Benefits.gov & DisasterAssistance.gov

Benefits.gov Interagency Leadership

Benefits.gov was one of the earliest "E-Government" initiatives to launch in 2002 as part of the President's Management Agenda and was established as the official benefits website of the U.S. government. Prior to Benefits.gov, citizens looking for government benefit information had to search through a complicated maze of web pages. There was no easy-to-use, single source of benefit information to help citizens understand which benefit programs they may be eligible for, or how to apply. Operated, managed by DOL, and supported by a partnership of 16 federal agencies, Benefits.gov provides an innovative, technology-based solution to benefit information delivery. As Managing Partner, DOL leads the interagency partnership through annual strategic planning, aligning program activities to the mission of Benefits.gov, and is responsible for executing activities, budget, schedule, and staffing for the initiative. Benefits.gov has been recognized for successful intergovernmental collaboration, creating government efficiencies, and ultimately helping partner agencies fulfill their missions by providing improved access to information. The Benefits.gov partnership provides governance support, benefit content, funding, and participates in an annual vote to enact the strategic plan and budget.

For over 18 years, Benefits.gov has provided millions of citizens with access to benefit information and has focused on transforming the citizen's digital experience. In October 2018, the Program successfully launched a comprehensive website redesign, featuring modern design elements and a new layout to provide a more intuitive user experience. Benefits.gov relies on scalable technologies to strengthen site performance and in 2018, migrated to a more efficient version of the Drupal content management system and Microsoft Azure for commercial cloud hosting services. In 2019, Benefits.gov completed a redesign of the site's primary feature, the Benefit Finder, to create a more user-friendly tool, to help determine eligibility for government benefits. In FY20, the Program focused on a redesign of the Benefits.gov Help Center, creating a new self-service model that guides users through commonly asked questions and answers to find information they need. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Benefits.gov quickly adapted communications and implemented a multifaceted strategy to keep the public informed. Since March, Benefits.gov has provided access to critical resources to millions of users and achieved record traffic, including 5.8 million sessions in April, and received national media recognition through publications and broadcasts including the Today Show, NBC Nightly News, New York Times, Washington Post, Credit Karma, and Forbes. Benefits.gov created a customized Help Center page for coronavirus resources, initiated a coronavirus digital engagement campaign to over 37,000 followers, and implemented a biweekly cadence for publishing helpful articles to our 650,000 citizen subscribers. The Benefits.gov Program has received a total of 44 industry awards, which help raise awareness of the site as a resource for citizens in need. Most recently, Benefits.gov received the 2019 W3 Award and 2020 Summit Communicator Award, recognizing the site's overall user experience and effective marketing and communications.

Continued Partnership with FEMA DisasterAssistance.gov

In 2006, the White House issued an Executive Order following Hurricane Katrina to improve emergency management and resources for citizens before and after natural disasters. FEMA partnered with DOL to build DisasterAssistance.gov, providing disaster survivors with information, support, and the ability to apply directly for disaster assistance. With DOL's support, DisasterAssistance.gov is the overwhelming preferred choice to apply for assistance from disaster survivors.

The program is linked to the Benefits.gov program through an Interagency Agreement between DOL and FEMA. The mutual support and leverage have proven beneficial for both agencies through shared services, technical innovation, partners and mutual points of contact as E-Government initiatives focused on benefits for the public. In FY2017, DAIP approved a Strategic Plan with four key goals, including a goal to improve the site's availability, systems and infrastructure. Over the last four years, while also managing the day to day activities of the site, the OCIO team has also modernized DisasterAssistance.gov, migrating to an Amazon Web Services (AWS) GovCloud environment in 2019. The team continued this modernization in 2020 by migrating the first components of the back-end Disaster Assistance Center (where citizens can apply for federal assistance following a disaster) to the AWS environment. The cloud environment provides DisasterAssistance.gov with the ability to rapidly scale up or down to meet the needs of citizens during critical events. The migration is the first step towards a full modernization of the disaster assistance application process, delivering on the goal of improving the disaster survivor experience on DisasterAssistance.gov.

Lastly, in the record-setting 2017 Hurricane Season DisasterAssistance.gov successfully served 41 million users. During the 2020 season, the site has seen nearly 5 million site visits with over 320,000 total user registrations for disaster assistance, while maintaining 100% availability and uptime of the site. The site has also evolved to accommodate increased mobile device usage – currently, 80% of all FEMA registrations on the site come from a mobile device.