

Getting the Most Out of Your 2026 Open Enrollment Communications

Open enrollment is a crucial period for both employers and employees. It's when employees can make important decisions about their benefits and an opportunity for employers to engage with their workforce effectively. As organizations continue to adapt to evolving workforce needs and changing regulations in 2026, open enrollment communication becomes more critical than ever.

This article highlights why open enrollment communication matters and provides tips on what to do before, during and after enrollment to maximize its effectiveness.

Why Communication Matters

Although open enrollment is critical, some employees make uneducated decisions or even miss deadlines. Some common reasons for this are that open enrollment information is often full of confusing jargon, employees may not receive enough communication from their employer or they simply don't understand the enrollment process.

Communication matters because it enables employees to understand the open enrollment process in a clear and assessable manner, which can boost active participation in benefits selection. Employees who feel valued and informed about their benefits are more likely to appreciate their employer's efforts and stay engaged with their work.

Before Open Enrollment

Educating and informing employees about their benefits package is integral to open enrollment. Effective communication is critical to educate and inform employees about new, returning or expanded benefits options.

Consider the following communication tips before the open enrollment period begins:

- **Review previous communications.** It can be enlightening for employers to review and evaluate past open enrollment communications to identify what worked and what didn't. This information can be used to improve the current communication strategy.
- **Develop key messaging.** After solidifying benefits options, employers need to plan their communication strategies. The first step is figuring out key messaging, focusing on new or updated benefits offerings, and developing FAQs to address common concerns quickly.
- **Customize communication.** Communication is often more successful when it's tailored to different employee segments. Consider the needs of various age groups, life stages and demographics within the workforce.
- **Gather resources.** Before the open enrollment period begins, it's important for employers to have all the necessary resources—such as printed materials, digital platforms and support staff—ready.

During Open Enrollment

During the open enrollment period, employer communication efforts take center stage, as it's when employees actively make critical decisions about their benefits. Effectively guiding employees through this process is essential for ensuring they make informed choices that align with their needs and preferences.

Consider the following communication tactics to engage employees during the open enrollment period:

- **Vary communication channels.** Use multiple communication channels such as email, printed materials, webinars and in-person meetings to reach employees effectively. Not everyone consumes information the same way, so a diverse approach is key.

- **Prioritize clear and concise messaging.** Open enrollment messaging should be simple and easy to understand. Avoiding HR or benefits-related jargon is best to help make benefits easier to understand. Additionally, many benefits are acronyms, so employers should help decode and explain the alphabet soup to employees.
- **Make it digestible.** It's crucial to catch employees' attention and present the key message immediately before they lose interest. Traditional benefits booklets can be lengthy; instead, employers could deliver bite-sized information to employees through videos and emails. If all open enrollment information is given at once, it's easy for employees to become overwhelmed and, ultimately, disengage with the information. Digestible communication makes it easy for employees to know what to focus on and take action.
- **Use real-world examples.** When possible, employers can put benefits offerings in context with real-world scenarios. Employees can relate to stories, so find ways to bring the options to life. For example, instead of describing telemedicine as a 24/7 benefit, highlight that an employee could get health care answers in the middle of the night when they or a child are running a high fever. The chances of employees needing to use health care benefits during the next year are highly likely, so help reiterate the importance of complete coverage.
- **Personalize communication.** A personalized approach can help employers engage employees with open enrollment information. Additionally, employers may yield better results by personalizing communications to individual employees whenever possible. For example, communications could address employees by name and highlight benefits relevant to their circumstances. This builds off the earlier tip of segmenting employee groups based on age and other factors.
- **Remain available.** Those leading open enrollment efforts should offer opportunities for employees to ask questions and get clarifications. This can be done through webinars, town hall meetings, dedicated question-and-answer sessions or HR open office hours.

After Open Enrollment

Although open enrollment is the most pivotal time to highlight employee benefits, employers can educate employees throughout the year. Ongoing communication after open enrollment can help employees understand and utilize their available benefits.

Consider the following communication strategies after the open enrollment deadline passes:

- **Follow up.** Although the enrollment period is over, employers can continue communicating with employees to remind them of their choices and deadlines. Additionally, they can send reminders about important events or changes to benefits.
- **Collect feedback.** Gather feedback from employees about the open enrollment process. Surveys or focus groups can be used to understand what worked well and where improvements can be made.
- **Evaluate and optimize.** As with any workplace effort, analyzing the outcomes of open enrollment communication efforts is important. Check if goals were achieved and use the data to refine next year's strategy.
- **Provide ongoing education.** Employers shouldn't limit communication to just the open enrollment period. They can periodically remind employees of the benefits and resources available to them.

Summary

Open enrollment communication is a crucial aspect of benefits administration that directly impacts employees' well-being and satisfaction. By planning, customizing communications and continually improving their approach, employers can make the most out of their 2026 open enrollment period. Effective communication helps employees make informed choices and strengthens their connection with the organization, leading to a happier and more engaged workforce.

Contact us for additional open enrollment support.

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