

Transforming CalWORKs Implementation
Support:

Job Search as a Choice

May 19, 2026



Welcome

CFPIC

- Stuart Oppenheim, Director Emeritus CFPIC

CDSS Engagement Bureau

- JR Colmenero, Analyst II
- David Dauer, Supervisor I

Riverside County

- Michael Maniglia, Deputy Director Self-Sufficiency Division



Housekeeping

- Please mute your mics
- Name format: first, last, and county.
- Monitoring chat

Agenda

- CDSS: Changes to Job Search Policy
- Riverside County Example
- Discussion and Q&A
- Next Steps in Webinar Series

Changes to Job Search Policy

J.R. Colmenero and David Dauer
*CalWORKs Parent Engagement
and Policy Section*

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Learning Objectives

Attendees should be able to:



Describe SB 119's impacts on job search.



Explain job search as a participant choice.



Articulate how counties can align with this policy.

SB 119 and "Job Search"

- Inclusive of "job search", "job readiness", and "job club" activities.
- **Please share an aspect of job search in your county that's innovative and/or that participants like.**

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- An approximately four-week period in early engagement where many participants were required to attend in order to continue in the program and develop at WTW Plan.
- IN THE CHAT – Please share an example of the kinds of activities CalWORKS WTW participants do in job club in your county.
- From WIC code: training to learn job seeking and interviewing skills, to understand employer expectations, and learn skills designed to enhance an individual's capacity to move toward self-sufficiency, including financial management education.

Benefits of Job Search

In-person engagement that builds relationships	Career exploration that helps people decide on a new path	A "default enrollment" that gives clients structure
Exposure to resources and services that CalWORKs/WTW offers	Opportunities for HHS workers to indicators of need for red flags for mental health, DV, and SA services	A catch-all placement for new participants who don't know what they want to do yet
Motivation and confidence building		



Each of the entries on this slide represents direct feedback from counties in our Transforming CalWORKs Advisory Committee, TCAC and CalWORKs County Implementation Collaborative, TWIC meetings about the SB 119 policy change to job search. What came across is that over the years many counties have built their "job search" activity into a robust employment program that provides a lot of good to participants. CDSS recognizes that job club is still a valuable part of the WTW program and emphasizes that with the law change job search and job club have become OPTIONAL (not banned nor discouraged). Counties may continue to run job club programs, advertise them to WTW participants, and recommend them when appropriate.

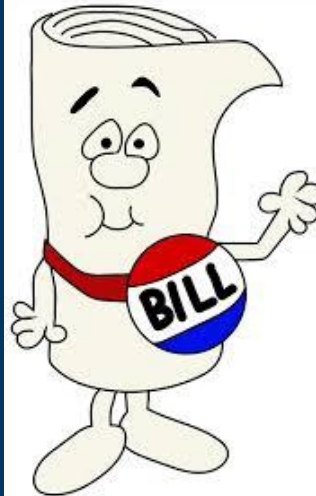
Why not keep it mandatory?

Job search origins and the "work first" model

Reducing sanction "pitfalls"

Trauma informed program administration

And...



