

Benefitfocus[®]

2026 Buyers Guide

**Strategic Benefits
Administration
and Engagement**





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Simplify Your Approach to Benefits Administration

Benefits can be a source of confusion and complexity – and judging by ever-changing regulations and an expanding HR tech marketplace (not to mention employees' expanding expectations!), the benefits landscape is likely going to get more confusing and more complex in the years ahead.

After all, employers have been grappling with the same benefits administration challenges for years:

-  **Rising health care costs** – Employer health care costs are expected to increase by 9.5% in 2026, the highest increase in five years.¹
-  **Administrative burden** – 57% of HR professionals considered their departments to be understaffed.²
-  **Data fragmentation** – siloed data that's hard to access and use.
-  **Overwhelmed employees** – A confusing benefits experience can impact decision making. Voya's 2025 research³ found that 49% of employees said they would gain more confidence when making benefits decisions if they had personalized recommendations.

In a world where HR teams strive to do more with less, benefits leaders need the time and tools to pursue a well-defined strategy that can help impact the organizational bottom line. A simpler approach to benefits administration can lead to:

-  **A streamlined benefits process** that is intended to eliminate administrative noise so you can focus on the big picture of delivering a winning benefits strategy for your organization.
-  **Data as a strategic accelerator** that improves quality and helps you find ways to evolve your benefits program, maximize return on investment (ROI) and innovate.
-  **Optimal decisions, optimal outcomes** through personalized guidance that makes it easier for employees to maximize the impact of their benefits, from health to financial wellness.
-  **Costs savings** from more efficient use of resources and optimal employee engagement with their benefits.
-  **Less wasteful spending** that may occur from inaccurate dependent verification, billing, procedures and more.



Are You Ready to Simplify?

This checklist outlines some of the top reasons we have seen benefits professionals change their approach to benefits administration. Use it as a conversation starter with your team. Which pain points can you identify with? Which challenges are holding you back from making a bigger impact?

Deficiencies with your current benefits administration solution

- Missing functionality – your needs have grown beyond your team’s or solution’s capabilities.
 - Broken tech – implementation errors or workarounds continually bottleneck progress.
 - Difficult to scale – your solution can’t keep up with company growth or emerging needs.
 - Disjointed experience – HR team and employees lack access to a centralized benefits hub.
 - Siloed approach – employees are not guided to optimize benefits across health and savings.
 - Poor customer service – the vendor support you receive fails to drive strategy and innovation.
 - Solution isn’t comprehensive – HR team is forced to fill in gaps in benefits administration expertise and functionality that current vendor can’t provide.
 - Unavailable metrics – you don’t have access to certain reporting and analytics that can help identify and control costs and determine ROI.
- Other: _____

Limitations caused by a rapidly changing benefits landscape

- Tactical overload – your team has too little time to focus on high-impact, strategic initiatives.
 - Lack of internal expertise – managing complex fiduciary and compliance responsibilities.
 - Underperforming comms and programs – resources are untapped, and people are disengaged.
- Other: _____

Resource constraints

- Lack of insights – without tools to understand program ROI, you can’t adjust your strategy.
 - Rising benefits costs – more programs to manage and fewer resources to invest in your benefits administration strategy has the potential to reduce business impact.
 - Low headcount – benefits complexity increases, but your team can’t take on any more work.
- Other: _____



Anatomy of a Strategic Benefits Administration and Engagement Solution

A benefits administration solution that's built to simplify benefits is intended to provide an expansive scope of functionality and services that do far more than help benefits leaders administer benefits. When you enter into a consultative relationship with a trusted benefits administration partner and leave the administrative complexity and support-oriented “heavy lifting” to their expert team, you're free to think – and act – more strategically and change the way your people experience and engage with their benefits.

Today, selecting the right benefits administration and engagement solution for your organization requires looking at the technology and vendor partnership in a new way. It's helpful to assess potential partners across four dimensions:

Core Administration	Service & Support	Employee Benefits Experience
The outsourced functionality and end-to-end platform features that help ensure your HR team has the tools, data and insights needed to operate efficiently, optimize resources and remain innovation-ready for ongoing program success.	The level of service and support provided to your HR team and employees that helps drive quality and consistency, protect and extend your technology investment and increase your capacity to impact business results.	The experience-shaping interface that guides employees to their next best action, streamlining and simplifying each step to help them achieve maximum value across health and financial benefits and engage year-round.
Partner Fit		

The vendor health and cultural elements that constitute a successful strategic partnership including complementary industry experience and functional expertise; alignment on vision and values; and a shared approach to defining and achieving goals, communicating effectively and resolving issues.

