

The Savvy HR Leader's Guide to Finding (and Hiring) a Benefits ~~Broker~~ Partner

Dive into what a benefits partner does, what to look for (and avoid), and how to make the switch.



Breaking the status quo: A New Way to provide exceptional employee benefits

In the heart of every company, HR leaders play a pivotal role, yet they often battle with outdated systems and constrained resources. It's time to break free from the status quo. This guide serves as your playbook for doing just that. **It isn't about choosing a benefits broker — it's about finding a benefits partner.**



A benefits partner does more than just manage benefits. They are an advocate that supports continuous improvement and strategic alignment with your business goals. A benefits partner embraces a new paradigm where benefits administration is not only simplified but also enhanced through innovative technology and a proactive support model that anticipates the needs of both the organization and its employees.



A benefits partner is a new way of doing business. They transform the exhausting cycle of benefits management into a seamless experience by offering collaborative support year round — ultimately serving as an extension of your HR team.



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Benefits partner basics



What is an employee benefits partner?

Employee benefits partners (or brokers) help employers design, customize, and purchase benefit packages for their client's employees. When it comes to annual renewals, these healthcare experts are here to help. They analyze employee population data and suggest the plans that best fit their needs while staying within budget.

But their support shouldn't stop after healthcare renewals are over. Your employees (and HR team) should continue to receive the help they need. Your benefits partner should offer guidance and support to make sure you





get the full value of your benefits - all year round.

In short, a great benefits partner is an employer's partner in all things benefits. They help make benefits management easy and efficient for HR teams, during benefits renewal season and year-round.

Benefits partners can be employed by a larger brokerage or work as an independent consultant. Regardless of where they work, every benefits partner must be licensed to provide these services.

What kind of support should a good employee benefits partner provide?

Although your benefits partner's services should flex to meet your team's unique needs, there are four areas of benefits management that any great benefits partner should support:

1.  **Healthcare renewals**
2.  **Open enrollment**
3.  **Compliance support**
4.  **Employee advocacy and support**

 BENEFITS PARTNER SUPPORT #1

Healthcare renewals

During your annual healthcare plan renewals, think of your benefits partner as an extension of your team. They should make the process efficient and collaborative while taking the initiative to offer recommendations. Ultimately, their goal is to start the year with you feeling confident in your benefits package.

While some benefits partners specialize in certain strategies, all benefits partners have access to the same range of providers, plans, and healthcare costs. In other words, two different benefits partners will get you the same price for the same plan. For that reason, their real value lies in how well they support you and recommend the best plan for your employees.

How can your broker help?

- ✓ Deliver renewal information with enough time to make any necessary edits before the deadline
- ✓ Proactively answer your team's questions through every step of the process
- ✓ Make benefits strategy recommendations tailored to your employee needs, budget, and company goals
- ✓ Propose cost-saving strategies to keep your year-over-year budgets sustainable
- ✓ Serve as an extension of your team, offering support throughout the process



 BENEFITS PARTNER SUPPORT #2

Open enrollment

Your benefits partner’s approach to open enrollment (OE) can make the process easy for your HR team, or a big headache. But it also has longer term impacts.

OE is a critical opportunity to educate your employees on how to choose and use their benefits. If they don’t understand the benefits available to them, your employees may not choose the best plans for their needs. One in six employees regret their benefits elections from last year, and only 40% of Americans say

they’re “very confident” in their ability to choose the right health insurance plan.

Open enrollment is the time to make sure your employees feel confident about their healthcare benefits. Fifty percent of employees say having a better understanding of their benefits would make them more loyal to their employer. Equip your employees with the right guidance so they can easily find providers, submit claims, and receive care throughout the year. This guidance helps your employees get the full value of their benefits.

How can your broker help?

- ✓ Educate employers and employees about their available benefits options
- ✓ Support employee communication to ensure folks are equipped with the info they need to make their plan selection on time
- ✓ Provide tools and resources to help employees navigate the process, such as digital enrollment portals, mobile apps, or chatbots
- ✓ Propose cost-saving strategies to keep your year-over-year budgets sustainable



BENEFITS PARTNER SUPPORT #3

Compliance support

About 50% of business leaders say maintaining regulatory compliance is “extremely” or “very challenging.” Staying compliant can be time-consuming and complicated. But it’s an essential part of the job.

Keeping up with requirements can feel like a chore, but failing to comply with federal

and state regulations can cost your business hefty fines in the long run.

Your benefits partner should provide you with tools and support to ensure you anticipate deadlines, avoid legal penalties, and stay compliant.

How can your broker help?

- ✓ Keep you up-to-date on relevant regulations, laws, and industry standards
- ✓ Provide guidance on how to comply with applicable regulations and laws
- ✓ Conduct regular audits to ensure you’re in compliance
- ✓ Help you review and update your policies and procedures
- ✓ Offer efficiency tools such as digital compliance calendars and automated filing systems



 BENEFITS PARTNER SUPPORT #4

Year-round employee advocacy & support




Benefits can be confusing for employees, with up to 85% reporting they don't understand what's available to them. And if they don't understand their benefits, they won't use their plans correctly (or, sometimes, at all).

Plus, employees who are confused about their benefits often opt to turn to their HR team with day-to-day questions. This can end up

draining time from HR's already busy schedule.

Building a great benefits offering is only half the battle; your employees need to know how to use it. That's why your benefits partner should offer resources and support to help employees understand, choose, and use their benefits.

How can your broker help?

