

**nssc**

**NASA Shared Services Center**

# Leave Programs

FY 2019 Annual Report

Version 1

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*Established to provide timely, accurate, high-quality, cost-effective, and customer-focused support for selected NASA business and technical services.*

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## Document History Log

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<b>Status (Basic/Revision/Cancelled)</b>	<b>Revision Date</b>	<b>Description of Change</b>
Basic (Version 1)	February 27, 2020	Basic Release

# Introduction

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## Leave Programs Management Overview

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Shared Services Center (NSSC) Leave Programs Team continues to provide unparalleled customer service, while striving to find ways to improve the quality of that service. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, the Agency's Absence and Leave Policy transitioned to the NSSC. Following a particularly active hurricane season in 2017, NASA implemented an Emergency Leave Transfer Program (ELTP) for employees affected by natural disasters.

The Leave Programs Team continued to focus on evaluating how the Voluntary Leave Bank Program (VLBP), Voluntary Leave Transfer Program (VLTP), and Advanced Sick Leave (ASL) program overlap and require coordination with other functional areas, both within and outside the NSSC. We placed special focus on ensuring the following actions were accomplished:

- Developing processes to provide employees affected by natural disasters the opportunity to receive emergency leave transfer donations to support their recovery efforts.
- Updating the NSSC Leave Programs Web page, located at <https://www.nssc.nasa.gov/leave-programs>.
- Ensuring that employees receive counseling on eligibility for leave programs when entering Leave Without Pay (LWOP) status due to a work-related injury/illness.
- Educating employees about the impact of LWOP on their benefits.
- Counseling employees on disability retirement, when applicable.
- Counseling terminally ill employees on living benefits.
- Ensuring that employees who apply for disability retirement are not using ASL.

The NSSC Leave Programs Team is moving towards an eventful year in FY 2020, aiming to increase services and employee outreach efforts. For more information on upcoming FY 2020 activities, refer to the [What Does the Future Hold?](#) section of this report.

This report provides information for FY 2019. However, since much of the data is collected by Leave Year (LY), it should be noted that the LY is the period beginning with the first full pay period of January.

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# Voluntary Leave Bank Program

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## Overview

VLBP is a benefit available to all NASA employees who meet the eligibility requirements and are current members of the Leave Bank. Almost all employees will experience a medical emergency at some point in their career, and many of these employees will not have enough leave to cover their expected absences.

If the anticipated length of an employee's nonpay status is at least 24 hours due to a medical condition, VLBP is designed to cover at least part of the absence. Nearly 19 percent of Leave Bank members have become leave recipients and have benefited by not losing income during a medical emergency.

Since its inception in FY 2014, VLBP has approved the transfer of over 80,000 leave hours to the leave accounts of NASA employees who have been affected by personal and family medical emergencies. Nearly 20,000 of those hours were transferred during LY 2019. Without this program, many employees would have suffered financial burdens due to medical conditions or family situations outside of their control. The Leave Bank Board approved nearly 100 requests for leave in LY 2019.

## Funding the Leave Bank

The Leave Bank is funded 100 percent by leave donated from NASA employees using the following methods:

- Mandatory annual VLBP membership "fees" (one pay period of an employee's earned leave).
- Gift donations.

In LY 2019, NASA employees generously submitted 419 leave donation requests, which totaled over 14,300 hours of donated leave. These hours have been used to help employees who are experiencing or have a family member who is experiencing cancer, pregnancy, surgery, broken bones, or other medical emergencies. In addition, just over 13,000 hours were transferred to the Leave Bank from membership fee contributions.

NASA ended LY 2019 with just over 68,000 hours in the Leave Bank. Since any remaining Leave Bank hours are maintained (and not subject to use-or-lose requirements), these hours will be used to fund the program in future years.