The insights on the following pages will help you identify the functionality to look for and use as points of comparison between prospective partners.



Core Administration

An end-to-end administrative solution helps HR teams strategically outsource tedious administrative tasks and processes and free up critical resources for complex, analytical work.

In 2024, 62% of HR professionals reported that their departments have been operating beyond typical capacity.²

A valuable way to cost effectively manage resource demands, outsourcing is also a way to help reduce complexity for an HR team already struggling to do more with less. And when you consider the added value in trusting the work to a team of trained specialists who get the job done accurately and in alignment with compliance requirements, you can feel confident that you're minimizing business risk.

The provider you choose should have a meaningful approach to data management that enables you to make the most of your data and keep your organization ready to innovate with emerging technology. You should expect your benefits administration vendor to aggregate, organize, transmit and translate data to deliver nothing short of accurate, secure, timely, accessible and usable insights. That way, you'll understand how your benefits program is performing — what's working and what's not, and how you can improve and evolve to maximize value and ROI.

Administrative Functionality Considerations

Here are the functionality categories to consider – and what to look for in a comprehensive solution.



Comprehensive benefits administration

- **End-to-end solution** – Does the solution help relieve the burden of administrative tasks throughout the benefits process?
- **Electronic eligibility and enrollment** – Is the solution proven to support complex eligibility (employees and dependents) and business rules?
- **Benefits administration expertise and focus** – Is the vendor dedicated to benefits administration solutions and offering ongoing enhancements?
- **Cost containment** – Can the vendor guide employees to wellness solutions that offer the opportunity to mitigate claims and provide analytics to help identify and act on cost drivers?
- **Flexible configurations** – Can the solution support mergers and acquisitions, unions and unique plan designs?



Billing and payment services

- **Carrier Billing** – Does carrier billing support list bills and self bills, provide consolidation and reconciliation and remit payment on your behalf?
- **Direct Billing** – Does direct billing provide a simple participant experience, with the ability to automatically apply outstanding balances to payroll deductions upon return to work?
- **Closed-loop Payroll** – Is closed-loop payroll available and does it automate payroll reconciliation and adjustments for every payroll cycle, with a proven record of success in recouping uncollected premiums?



Compliance services

- **ACA compliance and reporting** – Is it a comprehensive and proven solution that will analyze your data, proactively identify issues, calculate eligibility and affordability, prepare and send forms and assist with any penalty notices?
- **COBRA administration** – Does the service include automated notifications, intuitive participant experience and experienced in-house support with comprehensive reporting?
- **Qualified Medical Child Support Order (QMCSO)** – Can they take on QMCSO qualification support, processing, communication and monitoring on your behalf?



Benefits program reporting and insights

- **Standard and ad hoc reports** – Do they offer comprehensive and flexible reporting tools that are easy to use, offer strong data visualization and deliver actionable insight?
- **Health care data analytics** – Can they integrate medical and Rx claims data for analytics to help shape, manage and measure benefit strategy, supported by consultative health care data experts?
- **Price transparency capability** – Does it help support compliance with the CMS Transparency in Coverage Final Rule by allowing you to compare your price claims against actual negotiated rates between payers and providers?



Technology

- **User-focused design** – Is the platform simple and intuitive?
- **Expansive integrations and data exchange** – Do they offer expansive integration capabilities across HR, payroll and benefit carrier systems with proven record of success in delivering data on time with accuracy?
- **Emerging tech** – Do they take a responsible approach to exploring artificial intelligence (AI), data and other tech to improve the customer experience with their solutions?
- **Enterprise-level security** – Are they focused year-round on keeping your data safe including audits or attestation reports on the vendor, data encryption, proven backup and disaster recovery capabilities and use of multi-factor authentication methods?



Value-added administration services

- **Dependent verification services** – Can they take on one-time dependent eligibility audits and ongoing verification processes?
- **Retiree administration** – Do they offer support for initial, annual and qualifying event enrollment (including connection to retiree exchange), with the ability to handle complex eligibility rules and cost structures?
- **Consumer accounts administration** – Do they offer an integrated, intuitive experience for employees to manage consumer account contributions and balances, with flexibility to support complex plan designs, business rules and data exchange requirements?



