

Employer Readiness Environment Testing Guide

Who Should Read This Guide?

This guide (version 1.0) is intended for organizations who currently report contribution or employment information directly, or through their respective County Office of Education, to CalSTRS today using the Secure Employer Website (SEW). The types of organizations and staff resources who should read this guide are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Overview of Document Audience

Audience Type	Audience Description
Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Offices of Education • School Districts • Community Colleges • Charter Schools
Vendors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payroll Software Vendors • Third Party Administrators • IT Contractors
Staff Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payroll Staff • Human Resources Staff • IT Staff

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1. Introduction

This guide is part of the Employer Toolkit which is a collection of documents intended to support your testing efforts during Soft Launch. The Employer Toolkit is comprised of technical specifications, checklists and other support documents and is located in the Tools and Resources section of the Employer Support Portal.

This guide is a key resource aimed at supporting you and your organization in completing the testing success criteria in preparation for the implementation of the new Secure Employer Website. The Employer Readiness Environment is now available to all employers who report contribution and employment data to CalSTRS until cutover activities begin two months prior to implementation, which is currently scheduled for Fall 2021.

This guide is organized into sections.

- Section 1 – Introduction
- Section 2 – Getting Ready to Test
- Section 3 – Understanding the Employer Testing Environment
- Section 4 – Meeting the Employer Readiness Success Criteria
- Section 5 – Terms and Acronyms

A glossary of terms and acronyms, including hyperlinks, is included in Section 5, Support Resources. If you need additional assistance, please contact your Employer Services Representative.

2. Getting Ready to Test

The Employer Readiness Environment is a production-like environment built to simulate the employer functions that will be implemented with the new Secure Employer Website. This environment is where you can test the new methods of reporting contribution and employment data to CalSTRS in preparation for the new Secure Employer Website. The files and/or data you submit in the Employer Readiness Environment do not replace your monthly reporting in the current production Secure Employer Website. During Soft Launch, consider completing your monthly payroll reporting in production first, and then perform the same reporting in the Employer Readiness Environment to compare results.

The Employer Readiness Team assists with the registration of one System Administrator for each Report Source; System Administrators have the ability to establish additional users in the environment. You will need to identify which users in your organization need access and what system permissions they will need. Report Sources can have multiple System Administrators as well as designate System Administrators at Report Units. You can register new users in the system in accordance with your own processes and at your convenience. If you are supported by a payroll software vendor or third-party administrator, you will need to coordinate providing them system access in the Employer Readiness Environment as well. For data security purposes, it is recommended that user access is selectively granted and actively monitored.

Getting set-up and testing transactions in the Employer Readiness Environment generates notification messages. Since testing activities are typically iterative, it is likely users will receive multiple notifications from the Employer Readiness Environment (e.g., “NoReply@CalSTRS.CA.Gov”). As a reminder, notifications related to production activities and results are sent from “CalSTRS Secure Employer Website <reply@CalSTRS.com>”.

2.1 Schedule and Prepare for an Employer Readiness Visit

If you represent a Report Source and are ready to begin testing, email the Employer Readiness Team at PSEmployerReadiness@calstrs.com to schedule an in-person or online Soft Launch Readiness Visit. This visit is the gateway to the testing environment and the orientation to employer testing and readiness activities to be completed during Soft Launch. If you represent a Report Unit or vendor and are ready to begin testing, contact your Report Source to gain access to the testing environment.

2.2 Employer Support Portal

The Employer Support Portal is a centralized support location for employers that contains all documentation and resources employers need during Soft Launch. The portal houses links to the Employer Readiness Environment, Pension Administration Learning Management System and the Secure Employer Website. The portal also has a message board to communicate system outages, database refreshes and other important announcements related to Soft Launch. If you have questions or need additional assistance, please contact your Report Source or your Employer Services Representative.

2.3 Register in the Pension Administration Learning Management System

Computer-based training courses are available to educate employers on the new Secure Employer Website system functionality in the Pension Administration Learning Management System (PALMS). Each class includes several modules that provide a wide range of topics that users will need to understand to successfully test files in the Employer Readiness Environment. Each course also includes knowledge checks to ensure that you understood the course material. The computer-based training topics covered during Soft Launch will include:

- Registration and Login
- SEW Navigation
- Manage Employer Contacts
- Contribution File Processing
- Reviewing Contribution Data
- Data Validation

- Electronic Content Management
- Access Employee Information
- Introduction to Contribution Reporting
- Contribution File Upload
- Manage Data/Submitting to CalSTRS
- Employment File Upload
- Employment File Processing
- Online Employment Transactions

Initially, only a small subset of these topics is available in PALMS, but new modules and courses will be implemented over time. New training announcements will be posted in the Message Board on the Employer Support Portal as they become available during Soft Launch.

