SINGH PWM GUIDE

The Bridge Years' Playbook

Funding Your Life Between Leaving Corporate and Age 65
(Ages 55-65)

Raman Singh, CFP®, EA
Your Personalized CFO
CFP® SINCE 2016 | EA SINCE 2026

Published September 16, 2026 · Figures current for tax year 2026

Get the fillable worksheet and be notified when the 2027 numbers publish: singhpwm.com/guides/bridge-years-playbook

What this guide answers

You can leave a corporate career at 55, 58, or 62 with $2M, $3M, or $5M saved and still hit a wall: most of that money is locked behind a penalty until 59½, and Medicare does not start until 65. This guide covers how to structure a taxable "bridge brokerage" sized to fund those gap years, the two narrow IRS exceptions (Rule of 55 and 72(t) SEPP) that can open certain accounts early, the real healthcare options and costs before Medicare for a household whose income is often too high for ACA subsidies, and a full year-by-year cash flow example carrying one household from separation at 58 through Medicare at 65 and RMDs at 73. It does not re-derive the bracket-fill Roth conversion math, the RMD minimization toolkit, or the decumulation guardrails, those live in their own guides and get cross-referenced here.

IN SHORT

- The gap between leaving corporate and penalty-free retirement account access runs 4 to 10 years depending on your age at separation and which account type you need. A bridge brokerage, sized and invested deliberately for that window, is what closes it.
- Healthcare, not income, is usually the most underestimated cost of the bridge years. For a household above 400% of the federal poverty level, the 2026 ACA marketplace offers no subsidy at all, the cliff is back.
- The bridge years are also often your best Roth conversion and bracket-fill window. Running the bridge brokerage down without coordinating it against that opportunity leaves real money on the table.

Contents

1. The Decision in Front of You

> You are 58. The corporate paycheck stops on your last day. Your 401(k), your traditional IRA, most of what you saved, is not fully usable yet without a 10% penalty until 59½, and for money already rolled to an IRA, that date does not move. Medicare does not start until 65. Social Security is years away and claiming it early costs you for life. In between sits a real question: what pays for groceries, the mortgage, and health insurance for the next several years, and how do you avoid either running out of accessible cash or breaking a tax-advantaged account by accident.

7 years

The gap between separating at 58 and reaching Medicare eligibility at 65, illustrative for a household separating mid-decade

$25k-$30k+

Illustrative annual pre-65 healthcare cost for a married couple without ACA subsidies, COBRA or full-price marketplace[5][9][10]

$0

ACA premium tax credit available in 2026 to a household above 400% of the federal poverty level, the cliff is back[5][6]

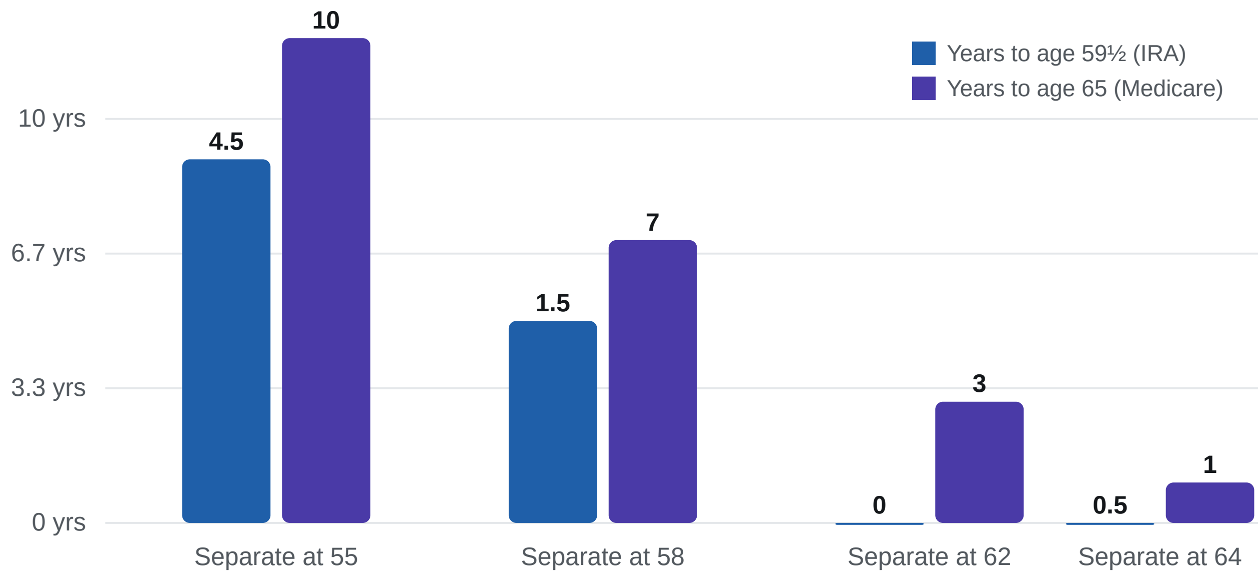
The default choice, doing nothing structural and just drawing from whatever account is easiest month to month, has a price. Pulling from a traditional IRA before 59½ without a qualifying exception costs a flat 10% penalty on top of ordinary income tax, and pulling more than planned in a high-income bridge year can also push a household over the ACA subsidy cliff or into a higher capital gains bracket. A household spending $175,000 a year that funds three of its seven bridge years from the wrong account, an early IRA withdrawal instead of a taxable brokerage, can lose $17,500 or more to the penalty alone, before the income tax on that same withdrawal.

