

Benefits Insights

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Preparing for Open Enrollment With a Hybrid Workforce

With open enrollment season approaching, now's the time for HR professionals to kick off their planning. Due to the pandemic—and employees' desire for flexibility—many employers now find themselves with a workforce on a hybrid schedule. It's imperative they make appropriate adjustments to lead a successful open enrollment period.

As a flexible model designed to support a distributed workforce of both on-site and remote employees, hybrid workplaces have become increasingly common. A Mercer survey found that 83% of employers are considering flexible work arrangements more than they did prior to the pandemic, and 73% plan to implement a hybrid environment. In this model, employees may be on-site some days and work the other days remotely, or specific departments or roles may need to work on-site while others can work remotely just as effectively.

With an increased number of employees working remotely, employers have had to adapt and rethink all aspects of the employee experience—including open enrollment.

Leverage Virtual Opportunities for All Employees

During 2020, virtual open enrollment initiatives played a significant role for many organizations, and they are likely here to stay. Of course, offering virtual open enrollment opportunities doesn't mean that an employer needs to scrap their traditional open enrollment process entirely. In a hybrid model, many employees continue to work in a brick-and-mortar location. Most employers already have robust open enrollment processes for those on-site; still, it's worth considering how virtual channels can supplement a benefits strategy for remote, hybrid and even on-site employees. Here are a few tips for leveraging virtual channels and opportunities:

- **Host a kick-off webinar or virtual presentation.** An engaging event can help employees start thinking about benefits and be effective at providing employees with the key information they'll need. A head start on open enrollment can help troubleshoot potential issues ahead of time and avoid a scenario where masses of employees need assistance at the same time when its time to enroll.
- **Create a benefits website.** A one-stop location will allow employees to hop online, engage with resources and learn more. Some employers even use mobile apps to support benefits education and enrollment.
- **Provide employees with the technical support they need.** Examine how an open enrollment experience can be accessible for all employees, regardless of their location. Benefits can often be complex to enroll in, but employers can take steps to change this perception among their workforce. Consider the user experience of an enrollment platform and how employees can receive timely support when they need help.
- **Prepare easily accessible materials for employees to review.** Employees will want to review materials with their dependents and decision-makers. Digitally distributing benefits resources will enable them to do this, as well as help educate them and allow them to feel confident in their choices.
- **Host a virtual open enrollment fair.** Typically, an open enrollment fair allows employees to learn about available benefits and discuss offerings with providers.



In a virtual environment, this is mirrored to be accessible to employees digitally. These events are great ways for employers and benefits providers to help employees understand and enroll in the benefits programs that meet their needs. Some tips for hosting a virtual open enrollment fair include:

- Develop an extensive agenda covering both general and specific benefits. If employees know what they want to learn more about, they can attend that particular session, make their enrollment decisions quicker and resume their workday.
- Provide clear instructions and details about how and when to attend the virtual fair. If you're introducing a new platform or web conferencing service to employees, ensure they have plenty of time to download and set up necessary accounts to join when it's time for the event.

These initiatives are considered supplements to existing open enrollment strategies targeted at on-site employees. For example, if offering a virtual open enrollment fair, an on-site fair can still take place, as it engages employees at a location.

Offer Flexibility for Enrolling

In a hybrid model, employees have varying employment circumstances and different needs for enrolling in benefits. Some employees may be readily prepared to make their benefits choices, while others may need more assistance. Similarly, some employees may desire a more traditional in-person enrollment experience, whereas others are eager to enroll virtually.

Here are a few ways to provide flexibility to employees:

- **Offer one-on-one informational meetings.** Employers should be prepared for those who prefer to meet with someone in a one-on-one setting to discuss benefits and have their options discussed face to face. Such channels can just as easily be done virtually and might be referred to as “virtual office hours” or a “virtual desk.”
- **Provide on-site enrollment options.** Don't neglect the in-person experience when meeting the needs of a distributed workforce. In a hybrid model, make

sure to allow employees an on-site option to enroll and focus on the quality of the experience.

- **Provide virtual enrollment options.** As virtual open enrollment plays a prominent role in a strategy for a hybrid workforce, a robust virtual experience is a vital component of open enrollment.

Communicate With a Hybrid Workforce in Mind

A comprehensive communication strategy can help employees understand their options and encourage participation. Many tried-and-true tactics may need to be digitized for organizations with distributed workforces.

Get Started Early

It's important for employers to communicate open enrollment initiatives early, often and effectively. By starting this process early, employees will have more time to engage with open enrollment resources. The goal is to make sure that all employees have plenty of opportunities to learn about benefits and ask questions so they can make informed decisions—regardless of location.

Address the Important Topics

To ensure all employees are educated about the most important topics, focus on what employees need to know, such as their enrollment options and which benefits have changed from the previous year. An overarching benefits guide is a common resource that can just as easily be distributed digitally to remote employees as it is to those on-site. Specific materials on unique benefits can also play a major role in a benefits strategy.

Reach All Employees

With employees dispersed in different locations, it's essential to use communication channels that reach all employees. Some traditional media like posters and internal meetings may continue to play a role in communicating to those on-site. In addition to these, channels including intranets, email, and chat platforms may help educate all employees.

Employer Takeaway

Every workplace is unique in how its workforce interacts with open enrollment and benefits. This year, hybrid workforces should be factored into an open enrollment strategy. For open enrollment planning and communication resources, contact us today.