



10 tips for benefits enrollment success

In the early years of employer-sponsored health insurance and 401(k) savings plans, enrolling for employee benefits basically involved checking a few boxes. How times have changed!

Today, it's a bit more complicated. Open enrollment is a great time to remind employees of their options and reinforce your commitment to their wellbeing. Benefits strategy doesn't stop when the plans have been designed: building a cohesive engagement strategy is just as important.

Benefits are one of the top three reasons, along with pay and job security, people join a company and stay at their job. What can you do to fulfill the needs and expectations of your workforce? How best to inform them of their options? Employee Experience experts at WTW advise you to start with these tips.

Tip 1: Use your benefits communications as an attraction and retention tool



Why it's important: Let your benefits show off! The benefits that you've carefully selected and invested in have been protecting your employees and helping them thrive for years. You've got to communicate this – they won't speak for themselves! Use benefits enrollment to boast about the protection they provide to remind your employees of their value. Benefits are one of the top three reasons people join a company and stay at their job – don't miss the opportunity to lean into this during annual enrollment.

Tip 2: Provide a wide range of options to meet the needs of your diverse employee population



Why it's important: Providing choice and opportunities for employees to select what works best for them are key drivers of engagement and trust as the workforce becomes increasingly diverse and hybrid work models become more prevalent. **WTW research** shows that delivering choice improves benefits appreciation. Just consider how much that appreciation would increase with targeted benefits guides for distinct employee groups to connect them to the specific benefits they need. When there is no choice, employees are more likely to say the plans are expensive, rather than a good value.

Tip 3: Use employee listening tools and techniques to better understand work, life and benefit preferences by demographics and life stage



Why it's important: Employers must listen, understand employee needs, and consider the affordability and efficacy of benefit programs to meet the diverse needs of all employees. Creating and deploying a listening strategy will help you make concrete, data-driven decisions and eliminate the guesswork in identifying which benefit programs to optimize. Employee resource groups (ERGs), one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and surveys are tactics you can use to uncover perceptions, preferences, challenges and levels of understanding when it comes to benefits and wellbeing programs.

Tip 4: Conduct design thinking/personal development, journey mapping to develop targeted and personalized communications



Why it's important: In addition to wanting a variety of benefits to choose from, employees also want choice in how they learn about their options. Having a multi-faceted communication strategy is critical to educate employees and reach them in ways and at times that work best for them. For example, the 2023 Human Rights Campaign Foundation's Corporate Equality Index gives high marks when organizations directly address LGBTQ+ employees with targeted benefits communication material (e.g., benefits guide specific to family formation, transgender inclusive healthcare, and HIV treatment/prevention). Communicating equitably to your diverse employee population requires extra effort but it's critical. ERGs are incredibly useful to help develop communication strategies.

Tip 5: Use story-telling techniques to illustrate how benefits are used so employees can relate



Why it's important: In addition to using traditional examples of varying benefits and conditions like prescription drugs, knee replacements, or high blood pressure, develop narratives focusing on how your employees are utilizing benefits. For example, show how your health and wellbeing programs can support a single woman or same sex couple planning to have a baby. Or how a parent can use applied behavior analysis benefits and resources to support an autistic child. Or how the EAP can help an employee recover from the brink of burnout.

Tip 6: Connect benefits enrollment messaging to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion strategies



Why it's important: Employees are growing increasingly more aware of their employer's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. Finding ways to weave messaging about how your benefits programs meet the needs of a diverse population and support an inclusive culture will help connect the dots for employees. Even small nods can make a difference, such as using gender neutral pronouns in examples or rethinking the photos used in communications.

Tip 7: Reinforce wellbeing with an emphasis on mental health and financial wellbeing tools and resources



Why it's important: Benefits enrollment is an important opportunity to create awareness of how your wellbeing, mental health and time-off programs help employees cope with stress and prepare for their financial future. Many will appreciate the reminder. Again, we advise providing examples of how employees are optimizing benefits.

Tip 8: Equip managers to have conversations about benefits



Why it's important: Managers are a critical line of communication to employees. They're relied upon to manage performance and help develop talent, but why not leverage their relationships with employees when it comes to their benefits? Managers have a lot on their plate, but there are ways to encourage them to be benefits ambassadors with a light touch. For example, arm them with specific tips for how to help support wellbeing by directing employees to tools and resources on their benefits and nudge them to take small actions throughout the year, like using telemedicine or contacting the EAP.

Tip 9: Deliver a consumer-grade experience using digital tools to make it easy to prepare for, enroll and use benefits



Why it's important: Digital engagement tools that mimic the digital experiences we use each day are essential. It's about meeting people in all ways, wherever they may be, with small bites of information — whether remote, hybrid or back in the office full time. Technology can help you target and segment communication to the relevant audience at the right time. Some of the most effective employee experience platforms to consider for reconnecting with your employees are virtual environments (e.g., virtual benefit fairs), personalized videos, text messaging, and responsive or interactive online publications. Be sure to leave yourself enough time to make your communications adhere to the ADA's [website accessibility guidelines](#).

Tip 10: Give a snapshot of the full Total Rewards picture



Why it's important: It's impossible to over communicate the value of your Total Rewards offerings. Make the most of this spotlight on benefits to show your workforce that you're acting on your commitment to provide robust and equitable benefits and rewards. Benefits enrollment period – a time when employers have a captive audience with employees who need to make decisions about their health coverage for the following year – is the perfect time to remind employees of the array of benefits options you offer and the value that they provide. Take advantage of this time period to ensure understanding and appreciation of the total value – beyond pay – of the total package. Evaluate and refine your Total Rewards “story” through a compelling narrative/brand, based on data and insights, and aligned with your talent strategy.

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