THIS IS WRONG FOR YOU IF

You already have a taxable brokerage account large enough, relative to your spending, to fund every year until 59½ without touching a retirement account, and your household income before any bridge-year withdrawals already sits comfortably under 400% of the federal poverty level. In that case, most of this guide's mechanics simply do not bind. This guide is for the more common case: a household whose liquid taxable assets do not obviously cover the gap, or whose income decisions in these years meaningfully change healthcare cost, tax bracket, or both.

The younger you separate, the longer the gap, and the gap is measured in years, not months.

Figure 1. Years until penalty-free IRA access (59½) and Medicare (65), by age at separation.



Illustrative, rounded to the nearest half year for clarity. IRA access assumes no qualifying exception used; a 401(k) still held at the separating employer may be reachable sooner under the Rule of 55, covered in Section 2. Medicare eligibility is fixed at 65 regardless of separation age.

Source: 26 U.S.C. § 72(t); Medicare.gov Initial Enrollment Period guidance. Retrieved September 16, 2026.

Separation age	Years to 59½ (IRA, no exception)	Years to 65 (Medicare)
55	4.5	10
58	1.5	7
62	0 (already past 59½)	3
64	0	1

2. How the Rule Actually Works

> Two narrow IRS exceptions can open certain accounts before 59½: the Rule of 55, which applies only to the plan of the employer you just left, and 72(t) SEPP, which applies to IRAs (and, once rolled, old 401(k)s) but locks you into a rigid, multi-year payment schedule. Neither is a general-purpose early-withdrawal button. Both have real conditions and real ways to get them wrong.

The Rule of 55

If you separate from service in or after the calendar year you turn 55 (age 50 for certain public safety employees), you can take distributions from **that employer's** 401(k) or 403(b) without the 10% early-distribution penalty. Ordinary income tax still applies, and the plan typically withholds 20% by default. Three conditions have to be true: you separated from service, not merely reduced your hours; the money stays in that specific employer's plan, it does not follow you to a new job's plan or to an IRA; and the plan itself has to allow the distribution pattern you want, some plans force a full lump sum.[1]

The edge case people get wrong most often: rolling the 401(k) into an IRA "for better investment options" the moment you leave. The instant that money lands in an IRA, the Rule of 55 exception is gone for good, IRAs are excluded from it entirely. If you plan to lean on this exception, leave the money in the old plan until you no longer need penalty-free access.

> **RULE OF THUMB**
>
> The Rule of 55 only reaches the plan you just separated from. An old 401(k) from a job you left five years ago does not qualify, even if you are 55 or older right now.

72(t) SEPP: substantially equal periodic payments

If the Rule of 55 does not apply, whether because the money is already in an IRA or because you need access to a different account, a 72(t) election lets you take penalty-free distributions from that account under a fixed, IRS-approved schedule. You choose one of three calculation methods (Required Minimum Distribution, amortization, or annuitization) and the payment amount that method produces, and you must take that exact amount every year, no more, no less, for at least five years or until you reach 59½, whichever is longer.[2]

This is the part that trips people up: 72(t) is not a spigot you can adjust. Modify the payment, skip a year, or take an extra distribution before the schedule's end, and the IRS retroactively applies the 10% penalty to every distribution you already took under the plan, plus interest, back to day one. A plan started at 58 that gets broken at 61 does not just lose its exception going forward, it costs three years of penalties all at once.

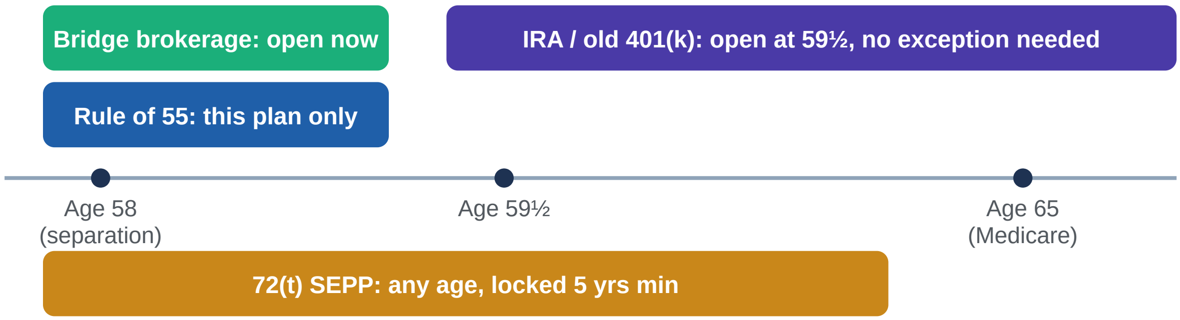
> **WARNING**
>
> A 72(t) plan is one of the least forgiving elections in the tax code. Do not start one to cover a single unpredictable year of spending. It exists for a household that knows, with real confidence, what it needs from that specific account every year until the schedule ends.

Where the bridge brokerage fits

A taxable brokerage account you deliberately size for the bridge years sidesteps both exceptions' rigidity. There is no penalty on taxable-account withdrawals at any age, and you decide the amount each year based on what you actually need, adjusting for a market downturn, a healthcare surprise, or a part-time consulting check that shows up. The tradeoff is that it has to be funded in advance, usually years before separation, and its asset allocation should be more conservative than your "main" retirement portfolio, since a bridge account forced to sell into a down market has no time to recover before the money is spent. Withdrawal order during the bridge generally favors taxable assets first (bridge brokerage, then any deferred comp or consulting income), IRA and 401(k) dollars only through a qualifying exception or after 59½, and Roth contribution basis (not earnings) as a last-resort, penalty-free option at any age.[16]

Four account types open at four different ages, and only one of them opens at your separation date.

