



How to Get to Know Your People Better

Your guide to using employee feedback to inspire an effective benefits program.

Ready to get to know your workforce? **Let's go!**

Benefitfocus[®]



Welcome!

Today’s workers want to be seen and understood, and they want their employee benefits packages to reflect and serve their personal needs.

Employers know that meaningful benefits can energize their workforce. One [study from Quantum Workplace](#) showed that employees who feel their employer cares about their wellbeing are 38 percent more engaged, 28 percent more likely to recommend the employer and 17 percent more likely to stay long-term.

But there’s a difference between gathering employee feedback and really knowing your employees. The latter takes a strategic approach and a commitment from leaders. It means using different ways to engage in listening, sharing and communicating, and then demonstrating your efforts to deliver on employees’ expectations.

Whether you are just starting on the journey to get to know your employees or are looking to boost your strategy, we’re here for you.

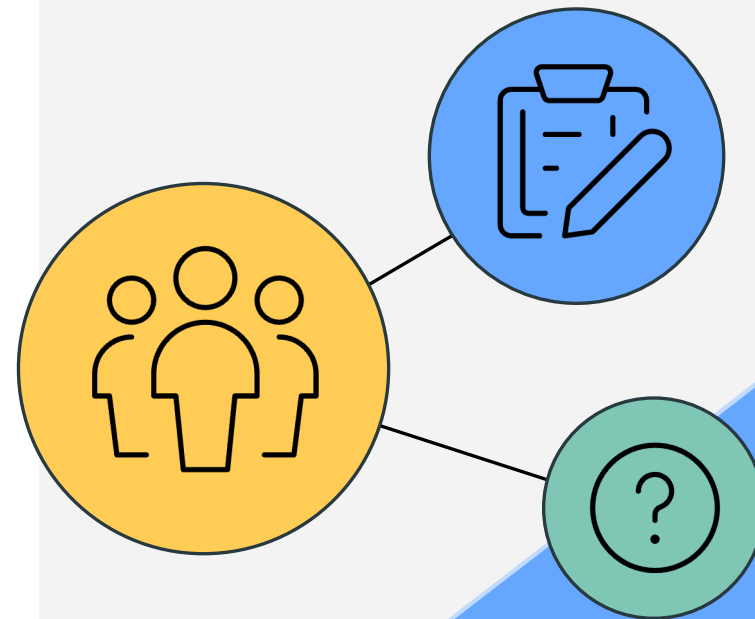


In this guide, you’ll explore:

- ✓ **Key tactics** you can use to effectively understand (and ultimately, better engage) employees
- ✓ **Pro tips** for administering benefits surveys
- ✓ **Example questions** for your next survey

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7 Tactics to Better Understand Employees and Their Benefits Needs

Let's dive in by exploring tried-and-true tactics that'll help you uncover deeper truths about how your employees choose and use benefits, their perceptions of benefits and their benefits experience, and their benefits needs and preferences – informed in part by Benefitfocus' own best practices.



1 Survey Your Employees Population

If you want to know what your population thinks and feels about their employee benefits, go straight to the source. Surveying your people can provide powerful insights into their benefit needs, behaviors, preferences and perceptions. It can also gauge how your benefits offerings may compare to workforce expectations, stack up to industry standards and reveal the role benefits play in your company's employee attraction and retention efforts.

What's more, getting employee feedback on your benefits program helps you build your business case when you want to make changes. How you and your employees define value is likely going to be different than someone in your Finance department, for example, so survey data can help you connect benefits to value and impact.

Pulse Surveys vs. Annual Benefits Survey: Which is Better?

	Pros	Cons
Pulse Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shorter• More frequent connection with employees• Quicker availability of fresh data points	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Higher potential for survey fatigue• Narrower scope of insights

Pro Tip: Consider surveying targeted ERGs or smaller populations of employees for pulse surveys so you avoid survey fatigue.

