

HR PLAYBOOK

For Water, Wastewater and Energy Sector
2026 EDITION

RECRUITMENT & OFFBOARDING

*A detailed overview of each of the steps
in the employee life cycle.*

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

*Best practices to ensure seasoned and
new staff stay and succeed in the
water industry*

ACCESS, VISIBILITY & OPPORTUNITY

*Create a space for employees to share
the same mission and values*

EMPLOYEE & LABOR RELATIONS

*Foster a positive work environment and
a culture where employees feel valued.*



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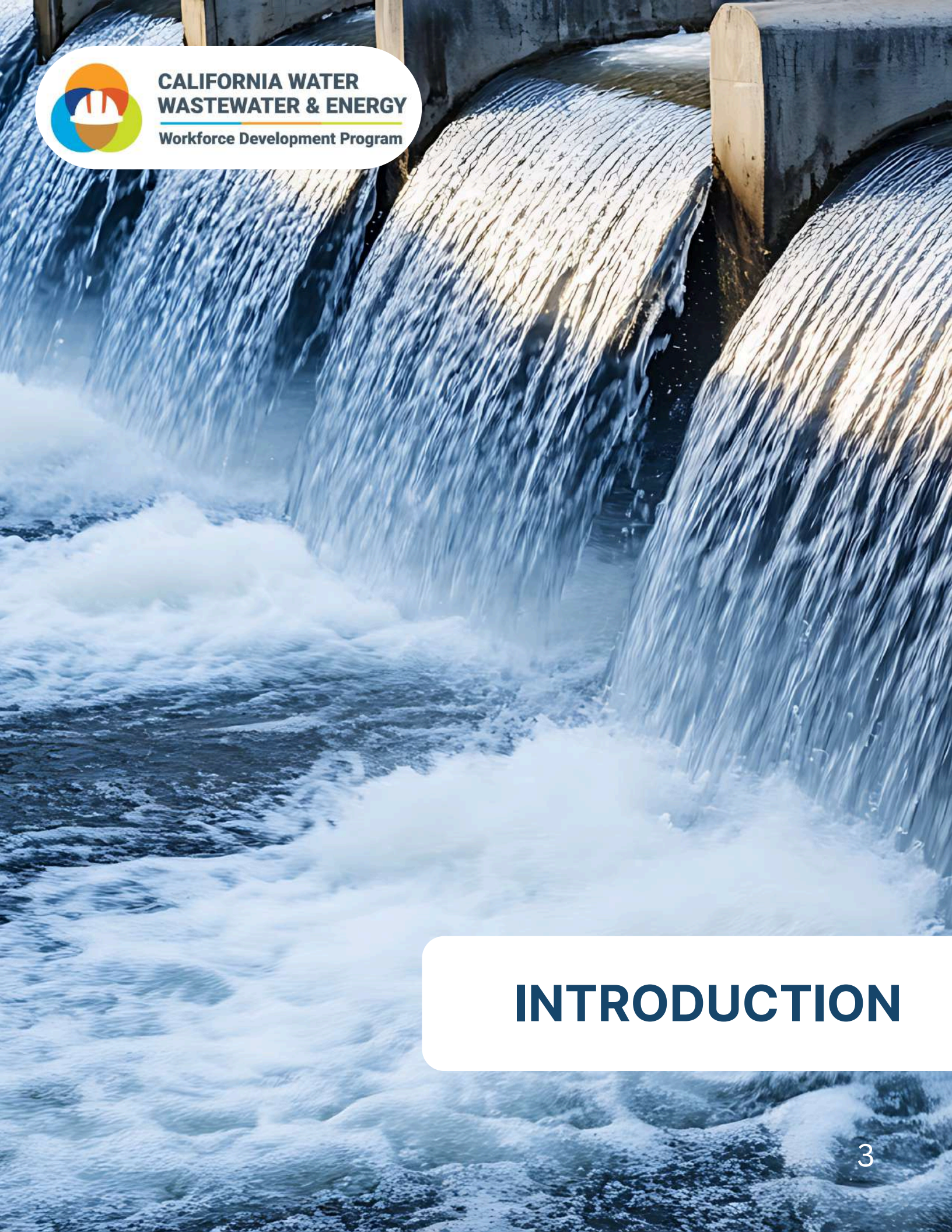
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**CALIFORNIA WATER
WASTEWATER & ENERGY**
Workforce Development Program



INTRODUCTION

HR Playbook Overview



California's water and energy utilities are facing a shortage of qualified workers, driven by labor market changes, increased competition, and upcoming retirements. This HR Playbook helps HR act strategically to build a skilled, inclusive, and resilient workforce.

Created as part of a statewide workforce initiative, this HR Playbook is designed to support California's publicly owned water, wastewater, and energy utilities in recruiting, training, and keeping skilled new workers. It emphasizes broadening access, raising awareness, and providing opportunities for all employees, while also strengthening partnerships that enhance career pathways and mobility. This strategy supports both operational excellence and the utility's dedication to community values.

This HR Playbook gives HR professionals and utility leaders a practical framework for applying best practices throughout the employee life cycle. **Using the AVO framework—Access, Visibility, and Opportunity—it embeds inclusion into HR processes and aligns strategies with each utility's mission and values.** This helps achieve business goals while strengthening employee and community impact.

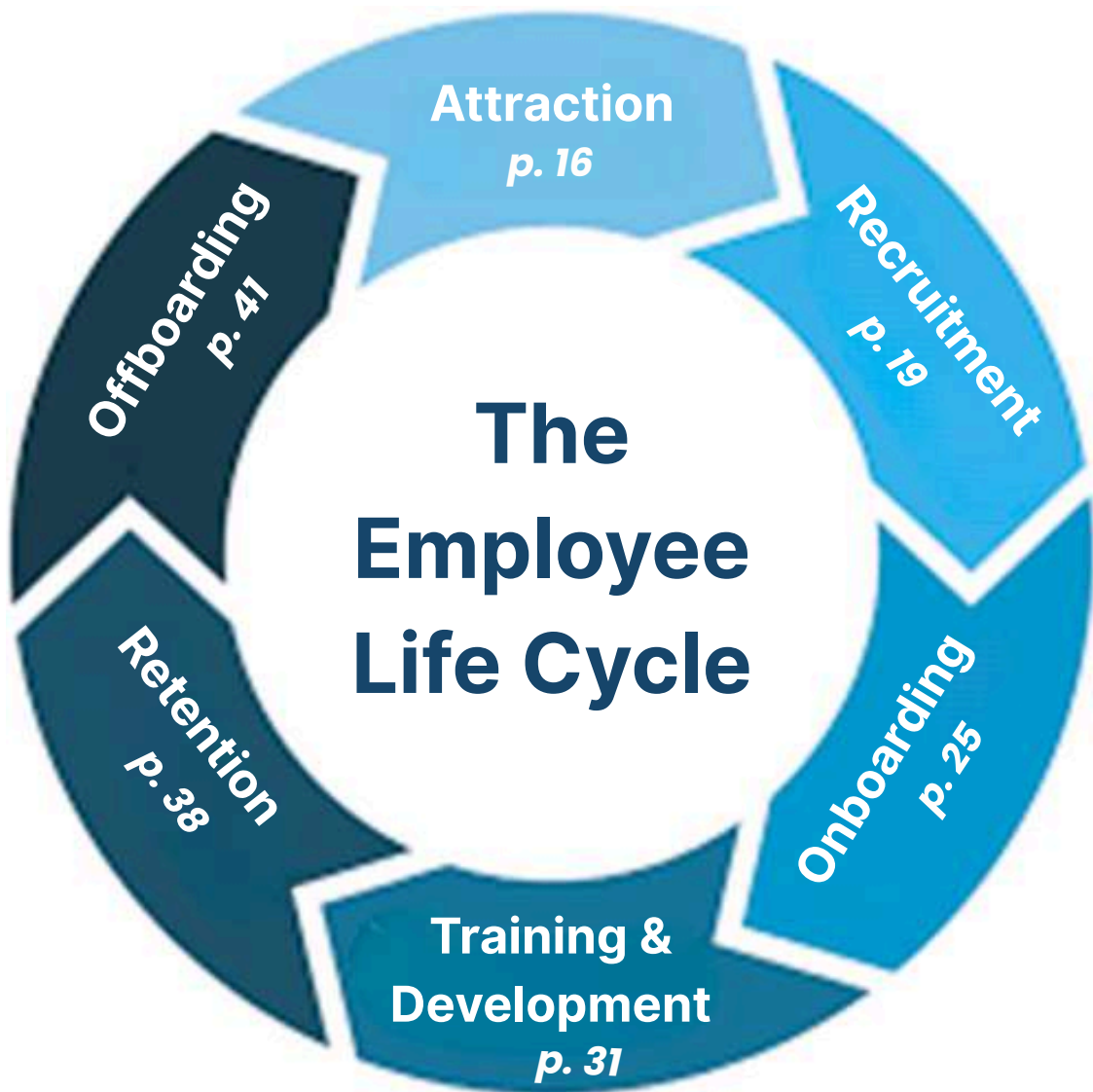
Leadership support is crucial. The Playbook stresses executive and governing body endorsement for credibility, and encourages teamwork with internal and external groups. Trust is built by providing fair access to resources for employees and ensuring community representation in the utility's staff and leadership.

