BFD.
- Disregard any beneficiary who, by virtue of a distribution of his/her/its entire interest prior to the BFD, has no further interest in the benefits as of the BFD.
- Disregard any beneficiary who is “removed” prior to the BFD by means of a reformation or decanting of the trust in a manner permissible under applicable state law.
- ...but ADD any beneficiary who is “added” to the trust by means of a reformation or decanting of the trust in a manner permissible under applicable state law prior to the BFD.
- If a power of appointment is exercised or restricted on or before the BFD, see PART 7, #7.

Note: Even though we are testing the trust, at the time of the participant's death, by looking into the future to see who gets the benefits when certain trust beneficiaries die, the tests are NOT reapplied later, when such beneficiaries ACTUALLY die.

8. “Primary” and “Residuary” beneficiaries; which can be be “disregarded”

Divide your list of potential beneficiaries (from #7) into two groups, called “primary” and “residuary” beneficiaries” in this Outline. The terms “primary” and “residuary” are not used in the regulation, but are used in the Treasury's Preface to the regulations, and are used here for convenience. The two groups are:

“(A) Any beneficiary that could receive amounts in the trust representing the employee's interest in the plan that are neither contingent upon, nor delayed until, the death of another trust beneficiary who did not predecease (and who is not treated as having predeceased) the employee; and

“(B) Any beneficiary of an *accumulation* trust that could receive amounts in the trust representing the employee's interest in the plan that were not distributed to beneficiaries described in paragraph (f)(3)(i)(A) of this section.” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(3)(i); emphasis added.

In other words, the “paragraph (f)(3)(i)(A)” or “primary” beneficiaries are those who do not have to wait for some other beneficiary to die. They are entitled or eligible to receive benefits because of the participant's death. Paragraph “(f)(3)(i)(B)” or “residuary” beneficiaries cannot get any benefits until at least two people have died—the participant and some other beneficiary.

If a beneficiary fits into both categories, he is placed in the paragraph “A” group. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(3)(i).

Note that you ignore the “residuary” beneficiaries of a Conduit Trust; only the conduit beneficiaries are “countable. Reg. 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(3)(i). For an accumulation trust, some residuary (paragraph (B)) beneficiaries may be disregardable. For both Conduit and Accumulation Trusts, however, NO primary (paragraph (A)) beneficiary can be disregarded—all are countable.

Here are the “disregard” rules for residuary beneficiaries of an accumulation trust. Note that these rules are in some circumstances ambiguous and/or risky to rely on:

- A. Disregard the “Second choice residuary guy.”** This residuary beneficiary is disregarded: “Any beneficiary of an accumulation trust who could receive amounts from the trust representing the employee's interest in the plan solely because of the death of another beneficiary described in paragraph (f)(3)(i)(B) of this section is not treated as having been designated as a beneficiary of the employee under the plan. The preceding sentence does not apply if the deceased beneficiary described in paragraph (f)(3)(i)(B) of this section—
- “(1) Predeceased (or is treated as having predeceased) the employee; or
 - “(2) Also is described in paragraph (f)(3)(i)(A) of this section.”

Here is a clear example of a residuary beneficiary who is disregarded under this rule: X dies, leaving an IRA to a trust that provides income to Y for life, plus principal if needed for health or support, and provides that on Y’s death, the trust shall terminate and be distributed outright to Z, if Z is then living, otherwise to Charity. At the time of X’s death, both Y and Z are living. Charity is “disregarded” because it is a residuary or second tier beneficiary (it is not eligible or entitled to receive a dime from this trust until not only the “primary” or “first tier” or “paragraph A” beneficiary has died, but also until *another* “residuary” or “second tier” beneficiary (Z) has died. Thus, the only “countable” beneficiaries of the trust are primary beneficiary Y and residuary beneficiary Z.

It can be fragile: Note that for planning purposes this trust is a little fragile. All is fine if Z survives the participant. But if Z dies before the participant, all of a sudden Charity becomes the only second-tier beneficiary there is and it is therefore not disregardable...it is countable. Moral for drafters: If relying on this rule to “disregard” any contingent remainder beneficiary, make sure you have plenty of layers of human remainder beneficiaries or you may find an unexpected beneficiary death has turned the trust into a non-designated beneficiary.

It can be ambiguous: The regulation can be read as not limiting the “disregard” requirement to only residuary beneficiaries whose interest is contingent on the prior death of a prior *outright* beneficiary.

Example: Mike dies leaving his IRA to the Mike Trust. The trust provides income, plus principal if needed for health or support, to Mrs. Mike for life. After her death, income plus principal if needed for health or support will be paid to their child Moe for life. Upon Moe’s death the trust will terminate and be distributed to Charity. Both Mrs. Mike and Moe survived Mike. Clearly, the total list of beneficiaries is Mrs. Mike, Moe, and Charity. Clearly, Mrs. Mike is the only “primary” or “first tier” beneficiary, and Moe and Charity are residuary beneficiaries. Is Charity disregardable? Maybe Charity is disregardable because it will not get anything until both Mrs. Moe and Mike are dead? Or would the IRS say, Charity is not entitled to money SOLELY because of Moe’s death—it is not entitled to get anything UNTIL Moe’s death, but the terms of the trust REQUIRE payment to Charity at that time of any trust principal that was not needed for Moe’s health and support.

While there may be some ambiguity in the interpretation of this rule, the wisest course when drafting a trust to receive inherited retirement benefits would be not to rely on an ambiguous interpretation.

B. Conditions other than death are not favored by the regulations.

EXAMPLE: CONTINGENCY OTHER THAN DEATH: Julia’s trust says “Pay all income to my husband Harold until his death or remarriage. Upon his death or remarriage, pay the principal to my daughter Charlotte if living, otherwise to Morgan Memorial.” Both Harold and Charlotte survive Julia. Harold is clearly a primary beneficiary because he gets benefits from the trust upon Julia’s death; he doesn’t have to wait until someone else dies. Charlotte is ALSO (apparently) a “primary beneficiary” because her right to benefits is “neither contingent upon, nor delayed until, the death of another trust beneficiary”—she would get the benefits while Harold is still alive, if he remarries. This conclusion is supported by language in the Preamble to the *Proposed* Regulations, p. 32... but there is no further elucidation on this point in the final regulations and no mention of it in the Preamble to the final regulations.

If this interpretation is correct, then the charity is the only “residuary” beneficiary in the picture, and none of the disregard rules would allow the charity to be disregarded, so the trust would not be a designated beneficiary trust. It is disappointing that this type of provision (“until death or remarriage”) is not mentioned in the final regulations or the Preamble.

It may seem frustrating that SOME potential future events that *could but may never* happen (exercise of a power of appointment, decanting, trust reformation) are DISREGARDED in determining the “countable beneficiaries” of a trust named as beneficiary, but other potential future events (such as remarriage of a beneficiary) that also may never happen are treated as if they definitely will happen. However, the distinction is not irrational: Disclaimers, exercise of a power of appointment, and reformation/decanting are formal legal events. If the door is opened to all contingent future events (graduation from college....divorce, marriage, bankruptcy...severe illness...real need...) the trust rules would become too amorphous and unmanageable.

C. Another tricky disregard rule: The Primary Inherits by Age 31.

Disregard any residuary beneficiary who will inherit only if a primary beneficiary who would have inherited the property outright at a certain age (age 31 or younger) [or by end of year after year of participant’s death, if later] dies before reaching that age [or such year-end]. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(3)(ii)(B). This seems reasonable. If a beneficiary is entitled to receive outright distribution of the entire trust principal no later than age 31, and the next beneficiary will inherit only if the young prior beneficiary dies at a very young age, said next beneficiary should be ignored, right? He/she/it is very unlikely to get anything, since death before age 32 is very unusual. However:

(i) Primary beneficiaries only. This reasonable “disregard rule” does not apply to any old successor beneficiary—it applies ONLY if the beneficiary entitled to that by-age-31 distribution is a primary (“Paragraph A”) beneficiary). Thus you can NOT rely on this “disregard” rule if the young beneficiary is not a primary “paragraph (A)” beneficiary:

EXAMPLE 1, AGE 31 RULE: Regina’s trust says, “Use income and principal of the trust for the benefit of my niece Sophie, for her health, education, and support, until she reaches age 31, at which time the trust shall terminate and be distributed outright to her. If she dies before reaching that age the trust shall terminate and be distributed to Charity X.” The primary beneficiary is Sophie. The residuary beneficiary is Charity X. The charity is disregarded because (1) it is a residuary beneficiary and (2) it will receive funds from this trust only if a primary beneficiary who would inherit the funds outright upon reaching age 31 (or any younger age) dies before reaching such age.

EXAMPLE 2, AGE 31 RULE: David’s trust says, “Pay income of the trust to my brother Ed for life; on his death pay the principal to Ed’s daughter Gina, provided she has attained age 31. If she has not attained age 31 at the time of Ed’s death, use income and principal of the trust for her health, education, and support, until she reaches age 31, at which time the trust shall terminate and be distributed outright to her. If she dies before reaching that age, or if she does not survive Ed, the trust shall terminate and be distributed to Charity X.” The primary beneficiary is Ed. The residuary beneficiaries are Gina and Charity X. The charity is NOT disregarded because even though it only inherits if Gina dies before age 31, Gina is not a “primary” (“paragraph (A)”) beneficiary so the Age 31 rule does not apply.

(ii) Not limited to children of participant. Although “age 31” is the same age as the final year of distribution to a minor child of the deceased participant (*i.e.*, a category of eligible designated beneficiary or EDB) (10 years after attaining majority), the age 31-disregard rule in Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(3)(ii)(B) applies with respect to ANY primary beneficiary who is to receive outright distribution at or before that age, even if such beneficiary is not a minor child of the participant. That’s the good news. However:

Keep in mind that the permitted delay in trust distribution (to any age up to 31) does NOT delay distribution of the retirement plan itself. In the first example above, niece Sophie is not Regina’s child and is not disabled or chronically ill, so she is a “plain old designated beneficiary” (PODB). Assuming Regina’s trust otherwise qualifies as a designated beneficiary trust (DBT), the 10-year rule applies to the trust. If niece Sophie is only 15 years old on her birthday in the year after Regina’s death, when Regina dies, the IRA will have to be distributed fully to the trust no later than the 10th year after Regina’s death, when Sophie will be turning age 25. The trust still has six more years to run, but the trust will have to receive 100% of the taxable income from the IRA within 10 years after Regina’s death. The trust will have to pay income taxes on those IRA distributions when received, to the extent they are not passed out to niece Sophie (or for her benefit), and only the after-tax remnant of the IRA will be left for distribution to Sophie when she reaches age 31.

9. Various Examples

This section collect various examples and comments.

EXAMPLE 1: VANILLA TRUST; NOBODY TO DISREGARD: Trust says “Pay income to my spouse for life, and on my spouse’s death distribute the principal to my issue then living by right of representation, or if no issue of mine is then living, to Charity X.” Participant is survived by his spouse, three children, and four grandchildren. The “potential beneficiaries” list is as follows:

Spouse, three children, four grandchildren, and Charity X. Charity is disregarded as a second-choice residuary beneficiary: The children or grandchildren will inherit outright immediately on the death of the primary beneficiary (or of the participant, if spouse did not survive participant); they are the “first choice second tier” guys. Charity is disregarded as the second choice second tier beneficiary. Note that if it should happen that all of the participant’s issue predeceased participant, and only spouse survived, the charity would step up to “first choice” second-tier guy. In other words, do not overlook the possibility of unlikely orders of deaths when drafting a trust and relying on this exception.

Common-situation disregard rules applicable when preparing list of all potential beneficiaries: These three disregard rules (A, B, C) are regularly encountered situations. These examples assume that there are no post-death changes that would affect the outcome; if there are post-death changes, see D-G.

A. Disregard people who predeceased participant. Disregard any beneficiary who died before the participant—or who is deemed to have predeceased the participant due to operation of a “simultaneous deaths” provision in state law or in the governing instrument. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(c)(2)(i), (ii); .

EXAMPLE: BENEFICIARY DIES BEFORE PARTICIPANT OR BEFORE BFD: Trust says “On my death, pay \$1000 to my sister Susie, then pay all income of the trust to my spouse for life, and on my spouse’s death distribute the principal to my issue then living by right of representation, or if no issue of mine is then living, to Charity X.” Participant is survived by his spouse, three children and four grandchildren but sister Susie predeceased him. The potential beneficiaries list is as follows: Spouse, three children, four grandchildren, and Charity X. Susie is not on the list because she predeceased the participant.

Compare: If Susie survived the participant, then died before the BFD, her death would NOT eliminate her as a listable beneficiary. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(c)(3)(vi). Presumably the regulation makes this distinction because Susie’s estate would take her share of the retirement account, and since Susie’s estate “is” Susie, she is still a countable beneficiary. Unknown: Suppose the trust instrument requires beneficiaries to survive until the BFD to receive anything under the trust. If the trust contains that provision, and Susie survives participant but dies before the BFD, neither Susie nor her estate would be entitled to benefits. Presumably she would not be included in the list of potential beneficiaries in that case, but the regulations do not specifically cover that point.

B. Disregard people who don’t exist yet. Disregard any beneficiary who doesn’t exist on the date of the participant’s death because he hasn’t been born yet.

This rule does not appear in the Regulations. It is an interpretation of the rule that trust beneficiaries must be “identifiable.” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(5). You do not “count” as beneficiaries any potential future/not-yet-born issue even though “issue” may be named as beneficiaries as a class in the trust instrument. This rule creates results you may not like, but there are ways to fix the problem at the drafting stage; see PART 4, #9(H). Or you can take your chances and ignore this rule because it does not appear in the Regulations.

EXAMPLE: PERPETUAL FAMILY TRUST: Trust says “The trustee shall pay income and principal to or for the benefit of such persons as the trustee shall select from the class consisting of my issue living at the time of such payment for their health, education, support, and welfare in such amounts as the trustee deems advisable. At the end of 200 years, or at any earlier time when there is no issue of mine living, the trust shall terminate and be distributed to Charity X.” Participant is survived by three children, four grandchildren, and no other issue. The potential beneficiaries list is as follows: Three children, four grandchildren, and Charity X. Though the trust is intended to benefit the participant’s present and future issue for 200 years, you cannot “count” people who do not exist yet. For purposes of testing this trust, you can look only at people who are actually living when the participant dies. There is no rule that would allow you to disregard Charity X; this nonindividual beneficiary would be a “countable beneficiary.” There are two ways to avoid that. One is to name an individual as the “wipeout” beneficiary instead of a charity; some drafters use the “last man standing” approach—if at any time there is only one beneficiary of the trust living the trust terminates and is distributed outright to him or her. Another approach is to have the trust terminate and pass outright (in case of a default of issue) to the individual(s) who would be the participant’s heirs at law under the laws of X state, as of the date of the trust, if participant died at the time such amount becomes distributable, unmarried, and a resident of X state, and in the proportions provided by such laws.

C. Disregard permitted appointees under a power of appointment, unless and until such power is exercised or “restricted.” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(5)(ii)(A).

EXAMPLE: PERMITTED APPOINTEES: Trust says “Pay all income of the trust to my spouse for life, and on my spouse’s death distribute the principal to such charity(ies) or individual(s) as my spouse may appoint by her last will, or in default of such appointment, pay the principal to my issue then living by right of representation.” Participant is survived by his spouse, three children, and four grandchildren. The potential beneficiaries list is: Spouse, three children, and four grandchildren. The potential appointees under spouse’s will are NOT countable unless and until the power is either:

- **Exercised.** Since that cannot happen until spouse’s death (because the power can be exercised only by will, which cannot be effective until the testator/power holder has died), this power is ignored for now. Instead, the “takers in default” (i.e. the beneficiaries who will inherit if the power of appointment is not exercised) are treated as the beneficiaries who will inherit on spouse’s death. Or:
- **Restricted.** The regulations contain a weird rule for what happens if the power-holder somehow (WITHOUT exercising the power), legally “restricts” the power of appointment before the BFD, so it can only be exercised in favor of two or more of the permissible appointees. In that case the “countable” residuary beneficiaries are changed from the “takers in default of appointment” to the new shortened list of permissible appointees!” Even if the power of appointment is never exercised! Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(5)(ii)(A), third sentence; (f)(6)(iv), “Example 4.”

In the example in the regulation, this “restricting” action turns the trust from a “plain old designated beneficiary” (10-year rule applies) into a trust entitled to a life expectancy payout (because all “countable” beneficiaries are EDBs)—even though, assuming the spouse never exercises the power, the trust will pass to the participant’s issue (the default-of-exercise residuary beneficiaries) just as it would have done if the spouse had NOT “restricted” her power.

Uncommon-situation disregard rules : The next four “disregard” rules involve events that may occur AFTER the participant’s death. In most cases there will be no need to tangle with these rules, since these situations are uncommon.

The designated beneficiary is determined as of the date of the participant’s death. However, you take a second look on September 30 of the year after the year of the participant’s death, called sometimes the Beneficiary Finalization Date or BFD. There are four situations in which your list of potential beneficiaries may need to change for events that occur between the date of death and the BFD. Any of these adjustments, if applicable, would change the list of potential beneficiaries *retroactively to the date of death*. These are:

D. Disregard beneficiary who disclaims his or her interest in the benefits by means of a qualified disclaimer prior to the BFD. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(c)(2)(ii), (3)(i).

EXAMPLE: QUALIFIED DISCLAIMER PRIOR TO BFD: Trust says “On my death, pay \$1000 to my sister Susie, then pay all income of the trust to my spouse for life, and on my spouse’s death distribute the principal to my issue then living by right of representation, or if none of my issue is then living, to Charity X.” Participant is survived by his sister Susie, his spouse, and his three children and four grandchildren. Susie disclaims her bequest by means of a qualified disclaimer prior to the BFD. The potential beneficiaries list is now as follows: Spouse, three children, four grandchildren, and Charity X. A “nonqualified disclaimer” would NOT eliminate Susie as a beneficiary.

E Disregard beneficiary who, as of the BFD, has received the entire interest to which such beneficiary was entitled. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(c)(2)(iii).

EXAMPLE: BEQUEST DISTRIBUTED BY BFD: Trust says “On my death, pay \$1000 to Saint Mary’s Church, then pay all income of the trust to my spouse for life, and on my spouse’s death distribute the principal to my issue then living by right of representation, or if no issue of mine is then living, to Charity X.” Participant is survived by his spouse, three children, and four grandchildren. The \$1,000 bequest is distributed to Saint Mary’s Church in full prior to the BFD. The Church is no longer a potential beneficiary. The potential beneficiaries list is as follows: Spouse, three children, four grandchildren, and Charity X.

F. Disregard beneficiary removed by reformation or decanting before BFD

If a trust is named as beneficiary of the retirement plan, and such trust is modified after the participant’s death (by means of a “decanting” or reformation permitted under state law) to remove

a beneficiary effective by the BFD, the removed beneficiary is disregarded—he, she, or it does not count as a beneficiary of the trust. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(iii)(B).

EXAMPLE: REMOVAL OF BENEFICIARY PRIOR TO BFD VIA DECANTING OR REFORMATION: Mark dies leaving his IRA to a trust that says “After my death, use income and/or principal of the trust for the health, education, care and support of my three children A, B, and C. In addition, the trustee may in its discretion pay income and/or principal to or for the benefit of my Aunt Phyllis if the trustee determines in its discretion that such amounts are not required for the care, support, etc. of my children and that Aunt Phyllis’s other resources are not sufficient for her health, care, and support. When there is no child of mine living who is under the age of 25 years, the trust shall terminate and all remaining principal and income shall be distributed outright to my then living children in equal shares.” Mark dies in his age-37 year; his three children are now under age 21 and are all accordingly EDBs. Aunt Phyllis is also an EDB; she will turn 83 in the year after Mark’s death and she is not disabled or chronically ill, so she qualifies as a “not more than 10 years younger” (NoMoTTY) beneficiary. Phyllis is living in her own home, in good health, with financial resources that appear more than adequate to provide for all her foreseeable needs for the rest of her life. Having her as a discretionary beneficiary would mean she would be the oldest trust beneficiary and the trust would have to take distributions over her life expectancy, which is just 9.3 years. Removing her as a beneficiary would mean the IRA could be distributed to the trust over the life expectancy of the oldest child (who will be 12 years old in the year after Mark’s death, so his life expectancy is 72.9 years), continuing until 10 years after the last child has attained age 21 or earlier died. Aunt Phyllis would have disclaimed her interest in the trust if someone had asked her to, but nobody noticed this problem until it was too late for a qualified disclaimer. (Participant died 1/1/2025 and the nine-month qualified disclaimer deadline was 10/1/2025.) The trust is reformed before 9/30/2026 (the BFD) to remove Phyllis as a discretionary beneficiary with respect to the retirement benefits. If the reformation is proper under state law, Phyllis will not be counted as a potential trust beneficiary with respect to the IRA.

Trust reformations to improve RMD results may become a common occurrence in future years, as individuals die without having updated their trusts for the SECURE and SECURE 2.0 law changes. The Regulations allow room for such reformations to be effective retroactive to the date of death for minimum distribution purposes, to either add or remove a beneficiary. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(5)(iii). Such retroactive reformations were not possible under the old (2002) regulations.

G. Add any beneficiary who is *added* by virtue of a reformation or decanting of the trust, or the exercise of a power of appointment, prior to the BFD. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(5)(iii)(C).

This would presumably be a very unusual event.

EXAMPLE: ADDITION OF BENEFICIARY PRIOR TO BFD VIA DECANTING OR REFORMATION: Trust says “After my death, pay income in equal shares to my beloved nephews Arthur, Bill, Charlie, David, Fred, and George, or the surviving member(s) of said group, as long as

they live, then distribute the principal to their then-living issue per stirpes.” After the participant’s death, the trust is reformed in accordance with applicable state law to correct a scrivener’s error which omitted one of the intended nephews (Edward) from the beneficiary list. The reformation is completed properly under applicable state law, before the BFD. Edward is added to the list of potential trust beneficiaries.

Note that the Regulations make no allowance for a post-death reformation of the *beneficiary designation form*—only a trust reformation will be recognized for RMD purposes apparently.

H. Comments on spray trusts and dynasty trusts

EXAMPLE: SPRAY TRUST: Steve’s trust says “Upon my death, pay income and principal to or for the benefit of such persons as the trustee shall select from the class consisting of my surviving spouse and all my issue living from time to time for their health and support. Upon my spouse’s death, distribute the entire trust to my issue then living by right of representation or if none is then living, to My Favorite Charity.” Steve is survived by his spouse, two children, and five grandchildren. All eight of those individuals are primary beneficiaries, since all of them are eligible to receive distributions as a result of Steve’s death: They don’t have to wait for someone else to die. The Charity is the only residuary beneficiary. It appears that none of the disregard rules would allow the Charity to be disregarded, so this is probably not an advantageous way to draft the trust—the regulations are “prejudiced” against spray trusts. The problem can be cured by naming an individual as the wipeout beneficiary in place of the Charity.

EXAMPLE 2-B: DYNASTY TRUST: Trust says “The trustee shall pay income and principal to or for the benefit of such persons as the trustee shall select from the then living members of the class consisting of my issue living at the time of such payment for their health, education, support, and welfare in such amounts as the trustee deems advisable. If at any time there is no issue of mine living the trust shall terminate and be distributed to Charity X.” Participant is survived by three children and four grandchildren as his only then-living issue. The potential beneficiaries list is as follows: Three children, four grandchildren, and Charity X. Though the trust is *intended* to benefit the participant’s present and future issue in perpetuity, you cannot “count” issue who do not exist yet (although as noted the regulations do not explicitly so state). For purposes of testing this trust, you can look only at people who are living (in existence) when the participant dies.

What are the tiers or layers of beneficiaries? The children, and grandchildren are all primary beneficiaries because they are all eligible to receive benefits once the participant dies....they don’t have to wait until someone else dies to be eligible to receive money from the trust.

Charity X is the residuary beneficiary; it only inherits when all the primary beneficiaries die (actually only when all the primary beneficiaries and all issue of such primary beneficiaries die—but we can’t count those speculative future unborn issue).