## Approval Process

To be an approved VLBP leave recipient, the employee must be a member of the VLBP. The employee must also demonstrate that the employee or a family member is experiencing a medical emergency, which requires the employee to enter a nonpay status for at least 24 hours or equivalent proration for part-time employees. All leave recipient requests for VLBP are to be submitted by the employee or the employee's representative through the Web-based Time and Attendance

Distribution System (WebTADS). If the employee or authorized representative cannot access WebTADS, the NSSC Leave Programs Team can assist with submitting the request on the employee's behalf through other means. The employee is required to submit medical documentation to support the request, which is reviewed for eligibility only by the NSSC.

Once the NSSC determines that the employee meets the eligibility requirements of the program, the request is sent to the Leave Bank Board for a decision. To ensure consistency in the decision-making process, the Leave Bank Board is not supplied with any medical documentation. Rather, the Leave Bank Board is only supplied with the number of hours requested, the number of hours currently in the Leave Bank, and information regarding the employee's previous VLBP usage. The Leave Bank Board uses this information to determine the number of hours to provide the employee.

The employee's supervisor will continuously monitor the status of the medical emergency affecting a leave bank recipient. Supervisors will evaluate all factors relevant to an employee's request to use VLBP along with policy requirements in determining approval or disapproval for the use of available leave.

The Leave Bank Board has consistently approved all or a portion of the leave requested for more than 95 percent of all requests. In LY 2019, the Leave Bank Board approved nearly 100 requests, transferring nearly 20,000 hours (over 9 work years) to the leave accounts of NASA employees.

## How Far has the NSSC Come Since the Inception of VLBP?

The NSSC has taken great strides to enhance VLBP. There are many notable accomplishments which can be attributed to changes that have taken place throughout the year.

In LY 2019, program awareness steadily increased throughout NASA, and more employees participated than the previous year. The following notable changes for LY 2019 occurred (over the LY 2018 figures):

- 9.5 percent increase in membership.
- 37.5 percent increase in hours approved for employee use.

The Leave Bank Board has the responsibility of maintaining a sufficient balance of leave to cover as many emergencies as possible. The Leave Board has established a 12,000-hour leave reserve. Each year, the Leave Bank Board determines the amount of donated annual leave an employee may receive based upon prior year usage and the available leave bank balance. For this reason, the NSSC has been partnering with supervisors, employees, and Servicing Human Resources (HR) Offices to explore all options available to employees outside of VLBP. Some of the considerations include:

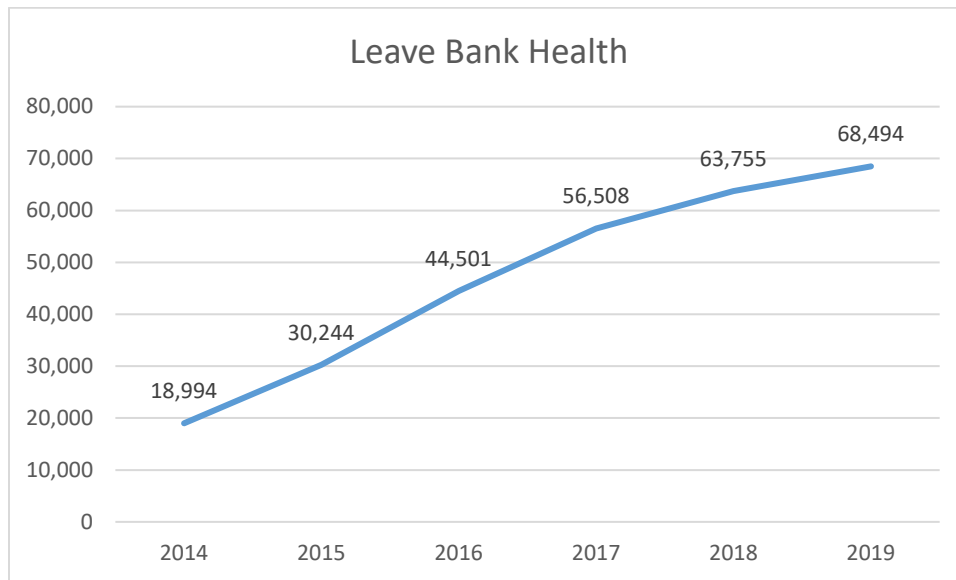
- Exploring telework options.
- Modifying work schedules.
- Exploring reasonable accommodations.
- Exploring disability retirement, optional retirement, etc.
- Participating in VLTP.
- Participating in ASL.