This HR Playbook takes a realistic approach to inclusion, avoids generic solutions, and recognizes that some training, like unconscious bias workshops, may not work without supporting data and systems change. It promotes practical strategies focused on access, visibility, and equal opportunity to achieve shared outcomes and lasting cultural improvement. The aim is a workplace where all employees feel valued and empowered, and the utility stays adaptable and connected to its communities.

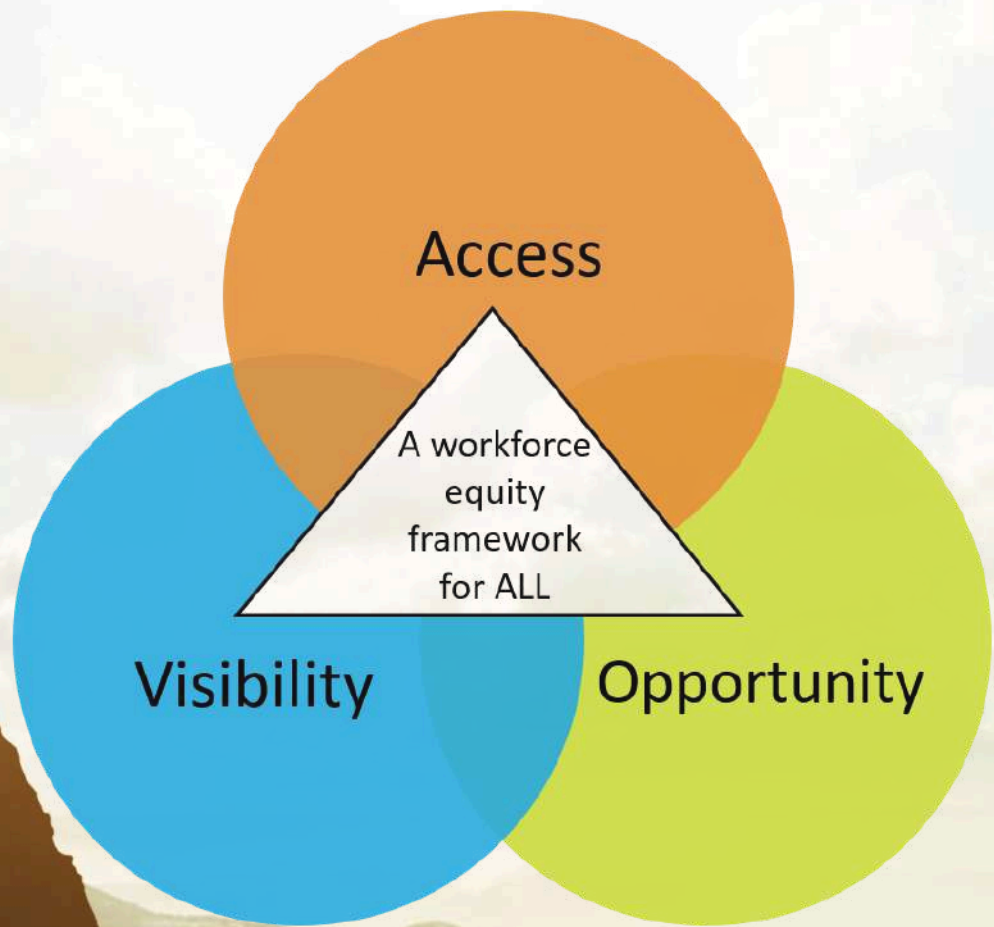


The Employee Life Cycle

The employee life cycle is a model that HR professionals use to visualize an employee's journey from the moment they hear about the organization to the time they leave. In this HR Playbook, you will learn about the life cycle in the water, wastewater, and energy sector, and best practices to follow to ensure your employees succeed.



Access, Visibility, and Opportunity



The AVO Framework

Access, Visibility, and Opportunity (AVO) provide a practical framework to build trust, foster engagement, and create high-performing utility teams. Rather than simply fulfilling requirements, AVO aims to strengthen systems for fair participation by all employees, candidates, and community members.

- **Access** ensures that employees and jobseekers can reach the people, tools, information, and systems they need to succeed.
- **Visibility** elevates individuals and contributions that have historically been overlooked, ensuring talent is seen, heard, and valued.
- **Opportunity** opens doors for advancement, skill-building, and leadership by removing unnecessary barriers and supporting a range of career pathways.

How We Put AVO into Practice

Our approach emphasizes integration over aspiration, embedding AVO principles into recruitment, onboarding, development, and advancement. This includes:



- **Building Trust:**
 - From hiring to promotion, people must believe the process is fair and transparent.
- **Broadening Access:**
 - Recognizing diverse routes to success: education, experience, or hands-on learning.
- **Spotlighting Talent:**
 - Highlighting top performers boosts motivation, provides mentorship, and encourages career growth.
- **Driving Opportunity:**
 - Eliminating barriers and build fair and adaptive systems for workforce growth.

Legal Alignment and Intent

Our strategy follows Proposition 209 and state and federal guidelines. We avoid quotas, proxy language, or preferences, instead prioritizing equitable design, inclusive outreach, and ongoing improvement. Our aim is to represent our communities and support all employees' success.

Why AVO Matters Now More Than Ever

In the water, wastewater, and energy sectors, where public trust, environmental resilience, and community impact intersect, Access, Visibility, and Opportunity (AVO) are not just values. They represent a strategic advantage. These industries serve California's most vital and vibrant communities, and the stakes are high: clean water, sustainable energy, safe infrastructure, and a workforce ready for tomorrow's demands.

A workforce built on the principles of AVO delivers smarter solutions, broader perspectives, and stronger connections to the communities served. Whether optimizing energy delivery, designing resilient systems, or ensuring safety in hazardous environments, teams that reflect a range of lived experiences are more effective, adaptive, and trusted.

When organizations ensure access, visibility, and opportunity for everyone, they promote fairness, encourage innovation, and retain talent to effectively lead through change.

Focus must remain on enduring priorities: fairness, access, opportunity, and operational excellence. Resilient utilities will be those that integrate these principles into the core of operations, treating them not as trends, but as essential to organizational and civic responsibility.

Leadership Commitment: Modeling What Matters

Leadership sets the tone. AVO principles only thrive when leaders are not just supportive—but visible, accountable, and action-oriented. That means:

- Integrating AVO-related goals into leadership performance metrics to drive alignment and accountability.
- Consistently communicating the “why” behind AVO efforts, especially during times of change or resistance.
- Investing in continuous learning, including workshops, peer exchanges, and feedback loops that deepen understanding and shift mindsets over time.

How AVO Shows Up Throughout the Playbook

The AVO framework (Access, Visibility, and Opportunity) is the organizing lens used throughout this HR Playbook. Rather than existing as a standalone section, AVO is embedded across each stage of the employee lifecycle to guide practical, usable workforce practices.

Throughout the playbook, you will see short callout boxes titled “**How AVO Shows Up.**” These callouts are designed to help agencies translate the framework into real-world actions that strengthen consistency, clarity, and workforce sustainability.

How to Use the AVO Callouts

Each callout highlights how AVO is applied in context:

Access

- How employees and candidates enter, navigate, and access systems, information, training, and resources.

Visibility

- How experiences, contributions, expectations, and pathways are surfaced so people can see themselves, their options, and what success looks like.

Opportunity

- How growth, development, advancement, and leadership opportunities are intentionally supported over time.

These callouts are not meant to introduce new requirements. Instead, they highlight design choices that help agencies build stronger, more consistent workforce systems, especially in complex, highly regulated environments such as water, wastewater, and energy.

Why This Matters

Embedding AVO throughout the playbook helps agencies:

- Create clearer on-ramps and reduce friction for employees and candidates
- Make expectations, pathways, and decision-making more visible
- Support leadership development and career growth without adding unnecessary complexity
- Strengthen workforce stability while remaining compliant and operationally sound

By using AVO as a lens rather than a standalone program, the playbook focuses on how work gets done.

Data-Informed AVO Accountability:

A successful workplace equity strategy relies on more than good intentions—it relies on evidence. Regularly collecting and analyzing workforce data enables HR leaders and decision-makers to monitor progress, identify potential gaps, and ensure Access, Visibility, and Opportunity throughout the employee lifecycle. This is not about setting quotas; it is about asking meaningful questions, such as: “Who is being hired, promoted, or leaving—and why?”