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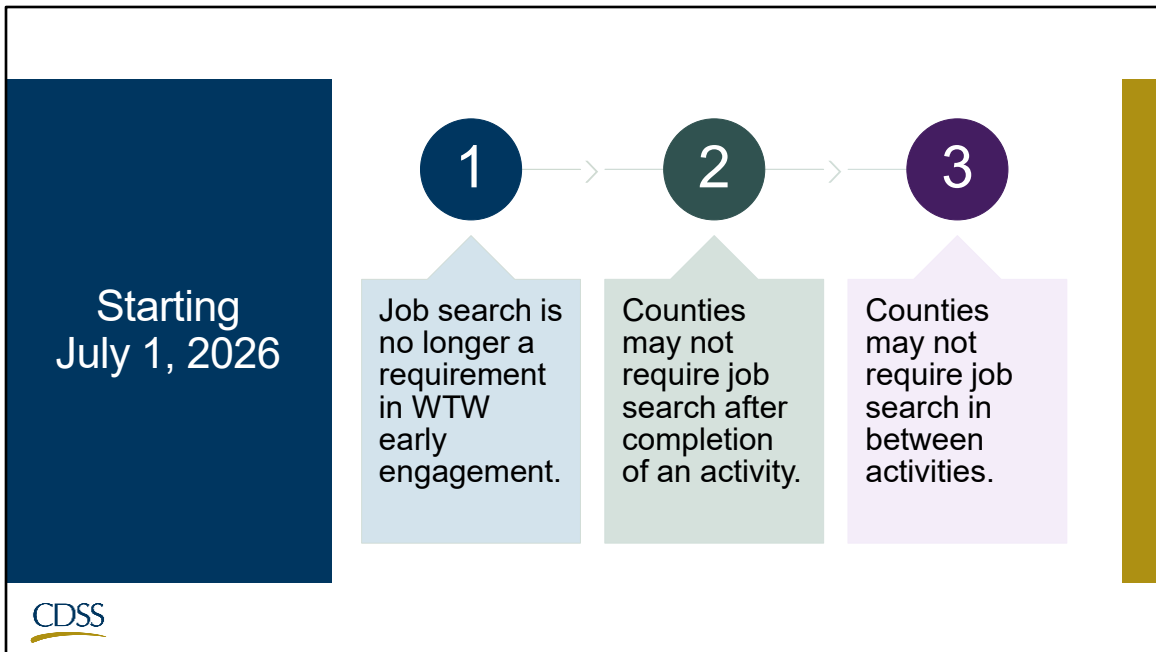
When the CalWORKS welfare to work flow of activities was first developed, job search was meant to function as a "test of the labor market" – where participants were required to try to find a job first before having access to supportive aspects of the program. Over the past decade many small program changes were made that reversed this effect, but the mandatory job search period remained in statute.

Job search as a mandatory program requirement dates to the "work first" model, which research indicates does not improve participant's long-term job prospects and earnings. ACL 26-32 cites a number of studies done since welfare reform began in the 1990s that question the efficacy of the work first model, finding that participants who are pressured to find a job quickly often end up in temporary, low paying positions that do not improve their long-term outcomes.

CalWORKs is actively trying to reduce sanction rates of participants early in the program, and one of the places where people are often sanctioned early on is by not participating in mandatory job search.

CalWORKs 2.0 operationalizes trauma informed care in program administration, meaning that for CalWORKs participants (who often enter the program while in crisis

or battling the after-effects of traumatic life experiences), we seek to promote emotional safety, facilitate connection, support healthy coping mechanisms, and RESTORE CHOICE AND CONTROL to people who have often had choices taken away from them. Allowing participants to choose whether job search is the right course of action for them is an evidence-backed way to restore self-sufficiency.