By working with the employee’s supervisor and Servicing HR Office, the employee may need fewer hours from the Leave Bank than the employee initially anticipated, which has led to a decrease in the amount of hours required and potentially allows the employee to have accrued annual or sick leave to use.

Overall, VLBP has been a success. In the past, the only option was to request that other Federal employees donate leave through VLTP, but now an employee can invest a small amount (one pay period of leave accrual per year) to be a VLBP member. This program has given employees the peace of mind knowing that there are options available in the event they experience a medical emergency, while maintaining their privacy by not having to share their circumstance with others in hopes that someone will donate leave. One of the benefits realized from VLBP is that new employees who may not know other Federal employees who can/will donate to them, or employees who are not comfortable asking for donations now have the option to receive leave from the Leave Bank by becoming a member.

The following chart illustrates the total number of the Leave Bank hours remaining at the end of each LY since inception:

Figure 1: Total Number of Leave Bank Hours Remaining at the End of Each LY since Inception



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# Voluntary Leave Transfer Program

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## Overview

VLTP is a benefit available to all NASA employees who meet the eligibility requirements of the program. Unlike VLBP, there is no membership requirement. The eligibility requirements for the VLTP are the same as the VLBP, so employees can receive leave donations from both programs concurrently.

Almost all employees will experience a medical emergency at some point in their careers, but may not have enough leave to cover their absences. VLTP is a program that employees can leverage to assist them in obtaining the leave they need.

The NSSC began administrating VLTP in LY 2007. Since the program's inception, NASA employees have donated over 819,000 hours, helping countless NASA employees who were experiencing medical emergencies.

## Approval Process

To be an approved VLTP leave recipient, the employee must demonstrate that the employee or a family member is experiencing a medical emergency requiring the employee to enter a nonpay status for at least 24 hours or equivalent proration for part-time employees. All leave recipient requests for VLTP are to be submitted by the employee or the employee's representative through WebTADS. If the employee or authorized representative cannot access WebTADS, the NSSC Leave Programs Team can assist with submitting the request on the employee's behalf through other means.

The employee is required to submit medical documentation to support the request, which is reviewed for eligibility by the NSSC. If the employee meets the eligibility requirements, the request is then forwarded to the employee's supervisor for approval or denial. The employee's supervisor will continuously monitor the status of the medical emergency affecting a leave recipient. Supervisors will evaluate all factors relevant to an employee's request to use VLTP, along with policy requirements, in determining approval or disapproval for the use of available donated leave. Requests can be denied for a variety of reasons, including the supervisor approval of alternative options such as telework or a modified work schedule; the employee may have initially requested a longer period than the medical documentation supported; etc.

In LY 2019, the NSSC approved 53 VLTP recipient requests, which allowed the transfer of just over 35,302 hours (over 16 work years) to the leave accounts of NASA employees.



## Advanced Sick Leave

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### Overview

Employees can request ASL for the same reason(s) they would request sick leave. This program has been very helpful for employees who have insufficient sick leave balances and do not meet the eligibility requirements to participate in VLTP or VLBP. ASL can be requested for routine sick leave use such as medical appointments, attending a family member's medical appointment, etc. Unlike VLBP and VLTP, employees become indebted to the Government and will need to pay back the ASL hours used.

### Approval Process

To request ASL, an employee must provide the NSSC Leave Programs Team with medical documentation to support the request and must submit an official request through WebTADS. If the employee or authorized representative cannot access WebTADS, the NSSC can assist with submitting the request on the employee's behalf through other means. The NSSC will review the documentation for eligibility and approve or disapprove the employee's request. If the request is approved, the employee will have the applicable number of sick leave hours available for use.