But the Charity is NOT disregarable! There is *no other beneficiary* who will inherit the trust outright upon the deaths of the [currently existing] primary beneficiaries. *The only beneficiary who inherits outright under this trust is the Charity!* And because the Charity is therefore a countable beneficiary and it is not an individual, this trust flunks. It is a “Non-DB.”

If drafting this trust, and wishing to assure that designated beneficiary treatment will apply, there are two approaches practitioners have used to cure this problem.

- One is to use a “last man standing” provision: If at any time in the future there is only one living member of the class consisting of the participant’s issue of all generations, the trust will terminate and be distributed outright to that one person. This eliminates the charity and means all countable beneficiaries are individuals so you have a designated beneficiary. It does not carry out the participant’s original charitable intent....but if the participant really expects the trust to last for 1,000 years for the benefit of his descendants, charitable intent is presumably not a high priority for him.
- The other way is to choose some other individual(s) to be the wipeout beneficiary if all the participant’s issue die, such as the participant’s “heirs at law determined as of the date of the last issue to die, as if the participant had died on such date, based on the laws of the state of XYZ as they exist on the date this trust is signed, for distribution of real estate of an intestate unmarried decedent.” The “heirs at law” solution is intended to assure that all countable trust beneficiaries will be individuals and the trust can qualify as a designated beneficiary, assuming that an intestate estate could not default to a nonindividual such as the state. If using this approach, the drafter should determine who this “wipeout beneficiary” would be under applicable state law if the participant died without issue the day after signing the trust, so the participant can face the reality of who is his “wipeout beneficiary.”

Do those wipe-out provisions make any sense? Not really. In order to qualify for “designated beneficiary trust” status the client is eliminating the “sensible” wipeout beneficiary (the charity) for essentially a totally random relative. How much tax money will be saved by this change?

“At the end of the day” the new trust-testing rules are almost the same as the old trust-testing rules, with lots more detail filled in: As leading IRA-estate planning expert Kathy Sherby, Esq., of St. Louis once put it, “you keep counting beneficiaries until you get to someone who can put the retirement plan benefits in his pocket.” The regulation is looking for when the retirement plan money comes out of the trust and *goes into someone’s pocket*. **Thus, perpetual or multi-generation trusts are not going to fit well with these regulations.** If the trust is designed so the money never “goes into someone’s pocket” it may not be possible to have a Designated Beneficiary Trust.

Another approach to this dilemma (pointed out by another leading IRA-estate planning expert from St. Louis, Steve Gorin) is to rely on the regulations’ generous treatment of post-death trust amendments. Under this approach the expectation would be built in to the estate plan, that the trust would be reformed at some point AFTER the retirement benefits had been fully distributed (for example, about 11 years after the participant’s death, if the 10-year rule applied to the trust) to eliminate the undesired human wipeout beneficiary provision and perhaps substitute a charity as wipe-out beneficiary. However, such a provision can not be explicitly included in the trust; it must be added or activated by some means after the retirement accounts have been fully depleted. For how to do this, consult articles and seminar outlines of Attorney Gorin available through Leimberg Information Services (Leimbergservices.com).

10. RMD Rules Based on Your List of Countable Beneficiaries

Here is your reward for completing your list of countable beneficiaries: You can now determine (1) whether your trust qualifies as a “designated beneficiary” and (2) what the distribution period and final-payout requirements are. Just find the description of your countable beneficiaries in paragraphs A, B, C, D, or E below and that paragraph will lead you to the distribution period applicable to your trust. Full details on the distribution period for a trust are found in PART 5 of this Outline. For another reason why qualification as a designated beneficiary may be important (aside from determining the applicable distribution period), see the next section.

- A. If any of your countable beneficiaries is a nonindividual (such as the participant’s estate or a charity) your trust is a nondesignated beneficiary (Non-DB). The distribution period for a Non-DB is the 5-year rule if the participant died before his RBD, otherwise the “ghost life expectancy.” See PART 5, #1. There is one exception to the preceding conclusion: If the trust is an AMBT, and the participant died after 2022, and the non-individual countable beneficiary is the right type of charity (see PART 5, #2), that countable charitable beneficiary does not make the trust a Non-DB; in this case go to “C.”
- B. If the trust is a conduit trust, the distribution period for the trust is exactly the same as it would have been for the conduit beneficiary(ies) if named directly as beneficiaries—*e.g.*, 10-year rule for a plain old designated beneficiary (PODB) if the participant died before his RBD. See PART 5, #1.
- C. If the trust is an “Applicable Multi-Beneficiary Trust” (AMBT), see PART 5, #2.
- D. If any countable beneficiary of the trust is a minor child of the participant, see PART 5, #3.
- E. If all countable beneficiaries of the trust are EDBs, but no countable beneficiary is a minor child-EDB, see PART 5, #4.
- F. If none of the above applies, the trust is just a “plain old designated beneficiary.” Even if one or more of the trust’s countable beneficiaries are EDBs, if not ALL of them are then (except for the special provisions in the case of minor child-EDBs [D] and AMBTs [C]) the decedent is treated as “not having an eligible designated beneficiary.” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(2)(i). In other words, the trust is just a PODB. Therefore:
- If the participant died before his RBD, the 10-year rule applies. All funds must be distributed no later than the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the participant’s death. No distributions are required in years 1–9. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(2), (f)(2).
 - If the participant died on after his RBD, the 10-year rule applies: All funds must be distributed no later than the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the participant’s death. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(2). In addition, annual distributions are required in years 1–9 due to the “at least as rapidly” rule. The Applicable Denominator in those

years is the “greater of” of the ghost life expectancy or the life expectancy of the oldest countable designated beneficiary. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(i), (ii), (f)(1)(i). However, such annual RMDs may be skipped in years 2021–2024 (PART 3, #1F).

11. Trust must qualify as a DB to transfer inherited QRP to inherited IRA

If the decedent’s retirement account is in a “qualified retirement plan” (QRP) (such as a 401(k) plan), “designated beneficiary” status may be very important for a reason other than determining the applicable distribution period. Assume the client’s 401(k) plan will be payable to a trust. For whatever reason, the estate plan assumes the trust will not qualify for designated beneficiary status, and the client and advisor are fine with the payout period that would result from such nonqualification (the 5-year rule or the ghost life expectancy).

The survivors may be in for an ugly surprise. When the client dies, the 401(k) money is trapped in the company plan. It cannot be transferred to an inherited IRA in the name of the trust because the ability to transfer money from a qualified plan to an inherited IRA (called a “direct trustee-to-trustee transfer”) is available only to a nonspouse *designated beneficiary*. § 402(c)(11); Reg. § 1.402(c)-2(j)(2)(ii). If the trust named as beneficiary does not qualify as a designated beneficiary, the trust is stuck with the payout options the 401(k) plan permits—which might be only a lump sum payout.

PART 5: DETERMINING THE APPLICABLE DENOMINATOR FOR A TRUST

After completing all the steps in PART 4 above, you have the list of “countable” beneficiaries of your trust. These will determine the payout period for the trust—what the Regulations call the Applicable Denominator. All you need to do now is figure out which one of the following sections 1-5 describes your trust and you will know your Applicable Denominator (including annual track required distributions and Required Terminal Distribution).

1. Trusts that get “EDB treatment” or not; trusts that are Non-DBs

“EDB treatment” is used in this Outline to indicate that the trust is entitled to a “life expectancy payout” based on the life expectancy of one of the trust beneficiaries (which one varies depending on the type of trust).

The approach of the Regulations is to allow “EDB treatment” for three types of trusts: an AMBT (see PART 5, #2); a trust that has at least one countable beneficiary who is a minor child-EDB (see PART 5, #3); and any trust all “countable” beneficiaries of which are EDBs (see PART 5, #4). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(2) indicates that if the beneficiary of the retirement account is one of the above three types of trust, “then the employee is treated as having an eligible designated beneficiary.” (If the account is left to any other type of trust “then the employee is treated as not having an eligible designated beneficiary.” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(2)(i).)

Clearly this “EDB treatment” applies to these trusts for purposes of determining the Applicable Denominator. It presumably also extends to allowing the trust to use the 10-year rule instead of the life expectancy payout if the participant died before his RBD (Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(5)(iii); see PART 3, #4(C)), though this point is not explicitly stated in the Regulations. The

Regulations' examples of trusts named as beneficiary do not mention this election; see Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(6), Examples 1–4.

With one significant exception, a trust that has any countable beneficiary (PART 4, #10) that is not an individual (*e.g.*, the participant's estate or a charity), is automatically a Non-DB. (The new and significant exception is that an AMBT may have certain types of charity as a remainder beneficiary without losing DB status; see PART 5, #2.) The distribution period for a Non-DB (UNCHANGED by SECURE) is the 5-year rule if the participant died before his RBD, otherwise the "ghost life expectancy." See PART 3, #2.

If the trust qualifies as a DB, but does not "qualify for EDB treatment," it will be a PODB. Reg. 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(2)(i).

2. Applicable Multi-beneficiary Trust (AMBT)

Under an AMBT, there is a disabled or chronically ill (D/CI) beneficiary, or there are multiple D/CI beneficiaries, identified in the trust. So long as such beneficiary (or any of such beneficiaries) is living, no beneficiary who is not a D/CI beneficiary so identified "has a right to any of" the participant's retirement benefits payable to the trust. § 401(a)(9)(H)(v); Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)(H)(v). See PART 3, #7(E), for definition of D/CI beneficiary.

In other words, during the lifetime of such D/CI beneficiary(ies) no distributions from the retirement plan may be paid to or for the benefit of anyone other than the D/CI beneficiary (or members of group of D/CI beneficiaries if there are more than one). That includes reinvestments and "proceeds" of such retirement plan distributions. Plan distributions (and proceeds thereof etc.) may be applied to or for the benefit of the D/CI beneficiary, or held for such use in the future, but may not (so long as the D/CI beneficiary is living) be paid to or applied for the benefit of anyone else.

This provision of SECURE facilitates supplemental needs trusts for the benefit of a disabled individual who was receiving means-tested government benefits. The goal of such a trust is to supplement, not replace, the government benefits, meaning the trust must be structured so that the trust does not become a "countable resource" for purposes of the beneficiary's qualification for the applicable government programs.

Sometimes it becomes necessary to prohibit all payments from the trust to or for the benefit of the D/CI beneficiary to avoid having it be counted as a "resource." To accommodate that situation, the regulations provide that the interest of the D/CI beneficiary can be terminated during the life of such beneficiary, without forfeiting AMBT status, *provided* the trust continues to prohibit distributions to any person other than the D/CI beneficiary as long as he or she lives. In that case, the beneficiaries who receive the trust upon the death of the D/CI beneficiary will be treated as new beneficiaries "added to" the trust in that year (see rules for post-death trust modifications). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(g)(2).

An AMBT gets the following special breaks under the RMD rules:

Certain charitable remainders permitted. As a result of "SECURE 2.0" (enacted at the end of 2022), the normal requirement of a designated beneficiary trust that all countable beneficiaries of such trust must be individuals is softened: SECURE 2.0 allows an AMBT to have a charity as a remainder beneficiary while still qualifying as a "designated beneficiary." § 401(a)(9)(H)(v) (last sentence), effective for participants dying after 2022: "any beneficiary which is an organization

described in section 408(d)(8)(B)(i) shall be treated as a designated beneficiary described in subclause (II).” The organizations described in 408(d)(8)(B)(i) are all “50%” charities (charities listed in § 170(b)(1)(A)) OTHER THAN donor-advised funds and supporting organizations. See § 408(d)(8)(B)(i).

Note: § 170(b)(1)(A) lists charities donations to which qualify for an income tax deduction for individual donors, up to 50% of the donor’s income. There are other types of charities (see § 170(b)(1)(B)) donations to which are allowed only up to 30% of income. These “30% charities” are NOT allowed “designated beneficiary” status for AMBTs.

The **Applicable Denominator** for an AMBT is:

If the participant died before his RBD: Unless the 10-year rule applies (see PART 3, #4(C)), the life expectancy of the D/CI beneficiary (or of the oldest countable D/CI beneficiary of the trust if there are more than one). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(1)(i), (ii).

If the participant died on or after his RBD: The greater of the “ghost” life expectancy (PART3, #2) or the life expectancy of the D/CI beneficiary (or of the oldest countable D/CI beneficiary of the trust if there are more than one). If the participant died after his RBD, and the participant’s life expectancy (“ghost life expectancy”) was longer than the oldest D/CI beneficiary’s life expectancy, the ghost life expectancy would determine annual distributions. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(ii).

The rest of this discussion assumes that neither the 10-year rule nor the ghost life expectancy applies. If these assumptions are not correct for your facts, you are on your own.

For example, assuming the 10-year rule or ghost life expectancy does NOT apply, for an AMBT for the life benefit of one D/CI individual, with remainder to another individual who is not D/CI, the payout period will be the life expectancy of the D/CI individual even if the residuary beneficiary is older. **Warning:** If the AMBT is for the life benefit of one D/CI beneficiary, with the remainder passing to an older beneficiary who is also “identified” as D/CI, the payouts would be based on the life expectancy of the remainder beneficiary; the payout period might end while the life beneficiary was still living. To avoid that result, the trustee could consider simply not “identifying” the older remainder beneficiary as “D/CI,” for example, by not supplying the required documentation for that status.

The **Required Terminal Distribution** for an AMBT occurs in the last year of the required annual payments under the life expectancy payout described in the preceding paragraph, or, if earlier:

- If there is only one D/CI beneficiary, the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the death of the D/CI beneficiary.
- If there are multiple D/CI beneficiaries “identified,” the year the contains the 10th anniversary of the death of the LAST of such D/CI beneficiaries to die. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(3), (f)(2)(iii).

NOTE: While the annual payouts to an AMBT are based on the life expectancy of the OLDEST D/CI beneficiary, the Required Terminal Distribution is based on the LAST TO DIE of the D/CI beneficiaries.

3. Trust with any minor child-EDB

If at least one countable beneficiary of the trust is a minor child of the participant (“minor child-EDB”), the trust is entitled to a life expectancy payout. The RMD requirements for a trust with multiple minor child-EDBs as “countable beneficiaries” changed significantly between the proposed regulations (Feb. 2022) and the final regulations (July 2024). Here are the new rules:

A. Annual payouts based on oldest countable DB

The Applicable Denominator for annual RMDs will be the life expectancy of the oldest countable beneficiary of the trust. This rule did NOT change from the proposed regs. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(1)(i). NOTE, this is the oldest countable beneficiary of the trust, who may or may not be a minor child-EDB...the oldest countable beneficiary may be a mere “PODB.”

An example would be, a spray trust for the benefit of the participant’s children, three of whom are still minors and one of whom is age 22. Even though one trust beneficiary (the oldest child) is not an EDB the trust gets to use the life expectancy payout to determine annual distributions because it has at least one child who is still a minor child-EDB. The life expectancy the trust must use is the life expectancy of the 22-year-old child (if he is the oldest countable beneficiary).

Another example: Trust for the benefit of the participant’s 5-year-old child, to be held for the child’s benefit until she reaches age 45. If she dies before that age, the trust passes to the child’s aunt who is age 43. This is not a conduit trust. The aunt is countable, and she is the oldest trust beneficiary, so her life expectancy determines the annual RMDs. Note: If the trust property were distributable outright to the child by age 31, rather than age 45, then auntie could be disregarded and the trust would use the child’s life expectancy as the Applicable Denominator. See PART 4, #10(B).

B. Required terminal distribution for trust with one minor child-EDB

When is final distribution required? Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(1) provides that “the entire interest of the employee must be distributed by the end of the earliest of the calendar years described in paragraph (e)(2), (3), or (4) of this section.” Each of those subparagraphs applies to a particular type of beneficiary.

In the case of a minor child-EDB, two subparagraphs apply: 10 years after the death of the minor child ((e)(3)) and 10 years after the minor child attains majority (age 21) ((e)(4)). So in the case of a trust with one minor child-EDB, annual RMDs are based on the life expectancy of the oldest countable designated beneficiary of the trust (who may or may not be the minor child), but the final payout year (when 100% of the account must be distributed) is based solely on the minor child-EDB—it is 10 years after he attains age 21 (*i.e.*, the year he attains age 31), or, if earlier, 10 years after his death (if he dies before attaining age 21).

C. Required terminal distribution for trust with than one minor child-EDB

Here the final regulations have made things much more protective for minor child-EDBs than were the proposed regulations: As noted above, the annual payouts will still be based on the life expectancy of the oldest countable DB of the trust (whether or not that is a minor child-EDB). But the FINAL payout year (Required Terminal Distribution) will not occur until 10 years after the youngest minor child-EDB reaches age 21. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(2)(ii)(C). There is an additional provision requiring payout (if earlier) 10 years after ALL the minor child-EDBs have died. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(2)(ii)(B). This is consistent with the provisions dealing with disabled/chronically ill EDBs, which do not start the 10-year countdown until after all the D/CI EDBs are deceased.

The actual wording of the regulation indicates final payout 10 years after the later of the death of the last surviving minor child-EDB or the year “the youngest of...[the minor child-EDBs] reaches the age of majority.” This drafting leaves a gap—literally, if the youngest of the children dies before majority, he/she will NEVER “reach the age of majority” and the payout period will not end until annual RMDs exhaust the IRA! Experienced trust drafters know you have to word this type of provision not as “when the youngest child reaches 21” but rather as “the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the earliest time at which there is no child living who has not attained age 21.” Presumably that is how this Reg. will be interpreted.

Note: The trust with one or more minor-child EDBs has different “measuring lives” for the annual distributions (life expectancy of the oldest **countable beneficiary** of the trust) vs. the Required Terminal Distribution (10 years after **all minor-child** EDBs reach age 21 or earlier die). This kind of distinction keeps you on your toes.

Exceptions to the general rules: If the participant died before his RBD, there are cases where the 10-year rule can apply to an EDB (see PART 3, #4(C)) or a trust for an EDB (PART 5, #1). If the participant died after his RBD, and the oldest countable trust beneficiary is older than the participant, the Ghost Life Expectancy would apply under the “greater of” rule. See PART 5, #7.

4. Trust which is neither of the above but all countable beneficiaries are EDBs.

This is complicated (unlike all the preceding material).

A Designated Beneficiary Trust is entitled to “EDB” treatment if all countable beneficiaries of the trust are EDBs. How do we know this? Because, first, Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(2)(i) says that if there are multiple designated beneficiaries and any of them “is not an” EDB, “then the employee is treated as not having an eligible designated beneficiary” [with two exceptions—the special rules for AMBTs (#2 above) and for any trust with a minor-child EDB beneficiary (#3 above)].

This leads to the conclusion that if there are multiple designated beneficiaries and all of them ARE EDBs, the oldest EDB’s life expectancy is the Applicable Denominator, unless either the “greater of” rule applies (see PART 3, #4(D)), or the trust is an AMBT (PART 5, #2)]. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(ii), (2).

See also Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(6)(ii) (Example 2). In the example, the life beneficiary of the trust is the participant’s surviving spouse (an EDB), but it is not a conduit trust because she is entitled only to income of the trust, not to receive all distributions the trust receives from the plan (as would be the case if this were a conduit trust). After the surviving spouse’s death, the trust is to pass outright to the deceased participant’s sibling who is less than 10 years younger than the

decedent—so the sole remainder beneficiary is also an EDB (he is a NoMoTTY). The sibling is also younger than the spouse. Both spouse and sibling survive the participant.

A charity will inherit the trust on the surviving spouse's death if the sibling has predeceased her; but the charity is not countable (i.e., it is disregarded) because it takes only if another residuary beneficiary (the sibling) predeceases the primary beneficiary (the spouse). See PART 4, #10(C).

Even though the oldest EDB is the surviving spouse, however, the trust will not get the special spousal RMD deals such as delayed commencement of RMDs, use of the Uniform Lifetime Table, and recalculation of life expectancy, because the surviving spouse must be the “sole” designated beneficiary to get those deals. See, e.g., Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(d), (e), -5(c)(2), (d)(3)(iv). Upon the death of the surviving spouse, RMDs will continue to be made to the trust [or to the individual successor beneficiary assuming the trust terminates at that point] based on the life expectancy of the surviving spouse [assuming she died before her fixed-term LE payout period ended].

So the Required Terminal Distribution for this trust is the year the surviving spouse's life expectancy goes to 1 year or less or (if earlier) the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the surviving spouse's death. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(3).

HOWEVER: The above general description is subject to the exceptions noted below....

If participant's death occurred before the RBD, the 10-year rule can apply in some cases instead of the life expectancy payout. See PART 3, #4(C).

If death occurred after the RBD, and the oldest EDB is *older than* the decedent, the annual distributions track is annual distributions over the *greater of* the life expectancy of the oldest EDB or the ghost life expectancy, with the Required Terminal Distribution being 10 years after the death of such oldest EDB, or, if earlier, when the applicable life expectancy drops to one or below. [Note: In the proposed regulations, the Required Terminal Distribution was essentially the “shorter of” the life expectancy of the oldest EDB or the ghost life expectancy. This has been replaced, fortunately for beneficiaries, by the “greater of” rule—if the beneficiary whose life expectancy would normally become the Applicable Denominator is older than the participant, the payout period will be based on the decedent's life expectancy (“ghost life expectancy”).]

The multi-EDBs rule can work in an unexpected or unfair way: Generally for a trust with multiple beneficiaries, with a life expectancy payout applicable, the Required Terminal Distribution (deadline for final distribution of 100% of the retirement account) is determined with reference to the trust's oldest designated beneficiary (whose life expectancy also dictates the Applicable Denominator). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(3), (f)(1)(ii). Example: Participant died after his RBD, leaving his IRA to a trust for his three younger brothers, all of whom are not D/CI and are within 10 years of his age (so all are NoMoTTYs). There would be a life expectancy payout based on the oldest beneficiary-brother's life expectancy with the ultimate 100% payout due 10 years after the oldest brother's death—even if the oldest brother died way prematurely and the other brothers are hale and hearty with many years to go. See Part 9, Case #5 (“Beverly”). The regulations waive this unfair result only in the case of a trust with multiple D/CI beneficiaries (Required Terminal Distribution based on the death of the *last* D/CI beneficiary to die, not the death of the oldest one).

5. Trust which is a DB Trust but is none of the above

If all countable beneficiaries are individuals (DBs), but not all of them are EDBs (and the special rules for AMBTs or trusts with a minor-child EDB do not apply) the trust has “PODB” status and the 10-year rule will apply. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(1)(vi).

Applicable Denominator: If the participant died before the RBD, there are zero distributions required through the ninth year (trustee can withdraw as much or as little as it wants to), with 100% distribution required in the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the participant’s death.

If the participant died after the RBD, the trust is required to withdraw annual distributions over the life expectancy of the oldest countable beneficiary of the trust through year nine unless the oldest countable trust beneficiary is older than the participant, in which case the Ghost Life Expectancy would apply in years 1–9 under the “greater of” rule. See PART 5, #7. Under the IRS waiver, however, no RMDs were required for years 2020–2024 (see PART 3, #1(F)).

Required Terminal Distribution. Because the 10-year rule applies, the entire account must be distributed to the trust by the end of the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the participant’s death. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(1)(vi), § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(1), (2), (f)(1)(i). See PART 3, #3(C).

6. Conduit trust for one beneficiary

This is the easiest one. If the trust is a conduit trust for one individual beneficiary, that individual is the “primary” beneficiary, and all “residuary” beneficiaries are completely disregarded—they don’t count at all. Accordingly, the Applicable Denominator and Required Terminal Distribution are the same as if the benefits were payable directly to that individual as sole beneficiary. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(3)(i)(A), (6)(i) (Example 1).

For example, a conduit trust for the benefit of the participant’s surviving spouse is entitled to the spouse’s full “EDB” treatment—life expectancy payout determined using the Uniform Lifetime Table instead of the Single Life Table, with life expectancy recalculated annually, and commencement of RMDs delayed until the participant would have reached his Applicable Age (if participant died before his RBD).