Annual Benefits Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employees can share their opinions on a wider range of benefits-related topics at one time.• Annual data benchmarking and analyses may deliver deeper strategic insights.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Survey requires more time for HR to design and deploy.• Takes longer for employees to complete, possibly resulting in less participation than from shorter surveys.
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Pro Tip: Make it clear to employees what will be covered and the expected time it will take to complete – and that their participation matters.

Bottom Line: Each has its pros and cons – and both have their place in an employee feedback strategy!





2 Create Personal Feedback Loops Between Employees and Your HR Team

Traditional surveys are a key source of employee input, but opportunities abound to glean equally valuable and even personal insight. It may sound simple, but if you want to get to know your employees better, ask questions and offer opportunities to check in – the old-fashioned (that is, one-on-one) way. For example, set up “HR office hours” (whether in-person or remote) to show employees that your door is open and you’re available to support them.

For as much self-guided support you may offer, sometimes people simply prefer to “talk it out” with someone in-the-know, and authentic connection and engagement can bring home the human component to benefits.

Abby Brolley of Benefitfocus describes the company’s Benefits Navigator approach, in which benefits team members provide employees with intentionally personalized benefits experiences. “I sit down or message one-on-one with associates to talk through their unique situations,” she explains. “I ask questions like, ‘What’s been your experience with benefits so far’ and ‘What are your health and financial goals?’”

If people show confusion or the team hears similar questions over and over, Brolley considers these important signals that employees may not know when or where to engage with benefits. “If people aren’t asking *any* questions,” she stresses, “that’s actually more concerning because they may not be interacting at all or are failing to see the value of the benefits we put together.”

At the end of the day, personal sessions can reveal opportunities to strengthen your benefits strategy as well as employee-facing resources and tools. Insights may lead to making improvements in benefits communication and education or introducing new technology, such as a digital decision support tool that provides important personalized guidance during the online enrollment process.

● There’s a lot you can hide behind in a remote environment. My best suggestion is to be available, put yourself out there and make yourself a person, not just a benefits or HR team.”

● **Abby Brolley, HR Analyst, Benefitfocus**

3 Leverage Your Company’s Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

Speaking of feedback loops, ERGs are active populations within your workforce that can be excellent sources of insight and sentiment. These employees are raising their hands to come together, engage and potentially be advocates for certain benefits you offer, so work with ERG leaders to maintain a pulse on their communities.

Consider having an HR representative periodically attend ERG meetings to make members aware of benefits they might appreciate – a fitness app for runners, for instance, or pet insurance for cat lovers. You can also show support by just listening in, taking notes and making yourself available if questions come up. Either way, carve out space for conversations about how the company’s benefits can better support employees with shared interests, challenges and needs.





4 Partner with People Managers

We're in a semi-virtual work world, making the personal connection side of HR harder than ever. It's essential to find ways to engage on a human level – and people managers can lend a hand!

While your benefits communication plan may already enlist managers to cascade messages to their teams, remind leaders that sharing feedback from the bottom-up is helpful, too. They have existing one-to-one relationships with employees, so they're a natural "fit" for sharing important HR messages with their reports and, importantly, funneling benefits feedback back to your team.

One way to take this initiative to the next level is to encourage managers to set up quarterly benefits check-ins with their teams and invite a member of your benefits team to participate. Conversely, coordinate with managers on opportunities for HR to be an "agenda item" at their team huddles – a slightly lower-touch approach that still puts benefits messaging in front of employees at key times during the year.

5 Seize Benefits Education Opportunities

In addition to helping employees understand how to choose and use their benefits, offering benefits education opportunities throughout the year also opens the door for two-way communication – and to collect the insights you need to know your employees better.

