Raising the Bar: Best Practices in Stock Plan Operations

Insights from Certent’s Stock Administration Operational Benchmark Survey
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INTRODUCTION

A strong equity compensation plan can make the difference in a company’s ability to recruit and retain key contributors. As valuable – and necessary – as they are for rewarding employees, these plans are subject to complex accounting, reporting and regulatory requirements – creating a deep need for expert plan administration and management.

The Certent Stock Administration Operational Benchmark Survey explores the realities of offering and administering a stock plan today. With input from more than 200 stock plan professionals representing diverse industries and a range of company sizes (in terms of revenue as well as plan participants), the survey results provide an insightful view into plan administration. Both privately- and publicly-held companies will benefit from understanding the challenges currently facing the equity compensation industry and the resulting opportunities for improvement.

Highlights of the survey findings include:

- Increased pressure on stock plan teams. Teams are smaller than ever, yet continue to carry broad responsibilities.
- Heavy reliance on cross-functional collaboration.
- Growing interest in Employee Stock Purchase Plans – and a corresponding need for strong employee engagement strategies.
- Challenges in tracking and reporting domestic and international mobility.
- Opportunities to improve employee communications and education.

Stock plan administration has long been a rapidly-changing field. To identify just a few prominent examples, the past decade has seen the change from FAS 123 to FAS 123(R) and then to ASC 718, the evolution of IRFS, increased scrutiny on executive compensation, and heightened attention on accurate mobility tracking and tax reporting. It is interesting, therefore, to observe that stock plans have recently settled into relative status quo, with few major changes year-over-year. In fact, 49% of the companies participating in the survey reported that they do not plan any critical stock plan initiatives this year.

There are several potential reasons for this stability. One is that there are no significant regulatory changes in the offing. In past years, changes such as those referenced above have required that companies adapt their plans to comply with new regulatory or accounting standards. Another hypothesis is that recent volatility in the stock market is driving companies to take a wait-and-see approach to any plan changes they may be considering. Similarly, election years typically create a great deal of uncertainty, and companies may be hesitant to undertake any changes before November.

Whatever the reason, this period of relative calm presents an opportunity for you to enhance areas that have been repeatedly identified as challenging. Outdated or non-existent documentation of procedures, participant communications, and a reliance on manual processes all surfaced as areas in need of improvement in 2014 and again in 2016. The absence of new initiatives may provide the “breathing room” necessary to address these gaps and raise the bar for your stock plan practices.
Methodology and Respondent Profile

This online survey was administered by Certent in December 2015. A similar survey was conducted by Certent in January 2014, and where relevant, comparisons between the two are highlighted. 205 individuals participated in the survey, representing a random sample of U.S.-based stock plan administrators and finance professionals. 62% of the respondents work for publicly-held companies, and 38% work for privately-held companies.

A wide range of industries is represented in the survey. Technology (software, hardware, telecommunications, internet and electronics) is most heavily represented, with 20% of respondents. It is followed by Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals (17%), Manufacturing (including food and beverage, 14%), and Finance and Financial Services (11%). An additional 11 industries were represented by less than 10% of respondents.

Annual revenue at the represented companies ranges from less than $10 million to greater than $2 billion, with the majority between $50 million and $2 billion, as shown below:
When it comes to organizational role, the respondents most frequently work in stock plan, finance/accounting, or HR/compensation.

The majority of respondents (70%) work at companies with fewer than 500 stock plan participants, and one-third have fewer than 50 participants. The remaining population is close to evenly distributed among companies with 501-1,000 participants (11%), 1,001-5,000 participants (10%), and more than 5,000 participants (8%).

A good range of equity instruments is offered by the firms surveyed:
STAFFING AND TEAM STRUCTURE

The 2014 survey reported that the individuals managing stock plans are generally stretched thin, with small teams and multiple additional responsibilities. The recent survey shows that these trends continue, with even smaller teams taking on a variety of roles in addition to stock plan administration. In fact, when asked about the biggest challenges facing their team, three-quarters pinpoint lack of time. This is closely followed by lack of resources (65%) and inefficient processes (56%). In this section, we’ll explore how teams are spending their time, and what they view as their strengths and opportunities.

