

COMPLIMENTARY RESOURCE — 2026 EDITION



The Retirement Account Consolidation Guide

*A Plain-English Guide for People Who've Done the Hard Work —
Now Let's Simplify*

Straightforward strategies for retirement clarity,
account organization, and lasting peace of mind.



INTRODUCTION

You May Have More Accounts Than You Think

If you've worked for decades and saved responsibly, there's a good chance your retirement savings are scattered across multiple institutions — and that's completely normal.

Each job brought a new 401(k). IRAs opened at different times. Annuities purchased for income guarantees. Savings accounts at the bank you happened to use. None of it was a mistake — but the result is a retirement picture you can't fully see.

"The greatest risk isn't a market crash — it's losing track of what you've already built."

5–7

The average number of financial institutions holding assets for a seasoned retiree (TIAA, 2024).

\$35B+

Unclaimed retirement benefits sitting in forgotten accounts annually (Nat'l Registry of Unclaimed Retirement Benefits).

25%

IRS penalty for each missed Required Minimum Distribution — per account, per year.

Why Your Accounts Are Scattered

01

Most people with multiple retirement accounts didn't set out to make things complicated. It happened the same way it happens for almost everyone who's worked for decades and saved responsibly:

- ◆ **Each job brought a new 401(k).** When you left an employer, you may have left the 401(k) behind — because you were busy, because rolling it over felt complicated, or because you simply forgot. After three or four jobs, that's three or four separate accounts.
- ◆ **IRAs opened at different times.** A tax advisor suggested opening a Traditional IRA one year. A few years later, you heard about Roth conversions and opened one at a different brokerage. Each decision made sense at the time.
- ◆ **Annuities purchased for guarantees.** At some point, a guaranteed income stream or principal protection sounded compelling. Annuities are often purchased at a specific moment in life and tend to stay where they are.
- ◆ **Bank accounts for convenience.** A savings account here, a CD there — you used the institution that was handy when the money was available.

■ ADVISOR TIP

Account sprawl is not a sign of poor planning. It's the natural result of decades of responsible saving across a changing life. Before making any moves, take a complete inventory: institution name, account type, and approximate balance for every account you hold.

The Hidden Costs of Account Sprawl

02

Having accounts in many places isn't just inconvenient — it creates real financial and legal risks that are easy to miss until something goes wrong.

- ◆ **You can't see your full picture.** When savings live in six different places, it's nearly impossible to know how you're actually invested. You may be unknowingly over-concentrated in one sector or paying for overlapping funds.
- ◆ **RMDs get complicated.** Once RMDs are required, you must calculate and take a distribution from each IRA separately. Missing even one can trigger a 25% penalty on the amount you should have withdrawn.
- ◆ **Beneficiary designations override your will.** Who gets your retirement accounts is determined by the beneficiary designation on file — not your will. Old accounts frequently list outdated beneficiaries: a former spouse, a parent, or no one at all.
- ◆ **Duplicate fees add up.** Many accounts carry annual maintenance fees, advisory fees, or fund expense ratios. Spread across many accounts, the total cost is higher than it needs to be — and harder to see clearly.
- ◆ **Forgotten accounts are more common than you think.** Billions of dollars in retirement assets go unclaimed every year. If you've changed addresses or lost track of an old employer, it's worth checking the National Registry of Unclaimed Retirement Benefits.

■ ADVISOR TIP

Review your beneficiary designations on every account — not just the accounts you think about most. One outdated designation can undo years of careful estate planning, regardless of what your will says.

What Consolidation Actually Means

03

The word “consolidation” can sound alarming — like you’re being asked to put all your eggs in one basket. That’s not what this means.

What Consolidation Is NOT

Consolidation does not mean putting all your money into a single investment, a single fund, or a single stock. Your diversification across different asset classes and strategies remains intact — or can actually improve.

- ◆ **Rolling old 401(k)s into an IRA.** Once you’ve left an employer, you’re generally eligible to roll that 401(k) into a personal IRA. This gives you more investment options, easier oversight, and often lower fees.
- ◆ **Consolidating multiple IRAs into one.** If you have a Traditional IRA at three different institutions, there’s often no reason they need to stay separate. One well-managed IRA can hold all of it.
- ◆ **Moving savings to fewer banks.** Not all consolidation is about retirement accounts. Simplifying your banking relationships reduces paperwork and makes estate planning cleaner.

The goal is clarity, not just simplicity. A well-consolidated retirement picture is one where you can see your total assets, understand your overall investment strategy, manage distributions efficiently, and know exactly what will happen when you’re no longer here to manage it.

Things to Watch Out For

04

Consolidating retirement accounts is generally straightforward — but there are a few important rules and risks to understand before making any moves.

The 60-Day Rollover Rule

If you receive a check from an old 401(k) and the money passes through your hands, you have 60 days to deposit it into an IRA. Miss that window and the entire amount is treated as a taxable distribution. If you're under 59½, you'll also owe a 10% early withdrawal penalty. Request a direct rollover instead, where the money moves institution to institution without ever touching you.

Annuity Surrender Charges

Annuities often include surrender periods — typically 5 to 10 years — during which withdrawing or transferring the money triggers a surrender charge. Before moving any annuity, review your contract carefully and confirm whether you're still in a surrender period.

RMD Timing

If you're already taking required minimum distributions, an RMD must be taken before a rollover can occur — you cannot roll over the RMD amount itself. Work with a financial professional to coordinate the sequence correctly.

State Tax Considerations

Some states treat certain retirement account distributions differently for state income tax purposes. A tax professional familiar with your state's rules can help you navigate any local wrinkles.

Your Consolidation Checklist

Use this checklist as a starting point before speaking with a financial professional. The more organized you are going in, the more productive your time will be.

- ☐ List every account you have — institution name, account type (401k, IRA, Roth IRA, annuity, savings), and approximate balance
- ☐ Locate the beneficiary designation forms for each account and review who is currently named
- ☐ Identify any old 401(k)s from past employers that are still sitting with those plans
- ☐ Check for surrender charges or surrender periods on any annuities you own
- ☐ Determine whether you are currently taking RMDs — and if so, from which accounts
- ☐ Request your free annual credit report at AnnualCreditReport.com to check for any forgotten accounts
- ☐ Check the National Registry of Unclaimed Retirement Benefits at unclaimedretirementbenefits.com
- ☐ Gather your most recent statements from every account so you have a complete picture in one place
- ☐ Talk to a financial professional before initiating any rollovers or transfers

Note: This checklist is a starting point only. Your situation may involve additional steps or considerations not listed here.

NEXT STEPS

Ready to See Your Full Financial Picture?

The topics covered in this guide are manageable — but only with a personalized strategy built around your accounts, your timeline, and your goals.

REQUEST A COMPLIMENTARY REVIEW

Organize Your Retirement Picture

A licensed financial advisor can review your accounts, identify consolidation opportunities, and help you build a clearer, simpler retirement picture.

REQUEST A FREE CONSULTATION

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