

Benefacts Analytics v.2 Outline functional specification August 2019

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

Based on version 1 (BAv.1) developed in 2016/17, Benefacts Analytics v.2 (BAv.2) is a proof of concept web application/web service providing registered users with controlled access to a body of information and analysis that has been designed, created, maintained and supplied by Benefacts, curated for their needs case-by-case.

BAv.2 is being developed to meet the needs (initially) of Government departments and agencies that provide funding for nonprofit organisations. These public sector bodies (PSBs) have funding relationships – often long-established – with thousands of nonprofits, mostly in Ireland but a small number based overseas.

Many PSBs have already developed management information systems to acquire, process and share information internally about these nonprofits – mostly submitted by the organisations themselves – to support analysis, decision-making, internal and external audit, and reporting. Some have installed digital grant management systems.

Benefacts Analytics augments the available data by creating for each PSB

- a verified online register where all of the existing IDs of each entity are mapped to a unique business identifier (assigned by Benefacts)
- a body of high quality (relevant, recent, 3rd-party verified) financial, governance and compliance data in digital form which is otherwise only accessible in thousands of dispersed analogue documents
- a set of data presented in a format that facilitates ready comparative and trend analysis within and across groups of organisations across many variables, based on public regulatory information (sometimes augmented by data provided by the end-user)
- user-specified reports signalling lead indicators of risk/other trends

The need for the system arises from the requirements for due diligence, risk planning and internal audit within PSBs, and the public policy direction towards a 'digital first' policy environment, including

- improved data governance
- data sharing within and across agencies
- digital-first solutions ("tell us once") with reduced administration overheads (for nonprofits as well as PSBs)
- greater transparency in public decision-making.

1.2 Business Context

Benefacts is a social enterprise incorporated in 2014 as a company limited by guarantee. Its purpose is to promote the transparency and accessibility of Ireland's Third Sector – meaning all entities that are not part of the private or public sectors.

It does this by defining entities in scope, harvesting the data they file with public registrars/regulators, cleaning, normalising, classifying and aggregating this in a data warehouse for deployment in a variety of free public and other (paid) applications. Benefacts Data Warehouse is the subject of a separate functional spec.

Benefacts was established with 50:50 co-funding between philanthropy and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) 2015-2017. About 70% of Benefacts second round of funding (2018-2020) is provided under the terms of multi-annual funding agreements with DPER and a private philanthropy, the Ireland Funds. The balance is derived from earned revenues and donations.

During 2018/2019, Benefacts identified six government agencies¹ with an interest in exploring the potential functionality of Benefacts data for different aspects of their business requirements.

They have agreed to provide funding and to cooperate in a 12-month development trial for this purpose, which commenced in July 2018. They are the sole partners in the BAV2 trial and their engagement in terms of giving requirements and testing solutions is seen as preliminary to any procurement process that might eventuate, pending proof of concept. They will potentially tender a service like the one being developed or based on it, and may do this alone or with others

This document describes the functional specification of this development trial service in the business context as described above.

¹ The Departments of Health, Employment & Social Protection, Foreign Affairs and Trade; Tusla/the Child and Family Agency; Kildare and Fingal County Councils respectively

2. General description

2.1 Product / System Functions

BAv2 is a trial web service providing structured access to large bodies of regulatory, governance, financial and other data about a set of nonprofit organisations, as well as analysis derived from the data.

Most of the data in Benefacts Analytics is derived from publicly available filings, processed by Benefacts and stored in the Benefacts Database of Irish Nonprofits.

Certain additional data has been provided by each PSB /procured on their behalf by Benefacts

In a departure from BAv.1, Benefacts is augmenting the portfolio of organisations in scope for each partner in the BAv.2 trial This includes

- a) additional rows (extra organisations), providing data on organisations not already in the database because they are based overseas or because they are incorporated by share
- b) additional columns including fields of administrative, regulatory, financial or other data, provided to Benefacts by the PSB in question under the terms of data sharing and non-disclosure agreements for the sole and exclusive use of their instance of BAv.2.

2.2 Control of the data rests with Benefacts

In the case of each trial user, Benefacts will create its universe of entities in scope. This is set out in a Benchmark Report.