Service & Support

Implementing a benefits technology platform is not a simple buyer-seller transaction – it's the beginning of a relationship that can be defined by the service and support you receive. A partner that is committed to nurturing your relationship for the long-term will emphasize collaboration, communication and transparency in their service to your HR team and employees.

47% of customers

feel less valued when they face difficulty reaching or talking to unsupportive customer service agents. ([Accenture Life Trends 2024](#))

Customer service is something to consider carefully when selecting a benefits administration partner. After all, their team is an extension of your team, meant to make your life easier and your employees' benefits experiences better. Their people – everyone from administration specialists and client service executives – should consistently demonstrate their dedication to helping you implement, deliver and iterate on a successful benefits strategy.

Service excellence matters. Set off on the right foot with a partner that's devoted to exceptional end-to-end service and follow-through – and whose people are as passionate about a strong service culture as you are.



Service and Support Model

Here are the support and service categories to consider – and what to look for in a partner.



Client support

- **Smooth Implementation** – Do they have a clear implementation process with timelines and involve the client manager from day one?
- **Industry expertise** – Do their service and support team members have deep benefits administration experience?
- **Service philosophy** – Is their service grounded in the principles of predictability, proactivity and partnership – do they take feedback well?
- **Single point of contact** – Do they offer an experienced single point of contact, backed by a team of subject matter experts?
- **Comprehensive metrics** – Are performance metrics and scorecards shared regularly?
- **Low team turnover** – What is the average tenure of the team that supports you and your employees?



Employee support

- **Multichannel support** – Do they offer support via phone, email and chat and have high resolution rates?
- **Chatbot with continual improvements** – Do they offer an artificial intelligence (AI) virtual assistant that continually improves?
- **Clear approach to workforce management** – Do they use a thoughtful, clearly articulated approach to workforce management (e.g., customer service representatives, capacity planning, etc.)?
- **Proven success** – Can they demonstrate their success with metrics such as first-call resolution, average speed to answer and customer satisfaction score?
- **Telephonic enrollment** – Can customer service representatives help employees enroll over the phone?
- **Availability** – What hours is employee support available and are they extended during open enrollment?
- **Multi-language support** – Can employees chat with an agent in 20+ languages?



Enhancements & Training

- **Product releases** – What is the frequency of product releases, how are they communicated and is there flexibility in adopting new features?
- **Enhancement feedback** – How can you share thoughts on current and suggestions on future functionality?
- **Multi-channel training** – Do they offer a variety of customer training options?
- **Professional development** – Do they offer educational content and training that provides the latest on industry updates? What about opportunities for professional development?



Employee Benefits Experience

While benefits education is important, employers know that it's unrealistic to expect employees to be benefits experts; rather, the path to making the right benefits decisions needs to be more experiential, guided and interactive. Employees today can benefit from a hyper-personalized, hyper-connected experience that directs them to their next optimal action – and that minimizes the potential for “bad” decisions and removes barriers to making the most out of their benefits for maximum personal impact.

A 2024 [pulse survey report](#) from Cornell University's* School of Industrial Labor Relations Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies revealed that **employee experience** is a top-of-mind concern for 44% of CHROs and HR leaders. Rounding out the top five topics were transformation and evolution (67%), talent management (56%), technology (50%) and leadership and succession planning (44%).

*Cornell University is not affiliated with Benefitfocus

When assessing benefits administration solutions, you'll want to be sure to consider how each vendor approaches their digital platform's design and UX. Consumer-grade experiences are the name of the game, as employees are accustomed to seamlessly swiping and tapping their way through their favorite shopping, entertainment and social media apps.

This means your objective is to leverage your benefits administration solution to deliver benefits in a way that increasingly mirrors the consumer experience – one that's on-demand, highly personalized, and almost anticipatory in its ability to meet the employee “where they're at” at the time they need to access, choose or use their benefits.

Employee Benefits Experience Capability Considerations

Here are the employee engagement capabilities to consider – and what to look for in a solution.



Benefits in one place

- **Centralized, online benefits hub** – Is there a single, personalized source to access integrated account balances, total compensation and pre-enrollment communication, education and resources?
- **Mobile app** – Do they offer an app for year-round access to benefits information (e.g., coverage details, claims history, account balances) on their mobile devices while providing an additional communication channel for just-in-time education?



