

# Simple, clear, concise, compelling

Ohio public plan powers up participant communications.



**Keith Overly**

Executive Director at  
Ohio Deferred Compensation

Keith Overly and Priscilla Mullins have a passion for doing the right thing for their participants. But getting the word out to 190,000 participants across 1,800 different employers takes more than hard copy handouts. They answered “Five Questions” about how they stepped up participant communications.

## 1 What drove your efforts to step up participant communications?

**Keith Overly:** We really do believe strongly in keeping the participant our one and only focus, but our communications were very one dimensional. We wanted to be more proactive and thoughtful. We hired Priscilla a couple years ago to take us up another level. Now we spend as much time on communications as anything else. It's been very successful.

**Priscilla Mullins:** We revised our website to make things easy to find. We had an abundance of great material but it was buried on our old site. Now we use less text, more graphics, and provide simple tools like the interactive retirement calculator. We even took away information! One of the things we heard in our focus groups was that sometimes too much information really is too much. We wanted everything to be clear and compelling.

## 2 How has the response been?

**Mullins:** Traffic doubled at first, but it has slowed down as you would expect. It's still about 30% higher. The iPDF we used as part of our target date fund campaign is getting an average of 300 hits a month with people spending about three minutes viewing it. It's interactive, it's interesting, and it's providing compelling information.

## 3 Have you been doing targeted communications?

**Overly:** Yes, we do several targeted communications. For around eight years now, we have personalized annual statements. We provide the model portfolio for conservative, moderate and aggressive investors and show how that compares to their portfolio. We try to get them to think about where they want to be rather than simply how much they can contribute by showing projected balances at retirement and projected monthly income. Our service center gets thousands of calls in response, so we know they're reading their statements.

**Mullins:** We had 40 targeted email campaigns last year and 37 campaigns scheduled for this year, with 4 left open for legislative or topical issues that may come up. At every opportunity we ask for an email address. A couple of years ago, we had 15,000. Now we have over 100,000 email addresses. For example, we send emails to anyone over 55 in a target date fund encouraging them to call so that they understand their fund. We target people who have multiple target date funds or target date funds in combination with other funds. We let school employees know that they can contribute to both their school's 403(b) plan and our 457 plan at the same time for the saving and tax-deferred benefits.

## 4 How did you develop your EZ enrollment strategy?

**Overly:** With 1,800 employers, auto enrollment was always going to be a challenge. For the state of Ohio employees, we developed a mandated opt-in/opt-out form that has to be shown to new employees and completed within 45 days. Now participation with the state is over 63%. For our other employers, the Field Account Executives don't always get a lot of time in front of participants. For example, in a correctional facility, you have fifteen minutes of break time to enroll employees. With EZ Enrollment they can check a box, sign the form and it defaults into the target date fund. 50% of new enrollments are through the EZ enrollment form. Participants can also enroll at workshops, through the website or call in. The goal is to make it as easy as possible.



**Priscilla Mullins**

Communications Manager at  
Ohio Deferred Compensation

## 5 Any general participant communications advice for plan sponsors?

**Mullins:** Keep it simple. People don't want to spend a lot of time. The simpler you can make it, the better. Keep it clear, keep it compelling and layer the messaging so that people can find what they need quickly. And, provide it in a variety of formats—print, online, face-to-face, podcasts, and video—to reach and to keep the interest of a variety of audiences.

**Overly:** Most participants focus on “How much can I afford to contribute?” We need to get participants thinking about the end result. We need to get them thinking about their retirement goals and then make it easy for them to reach their goals. **DC**

### DCfocus

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