A [PALMS Instructions](#) job aid has been created to assist you in registering for an account in PALMS which will allow you to enroll in classes.

2.4 Understand Old File Format vs. New File Format Testing

The Employer Readiness Environment is a non-production environment that employers will use to test both their current and future reporting files. The Employer Toolkit refers to F496 Files, VDF Files and MR87 Files that are used in production today as Old File Formats (OFF). The new reporting files, Contribution and Employment Files, to be used in the new Secure Employer Website will be referred to as New File Formats (NFF). The purpose of Soft Launch is for all Report Sources to successfully submit reporting files to CalSTRS, in either the OFF or NFF.

The Employer Readiness Environment supports testing of both NFF files (Contribution – DB/CB, Employment, Accounts Receivable and Match) as well as OFF files (F496, VDF, Address, MR87 and Match). Reporting of OFF or NFF files is controlled by a system setting per Report Source that is maintained by CalSTRS. An employer can only report OFF or NFF files based on this setting; employers cannot report both formats at the same time. The Report Source setting also applies to any Report Units associated to the Report Source.

By default, each Report Source and their Report Units are set to report OFF files. CalSTRS recommends testing OFF files before you begin testing NFF files. Once you have completed OFF testing, contact your Employer Service Representative to change

the setting to NFF. Please note that once a Report Source submits NFF data it cannot be set back to OFF until a database refresh. Refer to the [Employer Readiness Environment Maintenance Dates](#) section for specific dates.

Please note that employers who are:

- Uploading contribution or employment files will need to obtain CalSTRS Client IDs using the Match File in order to test NFF files. If applicable, CalSTRS Client IDs may need to be securely provided to a payroll software vendor.
- Submitting account receivable data using the Employer Application Suite will need to submit this data online in the new Secure Employer Website or use the NFF Contribution File.
- Unable to create an NFF Contribution File from their payroll system may be able to build one manually in Microsoft Excel. A template and instructions for creating a .csv file in Microsoft Excel is available on the Employer Support Portal.

3. Understanding the Employer Readiness Environment

The Employer Readiness Environment is intended to be as production-like as possible but is not subject to production levels of service with regard to uptime or the timeframes for remediating issues. While the environment hardware and software are robust, not all transactions are guaranteed to complete in a timely manner. Please notify your Employer Services Representative if you are experiencing processing times that deviate from those anticipated in production as outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Anticipated Production Processing Times

Transaction Type	Processing Time
Standard - Transaction	Less than or equal to 1.5 seconds
Complex - Transaction	Greater than 2.5 seconds and less than or equal to 4.5 seconds
Standard - Report	Less than or equal to < 5 seconds
Complex - Report	Greater than 10 seconds and less than or equal to 30 seconds
Employer Files	Process to completion within 60 minutes

3.1 Web Browser Compatibility

The Employer Readiness Environment is compatible with the most current version and one prior version of the following web browsers:

- Microsoft Internet Explorer¹
- Google Chrome
- Microsoft Edge
- Mozilla Firefox

Please ensure you are using one of the listed web browsers when accessing the Employer Readiness Environment.

¹ Initially during Soft Launch, you will not be able to print Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) documents unless you are using Microsoft Internet Explorer.

3.2 Converted SEW Users

Active users from SEW have been converted into the Employer Readiness Environment. To prevent every user from receiving the registration email when conversion completed, a 'cnv' extension was appended to each user's email address. During Soft Launch, employers should enter new users for the purposes of testing only in the Employer Readiness Environment. Employers can also evaluate the list of converted users for accuracy, gaps, and appropriateness of user roles. In preparation for FR2 go live, employers should make any necessary changes directly in the Secure Employer Website, so they are implemented during FR2 conversion.

