



475 N. Martingale Road, Suite 600  
Schaumburg, IL 60173  
P +1-847-706-3500  
F +1-847-706-3599  
[SOA.ORG](http://SOA.ORG)

**TO:** Reggie Mazyck, NAIC  
**FROM:** Dale Hall, Managing Director of Research, Society of Actuaries (SOA)  
Leon Langlitz, Chair, SOA Committee on Life Insurance Company Expenses  
**DATE:** July 16, 2019  
**RE:** 2020 Generally Recognized Expense Table (GRET) – SOA Analysis

As in previous years, the Society of Actuaries expresses its thanks to NAIC staff for their assistance and responsiveness in providing Annual Statement expense and unit data for the 2020 GRET analysis for use with individual life insurance sales illustrations. The analysis is based on expense and expense related information reported on companies' 2017 and 2018 Annual Statements. This project has been completed to assist the Life Actuarial Task Force (LATF) in its consideration of potential revisions to the GRET that could become effective for calendar year 2020. This memo describes the analysis and resultant findings.

NAIC staff provided Annual Statement data for life insurance companies for calendar years 2017 and 2018. This included data from 707 companies in 2017 and 722 companies in 2018. This increase breaks the trend of small decreases over the previous few years. Of the total companies, 326 were in both years and passed the outlier exclusion tests and were included as a base for the GRET factors (361 companies passed similar tests last year).

### Approach Used

The methodology for calculating the recommended GRET factors based on this data is similar in broad outline to that followed the last several years. The methodology was last altered in 2015. The changes which were made at that time can be found in the recommendation letter sent on July 30, 2015<sup>1</sup>.

To calculate updated GRET factors, the average of the factors from the two most recent years (2017 and 2018 for those with data available for both years) of Annual Statement data was used. For each company an actual to expected ratio was calculated. Companies with ratios that fall outside predetermined parameters are excluded and this process is completed three times in order to stabilize the average rates. The boundaries of the exclusions are modified from time to time and there was a slight adjustment this year to increase the number of companies in the final study. Unit expense seed factors (the seeds for all distribution channel categories are the same), as given in Appendix B, were used to compute total expected expenses. Thus, these seed factors were used to implicitly allocate expenses between acquisition and maintenance expenses, as well as among the three acquisition expense factors (on a direct of ceded reinsurance basis).

Companies were categorized by their reported distribution channel (four categories were used as described in Appendix A of this memo). There remain a significant number of companies for which no distribution channel was available, as no responses to the annual surveys have been received from those companies. The characteristics of these companies vary significantly, including companies not currently writing new business or whose major line of business is not individual life insurance. Any advice or assistance from LATF in future

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.soa.org/Files/Research/Projects/research-2016-gret-recommendation.pdf>

years to increase the response rate to the surveys of companies that submit Annual Statements in order to reduce the number of companies in the “Other” category would be most welcomed.

Prior to 2014, when responding to the survey if a company indicated they used multiple channels to distribute their individual life sales, the percentage weights provided to us were applied to that company’s reported results in the tabulations of each of the distribution channel’s unit expense results. In 2015 this was changed so that all expenses for a company will go to the channel with the highest percentage weight. This approach was changed because: (1) as fewer channel types were used, it was expected that fewer companies would have multiple channels as currently defined and (2) an insufficient number of multiple distribution responses were provided in that year’s survey to result in a significantly different outcome. The intention is to continue surveying the companies in future years to enable enhancement of this multiple distribution channel information.

Companies were excluded from the analysis if (1) their actual to expected ratios were considered outliers, often due to low business volume, (2) the average first year and single premium per policy was more than \$40,000, (3) they are known reinsurance companies or (4) companies were not in both years of the data supplied by the NAIC. To derive the overall GRET factors, the unweighted average of the remaining companies’ actual-to-expected ratios for each respective category was calculated. The resulting factors were rounded, as shown in Table 1.

### The Recommendation

Employing the above methodology results in the proposed 2020 GRET values shown in Table 1. To facilitate comparisons, the current 2019 GRET factors are shown in Table 2.

Further characteristics of the type of companies represented in each category are included in the last two columns in Table 1, including the average premium per policy issued and the average face amount (\$000s) per policy issued.

**TABLE 1**

**PROPOSED 2020 GRET FACTORS, Based on Average of 2017/2018 Data**

Description	Acquisition Per Policy	Acquisition Per Unit	Acquisition Per Premium	Maintenance Per Policy	Companies Included*	Average Premium Per Policy Issued During Year	Average Face Amt (000) Per Policy Issued During Year
Independent	\$168	\$0.90	42%	\$50	118	3,263	200
Career	214	1.20	54%	64	63	2,661	217
Direct Marketing	217	1.20	54%	65	20	2,489	213
Niche Marketing	125	0.70	32%	38	21	757	13
Other*	140	0.80	35%	42	104	876	34
Total					326		

