HR & Benefits Resources Series

The Consultant Selection Workbook

05

A working tool for evaluating employee benefits consultants and brokers on the same criteria, comparing candidates side by side, and keeping a record of how the decision was made

Why this matters

Benefits are most companies' second largest expense after payroll, and most group health plans are governed by ERISA, which expects employers to choose plan service providers prudently. A completed copy of this workbook, kept in your plan files, is the record that the choice was deliberate.

Plan Name: **Date:** **Completed by:**

Before You Interview Anyone

01

Write down what you need before any firm tells you what it sells. Complete this page first and use it to judge every proposal against your needs rather than against the other proposals.

Our plan and priorities	
Number of employees enrolled / eligible	
Current carrier(s) and funding type (fully insured, level-funded, self-funded)	
Renewal date	
Last renewal increase (%)	
Current firm and how long we have used them	
What we pay the current firm, if known (commission, fee, unknown)	
Top three problems we want solved	
Services we need year-round (enrollment, employee claims help, compliance support, other)	

Candidate Comparison Worksheet

02

Write the facts in each box, then score each row 1 to 5 using the guide below. Total the columns before you discuss impressions. Capture specifics: names, numbers, and dates.

Scoring guide: rate every row on the same scale	
5 · Verified	Shown in writing or confirmed by a reference, not just claimed.
4 · Strong	Clear, specific answer with names and numbers.
3 · Adequate	Answered, but general.
2 · Weak	Vague, inconsistent, or needed prompting.
1 · Missing	No real answer or declined to answer.

Compare up to three firms on identical criteria

Criterion	Firm A	Firm B	Firm C
Services included in the base engagement			
Compensation model (commission, fee, mix) and estimated annual dollars			
Written compensation disclosure provided? (Y/N, date)			
Named account team and client load per person			
Carriers and funding types quoted at a recent renewal			
Compliance support described (ACA, COBRA, ERISA notices)			
Employee-facing support (enrollment, claims help)			
References from employers our size (names, dates called)			
Total score (add the eight rows above, 40 maximum)			

The Scenario Questions

03

Ask each firm the same scenarios and write the answers down while they talk. Vague answers are answers.

“Our renewal comes in 15 percent higher than expected. Walk us through your next 30 days.”
Listen for: audit the increase, pull claims data, push the carrier, shop the market in parallel.

“An employee’s claim is denied during open enrollment. Who fixes it, and how fast?”
Listen for: a named person, a response time, an escalation path.

“We get a benefits inquiry from the Department of Labor. What do you hand us?”
Listen for: the plan records the firm helps you keep, including the annual gag clause attestation.

“Do you receive any compensation from the carriers or vendors you recommend to us?”
Listen for: a plain answer, offered in writing.

“Who works on our account day to day, and how many clients does each of them carry?”
Listen for: real names, real numbers.

Compensation Disclosure Checklist

04

Firms providing brokerage or consulting services to an ERISA group health plan and reasonably expecting $1,000 or more must disclose their compensation in writing before the contract is signed, extended, or renewed (ERISA Section 408(b)(2), added by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021). Use this checklist for each firm, including your current one at renewal.

Complete one column per firm

Item	Firm A	Firm B	Firm C
Written disclosure received before signing or renewal			
Describe the services to be provided			
States direct compensation (fees billed to us or the plan)			
States indirect compensation (commissions, bonuses, overrides)			
We reviewed it and judged the compensation reasonable for the services			
Date reviewed and by whom			
Copy filed with our plan records			

Decision Record

05

Complete this page when the decision is made and keep the whole workbook with your plan records.

The decision	
Firm selected	
Date of decision	
Who participated in the decision	
The three main reasons for the choice	
Firms considered and not selected	
Compensation agreed (model and estimated annual dollars)	
Next scheduled re-evaluation date	

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We work behind the scenes to support plans that value clarity, consistency, and confidence in how they are managed. If you'd like more information or a high-level review of how your retirement plan is governed today, click the link to schedule a brief review, or contact us (206)-625-1800.

Schedule a Brief Review

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