

# The Retirement Plan Experts

**Independent TPA provides high-touch service, customized plans to clients throughout Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and beyond.**

“**A** third-party benefits administrator offers unbundled solutions on behalf of companies that may not have the knowledge or bandwidth to do so themselves,” says Diane Barton, President and Principal of Metro Benefits, a Pittsburgh-based company that designs and implements defined contribution and defined benefit retirement plans. “While others offer off-the-shelf or bundled options, we practice a more high-touch and flexible approach to meeting client needs.”

There’s a difference, she says, between what kind of retirement plan might best suit an employer looking to attract new employees versus one seeking to retain employees. And for business owners who desire to shelter their own incomes from taxes while building a substantial nest egg for the future, there’s a whole different set of options. “Unbundling allows us to pick and choose the plan design that would be best able to meet the goals and objectives of our clients and allows us to work with their other advisors in the financial, accounting, and legal arenas. It’s what makes us unique and provides us with a competitive edge,” Barton says.

While a typical client might have less than 100 employees and assets in the \$5 million to \$10 million range, Metro Benefits also counts startups and larger firms among its client companies. Law firms, architects, engineers, and manufacturers, as well as independent physician, medical, and dental practices all use their

services. They also have a significant footprint in the nonprofit sector.

While many of Metro Benefits’ clients have dedicated controllers or human resource departments, some business owners (like doctors, lawyers, and small business owners) will attempt to administer retirement plans themselves. But benefits administration is a complex business, with the Department of Labor and IRS providing oversight.

“The paperwork alone is enough to bury most business owners, stealing precious time from their days,” Barton explains. “Add to that tax laws that change almost annually and complex compliance and disclosure requirements, and outsourcing such work to us becomes one of the best decisions employers can make. We take care of the details and provide clarity so our clients can focus on what they do best.”



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**Diane Barton is a principal owner of Metro Benefits**, along with partners Russ Smith and Leigh Lewis. She also serves as President of the firm founded with a primary focus on traditional pension plans by David Lipkin in the late 1980s. Barton joined Lipkin early on, becoming the company’s second employee. Soon after, clients and prospects alike began requesting information on 401(k) plans.

Barton grew the 401(k) side of the business, building in efficiencies and economies of scale, to the point that Metro Benefits became a major player in the industry. What began as a small firm with fewer than 20 clients today has more than 1,500. So indispensable was Barton, so much a part of the company’s DNA, that in 2012 when Lipkin decided it was time to take a step back and prepare for retirement, he asked her if she would be interested in taking over the business.

“David gave me the knowledge and the freedom to make a difference in the direction of the company and to become a successful businesswoman,” she recalls. “Our focus moving forward is to continue to grow Metro Benefits and expand our footprint in the retirement plan market while helping clients make the best choices for achieving their business goals.”