



THE PIER

Photo of Wrightsville Beach, NC

Planning | Investment | Engagement | Retirement

Refreshing Your Financial Priorities for 2026

As we flip the calendar to 2026, it's a good time to reassess your financial picture and set your priorities for the year ahead. With economic conditions continuing to evolve, focusing on the fundamentals can help you stay prepared, reduce stress, and make progress towards your long-term financial goals.

Revisit and Refine Your Budget

Rising costs and lifestyle changes can quietly throw a budget off track. Review your 2025 spending, adjust for new expenses and set realistic limits that reflect your current priorities. Refreshing your budget creates clarity and helps ensure your money is working where it matters most.

Strengthen Your Emergency Savings

Unexpected expenses are a fact of life but having a financial cushion can make all the difference. An emergency fund is essential for financial stability. Most should set a goal of three to six months of essential expenses in an account that can be easily accessed such as a high yield savings. If you have to dip into your savings, it's important to make replenishing your emergency savings a priority.

Prioritize Retirement and Long-Term Savings

A strong retirement strategy often draws from multiple sources. Benefit-eligible employees working 30 hours or more a week are required to participate in one of the Mandatory Retirement Plans, either the UNC Optional Retirement Program (ORP) or the Teachers' and State Employees' Retirement System (TSERS).



You may also want to consider increasing your retirement savings through a UNC Supplemental 403(b) and/or a 457(b) plan.

Tools and Resources Are Available

As you are updating your financial plan, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. UNC offers complimentary services and tools through our retirement carrier, TIAA and CAPTRUST, our retirement investment advisors.

For more Financial Education topics from TIAA, [click here](#) or you can schedule a retirement planning session with a TIAA Financial Consultant by [clicking here](#).

To meet one-on-one with CAPTRUST for assistance with your financial plan, [click here](#) to schedule a virtual appointment.

To enroll in the Supplemental UNC 403(b), complete the [2026 403\(b\) Salary Reduction Agreement Form](#).

To enroll in the Supplemental UNC 457(b), complete the [2026 457\(b\) Voluntary Salary Deferral Agreement Form](#).



What's Changing with the SECURE Act 2.0

On September 15, 2025, the U.S. Department of the Treasury and the IRS issued final regulations under SECURE Act 2.0, Section 603 provisions related to 401(k), 403(b), and 457(b) catch-up contributions for certain higher-income participants.

Beginning January 1, 2026, participants age 50 or older who earned \$150,000 or more in FICA wages in 2025 (as reported in Box 3 of the W-2) and who contribute catch-up amounts to the UNC 403(b) or UNC 457(b) plans will be required to make those catch-up contributions on a Roth after-tax basis.

Roth catch-up contributions are taxed when contributed, but qualified withdrawals—including eligible earnings—are tax-free if IRS requirements are met.

For full details about the changes for the SECURE Act 2.0 Section 603 Provisions, see the [UNC Secure 2.0 Provision 603 Roth Notice](#).

2026 IRS Annual Contribution Limits

The tax law places limits on the dollar amount of contributions to retirement plans and IRAs and the amount of benefits under a pension plan. IRC Section 415 requires the limits to be adjusted annual for cost-of-living increases.

The limit on contributions by employees who participate in the 401(k), 403(b), and most 457(b) plans increased to \$24,500.

The catch-up contribution limit for employees age 50 and over who participate in these plans increased to \$8,000.

To enroll or increase your UNC Supplemental Retirement Plan(s) contributions, complete the corresponding form linked below and turn it in to your Institution's Benefits Office. If you are newly enrolling in the UNC Supplemental Retirement plans, be sure to visit tiaa.org/unc to select your investments and beneficiaries. If you are increasing your contributions, it's a great time to review your investments and ensure your beneficiaries are up-to-date.

To enroll or change your contribution in the Supplemental UNC 403(b), complete the [2026 403\(b\) Salary Reduction Agreement Form](#).

To enroll or update your contribution in the Supplemental UNC 457(b), complete the [2026 457\(b\) Voluntary Salary Deferral Agreement Form](#).





Outwitting Hackers and Avoiding Scams

Laura Kirkland, a 78-year-old retiree, lost \$15,000 after a caller posing as a bank fraud specialist convinced her that her account had been hacked. Sounding credible and armed with personal details, the scammer persuaded her to grant computer access and wired the money overseas before she realized it was a fraud.

Scams like this are increasingly common. Cybercrime is now the primary way money is stolen, affecting millions of Americans each year. Criminals often impersonate banks or authorities, create a sense of urgency, and use personal data gathered from public records, email breaches, or social media to appear legitimate. Newer schemes include fake “account hacked” calls and AI-driven kidnapping scams that clone voices of loved ones.

If You’ve Been Scammed

What to do depends on how and what was breached. The first step is to figure out what happened and why and then take steps to minimize the damage. This could be as simple as changing a password or as complicated as freezing your bank, custodial, and credit accounts, and making filings with the FTC, FBI, and local law enforcement.

How to Protect Yourself

- *Don’t talk to strangers.* Don’t answer calls from people who aren’t in your contact list. A legitimate person will leave a message and a callback number.
- *Approach with Caution.* Most successful scams attempt to get you to act quickly and will sound like an authority figure. Be skeptical, and don’t get swept up in their urgency.
- *Assume the worst.* Neither your bank nor government agencies like the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) will call you about a problem. The bank will freeze your account; the IRS will send you a letter.
- *Don’t share PII.* Do not provide personally identifiable information (PII)—like passwords, and account, credit card, or Social Security numbers—to anyone who calls you on the phone. Legitimate service providers don’t typically ask for this kind of information over the phone.
- *Call back.* If you suspect you’re getting lured into a scam, hang up and call your bank, broker, or other service provider at a verified number.
- *Protect your social media accounts.* Criminals can use photos, videos, and check-ins shared on social media to target you unless you engage privacy settings on these accounts.