Recommended practices include:

- **Monitor workforce trends:** Track hiring, promotion, and exit data to identify patterns that may indicate barriers to access or opportunity.
- **Review performance and compensation:** Analyze trends to ensure fairness, consistency, and visibility for talent across the organization.
- **Listen to employees:** Conduct engagement surveys and listening sessions to understand lived experiences and improve access to feedback channels.
- **Report transparently:** Establish a regular rhythm of reporting to leadership and employees, building trust through visible transparency.
- **Practice data-informed vigilance:** Use findings not to assign blame, but to continuously improve systems, policies, and outcomes.



Goals of the HR Playbook



Create a Workforce Rooted in AVO

The playbook guides the utility in building a workforce based on Access, Visibility, and Opportunity (AVO), ensuring it reflects its communities and supports operational success, employee satisfaction, and customer engagement.

Secure Leadership Buy-In and Organizational Support

Securing leadership and governing body support is essential for HR initiatives. The playbook provides strategies and best practices to gain top-down endorsement and maintain accountability for AVO-aligned workforce goals.

Develop Tailored Training Programs

The goal is to generate ideas for training programs tailored to the specific needs of management and frontline staff, supporting AVO objectives and promoting inclusivity and collaboration within the utility.

Standardize HR Processes

Developing uniform processes for hiring, training, and keeping staff in technical and operational positions, such as engineers, plant operators, and technicians, to address the specific requirements of the utility industry.

Measure and Track Progress with Data-Driven Metrics

The playbook stresses the importance of setting measurable goals, establishing baselines, and consistently reviewing data to track progress. By using qualitative and quantitative metrics, the utility can ensure continuous improvement and transparency in its AVO strategy.

Implement a Phased Approach for HR Sustainability

The playbook proposes a phased, sustainable strategy for change. Utilities can begin with current resources and scale up as budgets and partnerships allow, ensuring ongoing progress in HR technology, people data, talent and workforce management, succession, and learning.

Leverage Internal and External Resources

The water, wastewater, and energy sector is urged to combine internal resources with external expertise, like consultants and community partners, to enhance efficiency, support workforce development, and promote equitable opportunity and visibility.

Enhance Employee Experience with Focus on Safety and Well-Being

Highlighting the significance of employee safety, mental health, and overall well-being is essential, especially in high-risk industries such as water and energy. Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is fundamental to achieving sustained employee retention and job satisfaction.

Ensure Legal and Environmental Compliance

The utility must comply with employment laws at all levels and follow relevant industry regulations, such as those from OSHA and the California Department of Water Resources.

Positively Impact the Community

Offering employment opportunities to local residents enhances public trust and service quality in water, wastewater, and energy sectors by eliminating access barriers and enabling them to represent and serve their communities effectively.

Celebrate Milestones and Progress

Recognizing achievements to support the utility's focus on access, visibility, and opportunity, and promote ongoing improvement. Key milestones may include finished training, improved employee satisfaction, and advancement toward workforce development goals.



How HR Professionals Can Use this HR Playbook

This HR Playbook is designed as a practical guide to support HR professionals in managing the workforce in the water, wastewater, and energy sectors. By providing comprehensive policies, best practices, and industry-specific guidelines, the playbook serves as a one-stop resource for handling key HR responsibilities. Here's how HR professionals can effectively use this HR Playbook:

Guidance for Policy Implementation

HR professionals can rely on this HR Playbook as a resource when implementing and updating workplace policies on critical regulations like employment law, health and safety standards, and leave policies.

Navigate Day-to-Day Employee Management

HR professionals can use the playbook to manage all stages of the employee lifecycle, with clear processes and steps for each phase. This helps HR leaders develop effective solutions, boost engagement, and support a positive workplace culture.

Audit Compliance and Risk Management

This HR Playbook helps utilities comply with California regulations by providing legal references and best practices for employee management. HR professionals can use it to audit their processes and ensure standards are met.

Create Effective Training and Development Programs

The playbook offers guidance for employee training and development tailored to California's water, wastewater, and energy industries. HR can use this section to design programs that ensure regulatory compliance and foster technical and leadership growth.



Implement Conflict Resolution and Employee Relations

HR professionals can use the playbook for advice on conflict resolution, performance management, and mediation. It offers practical strategies to ensure fairness, inclusiveness, and effective handling of issues like harassment, discrimination, and workplace disputes.

Support Access, Visibility, and Opportunity (AVO)

This HR Playbook outlines actionable strategies grounded in the principles of Access, Visibility, and Opportunity (AVO) that HR professionals can implement to foster a more inclusive workplace. These principles emphasize expanding access to information and opportunity, increasing visibility of all employees in meaningful ways, and ensuring equitable pathways for development and advancement. It includes policies for preventing discrimination, promoting cultural awareness, and supporting underrepresented groups. HR professionals can use these resources to design initiatives that align with organizational goals and legal obligations.

Resource for Supervisors and Managers

This HR Playbook is a useful tool for supervisors and managers as well as HR professionals. It helps train department leaders in employee management tasks like performance evaluations and conflict resolution and offers practical guidance for building a strong supervisory team. By sharing best practices and standardizing leadership methods, it promotes collaboration and consistency, helping departments work together toward organizational goals and a culture of excellence.

By utilizing this HR Playbook, HR professionals can improve processes, ensure compliance, and support a productive work environment. It offers adaptable solutions for California's water, wastewater, and energy industries, promoting efficient and fair HR practices aligned with organizational objectives.





CHAPTER 1: THE EMPLOYEE LIFECYCLE



STAGE 1: ATTRACTION



The initial stage of the employee life cycle involves attracting talent that fits your organization's needs. This can be achieved through various avenues such as word of mouth, social media outreach, and events like information sessions or career fairs targeting a broad audience, including K-12 students, college and trade school students, veterans, and members of non-profit organizations. Collaborating with different departments within your organization is crucial to ensure your brand appeals to future water professionals. In this section, we'll explore steps you can take to reach a wider audience for your organization.

Targeted Outreach Opportunities

HR needs to be a participant during community events to help build rapport and trust with community leaders and members. HR is well positioned to help bridge the silos that often exist between the utilities and the community.

- **Career Fairs:** Promote jobs, explain applications, and connect with candidates. You can register for career fairs on the [Handshake platform](#), and on the schools' career center websites.
- **Career Videos:** Showcase roles, daily tasks, necessary education, and workplace culture.
- **Facility Tours:** Offers insight into daily operations and lets candidates interact with professionals.
- **Information Sessions:** Provide a brief overview of the organization, including benefits, culture, job openings, and an invitation to prospective candidates.
- **School Advisory Committees:** Share feedback on school programs and connect with faculty for outreach information.

Partnerships

Forming partnerships with various organizations facilitates the development of a talent pipeline that possesses industry knowledge and understands the educational qualifications required for employment across different agencies.

- **K-12 Schools:** Present students with an introduction to careers in the water industry, including an overview of educational requirements, job responsibilities, advantages, and compensation.
- **Four-year Colleges and Trade Schools:** promote internships and full-time positions for students seeking practical experience and preparing to enter the professional workforce.
- **Veteran Groups:** Promote career opportunities for veterans whose transferable skills and experience can facilitate their transition into roles within the water and energy sectors.
- **Other Organizations:** These include non-profits, chambers of commerce, and county groups, among others. Attending their events offers a valuable chance to engage with local job seekers interested in opportunities within their communities.

Collaboration with Other Departments

External / Public Affairs: Effective communication with this department is essential, as it is responsible for reviewing informational materials disseminated to external organizations and the public. The following are additional ways in which HR professionals collaborate with professionals from this department.

- **Informational Material:** Create and approve promotional items like banners, brochures, flyers, and social media content.
- **Outreach:** At many agencies, this department targets K-12 students, while HR focuses on college and adult audiences. Both departments should collaborate to engage high school juniors and seniors and attend career events for students, teachers, and parents.



How AVO Shows Up

Access, Visibility, and Opportunity are present by allowing other departments and individuals contribute to outreach efforts by hearing their ideas and valuing their work

Operations & Maintenance, I.T., Engineering, and Others: As HR professionals, we participate in different events to attract potential candidates; however, it is essential to get the subject matter experts to engage with these candidates, talk about their career journeys, and answer questions. The following are additional ways in which HR professionals collaborate with professionals from these departments.

- **Informational Material:** Input such as job descriptions, educational resources, and Q & A's for brochures and flyers can be provided by those in the field.
- **Career Fairs and Information Sessions:** It is important to get those who are out on the field to participate in outreach events to engage with prospective candidates, provide recommendations, and answer questions that will help better prepare those who intend to apply at the water agencies.

STAGE 2: RECRUITMENT



The recruitment process is crucial for building a workforce that meets both technical needs and California's regulatory standards. It's important to evaluate candidates not just for their skills, but also for their dedication to sustainability, safety, and innovation. Ensuring transparency and access throughout the recruiting process promotes fairness for all applicants. This section provides HR professionals, supervisors, and managers with a structured and comprehensive recruiting approach that focuses on objectivity, reduces bias, and fairly assesses candidates from various backgrounds.