**SIZE OF STOCK ADMIN TEAM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team Size</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2016</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 or more</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td></td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than 1</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Stock administration teams rarely focus only on stock administration. While there have been some shifts in the specific tasks required, these teams continue to wear multiple hats. Combined with smaller team sizes, these additional responsibilities add to the challenge and stress of effective equity compensation management.

**WHICH ADDITIONAL ROLES IS THE STOCK PLAN ADMIN TEAM RESPONSIBLE FOR?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Routine reconciliation of monthly activity</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation of the proxy solicitation stmt</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine reconciliation of plan reserves</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting for equity comp</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin of other benefit plans</td>
<td></td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stock Plan Skills and Challenges

When it comes to how teams spend their time on stock plan specific tasks, stock plan administration – such as loading grants – is the winner, followed by accounting & tax, and financial reporting & disclosures. There is a strong correlation between how time is spent and a team’s strengths. 71% say that accounting is one of their team’s top three strengths, followed by internal financial reporting (58%) and working with the administrative software (50%). This is consistent with 2014’s findings, and may be because teams get better at the things they do most often – or it could be that teams hire people with strengths in areas that correspond to what they’ll be doing most frequently.

Given the complexities of stock plan taxation, it’s not surprising that taxation knowledge is consistently identified as an area that requires more support, with 53% of respondents reporting that this is one of their team’s top three weaknesses. In a related question, handling taxes for award transactions is named as the process that teams struggle with the most. It’s not surprising, then, to note that among companies that outsource some of their stock plan functions, one-third outsource taxation.

Rounding out the technical skills section, participant communications and personal finance literacy are the other areas most frequently named as the top three weaknesses. This is a slight change from 2014, when respondents named their top three weaknesses as taxation knowledge, participant communications, and training others. There seems to be a bit of a schism in how participant communications are viewed: in both years, participant communications ranked fourth in the “top three strengths” category while also being identified as one of the top weaknesses. Whether perceived as a team’s strength or weakness, participant communications are clearly an important topic, which is visited in depth on page 17.

Manual Processes and Outsourcing

Almost everyone who responded to the survey is completing some equity processes manually, and three processes are completed manually by the majority of respondents:

1. Termination processing (56%)
2. Award granting (52%)
3. Updating participant entries (51%)

Depending on the size of the plan, completing these processes manually may be exactly what is driving plan professionals to identify lack of time as their number one challenge. Outsourcing, of course, is one solution. Similar to 2014, companies seem to prefer partial outsourcing of select tasks. This partial solution can minimize investment while providing the flexibility to apply outside resources in the areas where they are most needed.
DO YOU OUTSOURCE ANY PORTION OF YOUR STOCK PLAN ADMINISTRATION?

For those who outsource part of the equity compensation management function, stock administration is the task that is most commonly outsourced.

WHICH SPECIFIC TASKS DO YOU OUTSOURCE?

Key Opportunities

It seems that the trend towards smaller stock plan teams wearing many hats is not likely to change soon. And, it seems that teams feel the same pain points year over year as well. In considering your plans for 2016, there are some opportunities you may want to consider.

1. Explore outsourcing. While full outsourcing may not be feasible within your budget, the section above demonstrates that many companies are finding success with partial outsourcing. This approach gives you the leverage to determine exactly what functions are most appropriate for outsourcing, and it allows you to maintain in-house control for others. If you are evaluating how an outsourcing solution might work for your company, download the white paper, Is Outsourcing Right for You? [http://bit.ly/1RIH1Ep](http://bit.ly/1RIH1Ep)
2. **Automate wisely.** Many companies find that an investment in automation pays dividends by saving time and improving efficiencies. Of course, not every task can be automated, but if you are looking for the biggest bang for your buck, consider automating employee demographic updates from your HR/payroll system. The benefits of doing so are significant, ensuring that employee information is always up-to-date. This can eliminate the need to update tax information in the stock plan system before options are exercised or restricted stock is released. It also streamlines some of the steps involved in termination processing. In addition, directly integrating your equity plan software with a broker will not only save you resources, but can improve the experience for your employees.

