BENEFITS.GOV
Your Path to Government Benefits

Benefits.gov Program Charter

FINAL

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Benefits.gov Program Charter

The Benefits.gov Program Charter defines the scope, objectives and participants of the program and serves as a reference of authority. Each 12-month program cycle is defined by a unique scope, schedule, set of requirements and estimated costs.

1. Benefits.gov Description

Benefits.gov – the official benefits website of the Federal government – uses the Internet to provide citizens with easy and personalized access to the government and its taxpayer-funded assistance programs. The Benefits.gov Program creates a more open and transparent government by ensuring that citizens can find available benefits, assess their potential eligibility for those benefits, and determine the necessary steps to pursue enrollment in the programs.

Benefits.gov reduces redundancy across government while also decreasing the cost of conducting business with the government through "Customized Connections," a service allow Benefits.gov Federal agency partner to rebrand the Benefits.gov solution for their unique constituencies. Government is also rewarded with the value generated from information transactions conducted with citizens in a very low cost channel.

At the close of FY09, the Program's websites featured over 1,000 Federally-funded programs. Many of the featured programs are managed at the State level which give citizens access to benefit information specific to their locality.

There are 17 Federal agencies that are involved in the partnership that provide strategic guidance to the initiative. These partners include the U.S. Departments of Labor (Managing Partner), Agriculture, Commerce, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Homeland Security, Interior, Justice, State, Transportation, Treasury, Veterans Affairs, the Office of Personnel Management, the Small Business Administration, and the Social Security Administration.

Funding for the Benefits.gov Program is provided by its funding partners and authorized by the Economy Act (31 U.S.C. 1535) and Section 204 of the E-Government Act of 2002 (44 U.S.C. 3501 note).

2. Benefits.gov Program Manager and Authority Level

The Managing Partner for Benefits.gov is the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). DOL is responsible for managing the program's operations in accordance with its Strategic Plan. The Managing Partner will receive direction from the Benefits.gov Governance Board in managing the program and its projects.

The Program Manager for Benefits.gov (currently Curtis W. Turner of DOL) is responsible for executing program activities concordant with the mission of the program and within the scope of the current Strategic Plan. The Managing Partner, DOL, authorizes the Program Manager to manage the activities, budgets, schedules and staffing of the Benefits initiative.

3. Business Case

In 2002, the U.S. Government began an intensive effort to build, launch and manage a diverse portfolio of government-to-citizen, government-to-business and government-to-government Internet capabilities. Operated, managed and supported by Federal agency partnerships, these initiatives provide high-quality solutions such as citizen tax filing, electronic training, Federal rulemaking and benefit information delivery. The beneficiaries include citizens, businesses, State governments and the Federal government.

Benefits.gov was the first of 24 E-Gov initiatives to launch its citizen-centric service. Benefits.gov was charged with creating a website to simplify the benefits search process and provide greater transparency to citizen users, while reducing redundancy across government. As the official benefits website of the U.S. government, the Benefits.gov Program decreases citizens' average benefit search time through through its streamlined, online approach. The website allows users to locate benefits through a number of different channels, including by Federal agency partner, State, category, key word, or through the completion of a confidential eligibility questionnaire.

Since launching, Benefits.gov has helped more than 37 million citizens, and referred more than 2 million visitors to Federal agency partner resources. According to Google analytics, there are currently over 5,000 websites that link to Benefits.gov, demonstrating the market reach of program and demand for its trusted information.

4. Stakeholders and Stakeholder Requirements

The primary stakeholders for the program and its projects include the Managing Partner, Federal partner agencies, and the citizens of the United States.

The **Managing Partner** is responsible for providing direction for the Benefits.gov Program as outlined in the strategic and performance plans. The Managing Partner chairs the Benefits.gov Governance Board.

The **Federal partners** are responsible for participation in the governance of the program, providing benefit program content for the websites and providing the necessary funding to accomplish the annual performance plans.

5. Measurable Program Objective

Program goals and objectives, as identified in the strategic and performance plans, are reported to OMB in the form of dashboard reports and the yearly OMB Exhibit 300 (Business Case). Program performance will be measured against stated and approved cost, schedule and scope milestones.