Recruitment Process Steps



Step 1: Job Posting

- **Secure Approvals:** Ensure proper documentation is secured for headcount addition or replacement, including budget approval. Identify corresponding job description for evaluation and possible updates.
- **Define Competencies and Skills:** Identify the key competencies, skills, and attributes essential for success in the role through a validated job analysis. Consider multiple qualification pathways including hands-on experience, education, and training. Embrace skills-based hiring by focusing on ability over degree.
- **Update Job Description:** Ensure the job description aligns with the team's needs, defined competencies and skills. Evaluate for gender neutral language, generational-specific language, and ensure that the job description reflects the organization's commitment to access and opportunities to attract a broad range of applicants with varied experience.
- **Legal Compliance:** Ensure the job posting meets the CA requirements for ADA compliance and California Labor Codes and Wage Orders pertaining to minimum wage and salary requirements.
- **Collective Bargaining Agreement:** Job postings for positions covered by Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs) should be discussed and created in partnership with the appropriate union representatives .

Step 2: Application Process

- **Internal Communication Strategy:** Ensure critical stakeholders (e.g., hiring managers) stay in the loop pertaining to timelines, process milestones, and touchpoints. Communicate as frequently as possible and engage them as necessary to address any issues.
- **Applicant Review:** Clearly define how applicants will be evaluated and moved to the steps in the application process. Ensure applicant tracking system is not filtering out qualified candidates.
- **Auditing:** Periodically review job postings to ensure adherence to critical deadlines (e.g., first-round of reviews) and that the job postings have not expired.
- **Education:** Create instructional material and incorporate non-traditional tools to educate potential applicants on how to complete the application process (e.g., posts a video through platforms such as Loom to walk applicants through the application stages).
- **Applicant Communication Loops:** Send regular updates to applicants about their status, especially if interview selection takes 4 to 6 weeks after confirmation or if the applicants have been dispositioned.



Step 3: Interview

- **Schedule Interviews:** Coordinate interviews, ensuring all participants are available, informed of the format, and prepared to facilitate an equitable and inclusive interview environment. Provide directions to your organization.
- **Prepare Interview Materials:** Create questions that assess both technical skills and soft skills, such as cultural awareness and collaboration. Balance the type of questions that will be asked, including conversational, behavioral, and open-ended for comprehensive insights.
- **Provide Interviewer Preparation and Awareness Training:** Brief interviewers on roles, scoring criteria, and the structured process. Formal training on implicit bias, fair and inclusive practices may be required.
- **Develop a Scoring Rubric:** Create a standardized scoring system or rubric to evaluate candidates against these competencies, with the goal of minimizing subjective bias.
- **Create Consistent Documentation:** Take detailed notes during each interview to support fair review and comparison, ensuring decisions are based on competencies rather than personal characteristics.
- **Immediately Finalize Scoring:** Score candidates using the predefined rubric immediately after each interview to reduce recency bias and ensure consistent evaluation.
- **Perform Collaborative Review:** Provide a platform for interviewers to share and compare their observations, enabling a well-rounded and fair assessment of each applicant. Before ratings are finalized, HR professionals should examine the sheets to confirm that feedback is suitable, unbiased, and matches the assigned scores. This team approach ensures every candidate receives fair treatment by considering both their qualifications and potential.

Share your organization's social media links before interviews to inform candidates of current projects and initiatives.

Step 4: Hiring

- **Conduct Final Candidate Review:** Complete a final review of the top candidate(s), assessing qualifications and alignment with the role.
- **Background Check Review:** Follow your organization's protocols and work with the third party vendor to verify employment related information. Some positions may require a credit check; credit checks will comply with the Fair Credit Reporting Act.
- **Pre-employment Physical Examination:** Some positions may require a drug screen due to their safety sensitive nature and will be conducted after a formal offer of employment has been extended.
- **Job Offer:** Work with the legal and finance departments if necessary to draft a job offer with all the terms and conditions for the position.
- **Hire Date in Applicant Tracking System:** Once official start date has been set, ensure new-hire is moved through the applicant tracking system to kick off the onboarding process. Ensure job posting is closed accordingly.
- **Collect Feedback for Improvement:** Gather feedback from both interviewers and candidates to refine the process and enhance its effectiveness, accessibility, and inclusiveness in future hiring cycles.



Integrating these practices into the interview process promotes a fair, transparent, and opportunity-driven approach, strengthening the utility's commitment to building a workforce that reflects its operational values and public service mission.

Recommended Metrics to Measure Success:

- **Summarize Candidate Experience:** Survey scores reflecting candidate satisfaction with the interview process.
- **Access to Process:** Percentage of candidates who received timely updates post-interview.
- **Fair Evaluation:** Calculate the percentage of interviews conducted using standardized rubrics and consistent evaluation criteria.
- **Opportunity Impact:** Track long-term retention rates over a specific time period and across different roles.
- **Document Time to Hire:** Average time from interview to job offer.
- **Process Improvement:** Percentage of feedback from interviewers and candidates implemented in future cycles.



STAGE 3: ONBOARDING

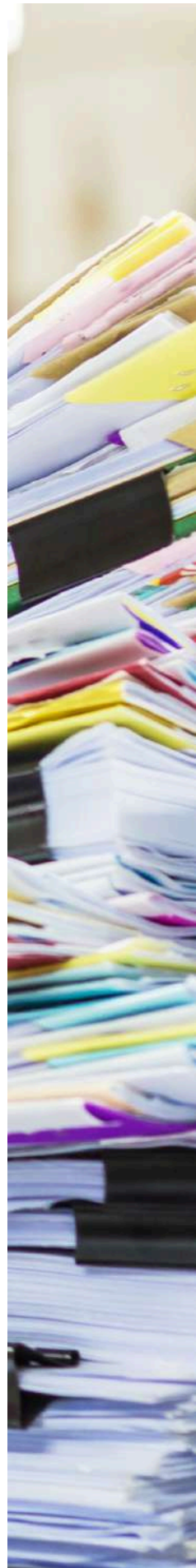


Effective onboarding in the water, wastewater & energy sectors is critical to ensuring that new hires are equipped to navigate the unique challenges of these essential industries. California’s complex regulatory landscape, environmental goals, and the ever-evolving nature of water and energy management demand a comprehensive onboarding process that goes beyond standard orientation. In these sectors, onboarding must not only familiarize new employees with organizational policies, safety procedures, and technical requirements but should create early access to the people, information, and support systems needed for long-term success.

The following are best practices for developing an onboarding checklist for the utility, incorporating access, visibility, and opportunity (AVO) principles:

Administrative Considerations

- **Clarify Policies and Procedures:** Develop clear hiring policies, including confidentiality agreements and new hire orientation processes, ensuring they promote inclusivity and nondiscrimination.
- **Streamline Document Management:** Implement a system to record and track the receipt of new hire paperwork, and ensure it is shared with relevant departments efficiently.
- **Develop Welcome Practices:** Create welcoming practices that reflect access and inclusion, ensuring all new hires feel valued and integrated into the team from the first point of contact.
- **Establish Timely Payroll and Benefits:** Ensure timely completion of payroll and benefit enrollment, with clear communication about available benefits and resources to support diverse access needs and equitable support systems.
- **Streamline Technology Setup:** Ensure all necessary technology (e.g., hardware, software, and access to systems) is set up and tested prior to the new employee's start date, including email accounts, required software, and access to relevant databases, so they can hit the ground running on day one. This also includes ensuring equitable digital access, particularly for remote, field-based, or disabled employees.
- **Ensure Office and Equipment Setup:** Prepare the physical workspace, including desk, office supplies, and any necessary equipment (e.g., phone, badge, keys) prior to the new employee's arrival. Ensure access to the building and ergonomic workstations are arranged, and provide a smooth process for badge issuance and office orientation. Consider visibility and accommodations for physical accessibility, remote work tools, and varied communication needs.



Pre-Arrival Activities

Prior to a new hire's arrival, HR should collaborate with other departments to make sure all necessary infrastructure and essential access (such as software and drives) are in place. The following outlines best practices for creating a pre-arrival checklist to help facilitate a seamless onboarding experience.

Getting Ready for New Hire

- Request hardware and software for new hire.
- Arrange facilities and parking access.
- Set up employee workstation.
- Coordinate with the hiring manager to create an onboarding schedule covering key meetings, introductions, training, and facility tours.
- Designate points of contact to guide new hires.
- Prepare an onboarding packet with the first-week schedule, contacts, org charts, scheduled meetings, training checklists, and essential information.
- Send welcome information to new hire
- Announce the new hire's arrival via team email
- Share a brief bio

New Hire Communication

- Inform the new hire of the necessary documents to bring on their first day (such as work authorization) and provide detailed instructions regarding arrival procedures for day one.
- If the organization requires certain PPE for day 1 arrival (e.g., steel-toe boots), this should be notified to the employee beforehand.