Streamlined enrollment and guidance

- **Step-by-step navigation** – Does the solution guide employees through enrollment with an intuitive, personalized experience based on the enforcement of business and eligibility rules that present employees only with information and tasks that apply to them at an individual level?
- **Eligibility management and plan packaging** – Is the enrollment experience easy to navigate and comprehensive, enabling employees to enroll in all their benefits from one place, with options thoughtfully categorized to aid in optimal selection?
- **Enrollment guidance** – Is decision support available and does it sort plans and options based on an employee's profile, preferences and past claims data to simplify the decision-making process and optimize their enrollment and savings decisions?



Engagement and communication

- **Care navigation and advocacy** – Is an integrated care navigation solution, using leading data science, available to guide employees to in-network doctors that are more likely to produce improved health outcomes and, in turn, lower total claim costs?
- **Integrated point solutions** – Do they offer key point solutions within their platform to support employee health and wellness?
- **Year-round education** – Do they offer communication tools to provide employees with personalized nudges to promote rewards and incentives?
- **Communications design and fulfillment services** – Do they offer technology, design and fulfillment services that support a multichannel, personalized, educational, year-round approach to employee communication? Are consultative services available to plan, design and execute on your behalf?



Partner Fit

The optimal benefits administration partner will provide your HR team and employees with the tools, support and insights you need to optimize resources and achieve ongoing success – however you define it. This means they’ll meet your needs across the parameters of technology, functionality and service. But your vendor assessment shouldn’t stop there.

When assessing potential technology partners, enterprise tech buying teams may also want to consider vendor health, a category of criteria that includes vendor stability, references, product or vendor roadmap and culture alignment to your team’s organization.

Typically, components of vendor health are fairly straightforward and can be uncovered through research before and during the sales process. Cultural fit, however, is nuanced and can be a little more difficult to evaluate. While you’ll see cultural alignment demonstrated in your partner’s approach to developing solutions for your organization and delivering service to your people, it’s also a feeling, or a sense of “They really get us” or “We work really well together.”



Partner Fit Considerations

Every organization is unique, and there's no one "right" definition of a right-fit vendor. As a starting point to help you consider what partner fit means to your technology buying team, you may want to look for these organizational health and culture markers from your preferred benefits administration and engagement partner:



Core values

- Is their organization guided by principles (e.g., innovation, accountability, transparency) that resonate with what matters most to your organization?
- Are their core values evidenced in your interactions with their people before, during and after the sales process?
- Do you share the same organizational commitments (e.g., sustainability, ethical conduct, diversity and inclusion)?



Leadership approach

- Does your partner's leadership team have deep experience and expertise in your industry?
- Are your leadership teams aligned on a commitment to improving employees' lives with benefits – and what it takes to get there?
- Do your partner's leaders (and their sales and service teams) instill a sense of confidence and trust in your team?



Strategic vision

- Do you share an approach to defining, pursuing and iterating on success?
- Does your partner seek to help employees connect benefits across health and financial wellness by optimizing enrollment decisions and utilization behaviors?
- Does your partner help educate your team on best practices to keep you on top of industry trends and ready for innovation?
- Do they incorporate feedback from clients and end-users into solution and service development roadmaps?



Track record of success

- Does your partner have experience working with organizations in your industry and companies who are overcoming similar challenges?
- Can your partner provide statistics detailing results and client experiences, such as successful open enrollment seasons?
- Does your partner have a history of technology investments and innovation focused on improving service delivery, solution and data quality, and customer and end-user experiences?
- Does your partner have successful relationships with industry players including carriers, technology consultants, benefits brokers, TPAs and health plans?

Next Steps

At Benefitfocus, a Voya Financial Company, we simplify benefits administration. We extend your team with our people, technology and data insights while delivering a connected employee experience that inspires optimal decisions across health and financial wellbeing. Our full-service, people-centered approach puts your success first by helping to drive value and improve employee outcomes.



Explore **Benefitfocus Resources** for insights on benefits and help choosing a new partner.



Book a demo to experience Benefitfocus in action – and learn how we can help simplify benefits for your organization.

¹Aon, “U.S. Employer Health Care Costs Expected to Rise 9.5 Percent in 2026”, September 2025.

²SHRM, 2025 State of the Workplace

³Voya Financial Consumer Insights & Research survey conducted Aug. 5-6, 2025, in partnership with Morning Consult among 427 employed, benefits-eligible Americans aged 18+ in the U.S. working full time/part time.

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