If true automation of employee updates isn’t an option for you at this time, one short-term solution is to regularly download a report from your payroll system and upload it to your stock plan system. Setting up a calendar trigger can help you do this on a regular and timely basis, and may reduce the number of times that you have to make ad hoc updates when an employee chooses to exercise options, or when you need to process a termination.

3. **Raise the profile of your stock plan.** If you plan to campaign for additional staff, be sure that the value of your company’s stock plan is universally understood. If employees feel that the plan is adding to their compensation in a meaningful way and helping them to reach their financial goals, they will become advocates for it. Requests for additional headcount, or investment in automation or outsourcing support, will be better received if the importance of your plan is well-established.

There are many ways that you can communicate the value of your equity compensation program. Ask if company-wide or departmental meetings can include a review of the benefits of the stock plan. Perhaps you can join smaller team meetings as a guest speaker, or host a lunch-and-learn session to educate employees about the plan. Many companies host benefits fairs, and that’s a great place for you to set up a table as well. Aside from in-person opportunities, your company intranet or newsletter are also great vehicles for reaching employees.

It’s also critical that your recruiting team know the ins and outs of the plan and how to explain it to job candidates and new hires. While the approaches suggested above will likely reach your recruiting team, it is also be worth reaching out to them directly. They may have specific needs, such as a plan fact sheet, that will help them communicate the plan benefit effectively.
CROSS-FUNCTIONAL COLLABORATION

Stock plan administration is a discipline that requires the involvement of diverse constituencies across a company. Because they link compensation to company performance, stock plans are of obvious importance to human resources and compensation professionals. And because they are subject to stringent accounting and reporting standards, finance teams are deeply involved. Lastly, because of the intense regulatory environment, legal has an important role to play as well.

With so many teams impacting and impacted by the stock plan, every company needs to develop processes that will keep them all in the loop. But that’s not always easy. In fact, cross-functional communication was identified as the weakest soft skill across stock plan teams, with 51% of survey respondents placing it in their top three – and almost one-quarter ranking it their team’s number one weakness.

Further, there is a risk of misinformation if teams aren’t working closely together. For example, many people may notify recipients of new options or awards, including their direct manager, HR, or the stock administration team. Clearly, these communications need to be consistent. Paradoxically, the more people who are in a position to deliver a message, the more likely it is that the message won’t be delivered at all – because everyone thinks someone else has done it.

Key Opportunities

1. **Over-communicate.** It is far better to over-communicate than to risk a communications failure. Even if you think something related to the stock plan won’t affect another team, tell them about it and let them determine how they need to engage, if at all.

2. **Establish a governing team.** Reach out to each group that could be impacted by stock plan activities or changes, and ask them to provide a representative. These groups may vary based on your company’s structure, but will likely include stock plan administration, compensation, HR, recruiting, legal, accounting, tax, and financial reporting. Once you have a governing team established, meet regularly to exchange updates and distribute minutes so that everyone has a record. You can also plan an occasional “state of the union” meeting with executive stakeholders to ensure that they are also aligned with your work.

3. **Reach out early.** When planning a change, or a plan activity such as a release, actively reach out to potentially effected teams early and often. This will give them time to plan and can also help identify risks while there’s still time to address them.

4. **Don’t operate in a vacuum.** Provide your calendar of plan events to your internal partners, and ask them to do the same for their areas. If possible, avoid creating competition for employees’ attention by spreading out major initiatives. For example, if you want to generate excitement for your ESPP, don’t send the messages out the same week that the benefits team is promoting open enrollment.
EMPLOYEE STOCK PURCHASE PLANS (ESPPs)

For the first time, the 2016 survey included a series of questions related to ESPPs. These plans are currently offered by 29% of respondents, and an additional 27% are considering the addition of an ESPP. Of those that do offer an ESPP, 60% have had their plan in place for more than five years. One-quarter of plans have been in place for less than two years, which seems to indicate a comeback in the number of companies offering these plans.

Following the financial downturn that began in 2008, many companies had to cut back on the expense of their ESPPs by removing look-back provisions and reducing or eliminating discounted purchases. As the economy is improving, companies are once again interested in establishing or restoring ESPP as an important part of their employee rewards programs.