The employee's supervisor will continuously monitor the status of the medical emergency affecting a leave recipient. Supervisors will evaluate all factors relevant to an employee's request to use ASL, along with policy requirements, in determining approval or disapproval for the use of available ASL.

For LY 2019, 109 ASL requests were granted for NASA employees.

## Emergency Leave Transfer Program

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### Overview

In LY 2017, NASA implemented the ELTP as a result of a very active hurricane season. An ELTP may be established when a substantial number of Federal employees are adversely affected by a major disaster or emergency as declared by the President. Under ELTP, Federal employees or an agency leave bank may donate annual leave following a specific disaster for transfer to employees of the same or other agencies who are adversely affected, or have family members who are adversely affected, by the disaster or emergency (e.g., floods, earthquakes, hurricanes).

During LY2019 one ELTP was established for Hurricane Dorian; however, no employees were adversely affected requiring the use of donated leave.

### Approval Process

To be approved to receive ELTP leave, an employee must make written application to become an emergency leave recipient. If an employee is not capable of making written application for participation in ELTP, a personal representative of the employee may make written application on the employee's behalf. Unlike VLBP, VLTP, and ASL, an employee may receive and use leave under ELTP without regard to any requirement that all annual leave and sick leave to their credit must be exhausted before any transferred annual leave may be used. If the application is approved, the employee will have an applicable number of annual leave hours available for use based upon available leave and number of applicants.

## What Does the Future Hold?

### Parental Leave

On December 20, 2019, President Trump signed into law the Federal Employee Paid Leave Act, which allows all eligible parents up to twelve (12) administrative workweeks of paid parental leave. Any gender employee completing 12 months of Federal service, who becomes a parent following the birth, adoption, or fostering of a child on or after October 1, 2020, will be eligible for paid parental leave. Additional guidance and clarity from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) regarding how paid parental leave will be applied is forthcoming. In the meantime, the NSSC is working on an implementation plan and development of new processes.

### Leave Donation Challenges and Solutions

The NSSC continues to identify several challenges with regard to leave donations and the ability for NASA employees to receive assistance when needed. If additional measures are taken to educate employees about the benefits of donating leave instead of forfeiting it, as well as exploring all leave options, more employees will be able to receive assistance.

#### Challenge: Leave Donations Peak in Use-or-Lose Season

The majority of VLBP and VLTP leave donations for LY 2019 were received between November and January (use-or-lose season).

The following graphs represent the total number of hours donated by NASA employees to VLTP and VLBP each FY by month (not including hours contributed by employees becoming VLBP members):