**TABLE 2**  
**CURRENT (2019) FACTORS, Based on Average of 2016/2017 Data**

Description	Acquisition Per Policy	Acquisition Per Unit	Acquisition Per Premium	Maintenance Per Policy	Companies Included*	Average Premium Per Policy Issued During Year	Average Face Amt (000) Per Policy Issued During Year
Independent	\$167	\$0.90	42%	\$50	130	3,496	194
Career	231	1.30	58%	69	69	2,287	203
Direct Marketing	221	1.20	55%	66	22	2,492	163
Niche Marketing	139	0.80	35%	42	21	702	20
Other*	136	0.70	34%	41	119	839	32
<b>Total</b>					<b>361</b>		

In previous recommendations, an effort was made to reduce volatility in the GRET factors from year-to-year by limiting the change in GRET factors between years to about ten percent of the prior value. The changes from the 2019 GRET were reviewed to ensure that a significant change was not made in this year's GRET recommendation. Only the Niche Marketing distribution channel category experienced a change greater than ten percent so the factors for this line were capped at the ten percent level (the Acquisition per unit factor changed more than 10% because of rounding) from the corresponding 2019 GRET values. The change occurred due to the change in the composition of the companies in this category where there is a small number of companies included.

#### Usage of the GRET

Also asked in this year's survey, responded to by companies' Annual Statement correspondent, was a question regarding whether the 2018 GRET table was used by the company. Last year, 28% of the responders indicated their company used the GRET for sales illustration purposes, with similar percentage results by size of company; this contrasted with about 30% in the prior year. This year, 26% of responding companies indicated that they used the GRET in 2018 for sales illustration purposes, with similar results for each of the distribution channels with a significant number of responders. Based on the information received over the last several years, the variation in GRET usage appears to be in large part due to the relatively small sample size and different responders to the surveys.

We hope LATF finds this information helpful and sufficient for consideration of a potential update to the GRET. If you require further analysis or have questions, please contact Dale Hall at 847-273-8835.

Kindest personal regards,

Dale Hall, FSA, MAAA, CERA, CFA  
Managing Director of Research  
Society of Actuaries

Leon Langlitz, FSA, MAAA  
Chair, SOA Committee on Life  
Insurance Company Expenses

## Appendix A -- Distribution Channels

The following is a description of distribution channels used in the development of recommended 2020 GRET values:

1. **Independent** – Business written by a company that markets its insurance policies through an independent insurance agent or insurance broker not primarily affiliated with any one insurance company. These agencies or agents are not employed by the company and operate without an exclusive distribution contract with the company. These include most PPGA arrangements.
2. **Career** – Business written by a company that markets insurance and investment products through a sales force primarily affiliated with one insurance company. These companies recruit, finance, train, and often house financial professionals who are typically referred to as career agents or multi-line exclusive agents.
3. **Direct Marketing**– Business written by a company that markets its own insurance policies direct to the consumer through methods such as direct mail, print media, broadcast media, telemarketing, retail centers and kiosks, internet or other media. No direct field compensation is involved.
4. **Niche Marketers** – Business written by home service, pre-need, or final expense insurance companies as well as niche-market companies selling small face amount life products through a variety of distribution channels.
5. **Other** – Companies surveyed were only provided with the four options described above. Nonetheless since there were many companies for which we did not receive a response (or whose response in past years' surveys confirmed an "other" categorization (see below), values for the "other" category are given in the tables in this memo. It was also included to indicate how many life insurance companies with no response (to this survey and prior surveys) and to indicate whether their exclusion has introduced a bias into the resulting values.

## Appendix B – Unit Expense Seeds

The expense seeds used in the 2014 and prior GRETs were differentiated between branch office and all other categories, due to the results of a relatively old study that had indicated that branch office acquisition cost expressed on a per Face Amount basis was about double that of other distribution channels. Due to the elimination of the branch office category in the 2015 GRET, non-differentiated unit expense seeds have been used in the current and immediately prior studies.

The unit expense seeds used in the 2019 GRET and the 2020 GRET recommendation were based on the average of the 2006 through 2010 Annual SOA expense studies. These studies differentiated unit expenses by type of individual life insurance policy (term and permanent coverages). As neither the GRET nor the Annual Statement data provided differentiates between these two types of coverage, the unit expense seed was derived by judgment based this information. The following shows the averages derived from the Annual SOA studies and the seeds used in this study. Beginning with the 2019 Annual Statement submission this information may become more readily available.

2006-2010 (average) CLICE Studies:

	<b>Acquisition/ Policy</b>	<b>Acquisition/ Face Amount (000)</b>	<b>Acquisition/ Premium</b>	<b>Maintenance/ Policy</b>
<b><u>Term</u></b>				
Weighted Average	\$149	\$0.62	38%	\$58
Unweighted Average	\$237	\$0.80	57%	\$76
Median	\$196	\$0.59	38%	\$64

<b><u>Permanent</u></b>				
Weighted Average	\$167	\$1.43	42%	\$56
Unweighted Average	\$303	\$1.57	49%	\$70
Median	\$158	\$1.30	41%	\$67

Current Unit Expense Seeds:

	<b>Acquisition/ Policy</b>	<b>Acquisition/ Face Amount (000)</b>	<b>Acquisition/ Premium</b>	<b>Maintenance/ Policy</b>
All distribution channels	\$200	\$1.10	50%	\$60