Figure 2. Which account is accessible, and when, for a household separating at 58.



Illustrative for a household separating at 58. The Rule of 55 window and the 72(t) window both start at separation, but the Rule of 55 reaches only the plan you just left, while a 72(t) plan, once started, cannot be adjusted or stopped early without retroactive penalty.

Source: 26 U.S.C. § 72(t)(2)(A)(iv)-(v); IRS Rev. Rul. 2002-62. Retrieved September 16, 2026.

Account	Earliest access	Condition
Bridge taxable brokerage	Immediately	None, ordinary capital gains tax applies
Former employer 401(k), Rule of 55	Immediately at separation	Separated in/after year turned 55, money stays in that plan
IRA, 72(t) SEPP	Any age	Fixed schedule for 5 years or to 59½, whichever is longer
IRA / old 401(k), no exception	Age 59½	None required past this age

3. What the Numbers Say in 2026

> Two sets of numbers drive the bridge-years math: what an early withdrawal actually costs in penalty and tax, and what healthcare actually costs before Medicare. Both are larger, and less forgiving, than most pre-retirees assume going in.

2026 figures for the bridge years

Item	2026 figure	Source
Early withdrawal penalty (no exception)	10% of the distribution, plus ordinary income tax	26 U.S.C. § 72(t)(1)
72(t) SEPP minimum duration	5 years or to age 59½, whichever is longer	IRS Rev. Rul. 2002-62
COBRA premium cap	102% of full group premium (employer + employee share + 2% fee)	DOL COBRA regulations
COBRA standard duration	18 months (up to 36 for certain qualifying events)	DOL COBRA FAQs
2026 ACA subsidy cliff	400% FPL: $0 credit above roughly $84,600 (household of 2, 48 states)	CMS 2026 Marketplace Fact Sheet
2026 federal poverty level, household of 2	$21,640 (48 contiguous states + DC)	HHS ASPE poverty guidelines
Fidelity 2026 lifetime retiree healthcare estimate	$185,500 single / $371,000 couple (Medicare-age, not pre-65)	Fidelity 2026 Retiree Health Care Cost Estimate
NIIT threshold, MFJ	3.8% above $250,000 MAGI, not indexed	26 U.S.C. § 1411
2026 LTCG 0% bracket ceiling, MFJ	$98,900 taxable income	IRS Rev. Proc. 2025-32

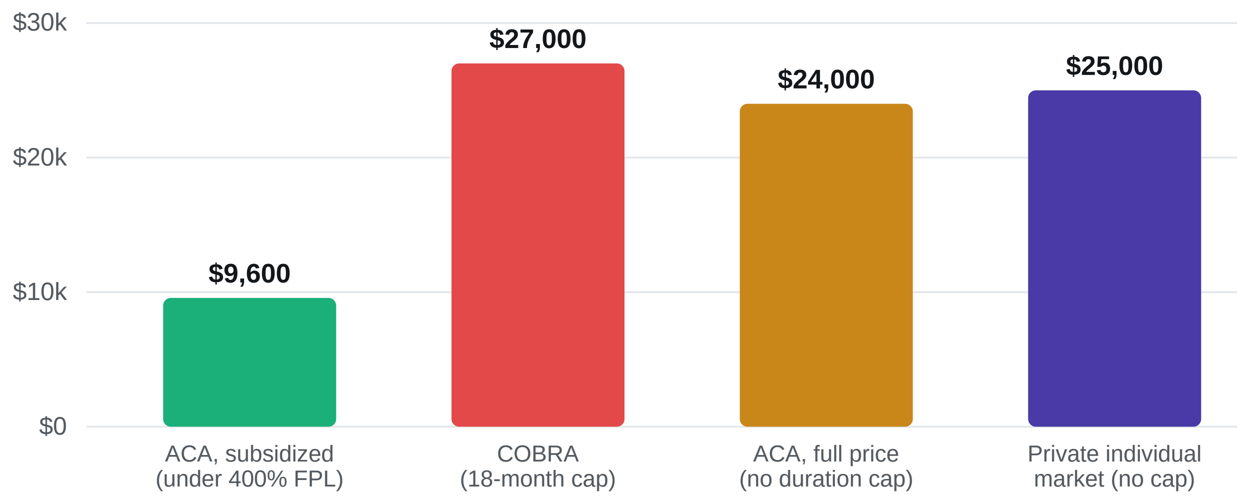
The 2026 ACA figure matters more than it did a few years ago. The temporarily enhanced premium tax credits that ran from 2021 through 2025 expired on January 1, 2026, and Congress did not renew them for the 2026 plan year. The marketplace reverted to the original ACA rules: a smaller credit for households under 400% of the federal poverty level, and a hard cutoff at that line, not a phase-out, above it.[5][6] For a bridge-years couple with $150,000 or more of taxable income from consulting, dividends, and brokerage draws, 400% FPL is easy to clear without deliberate MAGI management, and once cleared, the subsidy is not smaller, it is gone.