For the full article on *Outwitting Hackers and Avoiding Scams* from CAPTRUST, [click here](#).

MAKE AN APPOINTMENT WITH A FINANCIAL CONSULTANT TO DISCUSS YOUR FINANCIAL GOALS AND FUTURE RETIREMENT PLANS

Vendor	Plan Options	Reservation Tool	Individual Advisory Service
CAPTRUST at Work	Investment advice for all plans	www.captrustatwork.com	www.captrustatwork.com/
TIAA	UNC ORP 401(a) UNC 403(b) and 457(b)	www.tiaa.org/schedulenow	1-866-842-3519
EMPOWER <small>Previously Prudential</small>	State's 401(k) State's 457(b)	1-866-627-5267	1-866-627-5267

CAPTRUST at Work

The Joy of Missing Out

Retirement promises freedom, but without boundaries, that freedom can quickly vanish. Coffee dates, volunteer roles, and favors pile up until you're just as busy as before, only this time it's unpaid. Saying no isn't selfish; it's how you protect the life you worked decades to build.

For many people, saying no feels uncomfortable because we learned early that approval equals safety. As adults, guilt reinforces that fear, leading to people-pleasing and chronic over commitment.

Retirement makes boundaries even more important. Free time doesn't mean availability. Without intention, your calendar becomes everyone else's convenience.

The solution is simple but not easy: build your days around what matters most and say no to what doesn't. Treat your time like a castle—you control the drawbridge. Pause before committing, skip the apologies, expect pushback, and hold steady.

A well-chosen no makes room for a joyful yes—and that's what retirement is meant to offer.

[Click here](#) for CAPTRUST at Work's full article on *The Joy of Missing Out*.

TIAA

Importance of Updating Beneficiaries

A beneficiary is a person or organization you name to receive the money in your retirement account after you pass away. Many individuals name a primary beneficiary and a contingent beneficiary. The primary beneficiary is the first person or organization that is entitled to your assets. The contingent beneficiary is essentially the backup. They will be entitled to your assets if the primary beneficiary predeceases the account holder or passes away before the proceeds are dispersed.

Naming a beneficiary on your retirement account may be the most important financial move you can make that takes the least amount of effort. That's because, if no beneficiary is named on your account, the money will typically need to go through probate court before it's distributed to your heirs according to your will (or according to state law if you have no will).

Simply put, the fastest, most efficient, and least frustrating way to ensure that the people (and potentially organizations) you love have access to this money is to name them as your beneficiaries.

For full details on *The Importance of Beneficiary Designations*, read TIAA's full article by [clicking here](#).

Engagement Corner

Various retirement readiness resources and tools will be provided each month to help you learn more about how to live a financially well life, save more toward a comfortable retirement future, and gain additional knowledge on many other key retirement topics (Social Security, Medicare, etc.). We encourage you to take advantage of all available resources.

Upcoming Webcasts & Webinars

TIAA: www.tiaa.org/webinars2025

January 6th @ 11am ET:
Naming Your Beneficiaries: Why It Matters

January 14th @ 12pm ET:
Quarterly Economic and Market Update

February 12th @ 12pm ET:
Yours, Mine, Ours: Finances for Blended Families

February 24th @ 11am ET:
Managing Your Finances During and After a Divorce

March 11th @ 11am ET:
Your Guide to Living Well in Retirement

March 26th @ 12pm ET:
Understanding Required Minimum Distributions (RMD)

Resource Center

Below are two of the many great resources available to assist with preparing and educating you on your path to financial wellness.



Your Mandatory Retirement Plan 2026 Decision Guide



Your Supplemental Retirement Plan 2026 Decision Guide



More resources available at:

<https://myapps.northcarolina.edu/hr/benefits-leave/retirement/>

or contact the approved carriers directly.

Start Saving for your Future Today!



ARE YOU ON TRACK?

Am I on track?

Let's start with you

This can help you estimate how much you might need in retirement.

Current age: Your salary: What if I'm hourly?:

Would you like to include Social Security?
 Yes No

TIAA offers various tools to provide you with a clear picture of your current retirement savings. Take action to see if you are adequately prepared to meet your long-term goals.

Need a Retirement Blueprint?

CAPTRUST has many great financial calculators to help you see where you stand with your future financial goals

Visit www.captrustatwork.com or call 800-967-9948 to talk with a certified Financial Counselor to create your future financial "Blueprint"

Disclaimer

The information in this newsletter is general in nature and may be subject to change. Neither The University of North Carolina (UNC), Empower Retirement, TIAA, nor any of their agents, can give legal or tax advice. Applicable laws and regulations are complex and subject to change. For legal and tax advice concerning your situation, you should consult your attorney or tax adviser.

For more information about any of the authorized supplemental retirement carriers or their products, including investment options or charges and expenses, please contact a company representative for a prospectus. Please read the prospectus carefully before selecting a carrier or investment option. In the event of a conflict between this guide and the Plan documents, the Plan documents will take precedent. The UNC System reserves the right to amend the Plan documents.