An ESPP not only gives employees an opportunity to share in the company’s growth; it can also positively influence company culture. Many companies strive to engender an ownership culture, motivating employees to focus on results not just for the sake of professional fulfillment, but because they may benefit financially. When everyone in the company is driving toward the same goal with a shared metric – a rising stock price – it’s easier to create alignment across individual and departmental objectives. An ESPP can allow you to achieve these outcomes across all levels even if you choose not to issue broad-based grants.

ESPP Participation

In order for an ESPP to play a key role in creating an ownership culture, people need to participate in it. Unfortunately, most companies do not see high levels of participation in their ESPPs, presenting a meaningful opportunity for improvement.

Low participation rates can likely be attributed to a lack of knowledge and/or understanding of the ESPP. For someone who is not familiar with an ESPP, the benefits may not be immediately obvious, and concepts such as a look-back or a discount may be confusing.
**Key Opportunities for Increasing Participation Rates**

Whether you’ve offered an ESPP for many years, are new to it, or are merely considering the addition of such a plan, employee participation is likely top-of-mind for you. Should your company choose to offer an ESPP, it will be disappointing if participation rates lag your expectations.

1. **Raise awareness.** Education and communication are the keys to maximizing plan enrollment. Make sure that employees know what the ESPP is and how it can benefit them. Work with your HR team to be sure that new hire packets include details about the ESPP, but don’t forget about existing employees. As always, it can take some time for a message to be fully absorbed by the audience.

Consider a small marketing campaign before each enrollment period as a way to engage more employees. This could include posters in your physical locations, emails from key executives, and flyers distributed to each work station. Think out of the box – one company’s stock administration team wears t-shirts that read “Got Stock?” at enrollment time. This kind of viral marketing can stimulate conversation around the office and increase awareness of the program.

Getting your management team involved can also be an effective way to spread the word. Ask them to talk about their own participation in the ESPP and how they have benefitted from it. Encourage them to do this around enrollment windows, but also regularly throughout the year.

2. **Demonstrate the benefit.** Help employees understand how the plan works. Know that it may be difficult for employees to understand the difference between the enrollment period, the offering period, and the purchase period. In addition to defining these terms, you might publish a timeline of how they work at your company.

Examples using dollar figures and based on historical stock growth can be very compelling. This type of example is best conveyed visually, so video, your company intranet, or presentation slides are the most effective media to employ.

3. **Plan ahead.** It will take time for people to learn about the plan, get their questions answered, and determine their participation level. Start with your enrollment dates and work backward to develop a timeline for your communications. Begin your outreach three weeks in advance of enrollment to give employees time to do their research while still maintaining a sense of urgency.

Knowing what and when you want to communicate will allow you to get space on the corporate communications calendar. Consider requesting budget to support your activities; you might offer a pizza lunch to accompany an information session or buy those interest-generating t-shirts. You can also ask your broker to send communications on your behalf or provide communications templates for you to use with your employees.
ESPP Administration

When asked about their challenges in administering an ESPP, respondents indicated that tax reporting, enrollment, purchases and disqualifying dispositions are the most difficult. Interestingly, while tax reporting is most likely to appear in respondents’ top three, only 10% claim it is their single largest challenge. That honor went to enrollment, which 31% of respondents report as their top challenge. In response to the challenges of managing an ESPP, about half of respondents report that they outsource. Outsourcing practices for ESPP administration are very similar to those for general plan administration: 11% completely outsource the management of their ESPP, 35% partially outsource, and 46% do all management in-house.

Unique to ESPPs is the need to track participant progress toward the $25,000 contribution limit. There’s an even split between companies who monitor this manually and those who do so electronically (38% in each case). An additional 4% monitor only for a limited number of participants. No matter how they are monitoring, fewer than half (42%) of companies report that they notify participants as they near the limit.

ESPP Participant Experience

Most companies rely at least partially on electronic channels for ESPP communications and actions. Three-quarters of respondents send administrative documentation and statements electronically, with small percentages also sending paper copies. Conversely, the majority send tax documents and 6039 statements via paper (either exclusively or in combination with electronic delivery).

![How do you provide ESPP communications?](image)
In keeping with the trend to providing electronic communications regarding basic plan actions such as enrollment and trades, many companies give employees the ability to complete core ESPP actions online. In fact, 84% of respondents allow electronic completion of at least some ESPP actions.