> **DEADLINE**
>
> COBRA election must happen within 60 days of losing employer coverage or the qualifying event notice, whichever is later. Miss the window and COBRA is off the table for that job loss, permanently.

Four realistic paths cover pre-65 healthcare for this household, each with a different cost and duration profile, compared next.

Full-price marketplace and private-market coverage cost roughly the same for this age band; COBRA is close behind, and it is the only one with a hard 18-month clock.

Figure 3. Illustrative annual pre-65 health insurance cost, married couple age 58-64, by option.



Illustrative national averages for a married couple age 58 to 64, premium only, before out-of-pocket cost-sharing. Actual cost varies materially by state, ZIP code, and plan tier. Subsidized ACA assumes household MAGI is deliberately kept under 400% FPL; full-price and private figures assume it is not, or coverage is purchased outside the exchange.

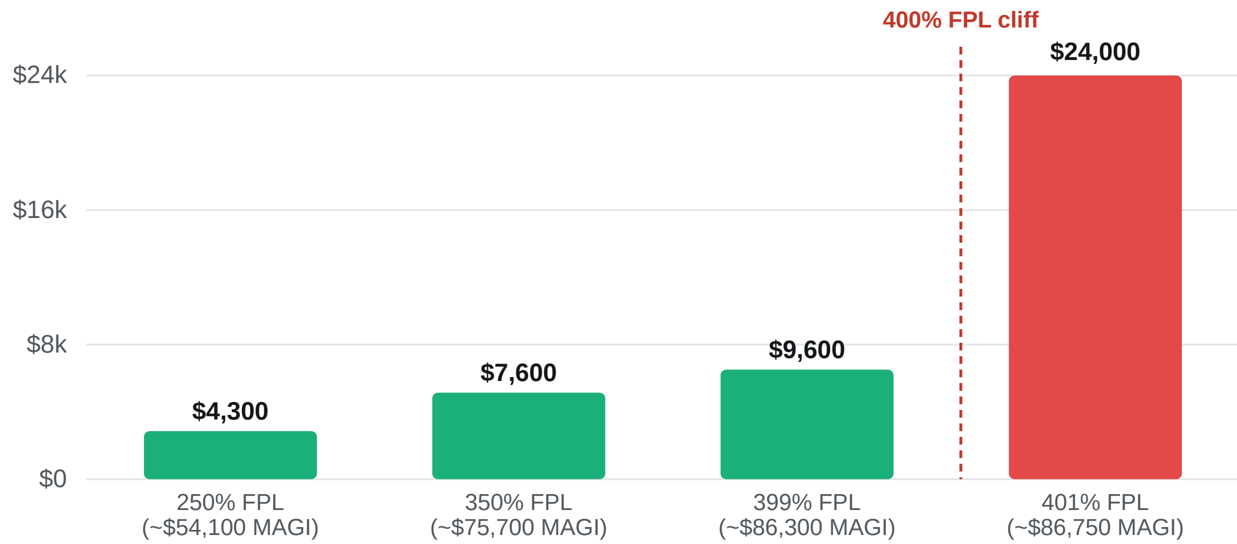
Source: DOL COBRA regulations (102% premium cap); Peterson-KFF Health System Tracker, 2026 ACA Marketplace brief; CMS 2026 Marketplace Fact Sheet. Retrieved September 16, 2026.

Option	Illustrative annual cost	Duration limit
ACA marketplace, subsidized (under 400% FPL)	$9,600	None, annual re-enrollment
COBRA	$27,000	18 months (up to 36 for certain events)
ACA marketplace, full price (400%+ FPL or off-exchange)	$24,000	None
Private individual market	$25,000	None

Health-sharing ministries exist as a fifth, lower-cost option, often $6,000 to $12,000 a year for a couple, but they are not insurance. They carry no legal or contractual obligation to pay a member's medical bills, are not subject to ACA consumer protections like guaranteed issue or pre-existing condition coverage, and claims-denial rates are not federally required to be disclosed.[12][13] That is not a reason to rule them out for every household, but it is a fact worth weighing with real seriousness against the premium savings, not glossed over.

One dollar of MAGI over 400% FPL does not shrink the ACA subsidy, it eliminates it.

Figure 4. The 2026 ACA subsidy cliff for a household of two, illustrative net annual premium after credit.



Illustrative, benchmark silver plan, does not reflect any specific ZIP code or insurer. MAGI figures are approximate, based on the 2026 federal poverty guideline of $21,640 for a household of two. The jump at the cliff is the entire subsidy, not a partial reduction.

Source: CMS 2026 Marketplace Fact Sheet; HHS ASPE 2026 poverty guidelines; Peterson-KFF Health System Tracker. Retrieved September 16, 2026.

% of FPL	Approx. MAGI (household of 2)	Illustrative net annual premium
250%	$54,100	$4,300
350%	$75,700	$7,600
399%	$86,300	$9,600
401%	$86,750	$24,000 (full price, no credit)

Want to see these numbers with yours in them?

The tables above are the inputs. What matters is what they do to your specific bracket, your specific healthcare choice, and your specific timeline. A Strategic Fit Interview is a 30-minute conversation where we look at exactly that. No pitch, no product, flat fee only.

Schedule a Strategic Fit Interview

4. The Worked Example

> David and Elena Marsh, 58 and 57, are a fictional household built to illustrate the mechanics above. David separates from his corporate role at 58 with a $200,000 severance and deferred comp payout. Together they hold $3.0M in investable assets: $1.7M in pre-tax 401(k)/IRA accounts, $600,000 in Roth accounts, and a $500,000 taxable "bridge brokerage" set aside specifically to fund the years before Medicare.

