



The benefits open enrollment period is important for any human resources team. It's a process that requires dedication, time and attention to detail. That had always been true for Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative, headquartered in Bastrop, Texas.



For Bluebonnet, the process started with employees making benefit selections for the coming year by filling out and submitting paper forms.

Each employee's form was manually compared with the previous year's selections to determine if benefits were changed. With more than 300 employees, this consumed a lot of time.

"I had a spreadsheet and did a mail merge that showed each employee's current selections," said Sandra Medack, Human Resources Representative for Bluebonnet. "That's basically how we did it. HR would receive over 300 forms, and we would manually sort through all of them."

The Benefits of Going Paperless

In June of 2020, Bluebonnet became the first Member to undergo a virtual implementation of NISC's software, including use of iVUE Connect – Financials. With iVUE Connect - Financials successfully implemented, NISC's benefit enrollment functionality took the cooperative's labor-intensive enrollment process from paper to online.

"It's been a huge improvement over what we had," Medack said. "I think it's really easy now to go in, make the selections and you're done."

The iVUE Connect – Financials software also allows Bluebonnet employees to see their previous selections and the cost of choosing a different plan.

"Even now, outside of open enrollment, employees can go into iVUE themselves to make changes to their W4 or 401K elections," Medack said. "They are becoming familiar with things they can do themselves rather than calling HR. This is so much easier than paper forms."

Perfecting the Process

The changed process was not without a few growing pains. To assist employees through such an important activity, Medack and the HR team decided to input employees' current selections into the iVUE Connect system so employees could see their current benefits.

"I had several conversations with NISC and worked with Sandra on which benefit offerings we needed to create," said Michael Chohrach, IT Applications Analyst for Bluebonnet. "We did go through a little learning curve on that, trying to figure out what selections she had to make for certain offering types, just to make sure it was working right."

After the initial implementation, there was additional functionality Bluebonnet needed from the iVUE Connect – Financials software, mostly centered on the voluntary life insurance offering and the benefit amount employees could select. Much of that functionality has been implemented or will be by the end of 2022.

"It's been good. It's been solid," said Leslie Barrios, Manager of IT, Applications for Bluebonnet. "We did have our struggles in the beginning. It's been a culture shift for us. We established some support calls with NISC that were really critical to our ability to adapt during our first year."

Saving Time and Reducing Errors

Now that Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative has been through two open enrollment periods using iVUE Connect – Financials, the process is easier for employees and a tremendous time-saver for Medack and the HR staff.

"You're saving a week's worth of time," Medack said. "Probably more than that. We would look through every single paper form. There was a lot of room for error with that process. There was some adjusting the first year, but now we open the process and rarely have calls for help from Bluebonnet employees. I can go into the system and see the people who already finished making their selections."

About NISC

NISC has been providing technology solutions to the utility and broadband industries for more than 50 years. NISC is committed to research, development, and quality of the latest in technology to ensure its solutions cannot only solve today's challenges, but are positioned to solve tomorrow's as well.

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