Figure 2: VLTP Donations by FY Month

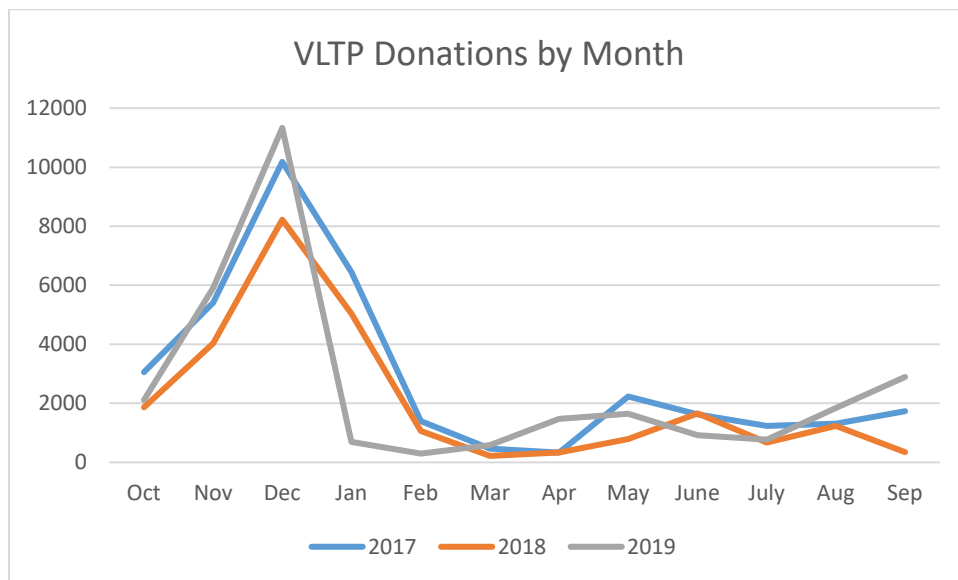
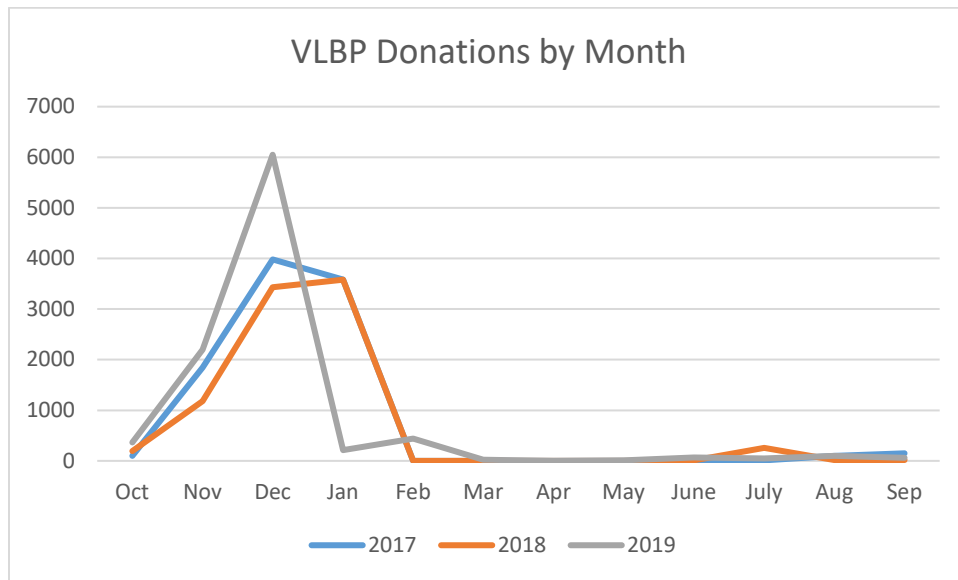


Figure 3: VLBP Donations by FY Month



There has historically been an inequality in the ability of employees to become leave recipients based on the time of year they are requesting leave hours. The inequality occurred for NASA employees becoming VLTP and/or VLBP leave recipients during the months of February through October (outside of use-or-lose season) and those becoming recipients during November through January (during use-or-lose season). VLTP leave recipients continue to experience an inequality in becoming recipients based on the time of year. However, with the increase in donations to VLBP and the remaining hours available, VLBP members may be less impacted when requesting leave donations outside of use-or-lose season.

The peak leave donation time occurs during the months of November through January, with the greatest volume of donations occurring every December and January. The peak and high volume of donations occur during use-or-lose season and are attributable to employees donating leave that they will not be able to use before the end of the leave year.

The impact to recipients of VLTP and VLBP is similar:

- For employees on VLTP during February through October, they are not as likely to receive enough leave donations to cover their anticipated absence due to the low level of leave donations received during this time.
- For employees on VLBP from February through October, they may be less likely to receive enough leave donations to cover their anticipated absence because even with reserves, the Leave Bank Board must ensure there are enough hours to support the Leave Bank throughout the year.
- Fewer employees may donate to the VLTP and VLBP when an ELTP has been established.