> They live in Arizona, file married filing jointly, and want to keep their household spending near $150,000 a year.

Sizing the bridge, before separation

Two years before David leaves, the Marshes redirect new savings and rebalance $500,000 into the bridge brokerage, held roughly 55% bonds and short-duration fixed income, 45% equities, more conservative than their "main" retirement portfolio, because this money has a known, near-term spending date and no time to recover from a downturn. David also leaves his 401(k) with his former employer instead of rolling it immediately, preserving Rule of 55 access on that specific plan in case the bridge brokerage needs a backstop.

Years 1-2 (ages 58-59): COBRA, consulting income, and the deferred comp cushion

David elects COBRA within the 60-day window. Their combined employer-and-employee premium was $2,200 a month; at 102%, COBRA runs $2,244 a month, about $26,900 a year. David picks up part-time consulting, $30,000 a year, for the first three years. The $200,000 severance and deferred comp payout, taxed as ordinary income in year one, covers a large share of year-one spending without touching the bridge brokerage at all.

Years 3-6 (ages 60-63): COBRA ends, full-price marketplace begins, bracket-fill conversions run alongside

COBRA's 18 months runs out partway through year 2. From that point the Marshes move to an ACA marketplace plan. Their combined income, consulting pay plus bridge brokerage draws plus a deliberate Roth conversion each December, sits above 400% FPL in most of these years, so they budget the full-price marketplace premium, not the subsidized one, using the same conversion-timing logic as our companion Fill-The-Bracket Roth Sheet guide: fill the bracket in years where the subsidy is already gone, and hold off in a year where staying under the cliff would preserve a meaningful credit.

Years 7-8 (ages 64-65): Medicare enrollment

David and Elena each enroll in Medicare during their own seven-month Initial Enrollment Period. The bridge brokerage, drawn down across seven years, is nearly exhausted by design, its job was to cover exactly this window, not to outlast it. From 65 onward, healthcare cost drops sharply to Medicare premiums and IRMAA exposure, covered in our companion Multi-Tier IRMAA Bracket Matrix guide, and the household's remaining pre-tax balance, smaller than it would have been without the conversion years, continues toward RMD age at 73.

> **WHY THE ORDER MATTERED**
>
> The bridge brokerage funded ordinary spending so the IRA never needed an early-withdrawal exception. The Rule of 55 stayed available as a backstop only because David did not roll his 401(k) immediately. And the same low-income years that funded the bridge were also the Marshes' best Roth conversion window, run deliberately, not automatically, against the ACA cliff.

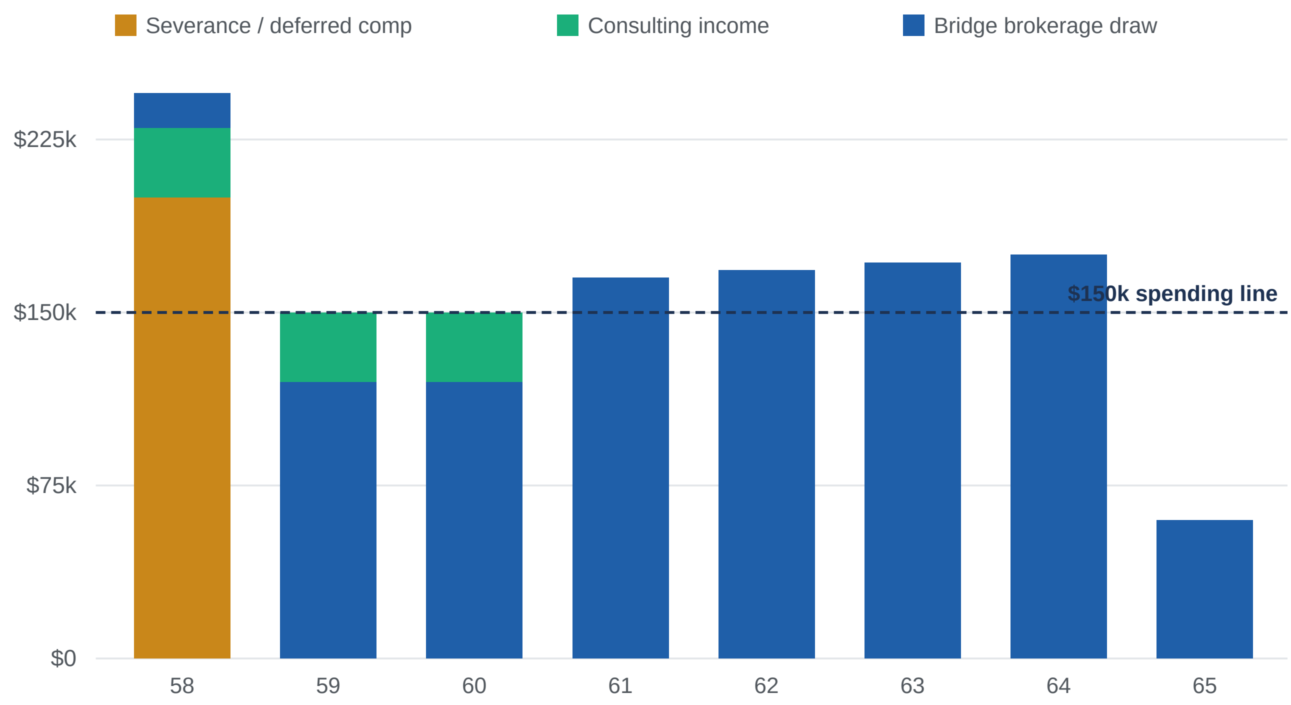
Your version of this example

The Marsh household above is illustrative. Yours is not. If you want to see the same year-by-year run on your actual balances and spending, that is what the first meeting is for.