Exception: If the participant died before his RBD, the “10-year rule” could apply instead of the life expectancy payout either under the terms of the applicable retirement account, or if the participant dictated or elected that it would apply, or if the “beneficiary” so elected (not clear whether the “beneficiary” would mean the spouse or the trustee for this purpose), unless it is prohibited by the terms of the plan or the beneficiary designation form. See PART 3, #4(C).

A conduit trust for a PODB gets the 10-year rule, with or without annual RMDs required in years 1-9 depending on whether the participant died before or after his RBD. See PART 3, #3.

There are reasons to name a conduit trust as beneficiary—some “RMD reasons” and some other reasons. The non-RMD reason would normally be that the participant does not want to leave a lump sum to the beneficiary. The participant would rather have a trustee control the investment of the account and the rate of distributions from the IRA (subject to the RMD rules of course)—even if the maximum payout period is only 10 years.

The two main “RMD reasons” would be to guarantee DBT [designated beneficiary trust] status for the trust without so much worry about whether your accumulation trust passes all the tests and to enable a trust to have a charitable remainder beneficiary and still have DBT status.

PART 6: MULTIPLE BENEFICIARIES; SEPARATE ACCOUNTS

1. Multiple beneficiaries designated: the concept of “separate accounts”

All is clear if an IRA is left to one human being as a “designated beneficiary.” But what if the retirement account is left to multiple beneficiaries? That raises the question of “separate accounts.” An inherited IRA can be split into multiple inherited IRAs and this is normally what is done when an IRA is left outright to multiple beneficiaries.

Example: Mitchell dies in 2025, after his RBD, leaving his \$600,000 IRA, invested all in cash, “in equal shares to my three children Huey, Dewey, and Louie.” At the boys’ request, the IRA provider opens three new “inherited IRAs” in the names of “Mitchell, FBO [for benefit of] Huey,” “Mitchell FBO Dewey,” etc. [or “Huey, as beneficiary of Mitchell,” “Dewey as beneficiary of Mitchell,” etc.] and transfers \$200,000 of the cash into each account. Assume all three sons are PODBs and the account is subject to the 10-year rule. This scenario raises three RMD questions:

- **How will the Applicable Denominator be determined for these accounts?** The entire account must be 100% distributed (Required Terminal Distribution) by December 31, 2035, because of the 10-year rule, but in the meantime (under the Regulations’ interpretation of the ALAR rule; see PART 3, #3(C)-(E)), annual RMDs will be required based on the life expectancy of “the Designated Beneficiary” [except for years 2021–2024]. Will each son’s RMD be based on his own life expectancy? or is the life expectancy of the oldest son controlling for all three accounts?
- Regardless of what the Applicable Denominator is, can distributions from any one account count towards the RMD requirement for all three? Or is each account required to distribute its share of the RMD to the beneficiary who owns it?
- And is the “applicable numerator” for all three accounts determined based on the combined value of all three accounts? or is it determined separately for each account?

2. Prior regulation: What it said and how it was applied

The 2002 regulations (superceded in 2024) stated that separate accounts treatment was available for the interests of multiple beneficiaries *for all purposes of the minimum distribution rules* only if the separate accounts were “established” by December 31 of the year after the year of the participant’s death. See [prior] Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-8, A-2(a)(2). This rule did not distinguish between the “how do we determine the distribution period” (applicable denominator) question and the questions of what was the applicable prior year-end account balance (“applicable numerator”) and whether each beneficiary would be responsible for taking the RMD only for his separate account.

Despite this plain wording in the 2002 regulation, it became apparent over the years, through private letter rulings, that the December 31 deadline for creating “separate accounts” applied *ONLY insofar as it related to determination of the distribution period*. See ¶ 1.8.01 of *Life and Death Planning for Retirement Benefits*:

- If the inherited account was divided into separate inherited IRAs by the December 31 of year-after-year-of-death deadline, then each such subdivided account was treated [effective starting in the year after the year of the owner’s death] as if it had been inherited solely by its separate owner for purposes of determining the denominator (distribution period) as well as for purposes of satisfying the RMD requirement. But:
- If the inherited account was not divided into separate accounts until AFTER that deadline, the separate accounts were treated as separate accounts for all purposes of satisfying the RMD requirement (so each “subdivided” beneficiary was responsible for taking his/her/its share of the RMD, and only such share), but all of them would have to use the same denominator/distribution period (which was finalized on December 31 of the year after the year of the participant’s death).

In other words, even if the multiple beneficiaries missed the 12/31-of-year-after-year-of-owner’s-death deadline, multiple beneficiaries who inherited through a trust or estate could divide up an inherited account ANYTIME for purposes of having each beneficiary do his own investing and distributing...and following such division, even though all the divided accounts had the same “denominator” for determining each year’s RMD, each separate account’s RMD (1) was computed based on the prior year end value of *that separate account* (as the “numerator”) and (2) had to be distributed from that separate account. See rulings collected at ¶ 6.3.02(B) of *Life and Death Planning for Retirement Benefits* (8th ed. 2019); www.ataxplan.com.

3. 2024 Regulations continue the old rule, with clearer wording

The 2024 final regulations do not change the separate accounts rule as it has been applied. The final regs state what was not previously explicitly stated, and recognize that multiple beneficiaries can create “separate accounts” reflecting their separate interests *anytime*. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-8(a)(1)(i). **If these separate accounts are established by December 31 of the year after the year of the participant’s death, they are given effect for purposes of determining the Applicable Denominator for each such account.** Otherwise....

If they are established *after* that date, then (beginning the year after such division/establishment) the required distribution for each such account is determined based on the prior year-end value of that separate account (and the distribution must come out of that separate account), but such RMD must be determined using the Applicable Denominator that was finalized (based on the combined single account with multiple beneficiaries) on December 31 of the year after the year of the participant’s death. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-8(a)(1)(ii)(A). Or, rather, the way it’s written in the regulation, the RMD for the entire (collective) group of accounts is determined “without regard to the separate accounts rule,” then the total distribution requirement is apportioned among

the late-created separate accounts in accordance with “each respective beneficiary’s share of the total remaining balance of the employee’s interest in the plan.”

The separate accounting requirement must always be complied with. Since this rule is not changed from prior regulations (see ¶ 1.8.01(D)), it is not covered further in this Outline.

4. Separate Accounts for retirement account inherited through a trust

Starting in 2002, IRS regulations provided that “...the separate account rules under A-2 of §1.401(a)(9)-8 are not available to beneficiaries of a trust with respect to the trust’s interest in the employee’s benefit.” [Prior] Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4, A-5(c). In other words, “separate accounts” treatment would not be allowed for multiple subtrusts (or even separate shares distributed outright to different beneficiaries) created under a single trust (called the “funding trust” in this Outline) unless the subtrusts (or shares) were named directly as beneficiaries of the retirement plan. See discussion of this rule at ¶ 6.3.02(A) of *Life and Death Planning for Retirement Benefits*.

SECURE (2019) essentially “overruled” this regulation *as it would apply to an Applicable Multi-Beneficiary Trust* (AMBT). In proposed regulations (2022), the Treasury recognized separate accounts treatment for subtrusts within an AMBT (as mandated by SECURE), but not for other trusts. Now, however, the final regulations (2024) have eliminated the difference between AMBTs and other trusts on this issue. Accordingly it is now possible for “subtrusts” to qualify for separate accounts treatment for RMDs, even if there is no disabled or chronically ill beneficiary, and even if the subtrusts are not named directly as beneficiaries on the beneficiary designation form—PROVIDED certain requirements are met.

Although these requirements are perfectly predictable and sensible, the new rules will require SHARP ATTENTION by estate planners—the “problems” with subtrusts have NOT vanished!

- A. **Generally, no separate accounts for separate interests under one “funding” trust.** Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-8(a)(1)(iii)(A) provides that “generally” the RMD rules cannot be applied separately to the separate interests of beneficiaries of a trust. To beat that general rule, the following requirements must be met:
 - B. **The funding trust is “terminated” and divided upon the death of the participant.** First, the trust must be “divided immediately upon the death of the employee,” into separate See-through Trusts (PART 4, #2) (the “subtrusts”). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-8(a)(1)(iii)(B).
 - “Immediately upon the death” essentially means “as of” the date of death—the regulation affirms that “administrative delays” do not violate the requirement (provided “amounts received” during the administrative period are allocated “as if” the trust were divided on the date of the employee’s death). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-8(a)(1)(iii)(C).
 - Although the regulation requires that the divided retirement account be “held in separate See-through Trusts,” this does not mean trusts must be ongoing—the retirement account that is payable to the “funding trust” can be transferred or retitled

to either an individual beneficiary *or* to a See-through Trust for individual beneficiary(ies). See PLR 200432027 for an example.

- C. There must be “no discretion as to the extent to which of the separate trusts post-death distributions attributable to the employee’s interest in the plan are allocated.”** Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-8(a)(1)(iii)(B). This requirement may (but should not) take practitioners by surprise: Separate accounts treatment will NOT be allowed for a trust that divides into subtrusts unless the share of each subtrust is fixed in the trust instrument. In other words, the trust must say something like “each retirement account will be allocated equally to the subtrusts for my children” or “any retirement account payable to this trust shall be allocated to the subtrusts created under Article 987 in the following proportions....”

This last requirement mimics the requirement of naming the subtrusts directly in the beneficiary designation form—the beneficiary designation form would say something like “I leave my IRA in equal shares to my four children,” not “I leave my IRA to my children, and Uncle Fred will decide exactly which child gets how much of it.” It is perfectly sensible for the regulation to impose this requirement to obtain separate accounts treatment for subtrusts—you can’t “designate a beneficiary” then leave it up to someone else to decide which of your nominees will actually be the beneficiary(ies). Rather, you CAN do so, but that approach would NOT be consistent with the concept of separate accounts for retirement accounts inherited by different beneficiaries.

- D. Tip #1: To assure separate accounts treatment, do this.** One solution for this problem is (as before the new regulations) for the participant to name, directly as beneficiaries of his retirement account, the separate subtrusts or beneficiaries intended to wind up owning the benefits. For example, instead of naming as beneficiary “The Mary Doe Revocable Trust,” which immediately upon Mary’s death is to split up into three subtrusts, name the subtrusts directly (“I name as my beneficiary the separate trusts established for my children and issue under Article 3 of the Mary Doe Revocable Trust, in the proportions indicated in said Article 3 which is hereby incorporated herein by reference”). If the separate shares or subtrusts are named directly as beneficiary on the beneficiary designation form, then they can qualify for separate accounts treatment, provided the accounting requirements (Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-8(a)(2)) and deadline requirement (Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-8(a)(1)(ii)) are met.
- E. Tip #2: Or do this.** Name the funding trust as beneficiary, BUT be sure that the funding trust specifies which subtrusts will inherit the retirement account in what proportions. If your trust instrument contains a standard “pick and choose funding” provision, and you want to qualify for separate accounts treatment, make sure the retirement benefits are excepted from this provision. The goal is, the trustee must not have discretion to decide who gets the retirement account.

PART 7: POST-DEATH CHANGES TO THE TRUST TERMS

A trust is tested for designated beneficiary status at the time of the participant's death, with a "second look" on September 30 of the year after the year of the participant's death. For convenience this deadline is referred to in this Outline as the Beneficiary Finalization Date or BFD. See ¶ 1.8.03 of *Life and Death Planning for Retirement Benefits* for more explanation of this term. The rest of this section explains how the Regulations recognize post-death planning options.

1. What does "identifiable" mean?

One requirement of a See-through Trust is that the beneficiaries must be "identifiable." From the Regulations: "The beneficiaries of the trust who are beneficiaries with respect to the trust's interest in the employee's interest in the plan are identifiable (within the meaning of paragraph (f)(5) of this section) from the instrument." Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(2)(iii). Then: "Except as otherwise provided in this paragraph (f)(5) trust beneficiaries described in paragraph (f)(3) [the 2-tier trust-testing system; see PART 4, #8] are identifiable if it is possible to identify each person *eligible* to receive a portion of the employee's interest in the plan through the trust. For this purpose, the specificity requirements of paragraph (a)(3) of this section apply." Emphasis added. By referring to the "specificity requirements" of Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(a)(3), the regulation simply incorporates the rule that "a beneficiary need not be specified by name"; for example, it could designate "my children" without naming them and they would still be considered "identifiable."

The "identifiable" requirement provides an avenue for the Regulations' treatment of post-death modifications in the terms of the trust that are made via powers of appointment, decanting, and trust reformations, and of how the potential for (and actual occurrence of) such post-death changes affect the question of which beneficiaries "count" for purposes of determining the designated beneficiary. These subjects are explained in the following sections 2–5.

2. Removing (or adding) beneficiaries by the BFD

The second look on the BFD allows for "removal" (via, *e.g.*, disclaimer or distribution) of one or more beneficiaries between the date of death and the BFD. A beneficiary who has been so "removed" as of the BFD, via either total distribution or disclaimer of such beneficiary's interest, does not count as a beneficiary for purposes of determining whether the participant has a designated beneficiary and if so who his designated beneficiary(ies) is/are. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(c)(2). The "removed beneficiary" is erased from the picture for purposes of determining post-death RMDs.

A person who is named as a beneficiary does not "count" as a beneficiary if he/she predeceased the participant or is deemed to have predeceased the decedent by virtue of (for example) a simultaneous deaths provision under the governing instrument or applicable state law. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(c)(2)(i), (ii). But the death of a beneficiary *after* the date of the participant's death generally does NOT remove that person as a beneficiary even if such beneficiary died before the BFD. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(c)(3)(vi), Example 6. Both of these rules are unchanged from pre-SECURE regulations.

The Regulations make the following changes in the rules regarding changes in the identity of beneficiaries taking place between the date of the participant's death and the BFD:

- The (now superceded) 2002 regulations listed qualified disclaimer and distribution as possible ways to “remove” a beneficiary between the date of death and the BFD. These were presented apparently as examples, not exclusive means, in the 2002 regulations. See [superceded] Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4, A-4(a). In the 2024 Regulations, however, the examples (distribution and qualified disclaimer) are presented as an “exclusive list” of means of “removing” a beneficiary prior to the BFD. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(1), (2).
- *Prior regulations* (2002) made no distinction, with respect to changes in the identity of the beneficiaries, between beneficiaries designated on the beneficiary designation form and beneficiaries of a trust that is named as beneficiary on the beneficiary designation form. The *new Regulations* (2024), in contrast, provide liberal rules for changing the identity of the countable beneficiaries under a trust that is named as beneficiary: beneficiaries can be not just REMOVED from the trust but also ADDED to the trust between the date of death and the BFD; and the means of removing a beneficiary are not restricted to qualified disclaimer or full distribution: Exercise of a power of appointment, decanting, or reformation will be similarly given effect. See PART 4, #8(F, G). These methods of changing the designated beneficiary are not available with respect to a beneficiary designation form—only with respect to a trust named as beneficiary.

3. Effect of post-death changes via decanting, etc., under prior rules

After adoption of the 2002 edition of the regulations, there was a growth industry (unrelated to retirement benefits) in post-death amendments of trusts via “decanting,” reformations, and other forms of post-death modifications of trust terms. The 2002 regulations did not seem to allow for such changes. For example, one requirement was that the trust must be irrevocable as of the participant’s death. How can a trust be “irrevocable” if it can be amended or terminated at any time in the future via reformation, decanting, etc. under state law even if the trust instrument itself does not authorize such changes? The effect of *the potential* for such changes on a trust named as beneficiary was a question that vexed practitioners.

The 2024 Regulations adopt a flexible approach to post-death changes in the terms of a trust, an approach that for the first time accommodates the possibility of later change:

4. The approach of the 2024 Regulations

Post-death changes in the identity of trust beneficiaries (either adding new beneficiaries or removing existing ones) may occur via exercise of a power of appointment, decanting, or reformation. The mere *possibility* (as of the date of death or BFD) that such a change may occur later (*i.e.*, a power of appointment may be exercised, or the trust may be reformed or decanted) will not cause the trust to flunk the “identifiable” test (PART 4, #7). If such change later actually occurs, such change will cause the trust to be “retested” as of the date of the change. If at that time such later change is made the addition or removal of one or more countable beneficiary(ies) would have shortened the distribution period (required a faster rate of distributions) had it been in effect on the BFD, the trust’s RMDs will be recalculated accordingly for subsequent years. However, such retesting cannot [1] cause a 100% required distribution earlier than the calendar year after such change

occurs, or [2] (if it occurs after the BFD) lengthen the distribution period. That is the general idea. More detail follows. Summary so far:

- The trust beneficiaries are “identifiable” (3rd RMD trust rule) “if it is possible to identify each person eligible to receive a portion of the employee’s interest in the plan through the trust.” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(5)(i).
- The existence of powers of appointment, or the possibility that a trust might later be reformed or decanted (potentially causing beneficiaries to be added or removed), does not in and of itself cause the trust to have non-identifiable beneficiaries. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(5)(ii)(A), (iii)(A).
- If the power of appointment is exercised or irrevocably restricted, or the reformation/decanting actually occurs, *prior to* the Beneficiary Finalization Date (BFD; September 30 of the year after the year of the participant’s death), then the change is apparently given effect retroactive to the date of death for purposes of determining who are the participant’s beneficiaries. See further discussion of each type of event, below.
- If the power of appointment is exercised or irrevocably restricted, or the reformation/decanting occurs, *after* the BFD, the trust will be “re-tested” at that time but will not be retroactively disqualified. The “new” terms will be effective for RMD purposes the following year; however, the “retesting” cannot *improve* the RMD results. See further discussion of each type of event, below.

5. Powers of appointment: Background

What is a “power of appointment” exactly? In common usage, and as seemingly contemplated by the Regulations, and as used in this Outline, it is a power *held by a trust beneficiary* to “appoint” income or principal of the trust to other individuals or to entities such as a charity. Typically the beneficiary/power holder would have a “power to appoint” trust property to or among some particular class of recipients effective upon the death of the power holder. Regarding powers held in a fiduciary capacity, see #8 below.

6. Dilemma under prior regulations: Are potential appointees countable?

Under the “old” (2002) regulations, a trust that provided “life interest to spouse [or other specified individual], and at death of spouse remainder outright to my then living issue [or other specified individual(s)], is “easy” to analyze: There are only “identifiable” individual beneficiaries (spouse and donor’s issue), and therefore the trust passes that test. That form of trust exactly tracks Example 1 in [now superceded] Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5, A-7(c)(3).

But what if the trust says “income to my spouse for life, remainder to such of my issue *and/or such charities* as my spouse shall appoint by will, or in default of appointment, to my issue then living?” Do all the potential appointees including charities “count” for purposes of testing this trust?

If so, the trust will “flunk” because it has potential nonindividual beneficiaries (the charities that spouse could appoint to).

7. Now: Potential appointees don’t count until POA exercised or “restricted”

Under the final regulations, the trust does not flunk the beneficiaries-must-be-identifiable test “merely because an individual (power holder) has the power to appoint a portion of the employee’s interest to...beneficiaries that are not identifiable...” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(5)(ii)(A).

If the beneficiary’s power of appointment is disclaimed, exercised, *or irrevocably “restricted”* in some fashion by September 30 of the year after the year of the participant’s death (the BFD), then such pre-September-30 action is given effect in testing the trust retroactive to the date of death. See example at #8 below. Otherwise, the takers in default are the countable beneficiaries for purposes of testing the trust. “Takers in default” means the beneficiary(ies) who would inherit the benefits if the power-holder does not exercise the power. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(5)(ii)(A), last sentence.

If the power is exercised after the September 30 deadline, the trust must be retested at the time of such exercise. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(5)(ii)(B), (iv). See discussion of retesting, below.

8. Powers of appointment: Examples, issues.

One thing that might need to be made clearer is the difference between a fiduciary power and a beneficiary power. The Regulations speak of an “individual” holding the power of appointment. Presumably that is to distinguish from a “trustee” holding the power.

In the tax code generally, a fiduciary’s power to distribute income or principal to someone is a “power of appointment.” The term power of appointment also applies (for transfer tax purposes) to a trustee’s power to “appoint” principal or income; see, *e.g.* Reg. § 20.2041-1(b)(1). But in the RMD Regulations, a *trustee’s* power to make distributions in its discretion to individuals or charities apparently makes such individuals or charities be treated as countable beneficiaries of the trust, not merely potential future beneficiaries. See Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(3)(i)(A). This subject needs further research and explanation.

Here is the power-of-appointment example from the regulation:

“Under the terms of Trust Q...[the surviving spouse, G, who is the life income beneficiary of the trust]...has a testamentary power of appointment to name the beneficiaries of the remainder in Trust Q.” Prior to the BFD, G irrevocably restricts her own power of appointment so she “may exercise the power to appoint the remainder...only in favor of G’s siblings,” who all are less than 10 years younger than the deceased participant. By thus restricting the remainder interest to only EDBs, and since she herself is an EDB, G’s alteration of her POA makes the trust have only EDBs as its countable beneficiaries, thus enabling a life expectancy payout for the trust. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(6), Example 4.

If “G” did not irrevocably restrict her power of appointment prior to the BFD, then the countable beneficiaries of the trust would have been G and the individuals who were the “takers in default” under the power of appointment. The strange thing about this regulation is that “G” has not

exercised her POA, she only “irrevocably limited it”—so the default taker will still inherit the trust at her death if she does nothing more. The beneficiaries of the trust haven’t changed, only the potential appointees list has changed. It is a puzzling regulation.

9. Decantings and reformations

The Regulations’ approach to potential future decantings and reformations (hereinafter “modifications”) is similar to the approach for powers of appointment. Yes this might happen in the future; we’ll worry about it when it happens: “A trust will not fail to satisfy the identifiability requirements...merely because the trust is subject to state law that permits the trust terms to be modified after the death of the employee (such as through a court reformation or a permitted decanting) and thus, permits changing the beneficiaries of the trust.” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(5)(iii)(A).

- “If a trust beneficiary described in paragraph (f)(3)...is added through a modification of trust terms (such as through a court reformation or permitted decanting). If the beneficiary is added on or before ...[the BFD], paragraph (c)...[the 2-tier trust-testing system] will apply taking into account the beneficiary that was added.” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(5)(iii)(C). “Paragraph (f)(3)” contains the 2-tier trust-testing system (PART 4, #8) so presumably a “trust beneficiary described in paragraph (f)(3)” means any trust beneficiary who is either counted or disregarded under that system.
- A modification that adds or removes a beneficiary after the participant’s death is given effect for minimum distribution purposes if the addition or removal is effective by September 30 of the year after the year of the participant’s death (the BFD). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(5)(iii)(B), (C).
- If a beneficiary is “added” after that September 30 date, the mere addition does not cause the trust to flunk the “identifiable” requirement, but “Beginning in the calendar year after the calendar year in which the new trust beneficiary was added, the rules of §1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(1) will apply [i.e., testing the trust for see-through status, countable beneficiaries, and designated beneficiary status] taking into account the new beneficiary *and* all of the beneficiaries of the trust that were treated as beneficiaries of the employee before the addition of the new beneficiary...” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(5)(iv). Emphasis added.
- If this “new” testing as a result of a post-death post-September-30 addition of a new countable beneficiary results would cause the trust to become 100% distributable in that year or an earlier year, AND the year the beneficiary was added was not ALREADY a year in which 100% distribution was required, then the 100% distribution will not be required until the year after the change. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(5)(v).

A. Trust changes other than adding or subtracting beneficiaries

The proposed regulations speak only of adding or subtracting beneficiaries via post-death changes. Why is there no mention of a post-death change that modifies the trust terms in some other way? Possibly the reason may be, in the proposed regulations' approach, all you need to know (in order to determine the RMD regime for a trust) is which beneficiaries are countable vs. disregardable. Therefore perhaps what they mean in this post-death changes section of the Regulations is that we will count the beneficiaries before and after your change, and a change in the identity of the COUNTABLE beneficiaries is what we will be looking at....so either there are new countable beneficiaries added or old ones subtracted (perhaps because of a change in see-through or designated-beneficiary status); that's the only kind of "modification" that matters for purposes of the RMD trust rules. If your post-death modification doesn't add or subtract countable beneficiaries (for example, a modification that changed applicable state law, or added new investment powers) we don't care about it.