Making a good first impression is not just on the new hire, it is also on the agency and the team. Making new hires feel welcome on day 1 will set the tone for an enjoyable journey that may end until retirement or beyond.



Day 1 Activities

Plan a welcoming first day that includes meeting with a cross-section of team members (to support early visibility and relationship-building), a comprehensive tour, and a team lunch to foster inclusion.

Training:

- **Organizational Chart:** Go over the organizational chart with new hires, pointing out department leaders and other important contacts. This enhances visibility and helps them identify key people within the company.
- **Utility Overview:** Create training about the utility's mission, values, and best practices to reinforce commitment to access, transparency, and career advancement.
- **Sexual Harassment Prevention:** Provide training that includes a wide range of perspectives and situations, fostering an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and safe.
- **Utility Policies:** Present a summary of company policies, emphasizing fair access, inclusive procedures, and open communication.
- **EHS Required Training:** Ensure new hires receive required day 1 EHS training to allow them to do their work.



New Employee Orientation

- New employee orientation is more than a requirement or a box to check. It helps integrate new hires to the organization, set expectations, and make them feel welcome and valued. While having an orientation event every month may not be feasible, it is recommended to at least hold one quarterly and follow some of the following practices.
 - **Presence of leadership team:** Having department leaders introduce themselves to new employees, and talk about their role and experience at the organization shows that regardless of the department, all leaders will support all staff.
 - **Scavenger Hunt:** Opportunity for new employees to meet others, explore facilities, learn fun facts about your organization, and know that your organization also offers engaging activities to employees.
 - **Evaluation:** Provide new employees the opportunity to provide feedback on your orientation event, but also their experience as they get acclimated to your organization.



How AVO Shows Up
Access, Visibility, and Opportunity are present during new employee orientation by presenting resources to new hires, giving them the opportunity to ask questions and hear their voices, and the opportunity to get to know others in the organization.

Check-In Meetings (30-60-90 days)

- Schedule check-ins with your new staff, especially at the 30, 60, and 90 day mark. These could be formal or informal; however, they go a long way as they help you understand if new employees are settling in or if adjustments need to be made.
 - Let the new employee guide the conversation about their experience, what has worked well, and where additional support may be required.
 - Take notes, and refer to them at the following meeting.
 - Set goals for the new employee to achieve prior to the following meeting.

Recommended Metrics to Measure Success

- **Onboarding Completion Rate:** Percentage of new hires who complete all onboarding modules within a set timeframe.
- **New Hire Retention Rate:** Retention of employees after their first 6 or 12 months.
- **Time to Productivity:** Measure how quickly new hires reach expected performance levels.
- **Access & Inclusion Feedback:** Survey scores from new hires regarding their experience with access to people, tools, and information, and whether they felt seen, heard, and included during onboarding.
- **Employee Satisfaction:** Satisfaction scores from surveys about onboarding support, inclusivity, and organizational culture.
- **Mentorship Engagement:** Participation rate in mentorship/buddy programs and feedback on effectiveness.
- **Onboarding Setup Metrics:** Percentage of new hires with complete tech/workspace setup on Day 1, time to full system/building access, number of support issues, and satisfaction with setup.

STAGE 4: TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT



Organizational success in California’s water, wastewater, and energy sectors is driven by continuous workforce development. Rapid technological advancement, evolving regulatory frameworks, and expanding sustainability initiatives require structured training and development programs to sustain operational excellence, regulatory compliance, and innovation.

This section of the HR Playbook defines training and development best practices for the water, wastewater, and energy sectors, focusing on building the skills and knowledge required for operational excellence while supporting employees’ long-term professional growth.

Training across technical, regulatory, leadership, and interpersonal competencies must be treated as a continuous priority. A well-trained workforce enhances safety, operational efficiency, and organizational adaptability. Through the Access, Visibility, and Opportunity (AVO) strategy, this HR Playbook promotes equitable growth and advancement for all employees, strengthening an inclusive, high-performing workplace culture.



Investing in the professional growth of your staff increases productivity, promotes innovation, enhances loyalty, fosters leadership and boosts employee engagement.

Best Practices for Training and Development in the Water, Wastewater, and Energy Sector

The following best practices are designed to address the unique challenges and requirements of California's water, wastewater, and energy sectors, supporting the development of strong, capable workforces.

Develop Role-Specific Training Programs

- **Tailor Training to Operational Needs:**
 - Each role within the water, wastewater, and energy sectors requires a distinct set of skills—from technicians and engineers to supervisors, managers, and field staff. Training programs should be tailored to address the technical competencies, safety protocols, and regulatory knowledge essential to each position.
- **Use Competency Frameworks:**
 - Implement a competency-based training model that clearly defines the required knowledge, skills, and behaviors for each role. This approach ensures training aligns with organizational expectations, supports consistent performance standards, and meets operational needs.

Integrate Regulatory Compliance and Safety Standards

- **Regulatory Awareness:**
 - Ensure employees receive regular training on local, state, and federal regulations affecting water, wastewater, and energy operations. This includes staying up to date on environmental laws, safety standards, and emerging regulatory requirements.
- **Safety as a Priority:**
 - Promote a strong safety culture through comprehensive training programs. Ensure employees receive regular updates on emergency preparedness, hazard communication, and the proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Incorporate Technology Innovation

- **Utilize Advanced Training Tools:**
 - Leverage technologies such as virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and simulation-based training to teach complex procedures. These tools provide hands-on experience in a safe environment, preparing employees for real-world scenarios.
- **Encourage Innovation and Adaptability:**
 - Create programs that help employees adopt new technologies and adapt to evolving equipment, energy systems, and automation. Building these skills is essential in industries experiencing rapid digitalization and technological change.

Promote Cross-Training and Knowledge Sharing

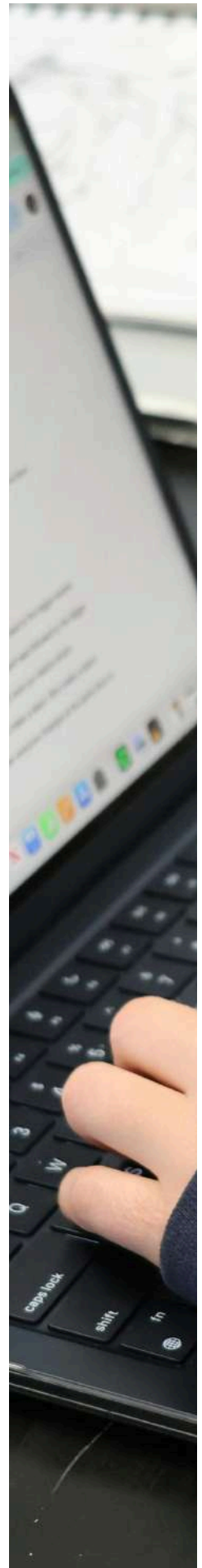
- **Foster Skill Versatility:**
 - Promote cross-training initiatives that give employees exposure to multiple roles within the organization. This approach increases operational flexibility, strengthens workforce collaboration, and builds resilience in managing staffing challenges.
- **Facilitate Peer-to-Peer Learning:**
 - Encourage knowledge sharing through mentorship programs, workshops, and team-based learning. Experienced employees can transfer critical operational insights and best practices to newer staff, strengthening institutional knowledge.

Support Leadership Development

- **Develop Leadership Programs:**
 - Implement leadership development initiatives that prepare employees for managerial roles. Focus on cultivating essential skills, including decision-making, conflict resolution, and strategic thinking.
- **Engage Emerging Leaders:**
 - Identify high-potential employees and nurture them for future leadership roles through succession planning initiatives. Provide coaching, mentoring, and stretch assignments to support their professional growth and readiness for leadership responsibilities.

Provide Continuous Learning Opportunities

- **Offer Ongoing Professional Development:**
 - Establish continuous learning programs that help employees stay current with industry trends, evolving regulations, and technological advancements. Encourage participation in certifications, workshops, and industry conferences to support ongoing skill development.
- **Online Learning Platforms:**
 - Provide access to online learning resources that allow employees to learn at their own pace while covering a broad range of topics, from technical skills to leadership and management development. It is important to have an efficient Learning Management System (LMS) that will keep employee records in a central location for easy access.