Schedule a Strategic Fit Interview

Consulting income and the deferred comp payout carry the early years; the bridge brokerage fills the rest and is designed to run out right around Medicare.

Figure 5. The Marsh household, illustrative income sources by year, ages 58-65.



Illustrative. Assumes $150,000 annual household spending plus healthcare cost layered on top in years without employer coverage, a one-time $200,000 severance/deferred comp payout in year one, $30,000/year consulting income in years one through three, and a $500,000 bridge brokerage funding the balance, held in a conservative allocation. Actual results depend on markets, spending, and healthcare costs realized each year.

Source: Singh PWM illustrative planning model, inputs cited throughout Sections 2 and 3. Retrieved September 16, 2026.

Age	Deferred comp/severance	Consulting	Bridge brokerage draw	Healthcare cost
58	$200,000	$30,000	$15,000	$26,900 (COBRA, partial year)
59	$0	$30,000	$120,000	~$27,000 (COBRA, partial) / marketplace begins
60	$0	$30,000	$120,000	~$24,000 (full-price marketplace)
61	$0	$0	$165,000	~$24,700 (full-price marketplace)
62	$0	$0	$168,000	~$25,400 (full-price marketplace)
63	$0	$0	$172,000	~$26,100 (full-price marketplace)
64	$0	$0	$175,000	~$26,900 (full-price marketplace)
65	$0	$0	$60,000	Medicare Part B/D begins

5. The Four Ways This Goes Wrong

Not hypothetical risks. Each one shows up repeatedly in households leaving corporate life in their late 50s and early 60s, and each one is preventable if caught before the decision is made, not after.

1. **Underestimating true pre-65 healthcare cost**

   Budgeting the employer-subsidized premium you were used to, not the full 102% COBRA cost or the full-price marketplace premium. For a couple, the gap between what you paid as an employee and what you pay on your own can run $20,000 or more a year, and over a seven-year bridge that is well over $140,000 missing from the plan.

2. **Breaking a 72(t) SEPP schedule**

   Taking an extra withdrawal, skipping a year, or changing the payment amount before the plan's 5-year or age-59½ minimum is up. The IRS applies the 10% penalty retroactively to every distribution already taken under the plan, plus interest, turning one flexible year into a multi-year, five-figure tax bill.

3. **Draining the bridge without coordinating the tax bracket opportunity**

   Treating the bridge brokerage purely as a spending account and ignoring that these same low-income years are often the best Roth conversion window of your life. Running the bridge down on autopilot, with no conversion plan layered in, can leave a materially larger pre-tax balance, and a materially larger future RMD, than a coordinated plan would.

4. **Assuming COBRA lasts long enough to reach 65**

   COBRA runs 18 months in the standard case, not until Medicare. A household separating at 58 that assumes COBRA covers the whole gap is short by roughly 5.5 years of coverage, and discovers the marketplace, and its cost, later than they should have.

Want the checklist version of these four? The companion checklist walks the same sequence in one page.

6. Your Decision Framework

> Run the four questions in Figure 6 in order. Most households land on a blend: a partially-funded bridge brokerage, a Rule of 55 backstop on one account, deliberate MAGI management in most years, and a Roth conversion plan layered on top in the years the ACA subsidy is already gone anyway.

The order matters because two of the underlying decisions have to happen before separation, not after: whether to leave a 401(k) unrolled to preserve Rule of 55 access, and how large to build the bridge brokerage before the paycheck stops. The MAGI and conversion questions, by contrast, are annual decisions you can revisit every December based on that year's actual numbers.