B. What about "reforming" the beneficiary designation?

The regulations permit post-death trust changes as noted, but do not recognize post-death "reforms" of the beneficiary designation form. In the past, post-death changes in the beneficiary designation have been recognized for tax purposes when there are "traditional" grounds for invalidating a beneficiary designation form (or change in such a form) under state law, such as scrivener's error or undue influence, and not otherwise. Presumably that standard continues to be applicable .

C. State law aspects.

The Regulations' generous attitude toward post-death changes does not mean that "anything goes" as far as state law or fiduciary obligations. There is no general rule allowing trustees and beneficiaries to get together to rewrite the trust to suit themselves, especially if the proposed change would affect the interests of minor, incompetent, unborn, or charitable beneficiaries. The Regulations merely describe how changes made *pursuant to applicable law governing the trust* are treated for RMD purposes. And the IRS is not bound by a court determination of what "state law" is unless it is the highest court in the state, under the *Bosch* case.

D. Federal tax aspects.

The Regulation's apparent blanket acceptance (with regard to the trust's obligations under § 401(a)(9)) of whatever trust changes get made prior to the BFD, applied retroactively to the date of death, would appear to "overrule" some previous tax law precepts. For example, the normal Treasury standard is that a post-death trust modification is not effective to change the tax consequences of a completed transaction. *Estate of La Meres v. Commissioner*, 98 T.C. 294 (1992). In at least one PLR, the IRS mentioned that it would not recognize, for purposes of determining required minimum distributions, any post-death trust amendments. See PLR 2010-21038. **These limits seem to no longer apply to any change completed by the BFD, to the extent specified in**

the regulations. But see #10 below regarding how this generous new standard is limited to RMD issues and NOT other federal tax issues.

10. Limitations on post-death modifications

Nothing in the Regulations addresses (or can be interpreted as “blessing”) other types of tax-motivated post-death modifications to the trust, beyond the addition or subtraction of beneficiaries. For example the following rulings regarding post-death modifications relating to tax treatment of retirement benefits did not involve the minimum distribution rules and are not affected (*i.e.*, would not be “reversed”) by the Regulations:

- **Qualifying for spousal rollover.** In PLR 2009-44059, the IRS refused to accept the result of a state court order which gave the surviving spouse the right to distribute to herself, outright, the retirement benefits payable to a discretionary trust for her benefit of which she was sole trustee. The goal of the proposed distribution was to enable her to roll the benefits over to her own IRA. The state court order interpreted state law and the trust instrument as validating the spouse-trustee’s right to make this distribution to herself, but the decision was not an interpretation of state law by the state’s highest court. The IRS made its own interpretation and (pursuant to *Bosch*) was not bound by the lower court decision, and disallowed the rollover. This was not a minimum distribution issue and the outcome would not have been changed had the 2024 Regulations been in effect at the time.
- **Qualification for charitable deduction under § 642(c).** In PLR 2014-38014, decedent’s retirement benefits were payable to a trust that provided for certain pecuniary charitable bequests. The instrument did not specify the source of payment for such bequests. The taxpayer sought and received a court reformation of the trust instrument to require payment of charitable gifts from retirement benefits in order to avoid taxation of the retirement benefits at the trust level. Specifically, the “purpose of the reformation was to ensure that Trust’s distribution of IRA assets to Charity 1 and Charity 2 would be treated as direct bequests to the charities rather than as income in respect of a decedent (IRD) to the trust § 691 [see ¶ 4.6 of *Life and Death Planning for Retirement Benefits*]. Alternatively, the purpose of the reformation was to qualify the Trust for a charitable deduction under § 642(c).” The Treasury ruled, citing numerous authorities, that the trust did not achieve this tax result because the state court’s actions was not for the purpose of resolving a conflict; rather “The purpose of the court order was to obtain the tax benefits...” This was also not a minimum distribution issue, and the outcome would not have been changed had the 2024 Regulations been in effect at the time.

PART 8: BENEFICIARIES OF PRE-SECURE DECEDENT; OTHER DOUBLE DEATHS

If the participant died before 2020, he died before SECURE was enacted. His beneficiaries are therefore to a large extent “grandfathered” from SECURE. SECURE itself provided that the designated beneficiary of a pre-2020 decedent was to be treated as an “EDB.” Which would mean

that such DB was still fully entitled to the life expectancy payout he became entitled to when the participant died.

The general rule for the successor beneficiary of a pre-2020 decedent is the same as the general rule for successor beneficiaries of post-2019 decedents: the successor beneficiary simply “steps into the shoes” of the deceased original designated beneficiary, and continues to be subject to whatever payout period applied to the original designated beneficiary. However, as is true for eligible designated beneficiaries of post-2019 decedents, there is a cap on that inherited life expectancy payout: The life expectancy payout continues until its final year (when the “denominator” drops to one year or less) OR for 10 years, whichever is LESS. 100% distribution (“Required Terminal Distribution” in this Outline) is required no later than the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the death of the original designated beneficiary.

In the final regulations, the IRS has filled out the above bare bones. Here is the detailed explanation, with citations, variations and exceptions:

1. Participant died before 2020 leaving benefits to one nonspouse designated beneficiary

This is the simplest situation. The original owner of the retirement account, *i.e.*, the owner of the IRA, or the “employee” who had a 401(k) account or other qualified retirement plan account, (the “Participant”) died before 2020, leaving the account to one individual designated beneficiary who was not his spouse. That beneficiary is called here the “Original Designated Beneficiary.”

The Original Designated Beneficiary, because he inherited from a decedent who died before 2020, is “grandfathered” from the rules of SECURE. He was/is entitled to the same “life expectancy payout” deal that applied to all designated beneficiaries prior to SECURE: He would have to take annual RMDs over his life expectancy as long as it lasted. SECURE’s rules are (supposed to be) applicable only to beneficiaries of a participant who died after 2019. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-1(b)(2)(i).

However, SECURE imposed a new rule for *successor beneficiaries* of that Original Designated Beneficiary. If the Original Designated Beneficiary of a pre-2020 decedent dies after 2019, SECURE dictates that the “grandfathered” Original Designated Beneficiary of a pre-2020 deceased participant shall be treated as an “eligible designated beneficiary.” This means the successor beneficiary of the Original Designated Beneficiary continues taking the life expectancy payout that applied to the Original Designated Beneficiary, *but not for more than 10 years*. He must withdraw 100% of the account no later than the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the Original Designated Beneficiary’s death even if such remaining life expectancy was more than 10 years. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-1(b)(2)(iii)(A), (3)(i) (Example 1). So:

- If the Original Designated Beneficiary’s remaining life expectancy, as of the date of his death, was 10 years or less, the successor beneficiary would have to take RMDs over that remaining life expectancy.
- If the Original Designated Beneficiary’s remaining life expectancy was longer than 10 years, the Successor Beneficiary would have to take RMDs over that remaining life expectancy in years 1-9 and 100% distribution in year 10.

What if the participant died before 2020, leaving the retirement account to a designated beneficiary (the Original Designated Beneficiary), and the Original Designated Beneficiary ALSO died before 2020? Then the 10-year limit does not apply! The successor beneficiary of the Original Designated Beneficiary continues taking RMDs over the remaining life expectancy of the deceased Original Designated Beneficiary with no 10-year limit! Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-1(b)(3)(ii) (Example 2).

One more thing: Though the ODB of a pre-2020 decedent is generally treated as an EDB, he is NOT entitled to elect the 10-year rule (PART 3, #4(C)). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-1(b)(iii) (Example 3).

2. Albert, Victor, Linda Example

Example: Albert died in 2015, leaving his IRA to his son Victor. Victor starts taking RMDs over his life expectancy. In 2022, he adjusts his “life expectancy” computation to adapt to the new IRS life expectancy tables. His life expectancy payout period is not affected by SECURE because the original owner, Albert, died prior to 2020. Then Victor dies in 2020, after taking the RMD for 2020, with 16 additional years left in his “life expectancy payout.” He named his daughter Linda as his successor beneficiary. Linda “steps into his shoes”: Her RMD for 2021 will be 1/16th of the 12/31/2020 account balance, just as it would have been for Victor if he were still living. In 2022, it will be 1/15th of the 12/31/2026 account balance, and so on. So far she is taking exactly the same RMDs as Victor would have been required to take if he hadn’t died. TWO THINGS interrupt this pattern:

- In 2030, the 10-year limit imposed by SECURE kicks in. Linda must withdraw the entire remaining account balance by 12/31/2030. Under pre-SECURE law, Linda (as successor beneficiary) would have continued whatever was left of the full payout period that applied to the original designated beneficiary (Victor)—she would have had the benefit of his full remaining 16 years of life expectancy payout.
- And: Because this rule was so misunderstood, the IRS granted in effect a “waiver” of RMDs for successor beneficiaries of pre-2020 decedents for the years 2021–2024. See PART 3, #1(F). And because of the COVID 19 epidemic, ALL RMDs were waived by Congress for 2020. So in fact Linda does not have to start taking any RMDs until 2025 (but her payout will still run out, with 100% distribution required, in 2030).

Here are some more angles to the Albert/Victor/Linda example....

- Q. What if, instead of dying in 2020, original-designated-beneficiary Victor died in 2032, when he would have had only had four years left in his “life expectancy payout?”
- A. Then successor-beneficiary Linda would have to take the money out in annual instalments over no longer than four years. The 10-year limit for payouts to a successor beneficiary is a MAXIMUM payout period, not a grace period or minimum payout period.

Q. What if Linda were disabled? Wouldn't she be entitled to a life expectancy payout because she is an "eligible designated beneficiary?"

A. The "eligible designated beneficiary" (EDB) status of the *successor* beneficiary is completely irrelevant. Even if Linda is disabled, or is Victor's spouse or minor child, or is the same age as Victor, Linda can not be an EDB or even a plain old designated beneficiary. She is just a "successor beneficiary." All "successor beneficiaries" get the same deal!

Q. What if original-beneficiary Victor had left the inherited IRA to his estate instead of to a human beneficiary? For example if he forgot to name any successor beneficiary, and the account defaulted to his estate?

A. Again, the "designated beneficiary" status of the successor beneficiary is completely irrelevant. The estate would get the same deal Linda got—it must withdraw the inherited account over what is left of the original beneficiary's life expectancy with 100% distribution in the 10th year even if the life expectancy hasn't run out yet. You don't "test" successor beneficiaries to figure out whether they qualify as "designated beneficiaries" or not—*they all get the same deal*.

Q. What if Victor had died in 2019 instead of in 2020?

A. THIS would make a big difference! If the original owner [Albert] and the original designated beneficiary [Victor] BOTH died prior to 2020, then the account is double-grandfathered! Linda, or Victor's pet rabbit, or whoever or whatever is the successor beneficiary to Victor, would keep taking RMDs over Victor's entire remaining life expectancy, with NO 10-Year Limit! Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-1(b)(3)(ii), Example (ii).

3. Participant died before 2020 leaving benefits to multiple DBs

Albert/Victor/Linda was the easy case. If the Original Owner left the retirement account to multiple designated beneficiaries (for example, he named a trust as beneficiary and the countable beneficiaries of the trust were several individuals), and the multiple beneficiaries are not treated as having "separate inherited accounts" (see Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-8(a)) the regulations created a rule.

As a reminder, when there are multiple countable designated beneficiaries, and the life expectancy payout applies, both the old pre-SECURE and the new post-SECURE rules use the life expectancy of the *oldest countable beneficiary* as the applicable distribution period for the group. The regulations go a step farther and take that oldest-beneficiary rule and apply it to the "grandfather" rule too: Essentially the trust is treated as if the oldest countable trust beneficiary were "the" (only) grandfathered designated beneficiary of the deceased original owner! Therefore, according to Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-1(b)(2)(iii)(B):

- When that oldest countable beneficiary dies, if he died after 2019, the trust continues withdrawing RMDs over what is left of the life expectancy of the oldest countable

beneficiary, up to a maximum of 10 years. In other words, the 10-year limit is triggered by the death of the oldest countable beneficiary—even though *all* the designated beneficiaries are “grandfathered” by the statute.

- But if the oldest countable beneficiary ALSO (like the Original Owner) died before 2020, then all the beneficiaries are totally grandfathered from SECURE and the 10-year limit does not apply to the trust at all! The trust continues withdrawing RMDs over what is left of the life expectancy of the oldest countable beneficiary, with no 10-year limit.

This rule works unfairly for multiple designated beneficiaries of a pre-2020 decedent. All of them inherited from a pre-2020 decedent and *all of them* should be entitled to the full protection of SECURE’s effective date, which provides (with respect to pre-2020 deceased participants) that the 10-year limit applies only to *successor beneficiaries* of the original designated beneficiary if such original designated beneficiary dies after 2019. When there are multiple designated beneficiaries of the original pre-2020 decedent, and one of them dies, the remaining members of the group are all still multiple designated beneficiaries of the original pre 2020 decedent. They are not suddenly transformed into “successor beneficiaries”—they are still ORIGINAL designated beneficiaries of the pre-2020 decedent. Their grandfathered status should not be affected by the death of another grandfathered original beneficiary, regardless of the order in which the beneficiaries happen to die.

Example: Jerry died in 2015 leaving his IRA to a pot trust for his four children. The trust qualified as a designated beneficiary trust and the countable beneficiaries (all of whom were “designated beneficiaries”) were the four children who were ages 52, 55, 58 and 61 at the time of Jerry’s death. The trust was withdrawing RMDs over the life expectancy of the oldest sibling (about 25 years). The oldest sibling died prematurely in 2021, with 19 years left in his life expectancy. According to the regulations, the other siblings now lose nine years of deferral that they were guaranteed to be entitled to by SECURE’s effective date grandfather rule!

Comment: Using the oldest countable beneficiary’s life expectancy as the *payout period* for the entire group made sense. There had to be only one payout period that applied to the entire group. The choices presumably were, use the life expectancy of the oldest one, use the life expectancy of the youngest one, or use the average life expectancy all members of the group. The IRS chose, and has always used, the life expectancy of the oldest member of the group for determining the life expectancy payout period for the group. If the original IRA owner didn’t like that effect he could have left the IRA in separate pieces, one for each beneficiary, so each beneficiary would have his own life expectancy as his payout period.

But what was/is a reasonable solution for determining the payout period for a group of multiple designated beneficiaries does not carry over to the application of the SECURE grandfather rule. ALL the designated beneficiaries were grandfathered, not just the oldest one. Using the death of the oldest one to trigger acceleration of the distribution to all of the beneficiaries is NOT necessary and is inappropriate, especially when one considers that the estate plan was carved in stone before SECURE existed. A beneficiary who finds himself subject to this rule might seek to challenge the validity of the IRS regulation, since the statute could sensibly interpreting as meaning that the 10-year limit does not kick in until ALL the “grandfathered” designated beneficiaries have died.

4. Double deaths if original beneficiary was surviving spouse

If the sole original designated beneficiary of the pre-2019 decedent who died before his required beginning date was the surviving spouse, see Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-1(b)(2)(iii)(C) for rules that apply on the surviving spouse's later death.

5. Participant died after 2019; now beneficiary dies

Here are the RMD rules for successor beneficiaries of a participant who died after 2020, so the original beneficiary was subject to the SECURE rules. If the original beneficiary was...

A. One "plain old designated beneficiary" (PODB)

If the participant died after 2019, this designated beneficiary was subject to the "SECURE" regime, meaning that (unless he or she qualified as an "eligible designated beneficiary"—EDB) had to withdraw all the benefits by the end of the year that contained the 10th anniversary of the participant's death (the "10-year rule"). If the participant died after his required beginning date (RBD) the PODB also had to take annual distributions in years 1–9 based on the PODB's life expectancy (except in years 2021–2024; PART 3, #1(F)). If the PODB dies before year 10, the successor beneficiary must simply continue the regime that applied to the original PODB—taking out 100% by the 10th year (and taking life expectancy payout distributions for years 1–9 in 2025 and later years if the participant died after his RBD).

B. One "eligible designated beneficiary" (EDB) (not surviving spouse)

Again the general rule is, the successor beneficiary steps into the shoes of the EDB, which means in this case that the successor beneficiary continues taking RMDs over the life expectancy of the deceased EDB, but with a twist. Under pre-SECURE law, if a designated beneficiary died while taking a life expectancy payout, the successor beneficiary would continue that life expectancy payout until it expired. If the original beneficiary died young, the successor beneficiary could find himself with a payout lasting decades.

SECURE changed this. As a result of SECURE, a life expectancy payout that is "inherited" from an EDB cannot last longer than 10 years. So the successor beneficiary continues the LE payout that applied to the EDB—but if the EDB died more than 10 years before the end of his "life expectancy, the successor beneficiary must take distribution of 100% of the account in the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the original beneficiary's death.

Special cases:

- If the original designated beneficiary was a *minor child of the deceased participant*, the child's "life expectancy payout" doesn't last a lifetime—it ends with 100% required distribution of the account in the year the child turns age 31. If the child dies before or during that year, the successor beneficiary would be required to take 100% payout in the year that contained the child's 31st birthday, or, if earlier the 10th anniversary of the child's death. PART 3, #6(E).

- Under the regulations, if the participant died before his RBD, leaving benefits to an EDB, the EDB can elect to use the 10-year rule instead of the life expectancy payout. PART 3, #4(C). If the EDB so elected, the successor beneficiary would be bound by that election and not be able to take a life expectancy payout.
- If the EDB was older than the participant, and the participant died after his RBD, the EDB's payout period would be the *participant's* life expectancy, under the "greater of" rule. PART 3, #4(D). The successor beneficiary would continue to use that payout rate as well (subject to the 10-year cap on payouts to a successor beneficiary).

C. **One designated beneficiary: The surviving spouse**

If the original designated beneficiary was the surviving spouse, and the participant died before his required beginning date, and the surviving spouse then dies before the end of the year in which the participant would have reached his Applicable Age, the surviving spouse is treated as if SHE were the "participant" and died before her RBD! So RMDs for her successor beneficiaries will be determined under the rules applicable to that situation. If she dies after her required commencement date she is treated like any other EDB with respect to payout to her successor beneficiary(ies). For more details see PART 3, #5(A)(iv), (B).

PART 9: THE CASE STUDIES

Case #1: Mr. Brady: Planning for a PODB; How to draft an accumulation trust

Your client Algernon Brady, age 63, a widower, wants to leave his estate in trust for his only child, Patrick O'Donahue Brady ("PODB" for short), age 31. PODB is not disabled or chronically ill. Concerned about PODB's ability to manage finances, and PODB's likelihood of having divorce troubles if he ever marries and/or creditor problems if he goes into business, client wants to leave all assets in trust for PODB, with the trustee using income and principal as the trustee deems advisable to provide for PODB's lifelong support and health and for the care of PODB's children if he ever has any. Client's assets include a traditional IRA, a Roth IRA, and a 401(k) plan with his employer, with significant sums in each account. You write the will and trust just as requested by Client, to deal with the nonretirement assets. What special tax and estate planning considerations apply to the retirement accounts?

Three things make the retirement accounts different:

- No "stepped up basis" at death. All distributions from the accounts (except the Roth) will be income-taxable to the recipient at ordinary income rates. Thus planning for these accounts must take into consideration the income tax rate that will apply to distributions after Algernon's death.
- The minimum distribution rules which dictate how fast the money must be distributed from these accounts after client dies. Since spreading out the plan distributions over a longer period of time generally reduces the overall income tax burden, the planner needs to know

what distribution period will apply to the client’s IRAs—and the extent to which such period can be extended by drafting the trust to qualify as a “Designated Beneficiary Trust.”

- Retirement benefits do not pass by will. They are non probate assets and pass by beneficiary designation form. The estate planning lawyer is responsible for that form! This Outline has over 100 pages trying to explain the minimum distribution requirements. But many estate administrations never get that far because the professionals flunked a basic requirement—**MAKE SURE THE CLIENT’S BENEFICIARY DESIGNATION FORM IS PROPERLY COMPLETED AND FILED!**

A. What happens when a traditional retirement plan is paid to a trust

When the trust withdraws distributions from the traditional plans, those distributions will be includible in the trust’s gross income and accordingly will be taxed at trust income tax rates except to the extent the distributions are, in the same year received, passed out to the trust beneficiary in a manner qualifying for the “DNI deduction.” If so passed out, the distributions would be taxed to PODB individually. The income taxes on the distributions will likely be much lower if they are passed out to PODB than if retained in the trust, due to the fact that a trust hits the top bracket (37% in 2025) at just \$15,650 of taxable income vs. \$626,350 for a single individual taxpayer. In this example, PODB’s income is much lower than \$626,350.

Client is still better off leaving the accounts to a trust to achieve his goals with respect to PODB: If the trustee has full discretion, when the trust receives a distribution from the retirement account, to pass such distribution out to PODB or not pass it out, the trustee can distribute (to take advantage of PODB’s lower tax rate) when trustee judges that PODB will make good use of the money or not distribute (and let the benefits be taxed at the higher trust tax rate) at times when it appears PODB may not make good use of the funds. Thus the trustee will have to monitor PODB and try to control the cash flow. From this perspective it would be helpful if the trustee could spread the distributions over a period of time rather than taking a lump sum distribution. But the longest possible period of time over which distributions can be spread is 10 years, due to SECURE.

The arbitrage between trust tax rates and PODB’s personal income tax rate does not apply to the client’s Roth account, distributions from which will be tax-free. The only advantage of “deferral” for the Roth account is, the longer the funds can be kept inside the account generating tax-free returns, the better (and this advantage can be substantial).

B. The minimum distribution rules applicable to PODB

If the retirement accounts are left to PODB as designated beneficiary, he would be subject to the “10-year rule.” Thus if Algernon died at age 63 in 2025 (before his “required beginning date” in other words), PODB would have to withdraw the entire balance by 12/31/2035 (year containing the 10th anniversary of his death). PODB could withdraw the balances anytime during the years 2025-2035, thus giving him 11 taxable years to “spread out” the distributions.

If Algernon dies AFTER his required beginning date (April 1 of the year after the year he reaches his Applicable Age), the payout period for the Roth IRA wouldn’t change—it would still be the 10-year rule as described above, because Roth IRAs have no “required beginning date, so there

is no such thing as death after the RBD for a Roth IRA. The payout period for the traditional accounts would change due to the “at least as rapidly” rule: In years 1–9 of the 10-year period, PODB would be required to take annual RMDs based on the “greater of” PODB’s life expectancy or the “ghost life expectancy” (i.e., Algernon’s remaining life expectancy at the time of his death). See PART 3, #3(C). This aspect of the regulations (requiring annual distributions in cases of death after the RBD even when the 10-year rule applies) was such a surprise the IRS has said it will not enforce the 25% penalty tax on PODBs who fail to take these RMDs in 2021-2024; see PART 3, #1(F). The final 100% payout would be required at the earlier of, the end of the applicable life expectancy payout or the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the date of participant’s death.

Those are the payout requirements for accounts left directly to PODB as beneficiary. What if the accounts are left to the trust Algernon contemplates having?

C. How to get the same treatment for the trust

The 10-year rule as described above is the best possible deferral deal available for PODB if the benefits are left to him personally under today’s RMD rules. Can a trust for PODB get the same deal? PART 4 of this Outline explains the rules for getting designated beneficiary status for a trust, including the trust testing process, in detail, with citations. This case study provides an example of the process described in PART 4:

The kind of trust Algernon (“client”) wants is called an Accumulation Trust: The trustee would not be required, every time it withdrew money from the retirement account, to immediately pass such distribution out to PODB—if it were, then the trust would be a “Conduit Trust” not an Accumulation Trust. On the contrary, the client wants the trustee to have the power to *accumulate* plan distributions in the trust (if the trustee thinks that would be best) for future use. Therefore the trust the client wants is an Accumulation Trust (PART 4, #2).