To help gauge what's on their minds, you can:

- ✓ **Invite** employees to send questions ahead of sessions
- ✓ **Leave** plenty of time for Q&A during sessions
- ✓ **Ask** employees to suggest session topics
- ✓ **Leverage** post-session surveys

6 Get Insights from Your Benefits Data

Your data has a story to tell. It can give you moment in time insight into which benefits your employees are choosing. Pair that with benefits analytics data, claims data, Rx data and more, and that's where the magic happens. Then, you can get a full picture of how your employees are choosing and using their benefits.

For example, let's say claims data reveals that a significant number of employees enrolled in major medical coverage use the hospital emergency room for nonemergent situations. This leaves them – and your company – on the hook for large bills that can be minimized or avoided if the employees tap into a telehealth app or visit an urgent care facility instead.

This insight can help you understand gaps in education or benefits strategy. It may lead you to incentivize preventative care, re-introduce your telehealth app or host a virtual education session with your employee population about the preferred ways to seek care for non-life-threatening ailments.

7 Work with Your Benefits Advisor

Working alongside a benefits broker or consultant can be invaluable, so don't leave your advisor out of your efforts to better understand your employees' benefits needs, behaviors and preferences. In this case, they can provide an outside-in perspective on employee trends, helping your team level-set and learn what other employers are doing when it comes to supporting a connected employee experience. They may also have ideas and resources you can leverage to survey employees, run effective communications campaigns and benefits education sessions, and more.





Top 5 “Musts” for Administering Benefits Surveys

Here are **five tips** we suggest to help you and your employees get the most out of benefits surveys.

Must be...Actionable

It's critical that if you're going to do a survey, your intention is to act on the results – and employees should know that. Demonstrating the ways their feedback leads to changes in your benefits offerings and programs can serve as an important trust-builder with your workforce.

The double-edged sword is that you often need that survey data to go about making changes in the first place. Often, executive teams will ask for quantitative data to back up making changes to employee benefits programs, especially for benefits that may only serve a specific subset of the population.

“We survey our population on our benefits every year, and fertility support was a gap that came back year after year as a comment,” shares Benefitfocus’s Abby Brolley. “When we were able to present that data to leadership and show this is something people are repeatedly asking for, we were able to invest in it and get it added to our benefits plan.”





Must be...Updated

Things can change in an instant. We've seen that over the last few years, and the ripples it has within our working environments. The priorities that were at the top of the list for employees five years ago are not the same today.

So, while asking the same questions of employees year-over-year can provide an insight into trends over time, it's also important to recognize that those questions may no longer be the right ones. Instead, think critically about which questions should remain and what needs changing. You might ask yourself questions like:

- What has changed since last year that would impact the questions we're asking?
- What new information are we trying to uncover?
- What benefits would we like to gauge interest on?

Must be...Concise

The goal is engagement. So, keep in mind, the longer the survey, the more employees may see it as a chore or something to "tune out" after a while.

To be effective, keep surveys as concise as possible, using scaled or statement questions with options for a few open-ended questions around the topics you're really looking to hear from your employees on. It's also important to have a free form section for employees to provide positive feedback, negative feedback or simply to vent – even if it's hard to hear.

- "We used to ask a ton of questions but found we would get neutral or non-answers in certain categories. Then, over the course of a few years, we started to whittle down the questions to get to a place where we found what worked."
- **Abby Brolley, HR Analyst, Benefitfocus**

Must be...Well-Timed

People are busy, so like in most areas of work and life, timing is everything. Yet, when it comes to surveys and ideal timing, there's unfortunately no silver bullet. Sending a survey on a weekday during a low-peak time may help ensure it's received with the least amount of interference from other priorities. But ultimately, it depends on your company and type of workforce.

It's a good idea to send a couple of reminders that gently nudge employees to respond. On that note, leave the survey window open for long enough to field a satisfactory number of responses.



Reminders can be shown to increase survey response rates by up to **36 percent**. (Qualtrics)

Must be...Gamified

Maybe survey-taking should be more fun? Definitely. Consider adding a level of gamification to drive responses. While keeping responses anonymous, you could show a tracker of total completions by department, offering an incentive for the department with the highest percentage of survey responses.