Only Benefacts can add to/take away nonprofits from this portfolio (on request from the end-user).

Although the data is derived (in the main – see below) from publicly available documents, its hyper-availability – in aggregate and comparative forms over multiple years – makes it potentially sensitive. For this reason, it is made available only to registered users, subject to the terms of funding and user agreements.

Control of access in the case of each trial user respectively is the responsibility of a nominated manager.

2.3 Separate directory, analysis grid, dashboard for management reports

The directory of all organisations in scope for each PSB is presented in one tab on BAv.2, whether or not Benefacts holds any additional regulatory data. This tab will include at least

- Registered name
- Benefacts unique ID
- PSB unique ID
- Level of funding provided by PSB in latest year
- Postal code
- County/country
- List of regulatory sources (e.g. Charities Regulator) and regulatory IDs
- Benefacts classification
- Institution type
- Link to their listing on benefacts.ie (where available)

The Directory has been designed to be a sharable data asset – it contains no sensitive data – and access to it can be provided separate from access to the analysis grid.

The Analysis grid has data structured in seven tabs – register, governance, compliance, funding, financials, ratios, people. Only organisations where Benefacts has additional regulatory (governance, financial, compliance) are included in the Analysis grid.

In both the Directory and the Analysis grid the data is filterable and sortable in every column; filtered/sorted selections will persist across tabs.

The raw data will be augmented by an analysis or “dashboard” screen, providing bespoke management reports including downloadable files. These are to be specified by each end-user as one of the outcomes of the trial.

The Register will include all nonprofits with which the Agency has a relationship, whether or not these are already in the Benefacts Database: many are not, because they are not otherwise regulated/registered in Ireland (for example they are established overseas, or they are funded by a local authority but are not regulated or registered as a charity, as a company or for tax relief purposes).

The entities included in analysis tabs overleaf will only be those for which Benefacts has some data to populate the fields.

3 User characteristics and objectives

All of the members of the user community in the BAv.2 trial are public servants. Their functional areas of responsibility are chiefly

- Senior/general management
- Internal audit
- Financial control
- Grant management/compliance
- Other including clerical/admin including registry/tech support
- Research
- Communications

Not all end-users have the same level of technical familiarity with a web application of this kind, or with the data contained in it.

Some will use this trial service with colleagues whom they meet regularly; others work in offices distributed around Ireland or overseas.

Some functionality for snipping/sharing content may be required although it is not envisaged that the trial service may be shared in its entirety and there is no plan to permit universal download.

Users will wish to compare some aspects of the data with other data about these organisations that they already hold; in this trial version, there is no facility to download data dumps from the trial service. Instead, users are invited to provide data for upload to the trial service.

From the perspective of these users, the system will need to provide both the raw data and the analysis including exception reports drawing attention to areas highlighted for further action/escalation.

2.3 Operational Scenarios

Five sample use cases are summarised here:

1	Senior management	Typically lacks detailed familiarity with individual organisations/cases. May not have more than general familiarity with financial statements. Accountable at a senior level for the performance of the whole system. Seeks reassurance that officials can access relevant data in a timely way and will be able to identify matters for further action/escalation. Likely to review dashboard/exception reports, access detailed data only for verification.
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2	Internal audit	<p>Highly specialised user of financial statements. Carries senior responsibility for risk and compliance. Receives a range of documentation, including the documents on which this service is based; currently generally manages risk oversight on a sampling basis.</p> <p>Likely to be most interested in compliance and analysis so long as it has been built to his/her specification/meets their needs.</p>
3	Financial control	<p>Highly specialised user; may have limited familiarity with individual cases but likely to be interested in financial analysis/other funding.</p>
4	Grant management	<p>General user, unlikely to have specialist financial expertise. Very familiar with the organisations, has access to a large body of other (mainly narrative) material including application data, management accounts, impact reports. Is likely to wish to compare data on this trial service with other data.</p> <p>Prime user of dashboard/report as a means of identifying cases for action.</p>
5	Other including clerical/admin/tech support	<p>Prime user of the register for verification purposes; likely to have system-wide responsibilities including documentation, harmonising this dataset with data from other sources. In the case of tech support, may be interested in taking a feed/acquiring the register as API.</p>