DMEC
2026 ANNUAL
CONFERENCE

From Solo to Symphony: Benchmarking Basics



Meet the Band



Christine Hinnerichs
Director of TAM Client Services
The Partners Group



Deborah LaBonar
Director of Benchmarking & Research
DMEC



Jackie Myers
Employee Benefits Consultant
Spring Consulting Group



JJ Jackson
SVP, National Practice Leader
HUB International



Kara Coutu
Sr. Manager, Customer
Consulting and Analytics
Aflac

Today's Program

- Introduction to benchmarking
- Today's activity
- Demo of Absence Exemplar®
- Group activity
- Read out
- Best practices in benchmarking
- Wrap up and additional benchmarking resources



Benchmarking 101

What is Benchmarking?

1

RAW DATA
"What Happened"

Facts from your organization.



2

REPORTING
"How Are We Trending?"

Organized data shows trends.



3

BENCHMARKING
"How do we compare?"

Context & comparison reveal opportunities and gaps.



4

STRATEGIC INSIGHT
"What should we do next?"

Insights that inform decisions and drive meaningful action.





Benchmarking 101

What to Benchmark

- Most benchmarking covers only STD, LTD, WC, and FMLA
- Adding LOA, PTO, paid parental & family care, and attendance policies gives the integrated view

Plan Funding

- Insured Status
- Payment Types
- Contributions
- Coordination with State Plans

Plan Features

- Eligibility, Waiting, and Elimination Period
- Duration and Benefit Amounts
- Relationships Covered

Additional Considerations

- Paid Time Off Provisions
- Attendance Policy Structures



Benchmarking 101

The Benchmarking Journey

1. **Define Your Objectives**
2. **Determine Your Strategy**
3. **Collect or Supplement**
4. **Organize into Reports**
5. **Continually Monitor**



Benchmarking 101

Define Your Objectives

Goal
Cost containment, talent attraction, retention, M&A harmonization, compliance, or an employee survey response?

Trigger
What prompted this review — a complaint, competitor move, budget cycle, or new leadership?

Positioning
Do you want to lead, match, or lag the market — and on which programs?

Competition
Who are you really competing with for talent?

Spend
Is this about reallocating or reducing existing budget, or adding new spend?

Peers
How do you define "peers" today, and does that definition still hold up?



Benchmarking 101

Source of Our Benchmark Data

AbsenceExemplar® Dashboards
Benchmark data is drawn from the DMEC Absence Plan Design and Practice Benchmarking Survey — the leading source for absence and leave program design.

Free — Limited Access

Open to DMEC employer members who participate in the survey. Compare by company size and industry.

To access: complete the survey and / or start a membership application.

Subscription — Full Dashboard

Expanded comparisons by size, industry, region, timeframe and employee class. Includes data from both the DMEC Plan Design and Practice Survey and the DMEC Leave Management Survey

Best for ongoing, granular benchmarking across multiple programs.