Essential Benefits Survey Questions to Ask

Setting up an employee benefits survey is dependent on many factors such as the benefits you currently offer or are considering offering, the type of workforce you have and what types of insights you're hoping to uncover. But it can be helpful to gain inspiration from examples. On the next page, you'll find survey question examples focused on different areas of benefits.

Your Helpful Breakdown to Question Formats:



Rating Scale

This is where respondents are asked to indicate their personal levels on things such as satisfaction or frequency. A Likert scale may be used (i.e., strongly agree / agree / neither agree nor disagree / disagree / strongly disagree).



Matrix

Here, respondents are asked to evaluate one or more row items using the same set of column choices.



Rank Order

Respondents are provided with a list of answer options that they can drag-and-drop into a list based on importance.



Free Text/Open Ended

These types of questions are more qualitative in nature, allowing respondents to offer their unique perspective by typing in a response.



Multiple Choice

Of course, most are familiar with this type where a question is posed followed by a list of possible responses.





Health Insurance

Health care is a major consideration for employees so it's important to understand whether your offerings meet employees' needs and expectations. Some health care question thought-starters...

- How satisfied are you with your health care benefits?
- I feel confident that my health care insurance will meet my needs in the next year.
- It was easy to understand my health insurance enrollment options.
- I know where to go when I have a health insurance question or concern.
- What changes, if any, would you like to see in your healthcare benefits?

Family Planning, Parental Leave & Caregiving Support

Employees who have families or are in the family planning process have a unique range of needs. Often, they are looking to their employer to go beyond the standard. These questions can get to the heart of what a specific employee population is looking for...

- How satisfied are you with your benefits related to family planning, parental leave and caregiving support?
- I understand the benefit options available to me related to family.
- What benefits are important to you when it comes to family planning, parental leave or caregiving support?
- If you could choose one element in our benefits related to family planning, parental leave or caregiving support to change or improve, what would it be and why?

Financial Wellness

Whether it's managing money for the future or relieving financial stressors in the present, providing options to help employees prosper is likely to be a top priority. Find out what's going to be the most impactful for your employees' financial wellbeing. Some financial wellness question thought-starters...

- How satisfied are you with our retirement plan?
- I understand how my company's tuition reimbursement policy works.
- I understand how to access my 529 College Savings Plan.
- I feel confident I have the resources I need to get ahead financially now and plan for the future.
- Are there any benefits or tools you'd like to see in our offerings to help you better protect, manage or save money?

Total Wellbeing

People's evolving needs require more than just core medical benefits. Understand how your benefit offerings are making an impact on your employees' total wellbeing with these question thought-starters...

- How satisfied are you with the range of employer-paid or supplemental benefits available to you (i.e., Employee Assistance Program, mental health program, identity theft protection, pet insurance)?
- Would incentives encourage you to participate in physical fitness, nutrition, financial wellness or mental health challenges?
- My employer offers generous benefits options to help me nurture my total wellbeing.
- Are you interested in any voluntary benefits not currently offered?



Need help getting started? Use this [Open Enrollment Employee Experience Survey Template](#).





Putting It All Together

Giving your employees a thorough overview of their benefits during orientation, having a benefits guide on hand and providing access to the decision-support tools they need to be self-sufficient is baseline. But that can't be where benefits communication ends. If you don't have feedback loops with your employees, you'll likely miss opportunities to connect and build trust. You may fail to understand their changing needs. Worst of all, you won't be able to spot telltale signs that undermine your efforts to recruit and retain top talent.

Experiment to find out which tactics work for your company and iterate your process over time. There's no right or wrong when it comes to getting to know your employee population and their benefits needs. The most important part is taking the first step.



If you want a benefits solution that'll help you boost employee engagement, Benefitfocus is here to help. [Schedule your demo today.](#)

