

**National Association of  
State Chief Administrators**

**2001 OUTSTANDING PROGRAM AWARDS**

**Program Title:** Benefits Open Enrollment  
Through the Employee Portal

**Category:** Human Resources

**State:** Kansas

**Submitted By:** Dan Stanley  
**Title:** Secretary of Administration  
Kansas Department of Administration

**Mailing Address:** Room 263-E  
State Capitol  
Topeka, KS 66612-1572

**Telephone:** (785) 296-3011  
**Fax:** (785) 296-2702  
**E-mail:** [dan.stanley@state.ks.us](mailto:dan.stanley@state.ks.us)

# STATE OF KANSAS

## Benefits Open Enrollment Through the Employee Portal

### Executive Summary

Kansas State government is proud of its innovative use of technology. Throughout the past several years we built our Internet presence by providing easily accessible information and services to agencies, employees, job applicants, and the general public. We posted job listings, human resource regulations, Kansas Quality Management principles, training course calendar, downloads, customer services, online employment registration, job class specifications, employee newsletters, and many other items on the Department of Administration's website.

In the fall of 2000, we gathered job-related services for state employees under one website – AKSESS (Automated Kansas State Employees Service System) at <http://da.state.ks.us/aksess>. The goal of this new website is to offer employees more access and control of their information and the services they use as State of Kansas employees. AKSESS is an employee portal for information and services – a one-stop shop for employees.

To launch AKSESS, we chose Benefits Open Enrollment as our first application. Automating common administrative functions, provided our administrative staff with more time for other activities, while offering employees access and control of their information and state services. The application was convenient, available 24 hours a day seven days a week, accessible from any location, and of short duration so that we could analyze success before launching another application.

We hired a consulting firm to write the actual code for the online pages, based on Kansas business rules. Then, we conducted extensive functional and usability testing to ensure employees would be successful. A demo set of pages was created and added to the Division of Personnel Services (DPS) website along with Frequently Asked Questions and a General

Information section. The demo increased employees' comfort level by showing them the screens and allowing practice entry.

Communication with employees and state agencies was an integral part of the project. It was imperative for employees to understand that the enrollment would be online only, and that agencies provided their employees access to onsite PC's with Internet access. To accomplish this, we held five agency stakeholder meetings, wrote four articles for the statewide newsletter, attended several agency meetings, provided information for agency newsletters, and had check stub messages reminding employees of the online enrollment. In addition, we established a lab for Topeka area employees to do data entry, and staffed a Help Desk to answer questions. Agencies were required to identify key contacts and complete an agency readiness checklist to ensure they met the project target dates established by DPS.

An overwhelming majority of employees told us it was successful in their agencies. They agreed that the following were very useful and contributed to the success of the project:

- Website with the demos and Frequently Asked Questions
- Stakeholder meetings and newsletter articles
- Help Desk to reset passwords and provide general information
- Reports that were available to agencies listing employees who had enrolled and those still needing to enroll in the Flexible Spending Accounts

The agencies agreed that navigation was easy and that the majority of employees felt comfortable with the process. Agencies ranked the following items as the primary benefits of the new online process:

- Employee responsibility 31%
- Speed and convenience 30%
- Reduced paperwork 26%
- Lower staffing needs 13%

Benefits Open Enrollment went online on time and under budget. It also provided a good use of technology for human resource applications. The team will continue its work of determining other suitable web applications for state employees.

**a. Description of the program and relative significance to the improvement of the operation and/or efficiency of state government:**

In the fall of 2000, we gathered services that relate to state employees under one website – AKSESS (Automated Kansas State Employees Service System) at <http://da.state.ks.us/aksess>. The goal of AKSESS is to offer employees more access and control of their information and the services they use as a State of Kansas employee. AKSESS is an employee portal for information and services – a one-stop shop for employees. To launch AKSESS, we chose Benefits Open Enrollment as our first application.

Annual Open Enrollment was a paper intensive process requiring employees who wanted to make a change to their benefits plan to fill out a paper form for central data entry. It involves more than 36,000 benefits eligible employees and benefits, human resource, and information technology staff in more than 100 state agencies.