Incorporate Access, Visibility, and Opportunity in Training

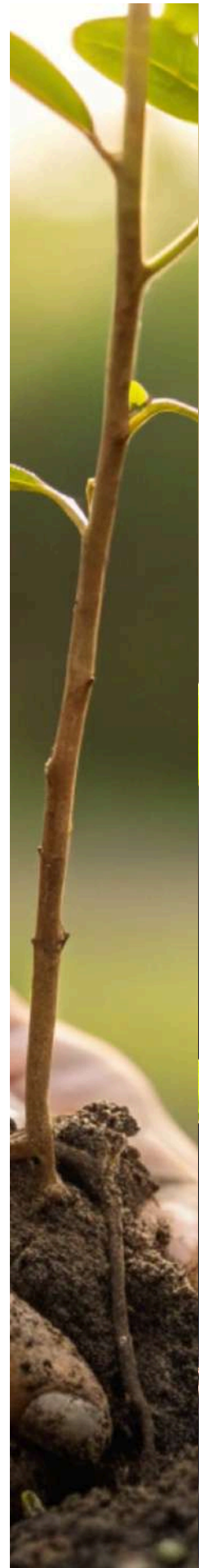
- **Accessible Development Programs:**
 - Ensure training programs offer equitable access for employees across all roles and backgrounds, supporting upward mobility and the development of internal talent.
- **Remove Barriers to Participation:**
 - Identify and address access barriers such as language, digital access, and physical ability. Provide accessible formats to ensure visibility, participation, and opportunity for all employees.

Soft Skills and Technical Skills Training are equally important

- **Provide Workshops / Programs on these Topics:**
 - Provide workshops on communication, time management, and public speaking to enhance employee skills, build confidence, and prepare staff for broader roles.
- **Encourage Leadership to Share Knowledge:**
 - Encourage leaders from different departments to share their knowledge and specialized skills through workshops and roundtables. This approach enhances staff learning, promotes collaboration, and strengthens organizational knowledge-sharing.

Measure and Evaluate Training Effectiveness

- **Track Training Outcomes:**
 - Use key performance indicators (KPIs) such as knowledge retention rates, safety incidents, and operational performance improvements to measure the effectiveness of training programs.
- **Conduct Regular Reviews:**
 - Regularly assess training programs to ensure continued relevance and effectiveness. Incorporate employee feedback and update content to reflect regulatory changes, technological advancements, and evolving industry best practices.



Customize for Environmental and Sustainability Goals

- **Sustainability Training:**
 - Provide training on environmental stewardship and sustainability practices relevant to water, wastewater, and energy operations. This includes education on conservation techniques, resource management, and waste reduction strategies.
- **Align Training with Organizational Goals:**
 - Link employee development programs to the utility's long-term sustainability goals and environmental impact initiatives, reinforcing the critical role employees play in these efforts.

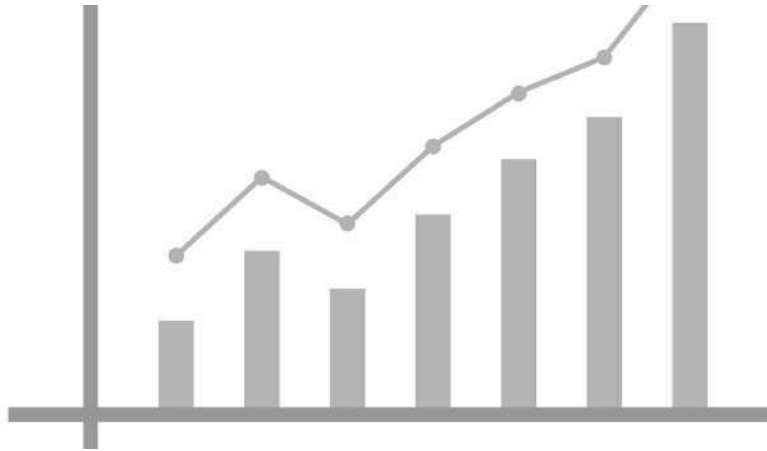
Partner with Industry Organizations and Educational Institutions

- **Collaborate with Experts:**
 - Partner with industry groups, technical schools, and universities to offer specialized training, gaining access to the latest research, technologies, and certifications.
- **Apprenticeships and Internships:**
 - Create programs with local educational institutions to provide students with real-world experience while building a future workforce pipeline for the utility. Transparency with candidates is recommended regarding the internship leading to real job placement.

By implementing these best practices, California's water, wastewater, and energy sectors can develop a skilled, adaptable, and resilient workforce, prepared to tackle industry challenges and drive the state's sustainable growth.



Metrics to Measure Success



These metrics will help assess both the immediate and long-term impact of training initiative and alignment with operational goals.

- **Knowledge Retention Rate:** Measure post-training quizzes or assessments to gauge knowledge retention.
- **Training Completion Rate:** Track the percentage of employees who complete required training modules.
- **Employee Performance:** Measure improvements in job performance after training, such as increased efficiency or fewer errors.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Track incidents related to non-compliance with regulatory standards.
- **Employee Feedback:** Use surveys to measure employee satisfaction and engagement with the training process.
- **Access to Training Opportunities:** Track participation rates across employee groups to ensure equitable access to training programs.
- **Safety Metrics:** Measure the reduction in safety incidents or accidents post-training.
- **Technology Adoption Rate:** Track how quickly employees adopt and effectively use new technologies introduced during training.
- **Retention Rate:** Monitor long-term retention of employees who have undergone professional development.
- **Sustainability Metrics:** Track improvements in environmental sustainability practices and resource management after targeted training.



STAGE 5: RETENTION



Employee retention is crucial for organizational stability and growth. High turnover leads to increased costs, understaffing, and lower morale, which can hurt productivity and disrupt business continuity. Losing experienced staff means valuable knowledge and skills leave the company, especially when needed most. Excessive turnover also harms reputation, as customers may view constant new hires as instability. Retaining skilled employees helps maintain productivity, efficiency, and innovation.

The retention stage examines strategies to motivate employees to remain with the organization. While fostering engagement and development among staff can enhance overall retention, prioritizing the retention of top performers is particularly advantageous, as these individuals contribute significantly to organizational success and are often difficult to replace. Soliciting their feedback, adopting their recommendations, and providing support and opportunities for growth can increase their commitment to the company.



How AVO Shows Up

Access, Visibility, and Opportunity are present in employee retention by giving employees, tools, information, and systems they need to succeed.

The Employee Experience at the organization:

Employee retention is affected by the overall employee experience at the organization.

This experience is the result of the day to day routines. For that reason, energy leaders should lead by example and demonstrate the following behaviors:

- Acknowledging another employee's presence
- Offering and providing support
- Thanking others for their work / contributions
- Checking in with staff
- Providing engaging projects, and changing the work routing

Recognition and Celebration of Milestones

Organizations should:

- Regularly highlight achievements such as expanding inclusive career pathways, launching community partnerships, or completing equity-focused initiatives.
- Publicly acknowledge individuals whose work embodies the principles of AVO, fostering a culture of shared purpose and visible impact.

Understanding Why Employees Leave

A high attrition rate indicates the company struggles with retaining employees. Exit interviews are helpful for uncovering why employees leave an organization. Those who leave often mention one or more of the following factors:

- Low pay or benefits
- Poor work-life balance
- No career progression
- Lack of recognition
- More appealing jobs elsewhere
- Repetitive tasks
- Concerns about company stability
- Burnout
- Weak management

Employee Wellness Programs

As workers continue to retire and agencies face challenges filling jobs, it's increasingly vital to upgrade current wellness programs. When employees have access to helpful resources, they tend to be more engaged and productive, and less prone to burnout. This is why agencies should provide solutions that are specifically designed to meet employees' unique needs.

The following are common areas of wellness programs, and ways in which they are addressed.

- **Physical health:** Annual health fair, newsletter articles, walking challenges, outdoor activities.
- **Mental health / emotional wellbeing:** Newsletter articles, Employee Assistance Programs (EAP).
- **Financial Health:** Workshops, newsletter articles, and workshops about retirement.
- **Social:** Employee appreciation day, end of the year celebration, and work milestones.



STAGE 6: OFFBOARDING



Offboarding is a critical yet often overlooked part of the employee lifecycle, especially in California’s water, wastewater, and energy sectors, where losing key personnel can disrupt operations and compliance. Thoughtful offboarding protects institutional knowledge, ensures regulatory adherence, and upholds confidentiality and ethical standards.

This section guides HR professionals in executing a structured, compliant offboarding process tailored to sector-specific needs. It highlights knowledge transfer, clear communication of responsibilities, and feedback collection to maintain a culture of access, transparency, and opportunity, even as employees transition out.

Effective offboarding shows an organization's dedication to fairness and transparency. A process based on access and visibility ensures every employee has a respectful transition. Done well, offboarding secures operations, retains key knowledge, and upholds the organization's reputation in California's water, wastewater, and energy sectors.



Treating employees with respect and dignity during offboarding acknowledges their contributions, keeps the door open for future collaboration, and allows them to conclude their journey positively—potentially becoming advocates for the organization to future candidates.

Best HR Practices for Off-boarding

In California's water, wastewater, and energy sectors, offboarding must be structured, compliant, and equitable to maintain security, legal compliance, and operational stability. The following practices align with regulatory requirements and the AVO framework:

Type of Termination:

- **Voluntary:**
 - Acknowledge receipt of resignation (written or verbal) to ensure process transparency.
 - Schedule and complete an exit interview to capture feedback that can inform improvements in access and opportunity.
- **Involuntary:**
 - Issue termination letter to ensure clarity and legal compliance.
 - Provide a severance agreement if applicable and obtain a signed copy.
 - Issue a WARN notice when applicable to uphold state and federal obligations and protect worker access to information.