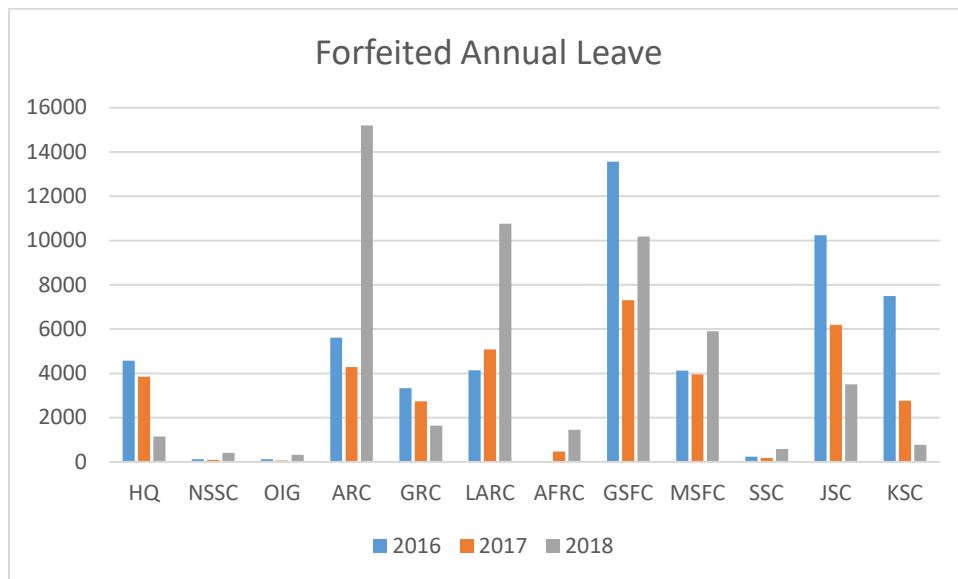
### Challenge: Forfeited Annual Leave Results in Lost Opportunities

Over the last 3 LYs, NASA employees have forfeited nearly 142,500 hours (68 work years) of annual leave, which could have been donated to the Leave Bank or given to an employee approved as a VLTP recipient. Based on the VLBP usage for LY 2019 (nearly 20,000 bank hours approved), the amount of leave forfeited over the last 3 years would have been enough to fund VLBP for over 7 years!

By analyzing the historical data, it appears that some Centers forfeit substantially more annual leave every year than others. The finalized total of LY2019 forfeited annual leave hours will not be available until the end of LY 2020.

The following chart displays the number of hours of forfeited annual leave over the past 3 years by Center:

Figure 4: Forfeited Annual Leave by Center by LY



### Solution: Encourage Employees to Use or Donate vs. Forfeiting Leave

One solution to reducing the forfeited leave is to encourage employees to use their annual leave to achieve a better work/life balance. When a Center has drastically larger amounts of forfeited leave, there is a high possibility of an underlying cause. If the underlying cause can be identified and addressed, employees should be able to use more of their annual leave. Another solution to reducing forfeited leave for those employees unable to use their annual leave is to encourage them to donate throughout the year to VLTP or VLBP. If these donations are made throughout the year, especially during the months of February through October, it will enable other employees facing medical emergencies to receive assistance. The amount of leave available in the Leave Bank directly affects the amount of leave that an employee will receive from the Leave Bank Board.

In an effort to promote using or donating leave instead of forfeiting it, the NSSC continued to work with the Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO) to develop communication

materials. These materials emphasize the high volume of forfeited leave and the benefits of employees using their leave or donating it to other employees in need. Some of the materials include informational materials posted on the [HR Portal Leave Page](#) as well as e-mail communications and talking points for OCHCO and Center leadership to distribute to employees.

### **Solution: Encourage Employees to Consider All Available Leave Programs**

Many NASA employees with medical emergencies and leave issues would benefit from VLBP and VLTP, but may not initially consider using those programs. The NSSC will encourage employees to consider all available leave programs by implementing the following activities:

- The NSSC Leave Programs Team will continue providing counseling to employees experiencing medical emergencies to encourage participation in all available leave programs.
- The NSSC In-Processing Team will continue to notify all new employees of their eligibility to become a VLBP member and provide assistance to new employees who wish to enroll as members in the program.
- The NSSC will continue to develop outreach activities throughout the year to encourage leave donations.