The 10-year rule is available only for a “designated beneficiary.” The minimum distribution rules say, an accumulation trust can qualify as a designated beneficiary only if it meets certain requirements. Here are those requirements and how you as the estate planner must deal with them:

There are four initial rules that are easy to comply with: The trust must be valid under state law; the trust must be irrevocable upon the participant’s death; a copy of the trust must be given to the plan administrator by 10/31 of the year after the year of the participant’s death; and it must be possible to identify the persons who will be beneficiaries of the trust. See PART 4, #7.

Once you clear those hurdles you have a “See-through Trust.”

Now we “look through” the trust and see who are the beneficiaries of the trust. Since the basic definition of a “designated beneficiary” is that the beneficiary must be an individual, all of the trust beneficiaries must be individuals or you are going to “flunk” this definition.

All of the trust beneficiaries must be individuals? Well not necessarily ALL: First, there is an exception to this rule for AMBTs; see PART 5, #2. Second, only the *countable* beneficiaries must be individuals—beneficiaries who cannot be “disregarded” in applying the “who are the *countable* beneficiaries” test. **This is the hard part of trust drafting and testing.** See PART 4, #7-#10.

This brings you to a decision point that will have to be faced with many clients. You can just draft the trust the way he wants it, and let the chips fall where they may—meaning the trust may not qualify as a Designated Beneficiary Trust (DBT; PART 4, #11) and therefore not qualify for the 10-

year rule. Or you can offer the client alternatives—ways to draft the trust that would so qualify even if that is not exactly what the client originally requested.

Step 1 in this process is to ask client Algernon, “who will inherit the money that’s left in this trust when PODB dies?” The answer to that question will tell you the RMD status of this trust—will it qualify as a DBT or not? Because the countable beneficiaries of this trust will be son Patrick [PODB] (the “primary” beneficiary) and whoever gets the money when he dies (the “residuary” beneficiary). See PART 4, #9. If the trust is not an AMBT, all countable beneficiaries (PART 4, #10) must be individuals or the trust is not a DBT.

Client says: “On PODB’s death, the remaining funds should go to PODB’s children if he has any but he doesn’t have any yet.” Children would be fine as residuary beneficiaries but [I believe] **you can’t count anyone who isn’t born yet**. PART 4, #8(B). So you ask: “And who will get the money if PODB dies without issue?”

Client says: “In that case my favorite charity.” A charity is not an individual. Naming a charity as remainder beneficiary of this trust would cause the trust to “flunk” the RMD trust rules and client would have “no designated beneficiary.” Would that be so terrible? The payout period would be, if client names charity as remainder beneficiary:

- If Algernon dies before his RBD, the 5-year rule instead of the 10-year rule. This rule would apply to the Roth IRA regardless of client’s age at death.
- If he dies on or after his RBD, the “ghost life expectancy” payout would apply to the traditional plans—annual distributions over what was left of client’s life expectancy. That period would range from about 15 years (if he dies at his current age, 74, after his RBD) to 4 years or less (if he dies at age 95 or older).

So the “no-DB treatment” is in most cases a little or a lot worse than the “DB” alternative.

To get “PODB” treatment for the trust, the client must choose one or more *individuals* as remainder beneficiaries. Instead of naming charity as the residuary beneficiary, he could name his nieces and nephews to inherit whatever is left in the trust if PODB dies without issue.

If the nieces and nephews are named as the remainder beneficiaries, the charity can be named as “wipeout” beneficiary if it should happen that PODB dies without issue AND all the nieces and nephews predecease PODB. With that structure, the charity can be ignored because it will inherit only if all the “first choice residuary beneficiaries” predecease the “primary beneficiary.” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(3)(ii)(A); see PART 4, #10(C).

D. Do this! Limit distributions from the trust to the decedent’s estate

In its Preamble to the Proposed Regulations, the IRS stated that a trust provision that would call for the trustee to make payments from the trust to the participant’s estate would cause the estate to be deemed to be a countable beneficiary of the trust! The participant’s estate is not an individual and cannot qualify as a designated beneficiary under any circumstances. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(b). Therefore, the Preamble (p. 41) casually stated, if the trust is to pay money to the estate (or pay obligations of the estate out of the trust fund), the participant does not have a designated beneficiary and the “no-DB rules” would apply.

Accordingly for a trust that is to receive retirement benefits, if designated beneficiary treatment is desired, and the trust instrument calls for the trustee to make distributions or transfers to the decedent's estate, the trust should prohibit the trustee from distributing any *retirement benefits or proceeds thereof* to the estate, either altogether or (at a minimum) after September 30 of the year after the year of the decedent's death. See PART 7, #2.

E. Planning agenda; alternatives to consider

The client's original goal was to name a charity as remainder beneficiary of the trust after his son's death. Client has to sacrifice that goal to get "designated beneficiary trust" (DBT) treatment for the trust he contemplates. Various alternatives should be considered before finalizing the plan.

- Before revising the trust (and defeating client's desire to name charity as remainder beneficiary) you (or someone you engage) should crunch the numbers to determine what the projected income tax difference will be between qualifying for the 10-year rule vs. not so qualifying. That projection is going to be complicated and expensive and may well not prove much of anything. It will have to make assumptions about the growth rate of investments, when the client will die, what PODB's spending needs will be, when PODB will die, and what PODB's tax rate will be. Without any monetary projections, however, it is hard to justify the sacrifices being made to achieve DBT status—such as giving up on the client's charitable goal.
- There is one more potential cost of having a trust that does NOT qualify as a DBT: The trust will probably be stuck with a lump sum distribution from the *qualified plan* (Algernon's 401(k) plan) because most plans only permit a lump sum distribution and the trustee will not be able to transfer the lump sum to an inherited IRA (where the trust could spread distributions over whatever RMD payout period applies) unless the trust qualifies as a designated beneficiary. See PART 4, #12, and ¶ 4.2.04 of *Life and Death Planning for Retirement Benefits*.
- If the two pots of money (retirement benefits vs. other assets) are large enough to justify two separate trusts, create one trust for the benefits (with individual remainder beneficiaries) and another for other assets (with a charity as remainder beneficiary). But this approach creates new complications for the trustee who is forced to choose each year which trust to deplete to provide for PODB's needs in such year. The planner might need to draft a formula for distribution on termination of the non-retirement-benefits trust to assure that nieces, nephews, and charity each received the appropriate amount regardless of which trust is depleted first during PODB's life.

Case #2: Jean Selby: Benefitting the spouse; How to draft a conduit trust

Your client Jean Selby has a \$1 million IRA among other assets. She wants to leave the IRA to her husband Simon Selby (SS) but not outright. She wants it to be held in trust for him for life. She understands that as her surviving spouse Simon is entitled to a life expectancy payout if he is

named as beneficiary. A gradual payout over his lifetime sounds just right to her for this IRA, as long as he does not have to inherit as outright beneficiary in order to get that treatment.

A. The client's trust goals; RMD effects

Here is what Jean wants the trust to say: "The trustee will pay Simon, each year, such amounts of income and/or principal as the trustee deems needed for his health and support. Upon his death the trust will distribute the remaining trust assets to my seven nieces and nephews (or the survivor(s) of them) equally, or if they have all died, to Charity X."

A trust written as Jean describes it would qualify as a DBT....all the "countable" beneficiaries are individuals:

Simon the spouse= primary;
 Nieces and nephews and charity= residuary;
 BUT charity is disregarded because [1] it is not a primary beneficiary and [2] it inherits only if all nieces and nephews (the "first choice residuary guys") die before Simon. See PART 4, #10(C).

However, unless ALL of the nieces and nephews are either disabled or chronically ill or not-more-than-10-years-younger (NoMoTTY) than Jean, this trust will NOT qualify for a life expectancy payout. Why? Because a trust for the spouse is entitled to use the surviving spouse's EBT treatment ONLY if the spouse is the SOLE countable beneficiary of the trust—i.e., only if the trust is a "conduit trust." The trust can qualify for EDB treatment (without the special spousal deals though) if all countable beneficiaries are EDBs (for example if all of the nieces and nephews were disabled or chronically ill or NoMoTTY), but that is not the case. See PART 5, #1, #4. If written as client has described it, this trust would only qualify for the 10-year rule (PODB treatment).

A better solution is to use a conduit trust instead. That would give Simon annual distributions over his lifetime as Jean wants. However, it would give Simon more control than he would have if the trust were written exactly as Jean envisioned it; the trustee would not be able to hold back any RMDs from the IRA (they would all have to be passed out immediately to Simon, or applied for his benefit). The trustee would not be able to take IRA distributions and accumulate them in the trust's taxable account for future use.

Before SECURE 2.0, even a conduit trust would not be that good a "deal" if the spouses were already in their 80s. Suppose both are 83. Under the pre-SECURE 2.0 rules, the surviving spouse's payout period to start with would be only about 9 years (single table life expectancy at age 83); though it wouldn't actually "run out" in nine years (because of the recalculation of the surviving spouse's life expectancy), those RMDs would start large and get larger. Thanks to SECURE 2.0, the surviving spouse's opening payout period under the Uniform Lifetime Table would be about 17 years at age 83, a big difference.

Jean agrees to the conduit trust idea. Now how do you actually draft a conduit trust?

B. How to draft a conduit trust

The usual first step is to draft a separate article or section of the trust dealing with retirement benefits that are subject to the minimum distribution rules of § 401(a)(9) of the Code. **Describe them** by Code section or list the client’s actual plans and accounts, being sure to include (if desired) subsequently acquired retirement accounts of a similar type. Have a boilerplate paragraph authorizing the trustee to take actions with these accounts such as investing them and transferring them to a different IRA provider. Ideally there should be a paragraph discussing how the trustee will account for these retirement accounts (*e.g.* determine income and principal with respect to these accounts). Trust accounting income is not the same as federal gross income.

Then have a paragraph **dictating what the trustee will withdraw from the account:**

- If the federal estate tax marital deduction is sought, it is essential for marital deduction requirements that the surviving spouse be “entitled to all the income...payable annually or at more frequent intervals...” Accordingly, the trust should so specify. The trust should also specify how the “income” of the retirement accounts is determined for this purpose. Rev. Rul. 2006-26 dictated how “income” of a retirement account must be computed to satisfy the federal estate tax marital deduction requirements (do NOT rely on state law for this); see ¶ 3.3 of *Life and Death Planning for Retirement Benefits*.
- It is customary to direct the trustee to withdraw any amount required to be withdrawn in such year by the Tax Code (*i.e.*, the RMD). In the case of a marital deduction trust the “RMD” requirement would be the extent the RMD is greater than the “income” the marital trust already requires the trustee to withdraw. It is not really necessary to specify the trustee must withdraw the RMD since the trustee has to withdraw the required minimum distribution *anyway*, whether you tell him to or not. But including this shows you are aware of the obligation.

If the client does not want to limit payments to the spouse to the requirements of the Tax Code, include provisions such as:

- [if desired for spouse’s health and support; recommended! See comment below]: “Such additional amount or amounts, if any, needed in the opinion of the trustee to provide for my spouse’s medical care, health, and support in his/her accustomed standard of living.”
- [highly advisable to allow the trustee flexibility in view of potential changes in circumstances and/or tax laws] “Such additional amount or amounts, if any, as the trustee deems advisable for any reason to carry out the purposes of this trust.” If using this type of provision be sure to state the purposes of the trust someplace—in fact that’s a good idea anyway.

After completing the list of what the trustee must or may withdraw from the retirement accounts, the following additional clause is MANDATORY; this is what makes the trust a conduit trust:

“Any and all amounts withdrawn from the Retirement Account(s) shall, upon receipt by the trustee, be paid directly to, or for the benefit of, [name of conduit beneficiary].” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(1)(ii)(A).

Editorial comment: I would urge Jean to permit the trustee broad discretion to pay Simon more than the “floor amount” of greater of RMD and income. Unless for some reason she is trying to put Simon in a very tight box, the trust will provide Simon no financial security or predictability if it is strictly limited to the RMD or even to the greater of income or the RMD. Remember 2020? The RMD that year was zero...and interest rates were also zero...so trusts that limited the surviving spouse to the “greater of income or RMD” gave the spouse...exactly nothing for the year. For the spouse’s peace of mind, include such additional distributions as shall be needed for Simon’s health, support, etc. For maximum flexibility for the trustee to deal with changing circumstances, allow discretionary distributions for any reason consistent with the purposes of the trust.

C. This variation does not work: Until death “or remarriage”

Jean suddenly realizes: Simon might remarry after her death! She asks you to insert a clause that if Simon remarries the trust will terminate and be distributed immediately to the nieces and nephews. That’s perfectly legal—you can do it. But it will cause the trust to lose its qualification for the life expectancy payout because Simon will no longer be considered the sole beneficiary. (Of course it will also not qualify for the estate tax marital deduction for Jean’s estate.)

Under a conduit trust for Simon’s entire life, Simon is the sole “primary” beneficiary, and the nieces/nephew are “residuary” beneficiaries...and because it’s a conduit trust the residuary beneficiaries are disregarded, and therefore Simon is the sole countable beneficiary, and therefore the trust gets the same RMD treatment as Simon would receive if named directly as designated beneficiary: Life expectancy payout using the Uniform Lifetime Table commencing in the later of the year Jean would have reached her Applicable Age or the year after Jean’s death, and life expectancy recalculated annually. [Note: This would not allow the trust to use the “spousal rollover” that Simon could use if he were named as outright beneficiary. A trust for the spouse may not use the spousal rollover or election to treat an inherited IRA as the spouse’s own IRA even if the surviving spouse is deemed to be the sole beneficiary of the trust for RMD purposes.]

But if the trust might terminate BEFORE Simon’s death, *e.g.* upon his remarriage, then the nieces and nephews move up to being “primary” beneficiaries. Why? Because their interest is “neither contingent upon, nor delayed until, the death of another trust beneficiary”—they might *not* have to wait until Simon dies to get the money, they can get it if he remarries. See the Preamble to the 2022 Proposed Regulations, p. 32. If a life expectancy payout is sought for the trust, it needs to be a conduit trust for the surviving spouse’s entire life, not terminable upon remarriage or any other lifetime event. In other sections of the Regulations, certain events that *could* happen after the participant’s death (namely reformation or decanting of the trust, or exercise of a power of appointment) are ignored in “testing” a trust for RMD purposes until the event actually *does* happen. See PART 7, #7–#9. This liberal approach does not apply to a contingency dependent on the spouse’s remarriage.

D. Conduit Trust Warning: The 10-year rule option for EDBs

The Regulations create one surprise pitfall for conduit trusts: If the conduit beneficiary is an EDB, and the participant dies before his RBD, the beneficiary can elect to use the 10-year rule instead of the life expectancy payout, if the election is permitted by the applicable retirement plan and not prohibited by the participant. See PART 3, #4(C) regarding this problem.

E. A Trusteed IRA is the same as a Conduit Trust

An individual retirement account under § 408 can be either a “custodial” account with a bank as the custodian or a trust with a bank as trustee. The Tax Code is indifferent regarding these two formats—they are treated identically under the Code. From the perspective of the IRA owner, the differences are in the level of service and degree of customization of the IRA governing agreement that can be provided by the “IRA provider.”

With a *custodial IRA*, the bank keeps track of the investments and the inflow and outflow of money and files required annual IRS tax reports (1099 and 5498). With a *trusteed IRA*, the bank performs additional services typically including managing the investments, determining when distributions should be made, paying the account owner’s bills or other designated expenses directly from the account, and (most importantly), after the owner’s death, limiting distributions to the account beneficiary(ies) to the minimum required distributions plus such other amounts (if any) as the deceased account owner has authorized. The trustee of a trusteed IRA can make distributions to or for the benefit of the account beneficiary(ies) on a similar basis to what the trustee of a conduit trust would do: For example, pay to (or apply for the benefit of) the beneficiary the RMD plus additional amounts if needed in the trustee’s opinion for health or support.

With a trusteed IRA the IRA owner does not have to prepare a separate trust agreement: The IRA agreement *is* the trust agreement. However, the IRA owner’s estate planning lawyer should participate in drafting that trust agreement or at the very least review it on the IRA owner’s behalf. Another possible advantage of a trusteed IRA is, the client can specify in the IRA agreement that the 10-year rule would (or would not) apply to the EDB if the client died before his RBD. See “D” above and PART 3, #4(C).

Since a trusteed IRA and an IRA paid to a separate conduit trust are identical in tax and RMD treatment, whenever a client is going to use a conduit trust, consideration should be given to placing the IRA into a trusteed IRA account and having the IRA trustee carry out the duties that were to be specified in the conduit trust. However, the trusteed IRA option is probably limited to wealthier clients, since “mass market” IRA providers may not be set up to accommodate customization for individual clients.

Case #3: Mr. & Mrs. Steinmetz: Providing for minor children

A. Stan and Stacey Steinmetz: Facts and goals

Stan and Stacey Steinmetz are in their 30s. They have four children ages 2, 6, 9, and 12. They have combined net assets of \$1.5 million, including Stan’s \$100,000 401(k) plan, Stacey’s \$250,000

IRA, their \$1,200,000 home with a \$500,000 mortgage, \$200,000 of life insurance (through Stan's job), and \$250,000 in various liquid investments acquired through savings and inheritance.

They are leaving all of their assets outright to each other. On the death of the surviving spouse, they would like to have all assets of both spouses pour into a "pot" trust for the benefit of the children. The trustee would be instructed to use the principal and/or income of the trust as the trustee deems best to provide for the care, support, and education of all four children, based on their various needs (*i.e.*, not necessarily equally) until there is no child living who is under the age of 25 years, at which time the trust would terminate and be distributed outright to Stan's and Stacey's issue then living by right of representation. In the highly unlikely event that at any time there are no issue of Stan and Stacey living, while there are still assets remaining in this trust, the remaining trust assets would pass to Stan's Uncle Oscar who is age 63.

Where do the retirement benefits fit into this?

B. RMD effects of leaving benefits to or f/b/o minor child-EDBs

The first step is to determine how the "life expectancy payout" could apply to benefits left to a trust for the Steinmetz children post-SECURE. As minor children of the plan owner they are "eligible designated beneficiaries"—but only up to a point. Specifically, as each child "attains majority," he or she ceases to be an EDB and the 10-year payout limit kicks in. Attaining majority occurs on the 21st birthday. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(3). So the "life expectancy payout" for a minor-child-EDB is actually a "life-expectancy-to-age-31" payout.

The Required Terminal Distribution to a minor child-EDB is "the tenth calendar year following the calendar year in which the designated beneficiary reaches the age of majority," meaning 100% must be distributed by the end of the year the minor attains age 31 (not by the 31st birthday itself). If the child dies before age 21, the Required Terminal Distribution (100% distribution required) is the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the minor child's death. § 401(a)(9)(E)(iii).

For RMD purposes, the Steinmetzes have the following options for retirement benefits payable to their minor children who are not (as of the date of the surviving parent's death) disabled or chronically ill:

- **For one child: Name child as beneficiary.** Of course a share could be left outright to each child, to be administered by the child's guardian, and this outright bequest would qualify for the life-to-age-31 payout. However, few parents would choose this approach which among other drawbacks would give the child total outright control of the asset upon attaining the applicable state law age of majority (18 in many states). Even though the *tax law* would permit the child to keep the IRA going to age 31 (taking annual RMDs in the meantime), the child might decide to cash it out at age 18 and throw a hell of a party.
- **For one child, cont: Conduit trust for child.** The parent could leave benefits to a conduit trust for a minor child-EDB. All retirement plan distributions received by the trust would have to be immediately paid out by the trustee to (or for the benefit of) the child. As a conduit trust, this would have the advantage of being guaranteed to receive the same RMD "deal" as the child would receive if named individually, *i.e.*, the life-to-age-31 payout,

without the drawback of the child's gaining control at age 18 or 21 (state law age of majority).

The trustee would have substantial control of the distributions from the retirement account: The trustee would of course have to withdraw from the account, each year, the RMD for such year...but the RMDs would be small (due to the child's long life expectancy...*e.g.* 69.9 years at age 15—see Appendix—meaning the RMD for a \$500,000 IRA would be \$7,153) and the trustee can “apply” that distribution “for the benefit of” the minor (e.g., paying tuition bills directly from the trust), or pay it to a custodian for the minor, rather than distributing the cash to the child. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(3)(iv). The trustee can determine whether to take any distributions beyond the RMD (with all such distributions being immediately paid to or for the benefit of the child). The trustee could control the rate of distributions from the retirement account until the year the child reached age 31 at which point the entire account would have to be distributed to the child.

The *drawback* obviously is the trustee's inability (under a conduit trust) to take distributions from the IRA and hold them in the trust for distribution at a later time.

An *advantage* of the conduit trust is that the parents can name any residuary beneficiary they want (such as a charity) to take the remaining benefits if the child dies before age 31. But under the Regulations it is not necessary to use a conduit trust to get this advantage—if the parents are willing to have the money pass outright to the child at age 31. See next paragraph:

- **For one child, cont: Outright-at-age-31 trust:** The good news is the parents do not have to use a conduit trust for the child in order to qualify for the life-to-age-31 payout. An accumulation trust will work as well, *provided* it is entirely distributable to the child by the end of the year in which the child reaches age 31. In effect it is an “accumulation trust” during the years from age zero to age 30, that turns into a conduit trust in the year the child reaches age 31. So the trust could provide that for years infancy through 30, the trustee would (1) take annual RMDs from the IRA based on the child's life expectancy and (2) take such additional distributions from the IRA as the trustee deemed advisable and (3) EITHER pass out such IRA distributions to or for the benefit of the child or hold them in the trust for distribution in a later year, provided that (4) 100% of the trust is distributed to the child no later than the year child attains age 31. Because of the outright distribution no later than the age-31 year, AND because the child's conduit trust is a “primary” beneficiary of the IRA not merely a “residuary” beneficiary, the child is deemed to be the sole beneficiary of the trust for purposes of computing RMDs. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(3)(ii)(B). See PART 4, #10(B).
- **For one (or more) multiple minor child-EDBs.** There's still another option allowing a “life expectancy payout” to a trust for a minor child-EDB (or multiple minor child-EDBs): An accumulation trust that has ANY countable beneficiary who is a minor child-EDB can use the life expectancy payout, with the following payout requirements: The life expectancy payout will be computed based on the life expectancy of the oldest countable beneficiary of the trust (who *may or may not* be a minor child-EDB). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1), (2); (f)(1); and the 10-year-payout limit year will be 10 years after the minor-child-EDB (or all of them, if there are multiple minor-child EDBs who are countable beneficiaries of the trust) have either reached age 21 or earlier died. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(2)(ii). See PART 5, #3.

Example: Parent leaves IRA to an accumulation trust for the benefit of her minor child Sophie, age 9. The trustee will use income and principal of the trust as the trustee deems best for Sophie’s benefit for her entire life. Upon Sophie’s death, the trust will terminate and pass to Sophie’s cousin Len who is now age 24. Because the trust has a countable beneficiary who is a minor-child-EDB (Sophie), it uses the life expectancy payout based on LEN’s life expectancy (because he is the oldest countable beneficiary). The entire IRA must be distributed *to the trust* no later than 10 years after Sophie reaches age 21 or earlier dies. Assuming she doesn’t die prematurely, therefore, the entire IRA must be distributed in 22 years (when Sophie attains age 31). **However, note that the fact that the IRA must be distributed to the TRUST does not mean it has to be distributed to SOPHIE. The trustee can retain the IRA distributions in the trust, pay tax on them, and then hold and administer the net after-tax amount for Sophie’s benefit for the rest of her life, as provided in the trust.**

Wow! That’s a lot of choices for the parents to sort through. But we’ve only just begun. Stanley and Stacey Steinmetz don’t want separate trusts for each of their children, they were thinking more of a “pot” trust so the trustee would have the ability to spend more for one child than another based on relative need. The 2-year-old will need to be supported a lot more years just to reach the life-stage the 12-year-old has already attained. And who knows which child might need special additional education or have unforeseen medical expenses? Or which child might have unique abilities that will cost extra money to develop—or will enable him/her to attend college “for free” on a scholarship? It does not make sense to this couple to create rigid predetermined shares for such young children.

What are their options for a trust for *multiple* minor children-EDBs?