6. Project Approval Requirement

Benefits.gov uses a permanent governance structure to ensure partner involvement in decision making and formulation of the strategic direction. The current governance structure leverages the insights and experiences of a diverse group of government representatives to support the program, enabling Benefits.gov to accomplish its mission on behalf of all U.S. citizens.

The Benefits.gov Governance Board (GB) is comprised of Chief Information Officers (CIOs), or their designees, from each funding Federal agency partner and provides ongoing strategic guidance and authority to the Program Manager. The board members will assure their Federal agency partner's financial and strategic support for the program. GB members will meet periodically to consider the progress of the program toward its goals, hear advice from the Change Control Board (CCB), and provide the authority to the Managing Partner to carry out the Governance Board's directives.

The Change Control Board (CCB) is comprised of designated representatives from each funding Federal agency partner. The CCB oversees development of the annual strategic and performance plans. The CCB considers and, if in support of, recommends GB approval for major changes to schedule or scope. CCB members provide counsel to their respective Federal agency partner representatives on the strategic or operational issues to come before the Governance Board.

Working Groups are formed by members of the CCB and other Federal agency partner subject matter experts. These groups examine program issues in detail and help formulate solutions that may be implemented directly by the Managing Partner or submitted for consideration by the CCB.

7. High-Level Program Risks

- Dependence on multi-Federal agency partner contributions poses a risk to Benefits.gov. The funding model of multi-Federal agency partner contributions to each of the E-Gov initiatives has never been a popular model and has traditionally required significant OMB support.

- Since the Benefits.gov program has a mission to support citizens, not Federal agency partner IT capital planning goals, agencies have traditionally had difficulty supporting their financial contributions to the program internally with their agencies. With the onset of the new administration's processes, inter- agency partner agreements to support Benefits.gov and other E-Gov initiatives will make it more difficult, or even impossible, for the partners to provide financial support.

- Several partners rely on Congressional approval to acquire funds to pay for Benefits.gov. If Congressional approval is not received, these agencies are not able to pay their contributions, resulting in funding shortfalls and cashflow challenges for the program.

8. Program Managing Partner

T. Michael Kerr, Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management, U.S. Department of Labor.

Appendix B – Partnership and Voting

Partners

Partnership is open to any interested organization. Admittance to the Partnership must be approved by the Governance Board.

There are two levels of Partners:

1. **Voting Partner** - Voting partners are those who meet all of the following conditions:
   - Federal agency
   - Has made or will make a funding contribution in the current fiscal year
   - Has designated a CIO-level member to the Governance Board as evidenced by a signed Memorandum of Agreement for the current year or the previous year
2. **Non-Voting Partner –** those partners who do not meet the Voting Partner requirements.

Purpose of Vote

In the governance of the Benefits.gov Program, votes are used to ascertain partner support for decisions involving program strategy, objectives and funding. This voting process equally applies at the Governance and CCB levels.

Calls for vote

A vote on any issue or opportunity may be called by the Managing Partner.

Voting Rights

There will be one vote per Voting Partner.

Quorum

A quorum is defined as greater than fifty percent of total Voting Partners. A quorum must be present at the start of a vote (including proxy votes). As of March 2010, there are currently 16

Voting Partners and 1 non-Voting partner. Therefore, a Quorum would be 9 Voting Partners. A vote can only be conducted when there is a Quorum present.

Proxy Voting

If a Federal agency partner is aware of a topic to be discussed in an upcoming meeting, it may give its proxy vote via email to the Managing Partner up to one hour in advance of the meeting, so as to give the MP sufficient time to determine if a quorum is present and to tally the votes. Such a proxy vote shall be accompanied with an explanation of the Federal agency partner's position and will be counted as part of the requirements for a quorum.

Simple Majority

A Simple Majority is defined as greater than 50% of the Voting Partners. A Simple Majority vote of all Voting Partners will be required for approving a recommended action or position. For example, in March 2010, there are currently 16 Voting Partners. Therefore, at least nine Voting Partners must vote "Yes" on an initiative for it to pass.

Lack of Consensus or Tie

In the case where there is no Simple Majority, then a proposal does not pass. In the case of a tie, the Managing Partner shall have the latitude to have the issue remanded to the CCB, reconsidered or closed.