Benefits:

- Provide information on continuation of insurance benefits (e.g., COBRA, life insurance), ensuring clear access to post-employment coverage.
- Review and communicate remaining FSA/HSA and dependent care FSA balances and associated deadlines.
- Confirm and document remaining PTO balance and how it will be processed.

Compensation:

- Notify about any outstanding balances owed to the company (e.g., loans).
- Notify payroll to process final paycheck, including unused PTO and severance pay if applicable.

Contracts/Legal:

- Provide written notice of any ongoing legal obligations (e.g., confidentiality agreements), reinforcing clarity and accountability through documentation.

Immigration:

- Notify the company immigration attorney if the employee is on a temporary work visa to ensure compliance and protect the employee's access to accurate legal guidance.

Records:

- Store personnel file and Form I-9 with terminated employee files.
- Obtain written authorization for responding to employment verification requests to maintain process visibility and ensure proper handling of sensitive information.



Information Technology:

- Disable email account, computer access, phone extension, and voicemail.
- Remove from distribution lists and directories to prevent unauthorized access.

Facilities/Office Manager:

- Disable security codes and change office mailbox if necessary.
- Clean work area and collect company property, including keys, ID cards, business cards, nameplates, company cell phones, laptops, uniforms, and tools.

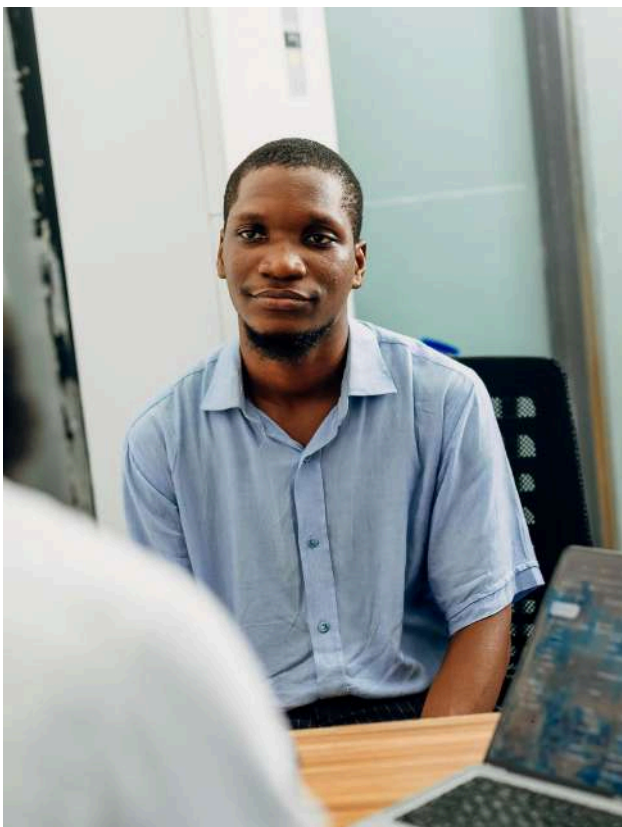
Completion:

Ensure all steps are documented, and the checklist is signed and dated by the HR professional to reinforce accountability and process integrity.



Suggested Metrics:

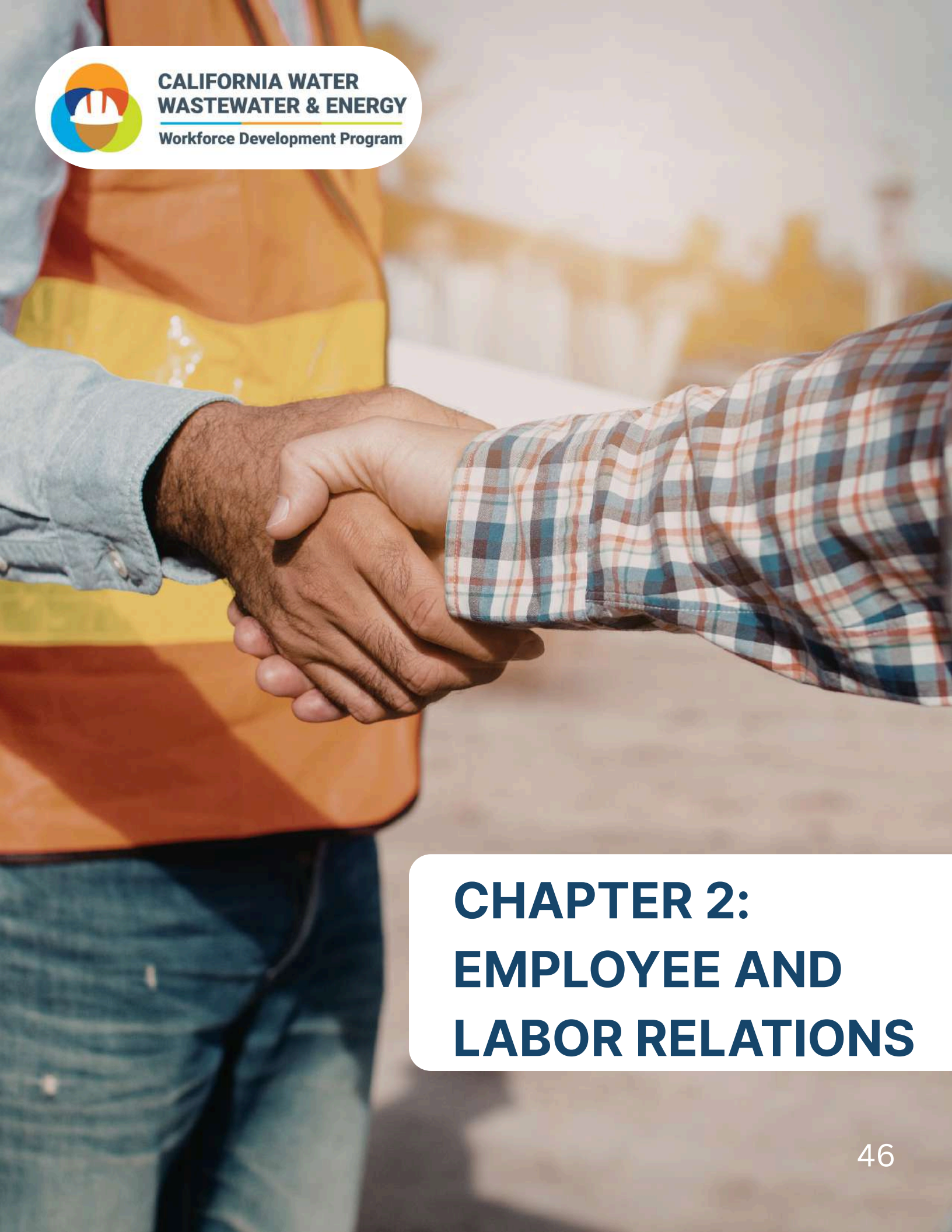
- **Knowledge Transfer Completion:** Track the percentage of critical tasks and institutional knowledge transitioned before departure to safeguard access to essential information.
- **Exit Interview Participation:** Measure the percentage of employees completing exit interviews and the quality of feedback gathered to ensure departing employees have visibility and voice.
- **Time to Revoke Access:** Measure how quickly IT and physical access are disabled post-departure to uphold data security and operational continuity.
- **Compliance with Legal & Benefits Obligations:** Track the timeliness of final pay, benefits notifications, and legal documentation to protect departing employees' access to earned resources.
- **Employee Satisfaction with Offboarding:** Survey departing employees on their experience to assess whether the process felt respectful, consistent, and fair in opportunity.
- **Retention of Knowledge:** Measure the impact of departures on operations and project timelines to monitor the effectiveness of knowledge visibility and transfer systems.



How AVO Shows Up

Access, Visibility, and Opportunity are present by ensuring all departing employees participate in an exit interview to share any final comments about the organization.

Aggregate results should be shared with all departments at least annually to gain insights into organizational improvements.



CHAPTER 2: EMPLOYEE AND LABOR RELATIONS



EMPLOYEE AND LABOR RELATIONS



Effective employee relations are the cornerstone of a productive and engaged workforce, particularly in California's water, wastewater, and energy sectors. Given the critical nature of these industries, maintaining positive relationships with employees are essential for ensuring operational continuity, safety, and compliance with state regulations. This section provides HR professionals and supervisors with best practices for fostering a positive work environment, addressing workplace conflicts, and creating a culture where employees feel respected, valued, and heard. A strong employee relations strategy should support a workplace culture centered on Access, Visibility, and Opportunity for all. Every employee should feel valued, respected, and have equitable opportunities to succeed.