A pot trust written just as the clients want it would say: Trustee pays income and principal as the trustee deems best to or for the benefit of the children for their health, education, support, etc. until “until there is no child of ours living who is under age 25,” at which point any remaining funds are paid out to the surviving children equally (and issue of a deceased child, if any).

C. What are the annual RMDs for this “pot” trust?

Before we can draft this trust, we have to ask the client, if all four children die before that termination point is reached, where does the money go? Of course that scenario is actuarially extremely unlikely but the trust is incomplete if it does not dispose of the trust funds based on any eventuality. The clients say “That is extremely unlikely, fortunately, but if it did occur the remaining funds should pass to our Uncle Oscar who is now age 63.”

The distribution period for this trust would be determined as follows: Because there is at least one minor child-EDB [there are four], the trust is entitled to “eligible designated beneficiary” treatment, meaning that the life expectancy payout will apply. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(2)(ii). The life expectancy used will be that of the *oldest countable beneficiary*. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(2)(ii), (f)(1)(i).

The oldest countable beneficiary is Uncle Oscar. At age 63, his life expectancy is 24.5 years. The Steinmetz’s oldest child is 12; his life expectancy is 72.9 years!

Can Uncle Oscar be disregarded? No. As explained in the “How to Test a Trust” section of this Outline (PART 4, #10(B)), the Regulations tell us that Uncle Oscar (as a “residuary”

beneficiary) can be disregarded only if his inheritance is conditioned on the death of a primary beneficiary who will inherit the benefits fully by age 31. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(3)(ii)(B). In other words, if there were only one child-beneficiary, and he/she would receive the benefits outright by age 31, but Uncle Oscar would inherit the benefits if such child died before age 31, Uncle Oscar would be disregarded.

But under the Steinmetzes' proposed trust Oscar's inheritance is contingent on FOUR primary beneficiaries' dying before they are *all* over age 25. By the time the Steinmetzes' youngest child (now age 2) reaches age 25, the oldest child (now age 12) will be age 35—i.e., older than age 31. Application of the age-31 rules may not be crystal clear in all situations, but it appears Oscar is NOT disregardable under the Regulations.

The Steinmetzes cure this problem by selecting a younger “wipeout” beneficiary, a 10-year-old cousin of Stacey's. Now the countable beneficiaries are the four children ages 2 to 12 and the 10-year-old wipeout beneficiary, **so the Steinmetzes' oldest child's life expectancy can be used as the Applicable Denominator for the trust.** As with many cases involving trying to mesh estate planning goals with deferral goals, the estate plan has to be changed a bit to accommodate the deferral goals. Is that worth doing? See “E” below.

Changing the estate plan to improve RMD results

Choosing a younger wipeout beneficiary for a pot trust for minor children is one case where modifying the clients' plan to achieve a better RMD result definitely seems advisable. Uncle Oscar is *extremely* unlikely to inherit anything from this trust (likelihood of a 63-year-old surviving four minor children is remote), yet his presence as “wipe-out beneficiary” significantly affects the payout period for the children's IRA money.

D. What is the Required Terminal Distribution for this trust?

The Required Terminal Distribution will be, in most cases, 10 years after the youngest minor child-EDB reaches majority. So the IRA must be totally distributed in the year the Steinmetz's youngest child (now age 2) reaches age 31. If both Steinmetz parents die this year, the IRA must be paid out in annual instalments over the life expectancy of the oldest countable beneficiary of the trust, with a final payout no later than 29 years from now (when the “baby” turns 31).

The regulation is slightly more complicated than that simple statement because it must include the possibility that one or more of the children die before attaining majority. The precise definition of the Required Terminal Distribution is, the 10th year after the first year in which none of the minor child-EDBs is living and under age 21. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(2)(ii)(B), (C).

Though complicated, this formula is a **substantial improvement** (for parents trying to provide for their minor children in case of premature death of the parents) over the proposed regulations' formula, which ended the IRA payout 10 years after the *oldest* minor-child-EDB attains age 21 or earlier dies. See Prop. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(1)(i), (2)(ii)(A). The final regulation cures the planning issues that existed under the proposed regs—where termination of the IRA was tied to the oldest child, thus shortchanging the younger minor child-EDBs (drastically so if the oldest minor child died prior to age 21).

E. Separate trusts vs. a family “pot” trust

If the Steinmetzes use a “pot trust” for the children as a group, with the oldest child’s life expectancy as the initial payout period for the retirement accounts, are they “wasting” the even longer life expectancy of their youngest child? As one practitioner put it, the youngest child is being “forced to use the life expectancy of the oldest child.” Is it “bad” that the trust cannot use the life expectancy of each child?

Not really. The difference between the life expectancy of the oldest child (age 12, LE = 72.9 years) and the youngest (age 2, LE = 82.8 years) is insignificant. The trustee will almost certainly be drawing out more than the RMD each year regardless of whether the RMD is 1/72.9th (1.37%) or 1/82.8th (1%), to provide for the children’s needs. A fixed-share division among the children is contrary to the client’s goal of having distributions based on relative need, and would provide little or no “gain” on the RMD side.

To have a separate trust for each child, so each child’s RMDs would be based on his or her own age, each child’s trust would have to be distributable outright to him or her no later than age 31 (so the residuary beneficiaries can be ignored). However, unless each child’s trust is a conduit trust, or a trust that is distributable totally to the child by age 31, the second-tier beneficiary(ies) will be countable, and those presumably would be the other children....putting you right back into the picture of having the oldest child’s age (or premature death) dictate the annual RMDs and Required Terminal Distribution!

How much is it worth, in terms of tax savings for the children, to use this separate-trusts approach as opposed to the “pot” trust the parents want? The estate planner must be prepared to quantify exactly how much money it would save for the family to have separate trusts for each child (to get the maximum deferral for each child’s share) vs. having a pooled “pot” trust that must base annual RMDs on the age of the oldest minor child. Though hypothetical tax savings based on using *each minor child’s* own life expectancy for his/her share are not normally a significant planning factor, the tax savings from using a younger rather than an older “wipe-out” beneficiary may be.

Here is where we have to leave the theoretical framework of “what gets the longest payout” and look at the individual family’s situation. Here are some views developed during the planning process:

- If the spouses die in the near future, it appears likely the total family assets of \$1,500,000 will be substantially or totally depleted by raising these four children to adulthood. Deferring taxes on the retirement benefits is not a realistic goal in view of the likely financial needs of the children. The retirement plans are likely to be cashed out faster than the RMD rules would require no matter what estate plan structure is used.
- The “pot” trust makes much more sense for this very young family, where the exact amount each child is likely to need to be raised to adulthood cannot be predicted and the asset pool is not so large they can safely assume that each child has more than enough under an equal-share division.
- It is extremely unlikely that both parents (now in their 30s) will die in the near future. The much more likely scenario is that all the children will be well past age 25 when the parents

die. It does not make sense to invest legal time and expertise in trying to arrange this trust to get the maximum deferral for every dollar of retirement benefits when (1) doing so would require adopting less desirable fixed-share estate plan and (2) this plan is being written to cover a very unlikely event anyway.

- Another approach would be to have four fixed-share separate trusts to use as beneficiaries of the retirement benefits (to achieve maximum deferral for each child's share) and a fifth trust, holding all the nonretirement assets, to be the true "pot trust" for the children as a group. Distributions from this trust could be used to (for example) provide the "extra share" the youngest child needs just to catch up with the older ones or the extra expenditures needed for each child's particular educational, medical, etc. needs. Realistically does it make sense to draft and then administer five separate trusts for this family, when the death of both parents during the children's minority is an unlikely event and the assets are not substantial enough to justify administration of so many trusts? This is an alternative that might be considered in case of a family with much more substantial wealth.

F. Conclusion, comments regarding planning for minor children

If time and money is going to be spent preparing numerical projections, aim those projections at how much money (after tax) should be left in trust to raise these children to adulthood. If it appears that number is more than the current family net worth, consider buying term second-to-die life insurance on the young parents (very cheap) to cover the gap, rather than trying to increase the pot by squeezing extra post-death deferral out of the retirement benefits. I.e., pay the insurance company to get an estate plan the clients WANT instead of paying the lawyer to draft an estate plan they DON'T WANT!

Can a case *ever* be made for reworking an estate plan to capture the benefits of the life-to-age-31 payout for minor children of the participant? Perhaps yes if it involved a substantial retirement account and a much older and wealthier participant who has minor children through a late-in-life union or adoption. This hypothetical client has more at stake (larger retirement plan), and is more likely to die while the child is still a minor (because client is old), and has sufficient other assets that there will be no need to accelerate distribution of the retirement plan just to raise the child to adulthood. Call me when that client shows up.

Here are few more fine points to cover for Stanley and Stacey:

Stan's 401(k) plan: Stan and Stacey and their attorney decide qualification as a Designated Beneficiary Trust (DBT) could indeed matter with respect to Stan's 401(k) plan. Although the only form of death benefit permitted under that plan is a lump sum distribution in cash, the trustee of a DBT named as beneficiary of the plan can direct the plan to transfer the lump sum, by direct trustee-to-trustee transfer (formerly called a direct rollover) to an "inherited IRA," thus preserving the possibility of life-to-age-31 payout allowed for minor children of the participant. Reg. § 1.402(c)-2(j)(2)(ii).

Stacey's IRA: Stacey's IRA does offer the life expectancy payout form of benefit. Thus, if the trust that is named as contingent beneficiary of Stacey's IRA qualifies as a DBT, the trustee will

qualify for the life-to-age-31 payout applicable to minor children of the participant if the trust for the children is designed to qualify for that. This would be a desirable outcome. It would be nice for the trustee to have the option of spreading out distributions from the IRA over the years of the children's childhood.

G. Can we pay to a “§ 678 grantor trust” (BDOT) instead of to the child?

Under § 678, a beneficiary is deemed the “owner” for income tax purposes of any trust assets he has the right to withdraw from the trust. This is the only one of the “grantor trust rules” that applies to the beneficiary rather than to the creator/funder of the trust.

Planners would like to find a way to get the life-expectancy-to-age-31 payout for an IRA payable to the client's minor child without actually paying the IRA over to the child. They would prefer to hold the assets in a trust but have the distributions taxed at the child's tax rate. Can this be done by naming a § 678 grantor trust (nicknamed by practitioners a “beneficiary deemed owner trust” or BDOT) for the minor child as beneficiary of the IRA? The theory is, the trust-drafter and trustee would somehow figure out a way that the child wouldn't actually withdraw the money even though he has the right to.

Advocates of this approach suggest that the child would be deemed to be the IRA beneficiary either because under § 678 he and the trust are considered “the same person,” or because the § 678 trust would be a see-through DBT of which the child would be deemed the sole beneficiary (thereby qualifying for minor child-EDB treatment). See discussion of “conduit trust” in this outline for response to this point.

Clearly under Code § 671 IRA distributions paid to a § 678 grantor trust for “Beneficiary X” will be included in the income of Beneficiary X. It does not automatically follow that a § 678 trust for Beneficiary X meets the definition of “designated beneficiary,” which is an “*individual* designated as a beneficiary by the employee.” § 401(a)(9)(E)(1). Although we do have all the IRS rulings starting in 1985 which seem to essentially say “grantor trust = grantor” and “your grantor trust is you and you is your grantor trust,” nothing has ever extended that viewpoint (which is NOT a viewpoint necessarily dictated by § 671—far from it) to § 401(a)(9)(E)(1). We know IRS has extended it to the point of allowing disabled or minor beneficiaries to transfer personally-inherited IRAs to *their own* grantor trusts, but the only IRS mention of such transfers by the IRA owner during life was hostile. See ¶ 6.1.06 of *Life and Death Planning for Retirement Benefits*.

Some commenters requested that the IRS approve this treatment (BDOT beneficiary is deemed to be the “owner” of inherited IRA payable to BDOT) in comments on the proposed regs; the IRS did not adopt that treatment and explained why in the Preamble to the final regulations, so we have their answer—this does not work.

Case #4: The Dingles: Planning for a disabled child: How to draft an AMBT

SECURE added to the Code specific provisions intended to facilitate leaving retirement benefits in trust for the benefit of a disabled or chronically ill (D/CI) individual. The Code gave the type of trust it especially authorized for D/CI beneficiaries the cumbersome title “Applicable Multi-Beneficiary Trust” (AMBT). The Regulations elaborated on and extended the AMBT provisions

extensively to facilitate this type of trust planning. This case study focuses on the supplemental needs trust.

A. Client facts and goals

Mr. and Mrs. Dingle, both age 48, have three children, Winnie (age 23), Daisy (age 18), and Tony (age 16). One of the children, Daisy (the 18-year-old), is disabled and will need lifelong care. Mr. and Mrs. Dingle have \$500,000 in their combined IRAs. Each will leave his or her IRA to the other spouse, who will roll it over into the survivor's IRA. On the survivor's death, the IRA will be left to a trust that will provide for Daisy's supplemental needs throughout her life.

Under a SNT, the trust provides only for "supplemental needs" of the beneficiary. The trust is not allowed to provide funds for the beneficiary's needs that are paid for through government programs (such as, typically, medical care or housing), and the beneficiary has no automatic right to receive "income," or a pass-through of retirement account distributions, or anything else beyond provision for his "supplemental needs." A SNT allows the disabled individual's benefactor to provide financial assistance to the individual by contributing to the trust without having the trust or its distributions counted as "assets" or "income" ("countable resource") of the beneficiary that would disqualify the beneficiary from the government benefit programs.

The Dingles have no other substantial assets they will be able to leave for Daisy's benefit. Daisy Dingle qualifies for government-provided medical care and other need-based welfare-type benefits. Thus, the Dingles want the IRA to be held in a trust to provide for Daisy's needs that are not covered by the benefits programs she qualifies for, and they want to be sure that after their deaths the trust and the IRA it holds are not considered "countable assets" or a "resource" that would disqualify Daisy for the benefits she now receives. They similarly do not want trust distributions for Daisy's benefit to disqualify her for need-based assistance. The type of trust they seek is called in this Outline a "supplemental needs trust" (SNT). An SNT should be drafted by a lawyer who is conversant with the asset/income requirements of the disability benefit programs Daisy participates in and with the requirements for an SNT to be treated as a non-countable asset.

Mr. and Mrs. Dingle will name each other as outright beneficiary of their IRAs, with the supplemental needs trust for Daisy's benefit as contingent beneficiary.

B. Options for Daisy's trust under the RMD rules

The Dingles cannot name a "conduit trust" for Daisy as beneficiary of their IRAs. Because a conduit trust mandates that all distributions from the IRA to the trust be paid out forthwith to or for the benefit of the individual trust beneficiary, such a trust would disqualify Daisy from the various need-based benefits programs. The required minimum distributions from the IRA would be treated as "countable income" of Daisy for purposes of her qualification for the benefit programs. Thus the trust must be an accumulation trust, not a conduit trust.

Due to her disability, Daisy is an "Eligible Designated Beneficiary" (EDB) under SECURE, entitled to a life expectancy payout for benefits that are payable to her outright as designated beneficiary. As we have seen, benefits left to a conduit trust for her would be entitled to the same EDB treatment she individually is entitled to—a life expectancy payout. But it is not possible to

name either Daisy individually or a conduit trust for her as beneficiary without sacrificing her eligibility for government benefit programs.

Fortunately for the Dingells: Under SECURE, a see-through accumulation trust for the *exclusive life benefit* of a disabled (or chronically ill) EDB *is* entitled to the EDB treatment/life expectancy payout—even though accumulation trusts for some other categories of EDB are not so entitled.

It would be desirable for Daisy’s supplemental needs trust to qualify for the life expectancy payout so that distributions from the IRA to the trust could be spread out over her long life expectancy. If she dies before the end of her “life expectancy,” payouts after her death would continue to be made over her remaining life expectancy, subject to an outer limit requirement: final distribution would be required no later than 10 years after her death (even if her remaining “life expectancy” when she died was longer than 10 years).

C. “Applicable Multi-Beneficiary Trust” (AMBT)

In order to qualify for the life expectancy payout, the trust for Daisy must meet two requirements:

- First, it must qualify as a Designated Beneficiary Trust. Since it must be an Accumulation Trust, that means the remainder beneficiaries will also be “countable beneficiaries.” This in turn NORMALLY means that the remainder beneficiaries must be “individuals” (i.e., people!) who will receive the trust property upon Daisy’s death. However, under a special dispensation for AMBTs, due to an amendment of the law made by SECURE 2.0, most types of charities can also be named as remainder beneficiaries without causing the trust to lose DB status, with respect to participants dying after 2022. See PART 3, #7.
- Second, the trust must provide that distributions from the retirement account (including proceeds thereof) may not be paid to or for the benefit of anyone other than the disabled beneficiary (Daisy) during Daisy’s lifetime. § 401(a)(9)(H)(iv), (v); Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(g)(1)(iii).

Oddly, the law does not require that the trust make any distributions at all to Daisy or for her benefit—as long as no distributions are made to or for the benefit of anyone else during her life.

To meet these requirements, the trust could be structured in either of two ways. One way would be to have a trust that was solely for Daisy’s benefit during her lifetime, with the trustee making distributions from the trust to Daisy or for her benefit for her supplemental needs; the trust could hold the IRA only, or the IRA plus other assets. This trust could provide that it would terminate and be distributed to Daisy’s two siblings (or a permitted charity) at her death. This would make the trust a DBT since Daisy would be the primary beneficiary and her siblings (or the permitted charity) are the residuary beneficiaries, and they are all individuals or permitted charities so they count as “designated beneficiaries.” If Daisy’s siblings are the remainder beneficiaries, and there is a contingent or wipeout beneficiary that would inherit at Daisy’s death only if her siblings predeceased her, that contingent beneficiary is disregarded. See PART 4, #8, #10(C).

Another approach would be to have the trust be for the benefit of all the Dingell children but require the trustee to segregate the retirement account and all distributions from it and all “proceeds” (reinvestments) of such distributions; these retirement plan distributions and proceeds could be used only for Daisy, with other trust assets available to all the children. Someone will have to figure out how the trustee can reliably keep the IRA and its distributions and reinvestments separate from other trust assets and remember to make distributions from this segregated account to (or for the benefit of) nobody other than Daisy. On Daisy’s death this segregated account would pass outright to the other two siblings (or a permitted charity).

Either approach works and will qualify as an AMBT.

Under either of those structures, because the trust (or the segregated IRA-plus-distributions-from-the-IRA account) is to terminate at Daisy’s death and pass immediately outright to two other named individual beneficiaries (the siblings), or (if the participant dies after 2022) to a permitted charity, the trust qualifies as a Designated Beneficiary Trust. The applicable distribution period (ADP) for required minimum distributions (RMDs) to this trust under the Proposed Regulations would be the life expectancy of the oldest disabled beneficiary, in this case Daisy.

Here are the RMDs for the above-described AMBT (either structure):

- If the IRA owner died before his RBD, the payout period would be over Daisy’s life expectancy because she is the oldest D/CI beneficiary, even though she is not the oldest child. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(1)(ii). If the IRA owner died after the RBD, the payout would be based on the “greater of” the IRA owner’s life expectancy or Daisy’s, but since Daisy is younger than her parents this would still be Daisy’s life expectancy. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(ii).
- The Required Terminal Distribution would be the final year of Daisy’s life expectancy, or, if earlier, 10 years after Daisy’s death, because she is the oldest D/CI beneficiary of the trust. Regs. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(1), (3), § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(2)(iii).

So, at first, it appears that all is well—the Dingells can leave their IRA to a see-through supplemental needs trust for Daisy that will qualify for the life expectancy payout, just as they could have done before SECURE. However there are important differences between these parents’ pre- and post-SECURE options:

- Under pre-SECURE law, the Dingells might have provided that, in any particular year, if the RMD taken from the IRA exceeded Daisy’s “supplemental needs” expenses for such year, the excess could be paid to other beneficiaries, for example Daisy’s siblings. That would have enabled the trustee to pass out such “excess” gross income to the siblings who are probably in lower income tax brackets than the trust itself is. That clause cannot be included post-SECURE without losing the life expectancy payout...so RMDs that come in to the trust and exceed the amount that can be spent that year on Daisy’s supplemental needs will be retained in the trust and be taxed at trust tax rates to the extent the retained distribution exceeds the trust’s exemption and lower-taxed income brackets. This result is presumably consistent with Congress’s goal of benefitting a disabled individual without allowing other family members to piggyback on the disabled beneficiary’s status to get tax deferral.

- Under pre-SECURE law, some practitioners would have recommended including a “poison pill” clause in the trust that would cause the trust to terminate and be distributable outright to other beneficiaries (such as Daisy’s siblings) if at any time its continued existence would cause Daisy to lose her eligibility for government benefits. Post-SECURE this clause cannot be included in that form due to the requirement that no beneficiary other than Daisy can receive any benefits from the retirement benefits during her lifetime. A “poison pill” clause can terminate payouts to Daisy, but only if nothing will be paid to anyone other than Daisy until her death. Of course, if the poison pill is triggered the RMDs from the IRA will accumulate in the trust and be taxed at trust income tax rates, which in this example would be much higher than rates applicable to Daisy’s siblings or Daisy.
- Under pre-SECURE law, if Daisy were to die before the end of her “life expectancy” payout period, the IRA could continue to be held by the trust (or by the trust’s remainder beneficiaries) with distributions continuing to be paid out gradually over what was left of Daisy’s original life expectancy. Post-SECURE, all benefits must be distributed within 10 years after Daisy’s death even if her “remaining life expectancy” was more than 10 years.

If Daisy’s trust is also a “qualified disability trust,” the trust would get an annual exemption of \$2,000 for federal income tax purposes (compared with the \$100/\$300 exemption applicable to other trusts), although this exemption is subject to a phase out in case of income over \$100,000. See § 642(b)(2)(c) for the special exemption rule and the definition of qualified disability trust.

D. Other planning ideas to benefit a D/CI beneficiary

The Dingles as noted have limited assets with which to provide for Daisy after their deaths, and correspondingly limited planning choices. A SNT is essential for their plan. Here are other options that would-be benefactors of a D/CI beneficiary can consider; the options are different for wealthier clients vs. those of more limited means, and differ depending on whether a SNT is part of the mix, whether the client has charitable intent, and whether the D/CI individual is capable of managing his/her own finances.

A wealthier client with some charitable intent could consider naming a charitable remainder trust (CRT) as beneficiary of the IRA. The IRA would pass income-tax-free to the CRT which would then pay a life-long annual income (either a fixed dollar amount or a fixed percentage of the trust’s assets revalued annually) to the D/CI beneficiary. The annual income paid to the D/CI beneficiary would be includible in his/her gross income. On death of the beneficiary, the principal would pass to the charity. See PART 9, Case #5.

The Dingles could consider naming a CRT as beneficiary of the IRA. The annual unitrust or annuity payments from the CRT could be paid to a special needs trust (SNT) for Daisy so as not to disqualify her from her government benefit programs. Rev. Rul. 2002-20, 2002-1 I.R.B. 794. While this approach might be suitable for some families, it is not suitable for the Dingles because this approach would cause the bulk of their IRA to pass to charity. Their intent is to have the IRA pass exclusively to family members. Also, Rev. Rul. 2002-20 appears to require that the SNT be includible in Daisy’s estate on her death; see the Ruling for details. For full explanation of charitable

remainder trusts (CRTs) and the advantages of naming a CRT as beneficiary of a retirement account, see ¶ 7.5.04 *et seq.* of *Life and Death Planning for Retirement Benefits*.

Another approach that some planners might consider is, using a conduit trust as beneficiary of the benefits, then having Daisy (through her guardian) transfer the conduit distributions, as she receives them, into a “(d)(iv)(A)” (self-settled) supplemental needs trust, if that approach is permitted under applicable state law without causing Daisy to lose her qualification for need-based benefit programs. A (d)(iv)(A) trust is a supplemental needs trust created by the disabled individual with her own assets. While permitted by applicable law governing various need-based benefit programs, this kind of trust does require that any trust assets remaining at the beneficiary’s death must be transferred to the state that paid Daisy the welfare benefits, up to the amount of such benefits Daisy received after contributing those assets to the trust.