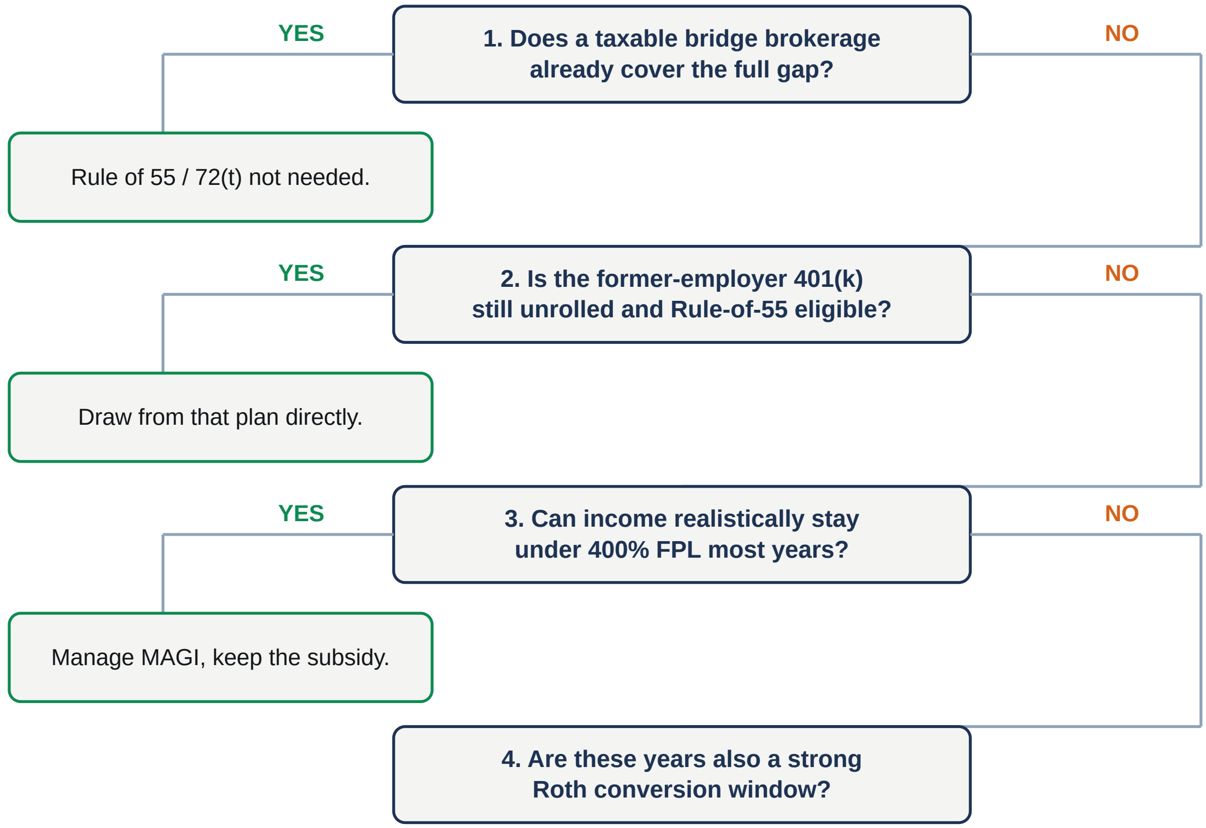
Not sure which branch applies to you yet?

That is normal, most of the answers depend on numbers that are not on this page: your actual account mix, your actual spending, your actual separation date. A Strategic Fit Interview fills those in.

Schedule a Strategic Fit Interview

Four questions determine which tools in this guide carry the most weight for your bridge.

Figure 6. Your bridge-years decision framework.



YES → run the bracket-fill sheet alongside the bridge.
NO → budget full-price coverage and move on.

A simplified framework, not a substitute for a full multi-year cash flow and tax projection.

Source: Singh PWM planning framework, built on the IRS and CMS inputs cited throughout this guide.

Question	If yes	If no
1. Bridge brokerage covers the full gap?	Rule of 55 / 72(t) not needed	Go to question 2
2. Former 401(k) unrolled, Rule-of-55 eligible?	Draw from that plan directly	Go to question 3
3. Income can stay under 400% FPL?	Manage MAGI, keep the subsidy	Go to question 4
4. Strong Roth conversion window?	Run the bracket-fill sheet alongside the bridge	Budget full-price coverage and move on

7. Your Action Plan

> Eight steps, each with an owner and a rough timing trigger, not a single deadline.

1. **Project your gap-years spending, including full-price healthcare.** Build a year-by-year budget from your actual separation age to 65, using the full 102% COBRA figure

and full-price marketplace premium, not the employer-subsidized number you are used to. You, 12 to 24 months before separation.

2. **Size and fund the bridge brokerage.** Move enough into a taxable account, held in a more conservative allocation than your main portfolio, to cover the gap years your projection identifies. You and your advisor, before separation.
3. **Decide whether to leave a 401(k) unrolled for Rule of 55 access.** If you may need it as a backstop, confirm your plan allows penalty-free distributions after separation, some do not, before you separate. You and your plan administrator, before your last day.
4. **Elect COBRA within 60 days, or decline deliberately.** If you elect, confirm the exact 102% premium with HR before your last paycheck. You, within 60 days of separation.
5. **Model your MAGI against the 400% FPL cliff for each bridge year.** Before any Roth conversion, brokerage draw, or consulting contract, check what it does to that year's ACA subsidy eligibility. You and your advisor, each December for the following plan year.
6. **Coordinate bracket-fill conversions with the bridge brokerage draws.** Run these together, not separately, per the framework in our companion Fill-The-Bracket Roth Sheet guide. You and your advisor, annually.
7. **If a 72(t) SEPP becomes necessary, get the calculation reviewed before day one.** Confirm the method, the amount, and your ability to sustain it for the full 5-year-or-59½ minimum before the first distribution goes out. You, your advisor, and your CPA, before the first payment.
8. **Set a Medicare enrollment reminder for your Initial Enrollment Period.** Each spouse enrolls individually; missing the window can trigger permanent late-enrollment penalties. You, starting three months before each 65th birthday.

8. Worksheet

> Fill this in before your next planning conversation. Every blank is a number your advisor will ask for.

Planned or actual separation age	____________
Years until age 59½	____________
Years until age 65 (Medicare)	____________
Current taxable brokerage balance available for the bridge	____________
Annual household spending target, including healthcare	____________
Prior employer's full monthly health premium (for COBRA math)	____________
Former 401(k) still with the separating employer? (Y/N)	____________
Expected other income (consulting, deferred comp, pension)	____________
Illustrative 400% FPL income line for your household size	____________

Notes:

Want a second set of eyes on these numbers? Schedule a Strategic Fit Interview.

9. What Changes This

> Several inputs in this guide are set to expire, sunset, or reset on a known schedule. Re-check before you act each year.