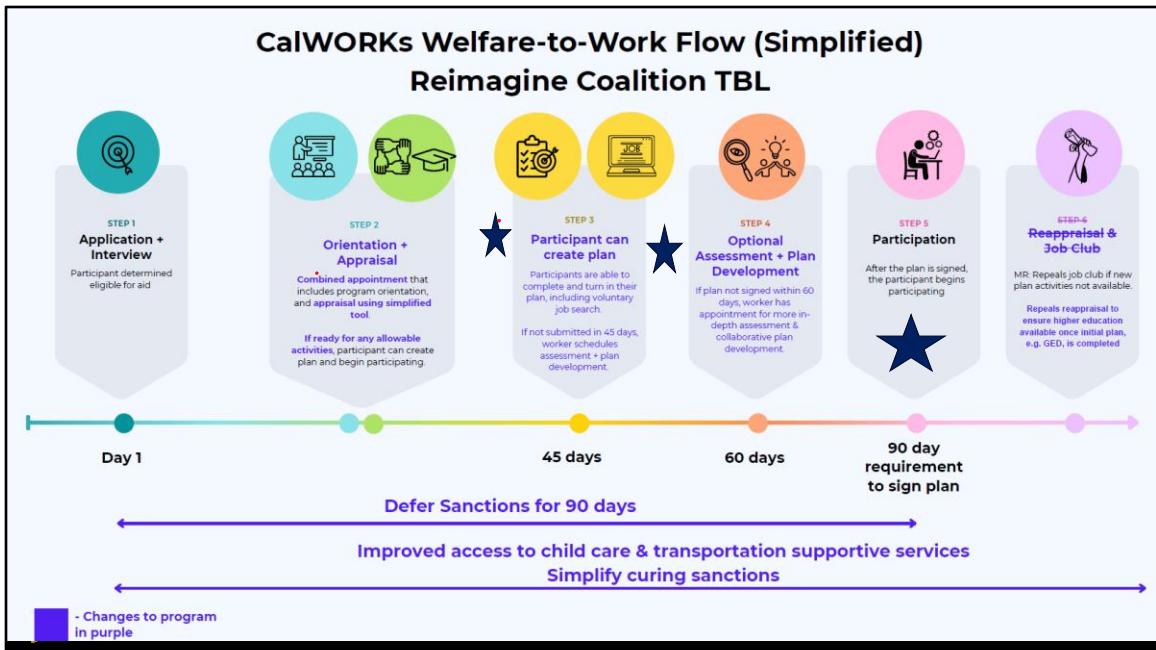


Here are the direct effects of the SB 119 changes to statute.

WIC 11325.22: SB 119 deleted mentions of job search during early engagement.

- An approximately four-week period in early engagement where many participants were required to attend to continue in the program and develop at WTW Plan.
- From WIC code: training to learn job seeking and interviewing skills, to understand employer expectations, and learn skills designed to enhance an individual's capacity to move toward self-sufficiency, including financial management education. [cite two places in code – initial engagement and bridging activities. Explain the changes to WIC code (one amended, one removed)]

WIC 11325.6: SB 119 removed this section entirely, which previously identified job search as a bridging activity when other activities aren't available.



You may be familiar with this graphic – it was created by the CalWORKs Reimagined team to illustrate the new flow of activities for WTW participants. SB 119 introduces several important changes to the program (which will be covered in future webinars!!), but today we're only focusing on job search. The new WTW flow allows a 90-day period after a participant is approved for aid during which they can complete orientation and appraisal, do barrier removal activities, and – if they so choose – develop a draft WTW plan on their own, and share it with the county for feedback before signing their plan.

Counties may still conduct job search/job club programs that take place in the time before a WTW plan is signed and after orientation and appraisal. Job club can be a great place to explore career options, polish or write job application materials, and start to develop their WTW plan independently before sharing it with their county worker.

Job search remains an activity option for WTW participants to include in their plan – as with any other activity, if a participant agrees to attend job club in their plan, they are required to attend.

Reframing Job Search Requirements

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- WTW Participation Requirements (ACL 20-120)
- Participant Engagement
- WTW Compliance

While job search can no longer be made mandatory at designated points in the WTW Flow, CalWORKs Hourly Participation requirements still apply and are unaffected by SB 119.

So, what are those participation requirements? In addition to the hourly requirements which we're all familiar with, per ACL 20-120, "WTW participants may participate in any allowable WTW activity throughout their time on aid without time limits."

SB 119 introduced significant flexibility in determining WTW activities and in allowing for participants to change their WTW plans. While a participant is technically required to do any activity they mutually agree upon with their worker, in alignment with increased WTW program flexibility, SB 119 promotes a model where counties should emphasize efforts to effectively engage over noncompliance and sanction.

For example, if a participant and their WTW worker mutually agree job search is an appropriate activity, then it is technically required. If the participant fails to participate, then they may be subject to noncompliance and sanction.

However, if the participant decides after a week or two that they prefer to do a different activity and they communicate that to the county, then they are still attempting to engage in the program, and the county should work with them to identify another, more appropriate activity that aligns with the participant's stated goals.



PRACTICAL SCENARIOS

It's now time for some interactive engagement! CFPIC helped us make the following scenarios interactive. Vote in the poll for each of the three scenarios, and feel free to provide your reasoning in the chat.

Is the WTW participant engaged?