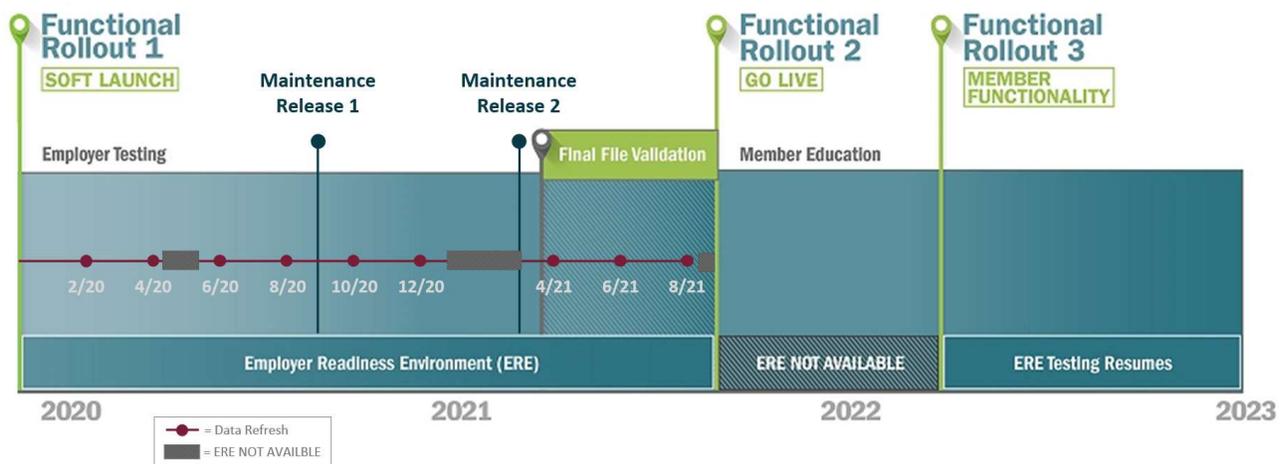
3.3 Testing Data Date

To successfully process and test files in the Employer Readiness Environment, employers must use test files with data that is as current as the production data snapshot date in the Employer Readiness Environment. The current data date is shown in the New Announcements section on the Dashboard in the testing environment and will be communicated in the Message Board on the Employer Support Portal.

3.4 Employer Readiness Environment Maintenance

The Employer Readiness Environment undergoes regular maintenance and updates as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Employer Readiness Environment Timeline



Monthly Database Updates

On the fourth Sunday of each month the Employer Readiness Environment database will be updated with the latest, necessary patches and security updates identified as part of CalSTRS environment management and maintenance practices.

Bi-Monthly Database Refreshes

Approximately every two months the database in the Employer Readiness Environment will be refreshed with an updated production snapshot of data. Any test data that has been uploaded and submitted in the test environment will be deleted. Though the underlying database will be refreshed with the new production data as of a certain date at each scheduled refresh, employer users that have been setup in the environment will NOT be deleted and will remain in the system after the refresh. Users will not need to be re-established after each refresh.

CalSTRS tentatively has refreshes scheduled the last weekend of the following months:

- February 2020
- March 2020
- May 2020
- July 2020
- November 2020
- March 2021
- May 2021
- July 2021

Updates regarding the dates and status of each data refresh will be available in the Announcements section of the Employer Support Portal.

Scheduled Maintenance Releases

There are two major maintenance releases scheduled during the Soft Launch testing period. Each maintenance release will introduce new functionality that will affect employer testing. The impact of each maintenance release on employer testing activities will be documented in Release Notes which accompany each major maintenance release and are located in the Employer Toolkit on the Employer Support Portal. The first maintenance release is scheduled for September 2020 and the second

maintenance release is scheduled for March 2021. CalSTRS requests that all employers upload and submit a final contribution file after the last maintenance release to ensure your files will process appropriately in the new Secure Employer Website.

Please monitor the Employer Support Portal message board for the latest communications regarding database updates, database refreshes and the maintenance releases.

3.5 Environment Batch Jobs

The Employer Readiness Environment is configured with many batch jobs that simulate transactions. Many batch jobs are immediate and occur seamlessly while end users are processing transactions. Other batch jobs occur at daily, monthly, or other intervals and may need to be considered when testing files. Table 3 shows the batch jobs scheduled to run in the Employer Readiness Environment.

Table 3: Employer Readiness Environment Batch Jobs

Job ID	Job Name	Timing	Job Description
8	Employer Address File Processing	Immediate	Processes Employer Address.
9	Employer Match Response File	Immediate	Creates the response file based on the match file uploaded by the employer.
10	Create Cash Balance Reporting Schedule	Monthly	Generates ESS Message Board notifications to the Employer Contacts to submit new fiscal year schedule for active Cash Balance programs.
11	Process MR87 Enrollment File	Immediate	Processes the MR87 Enrollment File.
12	F496 Contribution File Processing	Immediate	Processes the F496 Contribution File.
13	VDF Contribution File Processing	Immediate	Processes the VDF Contribution File.
16	Employer Contribution Report Posting	Immediate	Posts Employer Contribution Report.
18	Payroll Header Validation	Immediate	Validates payroll detail when user executes validate Payroll Detail in header.