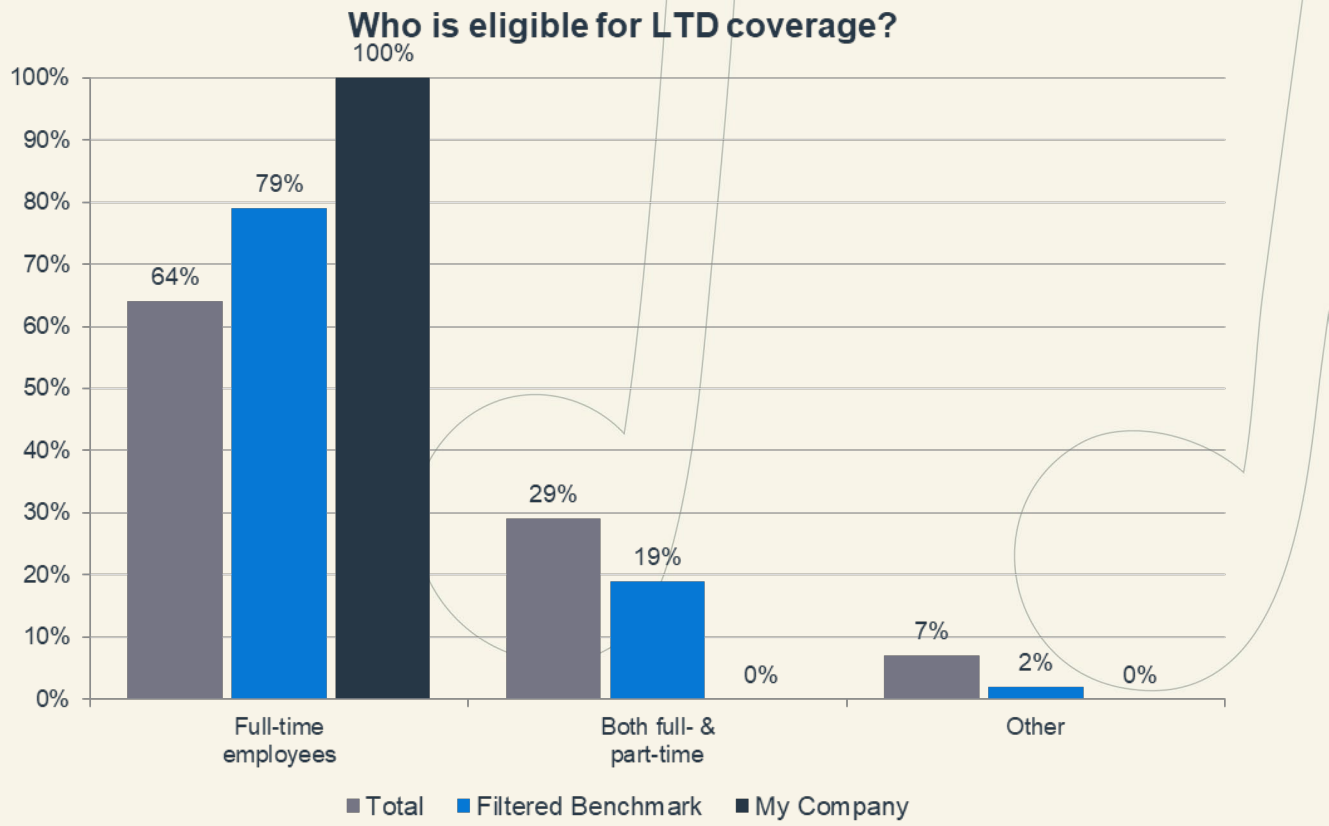
Benchmarking 101

Understanding the Charts

Total
All respondents in the survey

Filtered Benchmark
Respondents within your selected company size and industries

My Company
Reflected by information from your own Leave of Absence/Benefit Policy



AbsenceExemplar® Live Demo



Your Backstage Pass

What You Have at Your Table

- **Scenario Handout** — A fictional employer profile unique to your table, including company size, industry, workforce mix, and current leave and accommodation program details
- **Worksheet** — A step-by-step guide to walk your group through the activity, with space to capture your analysis and recommendations
- **Poster Paper & Markers** — For presenting your business case to the room

Your Mission

Using your scenario and the AbsenceExemplar® benchmark data, evaluate whether your employer's leave and accommodation program is competitive—then build a data-driven business case for improvement.



Learn the Song

Step 1: Review Your Scenario (5 minutes)

- Read through your table's scenario handout as a group
- Introduce yourselves and note any relevant experience with the scenario's topic

Step 2: Identify Gaps & Opportunities (10 minutes)

- Using the AbsenceExemplar® benchmark data, compare your employer's current program to market
- On your worksheet, note 1–2 areas of alignment and 2–3 gaps or risks
- Flag one emerging trend worth considering and one area where benchmarking alone should not drive change



Write Your Hit

Step 3: Build Your Business Case (20 minutes)

- Using your worksheet, propose a revised leave strategy backed by benchmark data:
  - One policy enhancement (e.g., expanded parental leave, paid leave integration)
  - One cost-neutral improvement (e.g., policy clarity, eligibility simplification)
  - One administrative improvement (e.g., harmonizing leave types or definitions)
- Capture your recommendations on the poster paper for display
- Be ready to distinguish between "nice to have" market trends and "must address" competitive gaps



Time to Jam



Take the Stage

Step 4: Present & Share Feedback (10 minutes)

- Each group briefly presents their scenario, key findings, and recommendations
- Other tables provide feedback
- Refine your business case based on peer input



Best Practices: Regulatory Alignment

- Consider Aligning Company Policies with PFML
  - Leave reasons, eligibility, etc.
  - Intermittent use and minimum increment
- Ensure Benchmark Decision Point Aligns with Regulation
  - Does your WC policy allow EEs to use accrued time to supplement
  - Do you require EEs to use accrued paid time for FMLA leave
  - Are EEs required to file for state PFML
  - Sick time meets or exceeds state requirements (e.g. waiting period)
- Review Summary Plan Descriptions to Verify Carrier Practices
  - STD offset with mandated PFML
  - Insurance benefit continuation



Best Practices: The Leave Ecosystem

- Consider Full Leave Ecosystem
  - Review how FMLA, state paid leave, company-paid leave, disability benefits, PTO, sick leave etc. interact.
  - Evaluate whether programs run concurrently or consecutively and the impact on total time away .
  - Assess supplementation practices and income replacement strategies.
- Evaluate Administrative Feasibility
  - Additional PEPM for TPA to manage a company leave
  - Configuration requirements to build new leave within software
  - Who will manage pay component
- Consider a Cost of Absence Analysis
- Allocate Time for Change Management
  - Assess the impact of policy changes on employees, managers, HR, and operational stakeholders.
  - Develop a communication strategy outlining key messages, timing, and delivery channels.



Best Practices: Sharper Data Cuts

- Slice the Benchmarking Data Several Ways
  - The obvious cut is same industry, same region, same size.
  - Don't stop there — consider large employers outside your industry who compete for the same talent.
- Factor in Other Organizational Changes
  - Benefits don't move in isolation. If a medical-plan change is already on the table, is pairing it with a leave adjustment the right timing — or too much change management?
- Anchor to Company Spend and Leadership Priorities.
  - What are budget constraints? Is the company experiencing other financial headwinds?



The Record Collection

- DMEC AbsenceExemplar® Benchmarking
- 2025 DMEC and Spring Consulting Group Employer Accommodation and Leave Management Survey Report
- 13th Annual DMEC Employer Leave Management Survey Insights (Archived Webinar, March 2026)
- 2024 DMEC Absence Plan Design and Practices Benchmarking Report
- Key Insights from DMEC's 2024 Plan and Policy Design Survey (Archived Webinar, June 2025)
- Benchmarking for Integrated Disability and Absence Management (IDAM) Programs Microcredential Course
- Comparisons Matter: Benchmarking Provides Direction for Disability and Absence Managers (Podcast, December 2024)



Keep the Music Going

- Christine Hinnerichs, chinnerichs@tpgrp.com
- Deborah LaBonar, dlabonar@dmec.org
- Jackie Myers, jackie.myers@springgroup.com
- JJ Jackson, jj.jackson@hubinternational.com
- Kara Coutu, kcoutu@aflac.com

Participate in the
2026 DMEC
Leave Plan & Policy Design Survey