

# **BENEFITS.GOV PROGRAM CHARTER**



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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. Benefits.gov also offers a service to its Federal Partners to reuse its platform as a solution, and partnered with DisasterAssistance.gov, SSABest.benefits.gov and GovLoans.gov to help citizens in their search for federal assistance. The Social Security Administration (SSA) Benefit Eligibility Screening Tool website is an example of this offering. Government is also rewarded with the value generated from information transactions conducted with citizens in a very low-cost channel.

The Program's websites feature over 1,100 benefit 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 16 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 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 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 its streamlined, online approach. The website allows users to locate benefits through several different channels, including by agency, category, keyword, or through the completion of a confidential eligibility questionnaire.

Since launching, Benefits.gov has helped more than 175 million citizens, viewing over 300 million pages of benefit information, and generating over 54 million referrals to government benefit programs.

### 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 Major IT Business Case (Formerly Exhibit 300s). 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 partner agency 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 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 each new administration's processes, interagency agreements to support Benefits.gov and other E-Gov initiatives could make it more difficult 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 cash flow challenges for the Program.

**8) Program Managing Partner**

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration and Management, Office of the Chief Information Officer, U.S Department of Labor.

## Appendix – 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 the following conditions:
  - Federal agency
  - Has made or will make a funding contribution in the current fiscal year
  - Has designated a representative 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).

### 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, 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.

### **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.