Online open enrollment ended the paper process, putting the responsibility to enroll on the employees. Automating common administrative functions, allowed our administrative staff to focus their efforts on other activities. The application was convenient, available 24 hours a day seven days a week, accessible from any location and of short duration so that we could analyze success before launching another application. The AKSESS website was easy for employees to understand, with minimal text and intuitive navigation. Instantly, employees saw the effects of their changes by following the on-screen instructions. For assistance along the way, various links within the application often provided the answer. To talk to a person, employees called a Help Desk established specifically for online open enrollment. We created electronic files of employee enrollment activity for each agency, so they could track progress.

The first time employees entered the site they could review their current plan year elections. If they made any election changes and saved those changes, the new elections displayed. Employees could change their elections more than once during the period.

Other features included:

- Links to health care plan providers, State of Kansas Benefits Guidebook, 2001 Open Enrollment and Options Booklet, and other informational resources.
- List of dependents, with ability to add new dependents.
- Display of available options based on the employee's geographic location and benefits eligibility.
- Costs of their selections.
- Ability to print their own enrollment confirmation.

During October, more 14,000 employees went online to view or change their group health insurance coverage or enroll in a Flexible Spending Account. On average, employees spent nine-and-a-half minutes to complete their Benefits Enrollment. The web enrollment files were then interfaced to our HR/payroll system for payroll deductions and electronic files were sent to the carriers.

In addition to Benefits Open Enrollment, we have an online Applicant Registration application available under AKSESS. We are in the process of adding online Training Registration and online Employment Summary to our employee portal within the next few months. Plans are underway to conduct online Benefits Open Enrollment again in October 2001 and to add an online Total Compensation Summary report for each employee to view.

**b. Calculation of actual savings in the short term and/or long term:**

Based on feedback received during the open enrollment period, a post-enrollment agency survey, and data sent to the insurance carriers, benefits open enrollment on AKSESS was a success. The program was completed on time and \$37,000 under the \$223,600 budget.

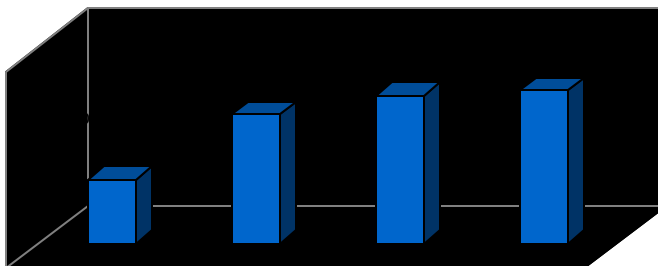
Online open enrollment resulted in the following cost savings for the Division of Personnel Services (DPS) and state agencies:

- DPS did not have to hire temporary employees or pay overtime to existing employees for data entry work
- Reduced agency effort to help employees complete paper forms
- Reduced printing and postage for custom enrollment forms
- With the online link to carriers and posted rates on the website, we did not have to provide a hard copy manual to every employee

- Agencies do not have to keep a hard copy of the employee's enrollment on file

**c. Quantitative benefits realized by service recipients, taxpayers, agencies, and state:**

In a post enrollment survey, agencies reported most employees found it easy to navigate between screens while enrolling. Agency staff did not spend more time assisting employees this year and do not anticipate spending more time next year. An overwhelming 95 percent believe that online benefits open enrollment was successful in their agency. Agencies identified four major areas as the “best thing” about online open enrollment, which are displayed in the graph on the right.



**Several important success factors are:**

- ◆ Employees had access to their own information at home or at work.
- ◆ The vast majority of employees were able to navigate the screens (only five percent of Help Desk calls related to the application).
- ◆ Hardware and software capacity sufficient for 24 hours a day seven days a week, access to website.
- ◆ The number of employees going online to enroll, re-enroll, or review their benefits was about as expected based on previous year's changes. This means Internet only enrollment did not deter employees from making changes.
- ◆ Set the stage for future AKSESS applications.
- ◆ Utilized Kansas Project Management Methodology.
- ◆ Used comprehensive communication strategies, including stakeholder meetings, newsletters, and agency readiness checklists.

**d. Relevancy of use by other state, local, and federal governments:**

Other states could benefit from our experience in planning, design, implementation, testing, and help desk services. We also provided strong agency communications to promote the new system and to make both agencies and employees aware of the services.

Other states will need to review their hardware and software capability as well as their Internet architecture. Implementing online Benefits Enrollment may necessitate some changes to business processes such as adding dependents.