WHICH ESPP ACTIONS CAN EMPLOYEES PERFORM ELECTRONICALLY?

Key Opportunities for Administration

If you offer, or are considering offering, an ESPP, here are some tips to make the administration as smooth as possible.

1. **Timing is key.** The timing of your offer and purchase periods can go a long way in making your plan easier to manage. Although it might feel natural to align with the calendar year, that may work against your best interests. You'll be making a purchase at year-end, when teams – both your own and your vendors – are likely to be short-staffed. Similarly, opening enrollment in the summer months may result in weak participation because many people take vacation at that time of year. And don't forget to consider the timing of other plan events. For example, stagger ESPP purchases and Restricted Stock release dates so that you can stagger the workload as well.

2. **Keep it short and sweet.** A long offering period complicates your administration. Best practice is a plan with a six-month offering period with the purchase at the end of the period and out-of-sync with the calendar year. This will make it easier to track the $25,000 limit and disqualifying dispositions.

3. **Create efficiencies.** Even if outsourcing and automation aren't fits for your plan, you can look for opportunities to create efficiencies internally. Dedicate time to review your existing processes from end to end, perhaps even asking someone from another team to join you to provide a fresh perspective. It may seem daunting to carve out time for this exercise, but the results may surprise you – and bring you the benefit of time saved in the future.

4. **Know your platform.** Almost 40% of respondents are manually tracking the $25,000 limit. Find out if your recordkeeping system can assist by providing automation. For example, did you know that Certent’s ESPP Management system includes a standard report showing year-to-date totals and who is nearing the limit? You can set this report to run automatically at the intervals you choose, allowing you to quickly identify anyone who is at risk of hitting the limit.
INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC MOBILITY

Taxation requirements for mobile employees are significant and create a high level of complexity for companies. As reported in 2014, many feel that they should be doing more than they are when it comes to mobility tracking, especially for employees moving domestically. Historically, global movement has been the focus of mobility tracking efforts. However, in recent years, local taxing authorities have been much more vigilant in upholding requirements for employees who move from one state to another. As a result, companies need to pay more attention to those requirements than they have in the past.

Administration

60% of survey respondents have employees who move from state to state or internationally.

Important, when compared to the last survey, more companies have instituted procedures related to mobility tracking.

Companies use a variety of tools to report tax data for mobile employees to payroll, with no clear preferred tool. 23% use standard reports available in their administration system, and a similar number (24%) use Excel spreadsheets. 13% use custom reports, and 14% outsource this responsibility.
Participant Experience

Although companies are providing more support for employees who move internationally than for those moving within the U.S. – similar to what is seen in administration of mobility tracking – there has been an increase in the communications and resources provided to domestically mobile employees.

**Key Opportunities**

1. **Educate participants.** Employees may not anticipate having taxes withheld and reported in multiple jurisdictions. This is especially true in cases where multiple withholdings are required based on the employee’s location at the time of grant, time of vest, and time of exercise/sale. If they know what to expect, it will avoid confusion and calls to your stock plan team. Work with your HR team to incorporate information about equity plan taxation in relocation packages.
2. **Change “shoulds” to “dos”**. While there was modest improvement year-over-year in mobility tracking, there is still a meaningful number of respondents who know they should do something (such as establishing procedures for mobility tracking), but haven’t yet done so. Make this the year to tackle these areas and mitigate the risk that comes from these gaps. Certent’s white paper, Best Practices for Equity Taxation for Mobile Employees, can help you determine what you need to do and how to get started. ([http://bit.ly/1T9oLHB](http://bit.ly/1T9oLHB))

3. **Equalize your approach to domestic and global mobility.** Most companies have a disparity in the way they approach domestic mobility as compared to international mobility. There may be reasons to continue in this fashion, but at the very least, it is worth reviewing the differences and determining whether or not they should be addressed. Historically, domestic jurisdictions may not have pursued taxes they are owed due to domestic mobility – but in recent years this has changed, as states seek the means to address budget shortfalls. Consult your company’s tax advisor to help you evaluate your specific situation and determine a course of action.
PARTICIPANT COMMUNICATIONS

As noted earlier, participant communications surfaced as one of the top three weaknesses of stock plan teams. Specific needs for increased communication are also noted in the ESPP and Mobility sections of this paper. Frequently, education and communication can drop to the bottom of a lengthy to-do list. After all, there’s no regulatory requirement for a company to educate its employees. But letting communications fall by the wayside for too long can be costly. Lack of knowledge can drive calls and questions to your stock plan team, typically at the busiest times of year. And, if participants don’t understand their plan, they likely won’t use it to its full effect.