- **Every fall:** the IRS publishes the next year's tax brackets, capital gains thresholds, and standard deduction. CMS announces the next year's Medicare premiums and IRMAA tiers in October. Re-run this framework's numbers each time.
- **Annually, by law:** HHS updates the federal poverty guidelines each January, moving the 400% FPL line and, with it, the ACA subsidy cliff's exact dollar threshold.
- **Watch Congress:** the enhanced ACA premium tax credits have already been extended once and allowed to expire once since 2021. Whether they return for a future plan year is a live legislative question, not a settled one, and would meaningfully change the healthcare-cost side of this guide's math if it changes again.
- **At the moment of separation:** whether you roll a 401(k) or leave it in place determines whether Rule of 55 access is available at all. There is no window to reconsider after the rollover happens.

Re-check trigger: revisit this whole framework any year your separation date, spending, healthcare choice, or income projection changes materially, and at minimum every fall when the next year's tax and healthcare figures publish.

If this was useful

Share it with someone it would help. And if you want to talk through how it applies to your situation, the door is open.

Schedule a Strategic Fit Interview

Raman Singh, CFP®, EA
Your Personalized CFO

www.singhpwm.com
(480) 420-4824
raman@singhpwm.com

SINGH PWM · EST. 2023

> *The highest compliment for me is that you share my values and views with the ones you care for. Thank you for your Trust!*

Sources and disclosures

1. [1] Internal Revenue Service. Retirement Topics, Exceptions to Tax on Early Distributions; 26 U.S.C. § 72(t)(2)(A)(v) (the Rule of 55). Retrieved September 16, 2026.
2. [2] Internal Revenue Service. Rev. Rul. 2002-62; 26 U.S.C. § 72(t)(2)(A)(iv). Substantially equal periodic payments (SEPP): three approved calculation methods, 5-year-or-59½ minimum duration, retroactive penalty on early modification. Retrieved September 16, 2026.
3. [3] IRS Rev. Proc. 2025-32. 2026 federal income tax brackets, long-term capital gains brackets, and standard deduction. Retrieved September 16, 2026.
4. [4] U.S. Department of Labor, Employee Benefits Security Administration. COBRA Continuation Coverage FAQs: 102% premium cap, 18-month standard duration, up to 36 months for certain qualifying events. Retrieved September 16, 2026.
5. [5] Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Plan Year 2026 Marketplace Plans and Prices Fact Sheet. Confirms expiration of the enhanced ACA premium tax credits January 1, 2026, and the return of the 400% FPL subsidy cliff. Retrieved September 16, 2026.
6. [6] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, ASPE. 2026 Federal Poverty Guidelines: $15,960 single, $21,640 household of two, 48 contiguous states and DC. Retrieved September 16, 2026.
7. [7] Medicare.gov / CMS. Medicare eligibility begins at 65; seven-month Initial Enrollment Period. Retrieved September 16, 2026.
8. [8] Internal Revenue Service. Net Investment Income Tax, 26 U.S.C. § 1411: 3.8% above $250,000 MAGI married filing jointly, statutory, not indexed since 2013. Retrieved September 16, 2026.
9. [9] Fidelity Investments. 2026 Retiree Health Care Cost Estimate: $185,500 single / $371,000 couple, Medicare-age lifetime estimate. Retrieved September 16, 2026.
10. [10] Peterson-KFF Health System Tracker. How Much and Why ACA Marketplace Premiums Are Going Up in 2026. Retrieved September 16, 2026.
11. [11] KFF. What We Know So Far About 2026 ACA Marketplace Enrollment, Premiums, and Deductibles. Retrieved September 16, 2026.
12. [12] National Association of Insurance Commissioners. Not All Products Are Health Insurance: Health Care Sharing Ministries, Discount Plans and Risk-Sharing Plans. Retrieved September 16, 2026.
13. [13] Commonwealth Fund. Health Care Sharing Ministries: What Are the Risks to Consumers and Insurance Markets? Retrieved September 16, 2026.
14. [14] Singh PWM. 2026 Retirement and Tax Reference. lib/content/answers.ts, slug 2026-retirement-tax-limits-reference.
15. [15] Singh PWM. How Do I Retire Early Before Medicare? lib/content/answers.ts, slug how-do-i-retire-early-before-medicare.
16. [16] Singh PWM. What Is a 72(t) Distribution and When Does It Make Sense? lib/content/answers.ts, slug what-is-a-72t-distribution-and-when-does-it-make-sense.
17. Singh PWM. The 2026 ACA Subsidy Cliff: What It Means for Early Retirees. lib/content/answers.ts, slug aca-subsidy-cliff-2026-what-it-means-for-early-retirees.
18. Singh PWM. The Fill-The-Bracket Roth Sheet (companion guide, bracket-fill Roth conversion mechanics). singhpwm.com/guides/fill-the-bracket-roth-sheet.
19. Singh PWM. The HNW Guide to RMD Minimization (companion guide). singhpwm.com/guides/hnw-guide-to-rmd-minimization.
20. Singh PWM. The Portfolio Decumulation Flowchart (companion guide, three-bucket structure and dynamic guardrails). singhpwm.com/guides/portfolio-decumulation-flowchart.

21. Singh PWM. The Multi-Tier IRMAA Bracket Matrix (companion guide, Medicare-age IRMAA mechanics). singhpwm.com/guides/irmaa-bracket-matrix.