Job ID	Job Name	Timing	Job Description
91	Process Employment File	Immediate	Processes the Employment File.
92	Employer Contribution Processing Batch	Immediate	Takes uploaded Contribution file and creates the appropriate records.
93	Pay Rate Update for Outgrowth Batch	Monthly	Updates the Annualized Pay Rate for transactions with a Service Type of Outgrowth.
127	Process Employment Detail Clean-up	Daily	Updates the status of old and outdated employment detail records to Void.
999 - CR125	Payroll Summary Deletion	Daily	Hard deletes payroll summaries that have been marked for deletion.

3.6 Reports

Employers can practice generating the following reports which are available in the Employer Readiness Environment:

- Employee Status Change Report
- ESS Compensation Cap Threshold Report
- Missing Report Units
- Outstanding Adjustments
- Void / Reject / Suppressed / Informational Detail Lines Report

4. Meeting the Employer Readiness Success Criteria

CalSTRS will track your progress in the Employer Readiness Environment throughout Soft Launch using a set of testing requirements called the employer Success Criteria. Each Report Source is expected to complete a series of activities to meet a set of mandatory success criteria. The criteria are the same for both OFF and NFF processing. The mandatory success criteria focus on registering system users and contribution and enrollment reporting. Completion of the mandatory success criteria demonstrates a sufficient level of readiness to use the new Secure Employer Website. Although not required, recommended success criteria enable employers to familiarize themselves and gain confidence using other features within the new system. To validate the completion of each success criterion, employers are required to contact their Employer Services Representative and indicate which success criterion they have completed and provide the details pertaining to each success criterion. The [Employer Success Criteria Checklist](#) job aid describes each success criterion and the details to be provided to CalSTRS. The following sub-sections describe each success measure and how to successfully complete them.

4.1 Mandatory Success Criteria

#1 - Register a System Administrator

A system administrator can grant access to the system as well as set user roles/permissions. Each Report Source must register a system administrator. Report Units can have a system administrator as well, but it will be up to the Report Source to allow a system administrator at the Report Unit level. System administrators at the Report Unit level can only administer users for their Report Unit. System administrators at the Report Source level can administer users for the Report Source and their respective Report Units. In order to complete this success criteria, when registering a user select the admin contact type check box. For step by step instructions on how to register a system administrator refer to the [Managing Employer Contacts](#) job aid.

#2 - Register a Payroll User

A payroll user can upload contribution files and submit enrollments. Most employer users will have this role assigned to them. In order to complete this success criteria, when registering a user select the payroll contact type check box. For step by step instructions on how to register payroll users refer to [Managing Employer Contacts](#) and [Employer Contact Types](#) job aids.

#3 - Submit Enrollment Transactions

Enrollment transactions can be submitted manually via screen entry or by file upload. In order to complete this success criteria, you must submit at least 10 enrollment transactions. For step by step instructions on how to submit enrollment transactions refer to [Submitting an Online Employment Transaction](#) job aid.

#4 - Upload and Submit Defined Benefit (DB) Contribution File

The Employer Readiness Environment is initially set for employers to upload OFF DB contribution files (i.e., F496). CalSTRS recommends you complete the criterion for OFF before you complete the NFF DB contribution files. Once a Report Source submits NFF data it cannot be set back to OFF until the next database refresh. Also, the OFF/NFF setting applies to all Report Units associated to a Report Source.

In order to complete this success criterion, you must upload and submit one or more DB contribution files that approximate a normal monthly volume of transactions and contain all of your active DB Report Units. The number of contribution lines should be within 10% of the total lines submitted for the same month in the production environment (SEW). If the equivalent month has not yet been submitted in production, then it will be compared to the same month from the last fiscal year.

Submitting a file will require correction or voiding of transactions in review status. CalSTRS requests that you correct at least two of each error type to familiarize yourself with the correction process. If more than two errors exist for an error type, you can choose to correct the additional errors or void them.

Report Units who upload their own files must coordinate with their Report Source to submit contribution transactions to CalSTRS.

For step by step instructions on how to upload and submit Defined Benefit contribution files refer to [Uploading a Contribution File](#) job aid.

#5 - Upload and Submit Cash Balance Contribution File

The Employer Readiness Environment is initially set for employers to submit OFF CB contribution files (i.e., VDF). CalSTRS recommends you complete the criterion for OFF before you complete the NFF CB contribution files. Once a Report Source submits NFF data it cannot be set back to OFF until a database refresh. Also, the OFF/NFF setting applies to all Report Units associated to a Report Source.