-  Answer day-to-day employee questions
-  Help employees navigate claims
-  Provide educational resources and tools to help employees understand their benefits



How to find a great benefits partner



See which benefits partners your HR peers recommend

Peer recommendations are the top strategy for finding a great benefits partner. A benefits partner's close relationship with HR teams reveals their true value. If HR teams rate a partner as just "meh", it's a red flag. Only consider partners who go above and beyond to support their HR clients.

Try to reach out to HR teams at similar-sized

employers. They're more likely to know what level of support you'll need from your benefits partner. For example, an HR leader at a midsize business will have a very different relationship with their benefits partner than the leader at a big employer. Virtual HR communities can also come in handy here. These forums allow HR leaders to chat and share experiences with benefits partners candidly.

Check out the contributors on benefits trade publications you trust

Your benefits partner should be on the up-and-up of industry data and trends. So if a benefits partner is contributing perspectives and thought leadership to trade publications, it says a lot about their expertise and influence.

Why? If a benefits partner's contributions are featured in a trusted benefits publication like [HR Dive](#) or [Benefits Pro](#), it's a good sign that they know what they're talking about. A benefits partner who serves as an expert

resource to HR leaders is someone who you want on your team.

Try doing a quick sweep of your favorite HR or benefits publications. Keep an eye out for benefits partners whose hot takes align with your values, or solve problems that are top of mind. Still, keep in mind that the loudest and most publicized voices still may not be the best partner for you. Don't base your decision solely on clout.

Ask your favorite vendors for recommendations

Benefits vendors have an insider perspective of the market and tend to know which brokers do good work. When looking for the right broker, benefits vendors can provide insight based on your budget, needs, and preferences, recommending a potential fit for your needs.

Vendors can offer guidance on the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate they recommend — so you can make a more informed decision.

Finding the right fit: Knowing when to hold & when to fold



Selecting the ideal benefits partner is a critical business decision, and navigating the search process can be daunting. To ensure a successful partnership, it's vital to recognize the telltale signs of a great fit — and the red flags that signal it's time to move on. In this section, we'll delve into the key indicators that will empower you to make informed decisions, knowing when to hold tight to a valuable benefits partner and when to fold and explore better options.

When to hold



They have a dedicated customer service team:

A benefits partner is only as good as their client support team. Ideally, you want to be assigned to a CS team with strong professional backgrounds. Pay attention to their CS team's average tenure — high turnover rates often don't bode well for consistent support.

They're committed to providing proactive support throughout the year:

Benefits management is a year-round commitment — so you should feel comfortable relying on your broker throughout the benefits lifecycle. And it's even better if they're the ones to reach out first.

They offer tech-driven tools and resources:

If you want a successful benefits strategy for a diverse workforce, ditch outdated tools. Your benefits partner should offer tech for easy benefit management. Consider an [app for employees](#) to access ID cards, plan details, and find covered providers nearby.

They're responsive and easy to reach:

Benefits partners should be responsive, ideally answering your queries within 24 hours. An added benefit is having an app to support not just HR but employees too. As a partner in designing your plans, they are best suited to

provide ongoing support, saving you the hassle of chasing them down.

You've heard good things about them: The HR community is nothing if not strong — and when HR pros find a reliable partner, they'll want to share the good news. When you're considering a new benefits partner, ask around in your network and check out their reviews on third-party websites. (Pro tip: Digital HR networks — like Nava's HR Slack Community — can be a great source for this info.)

They have a strong library of client quotes and case studies: Sure, any benefits partner can talk about their service and value — but can they back it up with case studies or data? Consider it a benefit if a potential benefits partner can offer you case studies and in-depth reports that showcase the impact they've already made on existing clients.

They're committed to understanding your employer's unique values: Your employer deserves benefits strategies and support that are bespoke to your needs — because one-size-fits-all won't do you any favors here. The first step? Your benefits partner needs to take a distinct interest in learning about your employer.

When to fold

**They refuse to disclose their compensation:**

Whether the benefits partner gives you vague answers or none at all, failing to disclose compensation is not only a red flag, it violates a law called the CAA. Under the CAA, benefits partners are legally required to share info that's been previously kept under wraps. This includes their compensation (both their salary as well as any carrier commissions, kickbacks, and "perks" like fancy trips or dinners) as well as the services they provide.

They're making big promises: A good benefits partner can help you choose the best benefits options for your company, but they can't perform miracles. If their claims sound too good to be true, or if they don't have a clear roadmap to take you from point A to B, stay skeptical.

Their answers are unclear or vague: If a benefits partner can't answer your questions about their experience in your industry or with companies of similar sizes, you have reason to be concerned.

They claim they can get you better prices for the same plan:

All benefits partners have access to the exact same plans and prices. So if your benefits partner suggests that they can negotiate a lower rate for the same plan, it's simply not true.

Their recommendations aren't data-driven:

Benefits partners should be able to provide market data or benchmarks to support their recommendations. If they can't offer that data – or if the data they do provide is incomplete – it's better to continue your search elsewhere.

They don't volunteer a client reference:

A great benefits partner has superfans in their corner, ready and willing to share what they've accomplished together. If the benefits partner hesitates to connect you with their existing clients, it may be a bad sign.



Benefits are hard. And you're busy.

Let us handle benefits, so you can focus on what you love to do.

Nava is a modern benefits brokerage that fuses innovative technology and deep industry expertise to make managing benefits easy for growing businesses. By delivering tailored renewal strategies, year-round back-office support, and always-on modern member support, Nava manages every step of the employee benefits lifecycle.

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