A client who has a very large retirement account balance, likely to generate annual RMDs after the client’s death in excess of the D/CI beneficiary’s needs, should consider the tax rate that will apply to large post-death IRA distributions paid to the trust. If the client’s personal tax rate is lower than what is likely to apply to these post-death distributions the client should consider doing annual partial Roth conversions from the IRA, which would be taxable at the client’s tax rate rather than the trust. The Roth IRA’s distributions to the trust after client’s death would be income tax-free.

Case # 5: Beverly: Providing for NoMoTTY beneficiaries

One category of EDB is an individual who (1) is not a member of any other category of EDB and [i.e., not the participant’s spouse, not disabled, etc.] and (2) is “not more than ten years younger than” the participant. The not more than ten years younger [or “NoMoTTY”] individual might be older than the participant, or the same age as the participant, or younger than the participant—as long as he/she is not more than 10 years younger.

Leaving an IRA to a trust for the benefit of a NoMoTTY is no easier than leaving a trust for any other EDB. For one thing, the fixed-term life expectancy payout may end well short of the actual lifespan of the NoMoTTY, which is not good if the NoMoTTY will be depending on this income stream. Also, the early death of a NoMoTTY could accelerate the payout unexpectedly for other trust beneficiaries who were counting on him/her to live to within 10 years of his/her IRS life expectancy.

A. Facts and goals: Beverly

Beverly is age 76, unmarried, and childless. She wants to leave her \$3 million IRA to a trust for the benefit of her three siblings Molly (age 74), Billy (72), and Kelly (70). Her goal is to provide them with professional management of the funds, a predictable (not necessarily large) income for life, and a fund that can be tapped disproportionately for extra expenses when needed. Preserving the fund for other possible beneficiaries after all the siblings are deceased is not one of Beverly’s goals for this trust. However, if there are funds left over they will go to charity, or (if that would cause the trust not to pass the “all beneficiaries must be individuals” test) to Beverly’s nieces and nephews. None of the siblings is disabled. All are NoMoTTYs.

The parents of Beverly and her siblings only recently died, at ages 98 (mother) and 102 (father); they were killed when struck by lightning while hiking in Baxter State Park, Maine, with their many siblings. Longevity is a feature on both sides of Beverly's family tree.

Here are possible structures and the pluses and minuses of each based on the assumption Beverly dies right now.

B. Three trust choices to get life expectancy payouts

Beverly considers the following trust configurations to utilize her siblings' "EDB" status; the options show that a "life expectancy payout" is not such a great deal for older beneficiaries.

- **A single "conduit" trust fund which would pay out to all of the siblings as needed.** As a conduit trust, the remainder ("residuary") beneficiaries would be disregarded so charity could be named as the remainder beneficiary. Since all countable beneficiaries would be EDBs, the life expectancy payout would apply based on the life expectancy of Molly, the oldest sibling. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(1)(i). (The "greater of" rule would not enter in because Beverly's "ghost life expectancy" is shorter than Molly's life expectancy.) The 10-year Required Terminal Distribution would apply based on Molly's death, because she is the oldest EDB—100% distribution of the IRA and the trust would be required within the earlier of about 15 years (Molly's approximate life expectancy) or 10 years after Molly's death (if she dies in the next five years, i.e., when her life expectancy is still over 10 years). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(2)(i). This last feature makes this structure unacceptable. Since anyone can die at any time, you have to look at what happens if Molly dies suddenly, shortly after Beverly, say at age 77? The whole trust would be paid out by the year Molly would have turned 87, when Billy and Kelly are still living and with many years to go on their probable life expectancy. This result would destroy the plan for the IRA to provide a lifelong source of income and financial security managed by a professional trustee for the younger siblings.
- **3 separate "conduit trusts," one for each sibling.** This gets closer to the goal. Although each sibling would have an equal predefined share (which is not the ideal—the ideal was to have some flexibility to pay more to one than another based on relative needs), each sibling would have a life expectancy payout based on his or her own life expectancy, and not be surprised by a speeded up payout based on the unexpected death of the oldest sibling.

If a sibling died, his or her remaining share would be placed into a trust for the benefit of the other siblings. This "remainder trust" would NOT be a conduit trust and would not be subject to ANY of the restrictions applicable to See-through Trusts...for example, it could accumulate IRA distributions, spend unequally between the surviving siblings based on need, and have a charitable remainder beneficiary. This remainder trust would have to withdraw the deceased sibling's share of the IRA in annual instalments over the remainder of the deceased sibling's life expectancy (with a Required Terminal Distribution 10 years after such sibling's death—even if the remaining life expectancy payout would have been longer than 10 years). **Drawbacks:** A conduit trust forces the trustee to pay out to or for the benefit of the sibling the RMD each year; the trustee is not able to accumulate distributions for possible needs in later years. And, as the IRA payout ends at the end of

the sibling's life expectancy, the sibling may have many years left to live, but the trust for that sibling is then "gone" and no longer provides a financial cushion. For example, at age 72, Billy's life expectancy is about 17 years. If he lives into or past his 90s (as their parents did), Billy will no longer have any income from his conduit trust. Once again, this structure does not fit well with Beverly's goals.

- **3 separate "accumulation trusts," one for each sibling.** The trust for, e.g., Kelly, would say "the trustee will use income and principal for the benefit of Kelly as long as she lives [setting forth the goal of a lifelong income plus extra funds as needed etc.]. Upon her death, if both of the other siblings are then living, the trust shall continue for their benefit on the same terms, or, if only one of them is then living, the trust shall terminate and the fund shall be distributed outright to such surviving sibling, or, if none of them is then living to Charity X."

Assuming all 3 siblings survive Beverly, here's how this trust is tested. Countable beneficiaries are Kelly (primary) and Molly and Billy (residuary). Charity is disregarded because it can inherit only if both of the other two siblings die before the primary beneficiary Kelly. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(3)(i), (ii)(A). Since all countable beneficiaries are EDBs, the trust is entitled to the life expectancy payout. The life expectancy payout and Required Terminal Distribution are both determined based on the oldest sibling's (i.e. Molly's) life expectancy. Thus, the trust has a foreseeable payout of about 15 years (Molly's life expectancy) after Beverly's death if Beverly dies in the near future. That anticipated payout would be accelerated by up to five years if Molly dies less than 10 years after Beverly (because then the Required Terminal Distribution would be 10 years after Molly's death). But regardless of when Molly dies, the trustee would have the ability to accumulate IRA distributions and (after paying tax on them) save them for future years' needs. **Drawbacks:** If two of Beverly's siblings predecease her, she would need to take a different approach since in that case the two countable beneficiaries would be last surviving sibling and charity, and the trust would not qualify as a DB. In that case the payout would be over Beverly's then remaining life expectancy, with no option to elect the 10-year rule (since Beverly is past her required beginning date).

C. Conclusion about Beverly's IRA trust plan

No matter how you cut it, this IRA is going to have to be distributed within no more than about 15 years after Beverly's death and even that short payout period gets shorter each year that Beverly and the siblings keep on living and getting older. Based on their family history there is a good chance that these siblings will live beyond the IRS table life expectancy.

And: Beverly has to make some compromises to get even that much "life expectancy payout" (such as possibly diverting the remainder to nieces and nephews to avoid having a countable charity/nonindividual beneficiary). And: The trust will have to pay trust income tax rates on any significant IRA distributions accumulated for the purpose of providing for the siblings' later years and/or for unexpected large expenses. And: The trust will be in a higher income tax bracket than any of the siblings is likely to be.

So Beverly has a problem if this is the only asset she has to fund her goal of providing for the siblings. If that is the case, she should consider annuity solutions and/or consider doing Roth

conversions during life so the trust can be funded with an asset that does not create such income tax complications.

On the other hand, if this asset is just one of many, then the conduit trust for each beneficiary for his/her 1/3 share can make sense. The siblings could be advised to regard the life expectancy payouts as temporary income, to be saved for the future or used for nonrecurring expenses. Or, the manager of the other assets could level out each beneficiary's cash flow by reducing distributions from the "main" trust (holding Beverly's substantial other assets) in the "early" years, then increasing distributions from the main trust when the IRAs ran out. The main trust provisions would say exactly what Beverly wants them to say with no compromises (in either drafting or trust administration) to accommodate the RMD rules.

And/or (again, if Beverly has other assets besides the IRA), Beverly could leave the IRA to a charitable remainder trust (CRT) which would pay the siblings a predictable *lifelong* income AND eliminate ALL income tax on the IRA death benefit AND provide for her charitable intent AND even provide an estate tax charitable deduction. The CRT distributions would provide the *lifelong* income to the siblings which is one of Beverly's goals, and other (nonIRA assets) could be used to provide the slush fund for extra/unforeseen expenses to supplement the income from the CRT. For full explanation of charitable remainder trusts and the advantages of naming a CRT as beneficiary of a retirement account, see ¶ 7.5.04 *et seq.* of *Life and Death Planning for Retirement Benefits*.

In summary, **qualifying for EDB status/"life expectancy payout" does not by itself accomplish the client's goals.** As a supplement to substantial other assets providing for the beneficiary(ies), it can work. As is often the case, the life expectancy payout does not provide a long enough "payout period" to substantially increase the value of the inherited plan, while its attendant complications and drawbacks may force compromises with the client's goals if those goals cannot be achieved with other assets.

Case #6: Hiram: Leaving retirement benefits to a trust with a variety of beneficiaries

So far we have looked primarily at retirement benefits left to one beneficiary or one type of beneficiary (such as a minor child of the participant or a disabled individual). If the trust is for the benefit of a varied collection of people with possibly different classifications in the DB/EDB system, what happens? The RMD effects will have to be painstakingly parsed out from the regulations. The planner will have to consider whether the estate plan could be rearranged to get better RMD results for at least some of the beneficiaries. The planner will have to be able to determine and convey to the client what would be the likely economic benefit to the estate plan if RMD results could be improved.

A. Hiram's complicated facts and family

Hiram, age 55, has about \$10 million of assets, of which \$2.5 million is in several traditional retirement plans and \$400,000 is in a Roth IRA. He wants to provide for his spouse (Holly, age 46, his second wife), his children from his first marriage (Hugo, age 30, and Hester, age 28; Hester is disabled) and his children from his second marriage (Hilda, age 16, and Harry, age 14). He is not worried about estate taxes. His plan is just to leave everything to one giant family trust, where the trustee would pay income and/or principal to or for the benefit of the family members, giving priority

to wife Holly's lifelong support; lifelong support and care for Hester the disabled child; support, education, and care into adulthood for minors Hilda and Harry; and (upon death of survivor of Hiram and his wife) everything distributed outright equally to the children, except that Hester's share would stay in trust to provide for her care for life, and the younger children's shares would be held in trust for their education and support until age 25.

B. RMD treatment if trust is written as Hiram has described it

The family group at this time has four EDBs: spouse Holly, disabled daughter Hester, and participant's minor children Hilda and Harry. If the trust qualifies as a Designated Beneficiary Trust (DBT), and Hiram dies in the near future, here is the applicable distribution period that would apply to this trust. As a preliminary matter we SHOULD probably first make sure the trust qualifies as a "DBT," but let's leave that aside for a moment and assume we can make it so qualify if necessary.

Even though the surviving spouse is a beneficiary and she is an EDB, the trust does not get a life expectancy payout based on her status because (1) she is not the sole countable beneficiary (it's not a conduit trust for her) and (2) the other countable beneficiaries are not all EDBs. One of the four children (Hugo age 30) is not an EDB—he is neither a minor child nor D/CI.

Even though disabled daughter Hester is also an EDB, there is no life expectancy payout based on *her* status since she is not the sole beneficiary (it is not a conduit trust as to her) and it is not an AMBT (there is no requirement that any retirement plan be set aside solely for her during her lifetime).

However, there are two beneficiaries who cause this big pot trust to qualify for a life expectancy payout of some type: the two minor children of the participant, Hilda, age 16, and Harry, age 12, who are minor child-EDBs. Because the trust has one or more minor child-EDBs, the Applicable Denominator (payout period) for the trust will be the life expectancy of the oldest countable beneficiary of the trust. The life expectancy of the oldest MINOR? No...of the oldest countable trust beneficiary. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(1)(i). That would be wife Holly, age 46 (assuming Hiram does not add a "wipeout beneficiary" who is older than Holly). At age 46, her life expectancy is 40 years. So the first year's payout would be 1/40th of the account balance, the second year's 1/39th, and so on until the final distribution year (or earlier if she dies within 30 years).

Note this odd situation—the trust gets a life expectancy payout because it has minor child-EDBs (even though not all the trust beneficiaries are EDBs), but that life expectancy payout is not based on those children's life expectancies—it's based on the oldest trust beneficiary's life expectancy, even though the oldest trust beneficiary is not a minor child.

The Required Terminal Distribution year would be 10 years after the earliest point at which both minor children have either attained age 21 or earlier died. Assuming there are no premature deaths, Harry, the younger of the two minor children-EDBs is 12; so he will turn 21 in 9 years, meaning the predicted Required Terminal Distribution will be in 19 years when Harry turns 31.

So, this picture is a little better than the "10-year rule." Essentially there would be a 19-year payout if Hiram dies right now. Of course as minor child-Harry gets older the payout period shrinks. Unless Hiram has some more children, the trust will not "do better" than the 10-year rule once baby Harry (now 12) reaches age 21 (because after that point there will be no more minor child-EDBs).

C. Slicing and dicing may be better for Hiram

It might be worth running numbers to slice and dice these retirement benefits among separate trusts for different beneficiaries. Hiram has a large enough estate he could consider leaving particular separate IRAs to different beneficiaries (or trusts for them) to get substantially longer deferral for the benefit of most of the family. In particular:

- Leave some IRA assets to wife Holly, perhaps through a conduit trust which would provide a “life expectancy payout” based on the life expectancy of someone 10 years younger than she is (*i.e.*, using the Uniform Lifetime Table; thank you SECURE 2.0!) recalculated annually. Or leave some of the IRA to Holly outright (for her to roll over to her own IRA).
- A separate IRA could be left to a trust for disabled daughter Hester; structured as an AMBT, it would have a life expectancy payout based on Hester’s very long (57 years) life expectancy at age 28. Note this does not have to be a “supplemental needs” trust to qualify as an AMBT; the only requirements are that Hester qualifies as D/CI and is the only permissible recipient for life (and that the remainder beneficiaries are individuals or qualifying charities).
- Separate trusts for Hilda and Harry, or a combined trust for both of them, could take full advantage of their minor child-EDB status.
- Hiram might consider weighting the Roth IRA to oldest-child Hugo, since Hugo (as the only “PODB”) is stuck with the 10-year rule and doesn’t get whatever “stretch” payouts are available to his siblings.

The rest of the assets could be left to a pot trust administered by the same trustee with explicit directions, in administering the pot trust, to take into account what each beneficiary receives from other sources including any trust that holds the retirement benefits.

Unlike with some other clients, where striving to “fit” into the minimum distribution rules’ requirements produced little apparent tax benefit (while sacrificing other goals), the slicing and dicing does benefit Hiram’s estate plan because he has a *large estate* with *large retirement account assets*, and plenty of *nonretirement assets* as well, and multiple beneficiaries entitled to EDB status.

Case #7: Wallace: How to leave benefits to charity through a trust or otherwise

Traditional retirement benefits are a good asset to leave to charity. Other heirs will have to pay income taxes when they draw money out of an inherited retirement plan, but a charity, being income tax exempt, collects the full account tax-free. The \$1 million IRA may be worth only \$600,000 to your family after taxes, but it’s worth \$1 million to your favorite tax-exempt charity.

The best way to leave a retirement account to charity is to name the charity as beneficiary on your beneficiary designation form. If the client has multiple charities to be named as beneficiary, and especially if the client loves to change the identity and/or percentages of the chosen charities, consider naming a Donor Advised Fund (DAF) [see IRC § 4966(d)(2)] as beneficiary of the IRA, then “advising” the DAF that the fund is to be distributed to your list of charities at your death. It’s

usually easier to change beneficiaries' names and amounts through a DAF account than to revise a beneficiary form....plus the DAF administrator will likely be much more skilled at dealing with plan administrators than the charities are likely to be. Of course the DAF administrator is not legally required to follow your "advice" but normally the DAF will follow it unless there is some reason not to (for example if the "charity" you have advised them to make a payment to does not qualify as a charity under the DAF's or IRC's standards).

If the charitable gift is made through a trust, additional complexities arise:

Wallace's Trust: Wallace dies, leaving \$10 million of assets, including \$4 million of retirement accounts to a trust. The trust provides that the trustee is to distribute \$100,000 to each of 10 charities (total \$1 million), and to distribute the rest of the assets in three equal shares to Wallace's two children and another charity. Upon Wallace's death, the trustee finds itself holding \$4 million of inherited IRAs plus \$6 million of other assets, and the need to distribute about \$4 million to charities and \$3 million to each of the children. The trustee's very first thought is, "Boy it would be nice to use the IRAs to fund those charitable gifts. Can I do that?"

If the trust is drafted to simply say the above, with no special provisions for how the charitable gifts will be paid, there will be no income tax charitable deduction for paying either the ten "pecuniary" charitable gifts or the \$3 million charitable "residuary" gift. The trustee could cash out the \$4 million of IRAs and be liable for the income tax on that amount, with no charitable deduction to offset the income: **There is no DNI deduction for distributions to charity.** A distribution to charity is deductible only if it qualifies for the fiduciary income tax charitable deduction under the stringent rules of Code § 642(c). For full explanation of those rules see and the ideas discussed below see ¶ 7.4 of *Life and Death Planning for Retirement Benefits*.

The easy way out of this problem is to specify IN THE TRUST INSTRUMENT that the charitable gifts must be paid out of the IRAs to the extent possible...then the trust gets its income tax charitable deduction, no problem. See example in PLR 2016-11002. [Note: It is not recommended to use the phrase "income in respect of a decedent" (IRD) when specifying the source of funds for payments to charity. Instead specify the retirement account(s) to be used (by name or by type) (even if part of the money in the account(s) is after-tax money so it may not be "IRD"). Why? Because IRD might be considered a "class of income" and an instruction to fund a charitable bequest with a "class of income" will not be respected for fiduciary income tax deduction purposes unless it has independent "economic effect." Reg. § 1.642(c)-(3)(b)(2); § 1.643(a)-5(b). (To date IRD has NOT been defined as a "class of income." Also because IRD is not a legally recognized separate type of receipt—it is just a tax characteristic applied to certain distributions. Many distributions that contain "IRD" are comprised partially of non-IRD income. That includes a distribution from a retirement account that contains after-tax as well as pretax money. There is no way under the tax code to separate those "portions" so the IRD goes to one beneficiary and the non-IRD goes to a different beneficiary. It cannot be done!]

But Wallace is deceased so it is now too late to add these words to the trust. The trustee can "fix the problem" with respect to the *residuary* bequests to charity by transferring the IRAs directly to those charities (rather than withdrawing money from the IRA and giving the money to the charity), but (according to the IRS) not with respect to the *pecuniary* bequests: The IRS's position is that transferring the IRA in fulfillment of a pecuniary bequest is treated as a sale of the IRA (which

would generate equivalent income at the trust level). However, the trustee can shift IRA income to the *residuary* charitable beneficiary by transferring a \$3 million inherited IRA to the charity intact. Transfer of an IRA to a residuary beneficiary does not trigger realization of income at the trust level. The charity takes over the IRA and cashes it out tax-free because the charity is income tax-exempt.



Appendix A: IRS RMD Life Expectancy Tables

Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-9(b), (c). Effective for 2022 and later years.

1. Uniform Lifetime Table

| Table for Determining Applicable Distribution Period (Divisor) | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------|---------------------|
| Age | Distribution period | Age | Distribution period |
| 70 | n/a | 95 | 8.9 |
| 71 | n/a | 96 | 8.4 |
| 72 | 27.4 | 97 | 7.8 |
| 73 | 26.5 | 98 | 7.3 |
| 74 | 25.5 | 99 | 6.8 |
| 75 | 24.6 | 100 | 6.4 |
| 76 | 23.7 | 101 | 6.0 |
| 77 | 22.9 | 102 | 5.6 |
| 78 | 22.0 | 103 | 5.2 |
| 79 | 21.1 | 104 | 4.9 |
| 80 | 20.2 | 105 | 4.6 |
| 81 | 19.4 | 106 | 4.3 |
| 82 | 18.5 | 107 | 4.1 |
| 83 | 17.7 | 108 | 3.9 |
| 84 | 16.8 | 109 | 3.7 |
| 85 | 16.0 | 110 | 3.5 |
| 86 | 15.2 | 111 | 3.4 |
| 87 | 14.4 | 112 | 3.3 |
| 88 | 13.7 | 113 | 3.1 |
| 89 | 12.9 | 114 | 3.0 |
| 90 | 12.2 | 115 | 2.9 |
| 91 | 11.5 | 116 | 2.8 |
| 92 | 10.8 | 117 | 2.7 |
| 93 | 10.1 | 118 | 2.5 |
| 94 | 9.5 | 119 | 2.3 |
| | | 120+ | 2.0 |

This table must be used by all participants to compute their lifetime required distributions in 2022 and later years, unless the sole beneficiary of the account is the participant's more-than-10-years-younger spouse. This table may not be used: for years prior to 2022; or by beneficiaries of a deceased participant, with two exceptions: [1] in the year of the participant's death if participant died after his RBD; or [2] by the surviving spouse in some cases—see PART 3, #5.

For each Distribution Year, determine: (A) the account balance as of the prior calendar year end; (B) the participant's age at the end of the Distribution Year; and (C) the Applicable Distribution Period (divisor) for that age from the above table. "A" divided by "C" equals the required minimum distribution (RMD) for the Distribution Year.

2. Single Life Expectancy Table

Use this Table for computing the life expectancy of a designated beneficiary in 2022 and later years, except as follows: In computing the RMD for the designated beneficiary of a participant who died in *2020 or earlier*, it will be necessary to apply a transition rule to determine the RMD for 2022 and later years (unless the sole designated beneficiary was the surviving spouse): See PART 3, #1(E), of this Outline. And: In some cases if the sole beneficiary is the participant's surviving spouse, the Uniform Lifetime Table may apply instead of this table: see PART 3, #5, regarding which table to use for a surviving spouse.

Ages 0 to 59

| Age | Life Expectancy | Age | Life Expectancy |
|------------|------------------------|------------|------------------------|
| 0 | 84.6 | 30 | 55.3 |
| 1 | 83.7 | 31 | 54.4 |
| 2 | 82.8 | 32 | 53.4 |
| 3 | 81.8 | 33 | 52.5 |
| 4 | 80.8 | 34 | 51.5 |
| 5 | 79.8 | 35 | 50.5 |
| 6 | 78.8 | 36 | 49.6 |
| 7 | 77.9 | 37 | 48.6 |
| 8 | 76.9 | 38 | 47.7 |
| 9 | 75.9 | 39 | 46.7 |
| 10 | 74.9 | 40 | 45.7 |
| 11 | 73.9 | 41 | 44.8 |
| 12 | 72.9 | 42 | 43.8 |
| 13 | 71.9 | 43 | 42.9 |
| 14 | 70.9 | 44 | 41.9 |
| 15 | 69.9 | 45 | 41.0 |
| 16 | 69.0 | 46 | 40.0 |
| 17 | 68.0 | 47 | 39.0 |
| 18 | 67.0 | 48 | 38.1 |
| 19 | 66.0 | 49 | 37.1 |
| 20 | 65.0 | 50 | 36.2 |
| 21 | 64.1 | 51 | 35.3 |
| 22 | 63.1 | 52 | 34.3 |
| 23 | 62.1 | 53 | 33.4 |
| 24 | 61.1 | 54 | 32.5 |
| 25 | 60.2 | 55 | 31.6 |
| 26 | 59.2 | 56 | 30.6 |
| 27 | 58.2 | 57 | 29.8 |
| 28 | 57.3 | 58 | 28.9 |
| 29 | 56.3 | 59 | 28.0 |

Single Life Table, cont. **FOR 2022 AND LATER YEARS**

See headnotes on preceding page for how to apply this table to the nonspouse designated beneficiary of a pre-2021 decedent and for whether to use this table if spouse is sole designated beneficiary.