This success criterion is only applicable to Cash Balance employers. In order to complete this success criterion, you must upload and submit one or more CB contribution files that approximate a normal pay schedule of transactions and contain all of your active CB Report Units. The number of contribution lines should be within 10% of the total lines submitted for the same pay schedule in the production environment (SEW). If the equivalent pay schedule date has not yet been submitted in production, then it will be compared to the same pay schedule date submitted in the last fiscal year.

Submitting a file will require correction or voiding of transactions in review status.

CalSTRS requests that you correct at least two of each error type to familiarize yourself with the correction process. If more than two errors exist for an error type, you can choose to correct the additional errors or void them.

Report Units who upload their own files must coordinate with their Report Source to submit contribution transactions to CalSTRS.

For step by step instructions on how to upload and submit Cash Balance contribution files refer to [Uploading a Contribution File](#) job aid.

4.2 Recommended Success Criteria

#6 - Merge Payroll Summary Records

When a contribution file is uploaded to the system it automatically creates a payroll summary record. The payroll summary record contains all the contribution lines uploaded on the file. If multiple files are uploaded, a payroll summary record is created for each file.

The system contains a new feature to merge two or more payroll summary records into one payroll summary record. This is an optional feature that some Report Sources may find useful if they are already combining contribution files from Report Units who have separate payroll systems (i.e., offline or independent Report Units).

In order to complete this success criterion, you must merge two or more payroll summary records into one payroll summary. Only payroll summary records for the same pay period can be merged. This will require uploading at least two files for the same pay period. For step by step instructions on how to merge payroll summary records refer to [Managing Payroll Summaries](#) job aid.

#7 - Submit Accounts Receivable Transactions

Accounts receivable transactions (i.e., service credit purchases) can be co-mingled and submitted with regular contribution lines on a contribution file or they can be submitted separately either manually on screen or via file upload. A user must have the Accounts Receivable Contact role in order to manually enter on screen or upload as a file.

In order to complete this success criterion, use one of the three options outlined above to submit accounts receivable transactions. For step by step instructions on how to submit accounts receivable transactions refer to [Submitting an Online Accounts Receivable Transaction](#) job aid.

#8 - Upload and Submit an Employment File

This success criterion is only applicable to employers who intend to submit employment transactions via a file. Users must have the payroll contact role to upload employment files. In order to complete this success criterion, upload/submit an employment file with transactions of your choice (e.g., enrollment, leave of absence, terminations, etc.). For step by step instructions on how to submit an employment file refer to [Uploading an Employment File](#) job aid.

#9 - Submit a Match Request File and View the Match Response File

The match file is a way to synchronize employer records with CalSTRS records (e.g., member vs nonmember, verify enrollments, obtain Client IDs, etc.). In order to complete this success criterion, upload/submit a match request file with at least 10 employee records (i.e., Tax ID and birthdate). After the request has processed view the response file and verify CalSTRS records are synchronized with your records. For step by step instructions on how to submit a match file and view results refer to [Uploading an Employee Match File](#) job aid.

#10 - Send a Secure Message

Secure messaging will not be enabled until after the second and last Maintenance Release currently scheduled for March 2021. In order to complete this success criterion, send a secure message to your Employer Services Representative at CalSTRS.

#11 - Upload a Document

Uploading documents will not be enabled until after the second and last Maintenance Release currently scheduled for March 2021. In order to complete this success criterion, upload a member or employer document (e.g., ES350, ES372, Bargaining Agreement, etc.).

5. Terms and Acronyms

Table 4 lists the common terms and acronyms defined in this document.

Table 4: Terms and Acronyms

Term	Acronym	Definition
Batch Job	-	A scheduled background program that runs on a regular basis without any user intervention.
Computer-based Training	CBT	Self-paced training modules accessible from the web.
<u>Employer Readiness Environment</u>	ERE	A sandbox/testing version of the new Secure Employer Website.
<u>Employer Support Portal</u>	ESP	A website with links to the ERE, PALMS and the SEW. Help materials such as job aids and file specifications. A message board for important announcements related to the ERE.
New File Format	NFF	The new reporting formats (Contribution file and Employment file) that will replace the current reporting formats (F496, VDF, MR87, Address file and Account Receivable file).
Old File Format	OFF	The current reporting formats used to submit Defined Benefit and Cash Balance information (F496, VDF, MR87, Address file and Account Receivable file).
<u>Pension Administration Learning Management System</u>	PALMS	New training system where you can access computer-based training and sign up for in person and webinar style training.
Success Criteria	SC	A set of testing tasks CalSTRS is asking Report Sources to complete to consider them ready for the new reporting system.
<u>Secure Employer Website</u>	SEW	The current production employer reporting system.