Scenario 1: Danny

- Danny is approved for CalWORKs, completes WTW orientation and appraisal, and works with the county to choose a four-week Job Club as a WTW Activity for 20 hours per week, agreeing to it in his signed WTW plan.
- On day 91 of his time on aid and during the second week of job club, Danny stops attending.
- Can the county initiate noncompliance?

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FOR CFPIC – POLL QUESTION – CAN THE COUNTY INITIATE NONCOMPLIANCE?
OPTIONS: YES // NO // NOT SURE

Yes they can. Danny is not participating in the activity he agreed to do in his WTW plan – without informing the county of the change, or arranging another activity, Danny is out of compliance when he stops attending his assigned activity.

Is the WTW participant engaged?

Scenario 2: Lali

- Lali is approved for the WTW program and completes orientation and appraisal. The county offers to enroll her in their four-week job club before developing her WTW plan, and she agrees.
- Lali informs the county they no longer want to do job search and requests a different activity.
- Can the county initiate noncompliance?

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FOR CFPIC – POLL QUESTION – CAN THE COUNTY INITIATE NONCOMPLIANCE?
OPTIONS: YES // NO // NOT SURE

This one is more complicated. Lali has not yet signed a WTW plan, and as of July 1, state law no longer requires job search as an early engagement activity. Maybe she attended and something happened in her personal life, or she lost access to transportation to job club, or maybe she went and realized it's just not helpful for her. As long as she is within 90 days of being approved for aid, the county cannot sanction her. They are not required to initiate noncompliance either.

The guidance is silent on this issue. Perhaps the county should work with Lali to review her proposed plan, discuss her long-term goals, and make sure she has the necessary supportive services to get off on the right foot.

Is the WTW participant engaged?



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Scenario 3: JR

- JR is new to the WTW program, and they want to be an astronaut. They have a GED. Their county worker wants them to do job search as an activity instead.
- Can the county worker require them to do job search in this case?

No, the county worker cannot make them do job search as an activity.

That said, becoming an astronaut is a very difficult job path that is unlikely to result in a participant actually becoming an astronaut. However, supporting the participant's goal by helping them research the requirements and start taking small steps towards that goal could result in the participant acquiring any number of useful knowledge, skills, and abilities and could lead to a number of different, rewarding career options.

Riverside County Example

- Job club not mandatory
- Customer Buy-In
- CalOAR Orientation & Attendance Rate
- Sanction Rate

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- Job Club was not a mandatory first activity for WTW in Riverside County. We work with the customer to agree upon the most appropriate activity to participate in that would provide the most benefit to the family.
- Getting the customer buy in is extremely important on getting their participation into WTW. This starts at CalWORKs approval. Our goal is to get the customers to orientation so they can really see the benefits of the program.
- One of our CalOAR performance measures we chose was to increase our Orientation Attendance Rate from 42% to 52%. Our current average stands at 62%!
- Our Sanction Rate has averaged around 11%.

Riverside County Example

- **Orientation:** Program benefits and opportunities
- **Appraisal:** Customer barriers and needs
- **Activities:** Career Readiness Training

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Orientation:

- This is where the customers get to see the benefits of the program and all the opportunities to achieve self-sufficiency.

Appraisal:

- Discover the customer's barriers and needs.
- Discuss requirements and collaborate on an appropriate activity.

Activities:

- **Career Readiness Training (CRT)** recently replaced our existing Job Club WTW activity name effective March 16, 2026.
- Unsubsidized Employment, Subsidized Employment, On the Job Training (OJT), Work Experience (WEX), Community Service (CS), Job Search/Job Readiness (JS/JR), Vocational Education (Voc/Ed), Job Skills Training Directly Related to Employment, Education Directly Related to Employment

Now What?

How can counties engage new WTW participants not interested in job search?

How can counties engage participants in between activities?

CFPIC will develop a Slido with these two questions for counties to provide responses.

Q&A



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Thank you for attending!

- This is the first of a series of Webinars to accompany issuance of Guidance Letters
- Next Webinars:
 - Transportation: 5/26
 - Sanctions: 6/9
 - We are looking for County volunteers to present promising practices for each webinar