Participant Education

14% of respondents do not attempt to educate their employees on stock plans. Of those that do, the majority use email and/or written materials. Companies rely less on their own websites than on those of third-party vendors, and online presentations are infrequently used.

HOW DO YOU EDUCATE EMPLOYEES?

Participant Communications

Just as education is delivered via email, communications for stock options and restricted stock are primarily electronic. The exception is 6039 reporting, which 39% deliver via paper, either solely or in addition to electronic transmittal. While some other communications are delivered both via paper and electronically, the trend here is clearly to e-delivery.
Award notifications are most likely to be delivered by a manager (48%), the stock plan team (45%), or HR (37%). The vast majority (82%) of grant notices are distributed within a month of approval, with 28% being distributed in less than a week.

**Key Opportunities**

1. **Employ email best practices.** With so many companies relying heavily on email to deliver important information, it’s a good idea to make sure those emails are working as effectively as possible. Start by monitoring email open and click through rates (the number of people who click on links in your message) to confirm that your emails are being read and acted upon. Be sure that you use clear subject lines. Each email should include contact information for your stock plan or HR team, and a link to FAQs or other sources of additional information.

2. **Use multiple channels for maximum reach.** Although email is a quick and inexpensive channel, many people suffer from email overload, meaning that your message may get lost in a crowded inbox. Leveraging other channels will help expand your reach. A great way to start is to take advantage of your company’s intranet. If frequent updates are impractical, create a page that covers evergreen topics such as basic stock plan education, FAQs, and plan contact information. Also, if you’re using an equity plan solution, be sure to leverage your vendor’s participant portal as another resource for employees.

Video can be expensive, but it is a rapidly growing channel and worth testing if your budget allows. Or keep it simple and use your smart phone to record a brief video message from an executive at your company. No matter how you produce the video, be sure to keep it short, and keep the most important content at the beginning, when you have the viewer’s full attention.
3. Work with your partners to reinforce each other’s messages. Generally speaking, participants will be most responsive to messages that come from their employer. But it can also make sense to have some messages delivered by your broker or plan provider. For one thing, they may have existing communications that can be used or tweaked for your company – or the resources to develop something for you. You can also reinforce a message by sending it yourself and asking your provider to follow-up with a reminder – or vice versa. Advertisers will tell you that most people need to be exposed to a message up to seven times before they internalize it. Keep this in mind, and ask your partners to help you reiterate key messages such as important plan dates and actions needed.

4. Know your target. Tailoring your message to different target audiences will allow you to focus on the content and media that are most relevant to each group. For example, executives have unique reporting requirements and busy schedules, so it may be best to have one-on-one meetings to review their obligations and answer their questions. On the other hand, sales teams and others who travel frequently will likely appreciate a recorded voice message or an intranet page that they can access at their convenience.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

These blog posts will help you establish the building blocks for a robust employee communications program.


2. Create a Strategy for Employee Education: http://bit.ly/1QsUj95

3. Learn How to Build a Framework for Participant Communications: http://bit.ly/1LzpOOm
CONCLUSION

Certent’s Stock Administration Operational Benchmark Survey provides important insights that can help you understand how your practices compare to those of others, and generate ideas about potential changes you may want to make to the administration of your own plan. By assessing the state of your practices in comparison to others, you’ve taken the first step toward optimizing your plan.

While the survey results show that resources are thin, there are plenty of low-cost opportunities to put best practices to work across your equity plan operations. This white paper outlines a number of ideas to jump start your initiatives - but don’t get overwhelmed. It may be best to choose one opportunity for improvement from each section that you think will make the biggest impact and implement that upgrade first.

By taking action to keep your plan current and competitive, you can ensure its continued success in driving the acquisition and retention of key talent as it was designed to do.

For more information, visit www.certent.com.