Ages 60 to 120

| Age | Life Expectancy | Age | Life Expectancy |
|------------|------------------------|------------|------------------------|
| 60 | 27.1 | 95 | 4.0 |
| 61 | 26.2 | 96 | 3.7 |
| 62 | 25.4 | 97 | 3.4 |
| 63 | 24.5 | 98 | 3.2 |
| 64 | 23.7 | 99 | 3.0 |
| 65 | 22.9 | 100 | 2.8 |
| 66 | 22.0 | 101 | 2.6 |
| 67 | 21.2 | 102 | 2.5 |
| 68 | 20.4 | 103 | 2.3 |
| 69 | 19.6 | 104 | 2.2 |
| 70 | 18.8 | 105 | 2.1 |
| 71 | 18.0 | 106 | 2.1 |
| 72 | 17.2 | 107 | 2.1 |
| 73 | 16.4 | 108 | 2.0 |
| 74 | 15.6 | 109 | 2.0 |
| 75 | 14.8 | 110 | 2.0 |
| 76 | 14.1 | 111 | 2.0 |
| 77 | 13.3 | 112 | 2.0 |
| 78 | 12.6 | 113 | 1.9 |
| 79 | 11.9 | 114 | 1.9 |
| 80 | 11.2 | 115 | 1.8 |
| 81 | 10.5 | 116 | 1.8 |
| 82 | 9.9 | 117 | 1.6 |
| 83 | 9.3 | 118 | 1.4 |
| 84 | 8.7 | 119 | 1.1 |
| 85 | 8.1 | 120+ | 1.0 |
| 86 | 7.6 | | |
| 87 | 7.1 | | |
| 88 | 6.6 | | |
| 89 | 6.1 | | |
| 90 | 5.7 | | |
| 91 | 5.3 | | |
| 92 | 4.9 | | |
| 93 | 4.6 | | |
| 94 | 4.3 | | |

Appendix B: Charts Summarizing The RMD Rules

Effective January 1, 2025

by Natalie B. Choate, JD

These charts summarize the minimum distribution requirements for beneficiaries of a retirement-account owner (“participant”) according to final and proposed IRS regulations issued in July 2024. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-1(d). Exceptions and limitations:

- These charts do not apply if the participant died before 2020. See PART 8 of this Outline.
- Annuities and collectively bargained retirement plans are not covered in this Outline.
- The rules in these charts are from: final regulations effective 1/1/2025, restating prior editions of RMD regulations and proposed regulations to implement changes made by SECURE 2.0 (2022). For certain transition rules for years 2021–2024 see PART 3 of this Outline, #1(F).

Charts I-A, I-B, and II summarize the requirements applicable to one beneficiary. For multiple beneficiaries, the payout periods would be the same as for a trust with the same “countable beneficiaries”; see Note 1 following Charts III and IV.

The regulations’ required minimum distribution (RMD) “system” for beneficiaries generally has two parts. First, there is an annual distributions track: Annual RMDs would be based on annual distributions over someone’s life expectancy (the “Applicable Denominator”). Second, there is a Required Terminal Distribution: 100% of the account becomes the RMD, regardless of what the “annual distributions track” was. The post-death payout must be completed in the Required Terminal Distribution year if the account was not previously exhausted by distributions (required or otherwise).

To use the charts you need the following information:

1. ***Did decedent die before or after his required beginning date (RBD)?*** See PART 2, #1.

2. ***What category is the beneficiary?***

...an **Eligible Designated Beneficiary** (EDB)? If so which type—participant’s surviving spouse, minor child of the participant, disabled or chronically (D/CI) ill individual, or not-more-than-10-years-younger (NoMoTTY) beneficiary? See PART 3, #4.

...a **plain old designated beneficiary** (PODB)? See PART 3, #3. Or,

...a **non-designated beneficiary** (Non-DB), such as the participant’s estate? See PART 3, #2.

3. ***How to use the Life Expectancy tables (Appendix A):*** The “beneficiary’s life expectancy” and the decedent’s or “ghost” life expectancy are calculated using The Single Life Table. Exception: If the sole designated beneficiary is the surviving spouse the Uniform Lifetime Table may apply; see PART 3, #5. The applicable life expectancy number (“Applicable Denominator”) is divided into the prior year end account balance. For how to calculate the prior year end account balance and other general RMD rules, see ¶ 1.5.05 of *Life and Death Planning for Retirement Benefits*.

Chart I-A: RMDs for one non-spouse beneficiary; Participant died before RBD

“PART” references refer to applicable section of this Outline

You must read preceding page, as well as notes following each chart, to understand the charts

| Beneficiary | Annual distributions required beginning year AFTER participant’s death (Note 1) | Required Terminal Distribution (100% distribution required) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| EDB: Minor child of participant PART 3, #6. | Annual distributions over child’s life expectancy (Note 1) unless 10-year rule applies (Note 2). | Year that contains the 10 th anniversary of earlier of the child’s death or 21 st birthday. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(1), (3), (4). Or year that contains 10 th anniversary of participant’s death if 10-year rule applies (Note 2). |
| EDB: Disabled or chronically ill individual; or not more than 10 years younger individual. PART 3, #7, #8 | Annual distributions over beneficiary’s life expectancy (Note 1) unless 10-year rule applies (Note 2) | Final year of EDB’s life expectancy or (if earlier) year that contains the 10 th anniversary of EDB’s death. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(1), (3). Or year that contains 10 th anniversary of participant’s death if 10-year rule applies (Note 2) |
| Plain old designated beneficiary (PODB) PART 3, #3. | None. No distributions required in Years 1-9. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(3). | Year that contains the 10 th anniversary of participant’s death. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(3). |
| Non-DB (e.g., participant’s estate, or a trust that does not qualify as a designated beneficiary) | None. No distributions required in Years 1-4 (or 1-5, if participant died in 2015-2019). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(2). | Year that contains the 5 th anniversary of participant’s death (or 6 th anniversary, if participant died in 2015–2019). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(2). |

1. Life-expectancy RMDs to a non-spouse EDB commence the year after the year of participant’s death. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(4), § 1.401(a)(9)-5(a)(2)(iii). Life expectancy of a non-spouse EDB is NOT recalculated annually. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(3)(iii).

2. If the participant died before his RBD, the 10-year rule MAY apply to an EDB instead of the life expectancy payout; Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(5)(ii), (iii); see PART 3, #4(C), for how this can happen and how to prevent/avoid such treatment.. If the 10-year rule applies, see “PODB” rather than EDB for payout rules.

**Chart I-B: RMDs for participant’s surviving spouse as sole beneficiary:
Participant died before RBD**

This chart applies if the participant died before his RBD, and the participant’s surviving spouse is the sole designated beneficiary of the decedent’s entire account, or of a “separate account” created in accordance with Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-8 (see PART 6 of this Outline). This Chart also applies to a conduit trust (PART 4, #2) for the surviving spouse’s sole life benefit if such trust is the sole beneficiary of the decedent’s entire account (or of a separate account thereof). This Chart shows required minimum distributions only; see Note 5 re *spousal rollover/election* option.

This Chart is effective for the surviving spouse-beneficiary of any decedent who reaches, or would have reached, or will reach, his Applicable Age **in 2024 or later**; see Note 6. The Chart covers two possible “payout periods” for such spouse, the “life expectancy payout deemed elected under 401(a)(9)(B)(iv)” and the “10-year rule.”

If the life expectancy payout applies (see PART 3, #5):

| When distributions to the spouse must begin | Annual distributions required once distributions begin | Required Terminal Distribution (100% distribution required in this year) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Year participant would have reached his Applicable Age, or the year after the year of participant’s death, whichever is later. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(4), (d). Deadline for first RMD (surviving spouse’s “required commencement date”) is Dec. 31 of that year. There is no RMD for the year of the decedent’s death. Notes 1, 2. | Annual distributions are determined under the Uniform Lifetime Table, as if spouse were “the employee.” Note 3. Life expectancy is recalculated annually. | Earliest of: final year of payout to spouse while living (would not be reached until age 120+); or, if spouse died before that point, the earlier of [1] the final year of her single life expectancy or [2] the year that contains the 10 th anniversary of spouse’s death. Note 7. |

If the 10-year rule applies:

See PART 5(A)(vi), (vii), for how the 10-year rule can apply to the surviving spouse if participant dies before his RBD, and for how the spouse can escape the 10-year rule and get a life expectancy payout instead. See PART 5(E) for “catchup” distributions required in some cases if spouse escapes the 10-year rule by rolling over the inherited account into her own IRA or electing to treat the inherited IRA as her own IRA after reaching her own Applicable Age.

If the 10-year rule does apply to the surviving spouse, then 100% distribution of the account is required in the year that contains the 10th anniversary of the decedent’s death. No distributions are required for the year of the decedent’s death or in the following years 1-9. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(3). If the 10-year rule applies, the delayed commencement date that applies when the surviving spouse

is taking a life expectancy payout does NOT apply; the 10 years are measured from the year of the deceased spouse's death, NOT the year he would have reached his Applicable Age. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(d). If the spouse dies before the end of the 10-year period, it appears her successor beneficiary must complete the payout within the 10-year period that applied to the spouse.

Note 1: The Code generally requires that life expectancy payout to a designated beneficiary, based on the beneficiary's life expectancy must begin the year after the year of the participant's death. § 401(a)(9)(b)(iii). However, for the surviving spouse, there can be a deferred commencement date—RMDs to the surviving spouse begin in the year the deceased spouse would have reached his/her Applicable Age, or the year after the year of participant's death, if later. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c). Under the Code, this treatment is elective for the spouse; under the proposed regulations, it is automatic (no election required). § 401(a)(9)(B)(iv); Prop. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(g)(3)(ii)(A). This Chart does not cover the possibility that somehow the spouse elects OUT of this treatment.

Note 2: Because in cases of participant's death prior to the Required Beginning Date the first distribution year is no earlier than the year after the participant's death, and because a decedent could die IN the year he reaches his Applicable Age and still die before his RBD, the required commencement date for the surviving spouse (though generally it is the year decedent would have reached his Applicable Age) is the "later of" that year and the year after the year of the participant's death. If the surviving spouse then dies BEFORE that required commencement date, see Note 4!

Note 3: Life expectancy payments to the surviving spouse are determined using the Uniform Lifetime Table (ULT) (Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-9(c)) "as if" the surviving spouse were "the employee." The ULT is based on the joint and survivor life expectancy of the "employee" [surviving spouse] and a hypothetical 10-years younger individual. Under the Code, this treatment is elective for the spouse; under the regulations, it is automatic (no election required). § 401(a)(9)(B)(iv); Prop. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(g)(3)(ii)(A)

Note 4: The generous payout rules for the surviving spouse have a potential trap: If the surviving spouse dies BEFORE her extended required commencement date, she suddenly is treated as the "participant" and the payout period for her successor beneficiary(ies) is determined using the "death before the RBD" rules. § 401(a)(9)(B)(iv)(III). Thus, for example, if she failed to name a successor beneficiary, and the account defaulted to her estate as beneficiary, the 5-year rule would apply to the spouse's estate. § 401(a)(9)(B)(iv)(II); Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(d).

Note 5: This Chart deals only with required minimum distributions (RMDs). The surviving spouse named as outright beneficiary of a retirement account also has the option to "roll over" distributions from the decedent's account into the S/S's own retirement account or into an "inherited IRA." Reg. § 1.402(c)-2(j)(1)(i); § 1.408-8(d)(1)(ii), (iii). In the case of an inherited IRA, the spouse has the option to elect to treat the inherited IRA as the spouse's own IRA. Reg. § 1.408-8(c). Following such rollover or election, the S/S's RMDs will be calculated using the Uniform Lifetime Table with the spouse as "participant." The rollover option does not apply to any distribution to the S/S that is an RMD. Reg. § 1.402(c)-2(c)(2)(ii). (RMDs are not eligible rollover distributions). The rollover/election options are NOT part of the minimum distribution rules; they are separate spousal

rights. The right to elect to treat an IRA as the spouse's own IRA applies only if the spouse has the unlimited right to withdraw from the IRA, and cannot apply to a trust (even a conduit trust). Reg. § 1.408-8(c)(1)(ii).

Note 6: The effective date of this payout system will be surprising in some situations because it applies to surviving spouses of participants who died before SECURE 2.0 [or even SECURE itself] was enacted: It applies to the surviving spouse of any decedent who reaches *or would have reached* his Applicable Age in 2024 or later. Thus, if the participant died in 2018, in the year he attained or would have attained age 64, that means he was born in 1954. His Applicable Age (under laws passed after his death) was 73. He would have attained his Applicable Age in 2027 if he had lived. If the surviving spouse, as sole beneficiary of the decedent's IRA, is still holding the IRA as beneficiary, she will be required to start taking RMDs as beneficiary (using the Uniform Lifetime Table) in 2027.

Note 7: Recalculation of S/S's life expectancy, and use of the Uniform Lifetime Table, both end with year of S/S's death, and thereafter RMDs to the successor beneficiary continue based on the surviving spouse's remaining SINGLE life expectancy minus one each year. Prop. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(g)(3)(ii)(D). Thus if her death occurs in her age 81 year or later, the payout period for her successor beneficiary(ies) will be less than 10 years (single life expectancy less than 10 years after that age). The spouse's single life expectancy is not recalculated annually for this purpose.

**Chart II: Post-death RMDs to One Beneficiary
Participant Died ON OR AFTER his/her RBD**

| Beneficiary | RMD for year of Participant's death | Annual distributions required in succeeding years | Required Terminal Distribution (100% distribution required in this year) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| EDB: Participant's surviving spouse (S/S) | Balance of participant's RMD if not taken by participant (Note 1) | Annual distributions over greater of spouse's "Uniform Table" life expectancy or decedent's ("ghost") life expectancy (Notes 2, 3). | Earlier of year that contains 10 th anniversary of S/S's death or the final year of a payout based on spouse's <i>single</i> life expectancy starting the year after spouse's death (Note 4) |
| EDB: Minor child of participant | Same—see above | Annual distributions over the greater of the "ghost" life expectancy or the beneficiary's life expectancy (Note 5) | 10 th year after the year of the child's 21 st birthday (or of child's death if he died before age 21). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(2)(ii). |
| EDB: Disabled, Chronically ill, or not more than 10 years younger individual | Same—see above | Annual distributions over the greater of the "ghost" life expectancy or the beneficiary's life expectancy (Note 5) | Earlier of: Year that contains 10 th anniversary of EDB's death or final year of the EDB's life expectancy. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(1), (3) |
| PODB | Same—see above | Annual distributions over the greater of the "ghost" life expectancy or the beneficiary's life expectancy (Notes 5, 6) | Earlier of: (1) year that contains the 10 th anniversary of the participant's death or (2) final year of the beneficiary's life expectancy. (Notes 2, 8) |
| Non-DB (such as participant's estate) | Same—see above | Annual distributions over ghost life expectancy. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(iii), (3)(ii). | Final year of ghost life expectancy. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(iii). |

Notes to Chart II:

1. If participant had not taken the full RMD for the calendar year of his death, the beneficiary must withdraw whatever portion the decedent failed to take by December 31 of the year of death. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(c)(1). If the beneficiary misses that deadline, then, “Unless the Commissioner determines otherwise,” there is an automatic waiver of the excise tax (currently 25%) normally assessed on a missed RMD (§ 4974(a)) if the beneficiary satisfies the year-of-death distribution requirement by taking the distribution “no later than the tax filing deadline (including extensions thereof) for the taxable year of that beneficiary that begins with or within that calendar year (or, if later, the last day of the calendar year following that calendar year).” Reg. § 54.4974-1(g)(3).
2. RMDs to the S/S are a “life expectancy payout” using either the Uniform Lifetime Table (annual RMD is based on the joint life expectancy of spouse and a hypothetical beneficiary 10 years younger than spouse) OR the Single Life Table (based on spouse’s life expectancy only)—spouse elects which applies, though the plan may have a default choice if spouse fails to elect one or the other; OR, if longer, the participant’s life expectancy (“ghost life expectancy”). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(ii), (g)(3)(i); Prop. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(g)(3)(ii)(B), (C). The S/S’s life expectancy is recalculated annually, the ghost life expectancy is not, so they might eventually “cross.” Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(3)(ii), (iv). Recalculation of S/S’s life expectancy ends with year of S/S’s death, and thereafter RMDs to the successor beneficiary continue, based on the surviving spouse’s remaining SINGLE life expectancy minus one each year for up to 10 years (final payout in earlier of 10th year after spouse’s death or final year of spouse’s single life expectancy). Prop. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(g)(3)(ii)(D).
3. This Chart deals only with required minimum distributions (RMDs). The surviving spouse named as outright beneficiary of a retirement account also has the option to “roll over” distributions from the decedent’s account into the S/S’s own retirement account or into an “inherited IRA.” Spousal rollover is not covered in this Outline.
4. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(1), (3).
5. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(ii). Life-expectancy RMDs to a non-spouse designated beneficiary are required to commence the year after the year of the participant’s death. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(i) (2d sentence); § 1.401(a)(9)-5(a)(3) (2d sentence). Life expectancy of a nonspouse EDB is not recalculated annually. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(3)(iii).
6. The rule for PODBs in case of participant’s death after the RBD is the 10-year rule limit, unless the payout ends earlier under the “greater of” (PODB’s or participant’s life expectancy) rule. The “greater of” rule might come into play for a PODB if the beneficiary is a see-through accumulation trust with multiple designated beneficiaries; this Chart II does not cover trusts or multiple beneficiary situations, see Chart IV instead.

**Chart III: RMDs to a Trust Named as Beneficiary of a Retirement Account
If Participant Died BEFORE RBD**

NOTES FOLLOW CHART IV; SEE NOTE 1 BEFORE USING THIS CHART

| Type of trust that inherited the account | Annual distributions required beginning year after Participant's death | Required Terminal Distribution (100% distribution required in this year) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Trust that does not qualify as a DBT; a Non-DB. | None. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(2). | Year that contains 5 th anniversary of participant's death (6 th year if death occurred in 2015-2019). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(2). |
| Conduit trust for one beneficiary who is a PODB or EDB | Same RMD "deal" as would apply to that PODB or EDB if named directly as beneficiary; see Charts I-A and I-B. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(3), (6)(i) (Example 1). Note 2. | Same as would apply if that PODB or EDB were named directly as beneficiary (see Chart I). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(f)(1)(ii), (3)(i)(B), (6)(i) (Example 1). Note 2. |
| Applicable Multi-Beneficiary Trust (AMBT) | Annual distributions over life expectancy of oldest countable D/CI beneficiary. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(1)(i), (ii). Note 2. | Earlier of: Final year of the life expectancy payout or year that contains the 10 th anniversary of the death of the last-to-die D/CI beneficiary of the trust. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(2)(iii). Note 2. |
| DBT which has at least one countable minor-child-EDB | Annual distributions over life expectancy of the oldest countable beneficiary of the trust (NOT just the oldest minor-child EDB). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(1)(i). | 10 th year after the earliest point at which there is no living minor child-EDB who is under age 21. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(2)(ii). |
| DBT which is none of the above, but all countable beneficiaries of which are EDBs | Annual distributions over the life expectancy of the oldest countable beneficiary of the trust. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(1)(i). Note 2. | Year of 10 th anniversary of death of oldest countable beneficiary. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(1), (3), (f)(2)(i). Note 2. |
| DBT trust which is none of the above | 10-year rule applies; no annual distributions. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(1), (3), (5)(i)(B). | Year containing 10 th anniversary of the participant's death. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(2). |

Chart IV: RMDs to a Trust: if Participant Died AFTER RBD
See Note 3 for *all beneficiaries*; all notes for this Chart are on next page

| Type of trust that inherited the account | Annual distributions required beginning year after Participant's death | Required Terminal Distribution (100% distribution required in this year) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Trust that does not qualify as a DBT; a Non-DB. | Annual distributions over ghost life expectancy. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(iii). | Final year of ghost life expectancy. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(iii). |
| Conduit trust for one beneficiary who is a PODB or an EDB | Same RMD “deal” as would apply to that PODB or EDB if named directly as beneficiary: see Chart II. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(1)(ii). See Note 4. | Same as would apply if PODB were named directly as beneficiary. See Chart II. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(1)(ii). |
| Type II AMBT | Annual distributions over life expectancy of oldest countable D/CI beneficiary (or, if longer, ghost life expectancy). Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(1)(i), (ii). | Year that contains the 10 th anniversary of the death of the last D/CI beneficiary of the trust to die. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(2)(iii). |
| DBT which has at least one countable minor-child-EDB | Annual distributions over life expectancy of oldest countable trust beneficiary or ghost life expectancy if longer. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(ii), (f)(1)(i). | 10 th year after the point at which there is no living minor child-EDB who is under age 21. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(2)(ii). |
| DBT which is none of the above, but all countable beneficiaries of which are EDBs | Annual distributions over life expectancy of oldest countable beneficiary of the trust or over ghost life expectancy if longer. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(ii), (f)(1)(i). | Final year of applicable life expectancy, or if earlier year that contains 10 th anniversary of death of the oldest EDB. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(1), (3); (f)(2)(i). Note 3. |
| DBT trust which is none of the above | Annual distributions over life expectancy of oldest countable trust beneficiary or ghost life expectancy if longer. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(d)(1)(ii), (f)(1)(i). Note 4. | Year that contains the 10 th anniversary of the participant's death. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-4(e)(2)(i), § 1.401(a)(9)-5(e)(2). |

NOTES TO CHARTS III and IV

NOTE 1: Though these charts apply specifically to trusts, the same RMD rules apply to any retirement account that had multiple designated beneficiaries, even if there is no trust involved. To apply in that situation, just apply the charts as though your multiple DBs were countable beneficiaries of a designated beneficiary trust. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(f)(1)(i).

Charts III and IV summarize the information provided in PART 5 of this Outline, “DETERMINING THE APPLICABLE DENOMINATOR FOR A TRUST.” To use Charts III and IV, you must FIRST determine who are the “countable beneficiaries” of the trust you are testing; see PART 4. You cannot use Charts III and IV for a trust unless you have first read and understood PART 4, “RMD RULES FOR TRUSTS; HOW TO TEST A TRUST.” To determine the countable beneficiaries, you will also need to learn along the way the difference between a designated beneficiary trust (DBT) and a trust that does not qualify as a designated beneficiary and the difference between a conduit trust and an accumulation trust. *See PART 4!!!!*

NOTE 2: If the participant died before his RBD, the retirement plan may require that the 10-year rule “will apply” to some or all EDBs in place of the life expectancy payout; OR allow an EDB to elect the 10-year rule instead of life expectancy payout; OR allow the participant to elect that the 10-year rule shall apply to the EDB instead of life expectancy payout. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-3(c)(5)(ii), (iii). For details on this election, see PART 3, #4(C).

NOTE 3: If the decedent had not taken the full RMD for the calendar year of his death, the beneficiary must withdraw whatever portion the decedent failed to take by December 31 of the year of the participant’s death. Reg. § 1.401(a)(9)-5(c)(1), last two sentences. If the beneficiary misses that deadline, then, “Unless the Commissioner determines otherwise” (???), there is an automatic waiver of the excise tax (currently 25%) normally assessed on a missed RMD (§ 4974(a)) if the beneficiary satisfies the year-of-death distribution requirement by taking the distribution “no later than the tax filing deadline (including extensions thereof) for the taxable year of that beneficiary that begins with or within that calendar year (or, if later, the last day of the calendar year following that calendar year).” Reg. § 54.4974-1(g)(3).

NOTE 4: For a PODB and for the successor beneficiary to an EDB [but NOT for the EDB him/herself!], RMDs for the years 2021–2024 may be “skipped” without consequence; see discussion of Notices 2022-53, 2023-54, and 2024-35 at PART 3, #1(F).

