

Work-based Learning

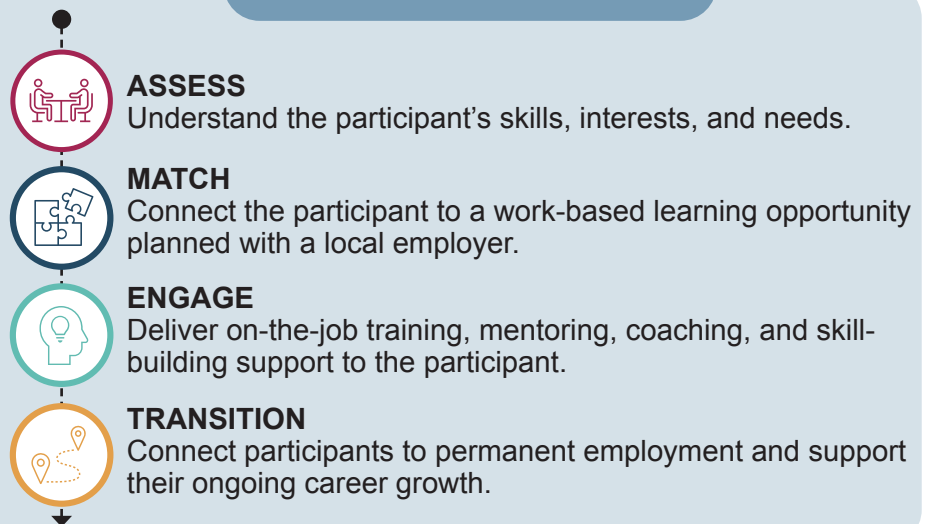
Employment Strategies Used in TANF's 30-year History

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs must place participants in defined work activities to meet the federally-mandated Work Participation Rate.¹ Over the last 30 years, TANF programs have intentionally designed work-based learning experiences for participants that combine work experience (a 'core' activity) with job skills training (a 'non-core' activity). Work-based learning is structured, on-the-job training or learning experiences that combine work activity with skill development, coaching, employer involvement, and sometimes credentials. Work-based learning may include subsidized employment, unpaid work, or learning experiences in a work setting.

WHY TANF TRIED THIS

- Recognizing that countable work experience activities do not always build in-demand job skills, TANF programs sought to make required participation more meaningful for participants.
- In work-based learning experiences, employers can help shape training around actual job needs, making learning relevant to available job opportunities.

HOW IT WORKS



WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

Meaningful work-based learning depends on employer engagement to create workplace experiences that build relevant skills. These approaches can produce modest gains in employment and earnings that persist over time. However, these gains do not necessarily reduce participants' receipt of public benefits.²

Can Increase Employment

Evidence from five work experience and work-based learning interventions found modest increases in short- and long-term employment.²

Can Produce Gains in Annual Earnings

Evidence from six work experience and work-based learning interventions found modest increases in short- and long-term annual earnings.²

Does Not Decrease Benefit Receipt

Evidence does not show that work experience and work-based learning consistently reduce participants' receipt of public benefits.²

To learn more about what works to help job seekers with low incomes find and keep employment, see the Administration for Children & Families' Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse: <https://pathwaystowork.acf.gov/>.



EXAMPLES IN ACTION



Chicago Women in Trades

- Operates pre-apprenticeship programs for low-income women, including TANF participants, entering construction and transportation trades focusing on occupations such as carpentry, electrical work, welding, and heavy equipment operation.³



Kentucky Ready to Work

- Helps TANF participants combine college coursework with paid work-study, coaching, and supportive services that prepare them for employment in their chosen field.⁴

MOVING FORWARD

- Work-based learning that combines real-world work experience is paired with **structured skill development, coaching, and employer feedback**.
- TANF programs can continue to apply these lessons by turning required work activities **into intentional steps along a career pathway**.

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Sources

- ¹ Federal TANF rules require states and territories to meet work participation rate targets based on families' participation in specified activities and hours. Tribal TANF programs negotiate minimum participation rates, hours, and allowable work activities with ACF.
- ² Shenk, Marisa, Erin Welch, and Sarah Dolfin (2023). Evidence Snapshot: Work experience and work-based learning. OPRE Report #2023-056, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [Link](#)
- ³ For more information, see <https://cwit.org/>
- ⁴ For more information, see <https://kctcs.edu/education-training/initiatives/ready-to-work/index.aspx>

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<https://peerta.acf.hhs.gov/>