Key Components of Employee Relations

Open Communication

Promoting transparent, two-way communication is key to building strong employee relations. Employees should feel empowered to voice concerns, offer feedback, and suggest improvements without fear of retaliation.

- **Regular Check-Ins:** Encourage managers to hold consistent one-on-one meetings with employees to discuss performance, workload, and any challenges.
- **Employee Surveys:** Use quarterly or biannual surveys and feedback mechanisms to assess employee satisfaction and engagement.
- **Town Halls and Team Meetings:** Regular department-wide meetings help keep employees informed and connected to the organization's mission.

Employee Feedback and Listening Systems

Active listening is crucial for building trust and addressing employee concerns before they escalate. Create formal and informal channels for employees to share feedback, raise issues, and suggest improvements.

- **Employee Hotlines:** Establish confidential reporting systems for grievances or sensitive matters.
- **Suggestion Boxes:** Provide opportunities for employees to submit anonymous feedback or ideas for improving operations or the work environment.
- **Labor-Management Meetings:** Meetings where union representatives and management meet to resolve any worksite matters before they reach the grievance process.

Conflict Resolution and Mediation

Conflicts are inevitable in any workplace. Addressing disputes swiftly, equitably, and appropriately minimizes their impact on morale and productivity.

- **Early Intervention:** Train managers to recognize early signs of workplace conflict and address issues promptly through informal conversations or meetings.
- **Day-to-day Disagreements:** Train managers on how to deal with day-to-day workplace disagreements so they don't escalate and tie up valuable time and resources.
- **Mediation Services:** Provide neutral third-party mediation services to help resolve more complex or sensitive disputes.

- **Grievance Procedures:** Ensure that employees understand the formal procedures for filing grievances and know that their concerns will be addressed adequately within a predetermined timeline as outlined in employee manuals or Collective Bargaining Agreements.

Legal Compliance

Maintaining positive employee relations includes ensuring that the organization is compliant with federal and California labor laws. This includes regulations related to union rights, discrimination, workplace safety, and wages.

- **California Employment Laws:** Ensure compliance with relevant labor laws, including the California Labor Code, Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA), Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH - better known as Cal/OSHA), and the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA).
- **Unionized Environments:** In unionized settings, it is critical to work collaboratively with labor representatives, adhere to collective bargaining agreements, and understand union employee rights.
- **Non-Unionized Environments:** Promote fairness and consistency in the treatment of all employees by establishing clear HR policies and procedures.

Workplace Wellness and Employee Support

The well-being of employees directly impacts their productivity and engagement. Offering resources to support mental, emotional, and physical health enhances employee relations.

- **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs):** Provide access to confidential counseling and resources for employees facing personal or work-related issues.
- **Wellness Initiatives:** Offer programs and incentives to promote physical, mental, and emotional wellness, such as fitness challenges, health fairs, mindfulness workshops, or stress management resources.
- **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Consider flexible working schedules or telecommuting options where feasible to support work-life balance.

Well Defined Code of Conduct and Anti-Bullying Policies

What is a Code of Conduct?

A code of conduct is an official document that defines acceptable workplace behavior, guiding employees to act with integrity and follow organizational values. It helps leadership foster a professional and healthy work environment.

What should a Code of Conduct include?

A code of conduct does more than set rules for compliance—it also guides employees, supports company culture, and protects reputation. Every organization decides what goes into their code, but you might want to include these elements:

- **Organizational values**
 - Explain what your organizational values mean, with practical examples of how employees can put them into action.
- **Employee behavior expectations**
 - Clearly outline how employees should behave at work. This covers professionalism, such as using company resources appropriately, following dress codes, keeping information confidential, and obeying attendance and break guidelines.

What is Workplace Bullying?

Workplace bullying involves repeated, unreasonable actions by individuals or groups aimed at employees, with the intent to intimidate, degrade, humiliate, undermine, or cause risks to their health and safety. This behavior often stems from an abuse of power and violates the victim's right to dignity in the workplace.

How Can Organizations Prevent and Respond to Bullying?

Organizations can prevent and respond to bullying by combining clear expectations, education, accountability, and support systems.

- Establishing behavior standards
- Providing regular training
- Creating safe reporting channels
- Responding promptly and fairly
- Supporting affected employees

Employee Relations Best Practices

- **Train Management to Lead by Example:** Managers play a critical role in shaping employee relations. Ensure they receive ongoing training in communication, conflict resolution, and leadership skills.
- **Create Clear Policies:** Develop and communicate clear policies on employee behavior, rights, and dispute resolution procedures. Make these policies easily accessible to all employees.
- **Recognize and Reward Good Performance:** Acknowledge and celebrate employee achievements to build morale and engagement. Recognition programs can range from informal praise to structured rewards systems.
- **Focus on Fairness and Equity:** Employees are more likely to feel valued when they believe they are treated fairly. Ensure that promotions, performance reviews, and compensation decisions are transparent and based on merit (apply CBA principles when necessary).
- **Invest in Employee Development:** Show employees that their growth is a priority by providing opportunities for training, advancement, and skill-building.

Suggested Metrics for Employee Relations

- **Employee Engagement Score:** Measure employee engagement through regular surveys that assess their satisfaction with management, communication, and overall work environment.
- **Conflict Resolution Timelines:** Track the average time taken to resolve workplace conflicts or grievances, aiming for swift and fair resolution to minimize disruptions.
- **Employee Retention Rate:** Monitor the turnover rate, particularly among key talent and hard-to-recruit talent, to ensure that employee relations foster retention.
- **Manager-Employee Communication Frequency:** Track how often managers conduct one-on-one check-ins with their team members to ensure regular, open communication.

- **Legal Compliance Audits:** Conduct regular audits to ensure that the organization complies with federal and state labor laws, especially those related to unionized environments, safety, and non-discrimination policies.
- **Conflict Recurrence Rate:** Track the recurrence of conflicts involving the same individuals, teams, or issues to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of conflict resolution and mediation efforts.
- **Training Completion Rate for Employee Relations Skills:** Monitor the percentage of managers and supervisors who complete the required training in conflict resolution, communication, and leadership skills to ensure they can effectively handle employee relations.
- **Recognition and Reward Program Participation:** Track the number of employees recognized through formal and informal recognition programs to ensure a culture of acknowledgment and appreciation.
- **Work-Life Balance Satisfaction:** Include questions in employee surveys to measure satisfaction with flexible work arrangements, work-life balance, and the organization's support for these areas.

Labor Relations

Effective labor relations with union-represented employees require a well-coordinated approach to resolving conflicts and fostering collaboration. Key mechanisms, such as the grievance process and labor-management meetings, should be utilized to address concerns promptly and constructively. The foundation of these interactions is mutual respect between management and labor representatives. Maintaining a positive and productive work environment hinges on strict adherence to Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs) and compliance with relevant federal and California labor laws. Proactive communication is essential for addressing issues early and transparently, helping to prevent conflicts from escalating.

It is crucial to involve labor attorneys early in the process when labor-related issues arise to ensure a well-managed and legally compliant resolution.

Strengthening the Connection Between Physical and Psychological Safety

Overview

Strengthening the connection between physical safety (protection from injury and hazards) and psychological safety (freedom to speak up without fear) is especially critical in the water and energy sectors. In environments involving heavy equipment, high voltages, confined spaces, or hazardous materials, silence can be as dangerous as any mechanical failure.

Ultimately, physical safety and psychological safety are interdependent. A workforce that feels heard is more vigilant. A team that can question decisions prevents normalization of risk. And an organization that responds constructively to concerns builds trust, reinforcing both hazard prevention and human performance. In high-risk sectors, safety is not only engineered; it is communicated.

Without psychological safety, physical safety systems fail silently. Employees who feel psychologically safe are more likely to:

- Report hazards and near misses
- Admit mistakes early
- Challenge unsafe practices
- Contribute ideas to improve systems
- Speak up about fatigue, stress, or impairment

Sample Policy Statement on Physical and Psychological Safety

“Our commitment to safety includes both physical protection and the psychological conditions necessary for employees to speak openly about risks. We believe that every injury is preventable, and every voice matters.”



Human Resources and Organizational Leadership Strategic Roles

- **Promoting Leadership Standards & Accountability**
 - Evaluate leaders not only on incident rates but also on:
 - Near-miss reporting frequency
 - Employee safety climate surveys
 - Turnover in high-risk teams
 - Require leaders to model vulnerability (e.g., admitting mistakes).
- **Promoting a Speak-Up Workplace Culture**
 - Provide anonymous and open reporting channels
 - Establish clear anti-retaliation policies
 - Implement follow-up practices on employee concerns
 - Minimize or eliminate any barriers that prevent employees to report good-faith safety concerns
- **Implementing a Safety Conversation Training**
 - Train employees in leadership roles on:
 - Non-defensive listening
 - Constructive response to error disclosure
 - Trauma-informed communication (especially after incidents)
 - Fatigue and stress recognition
 - Include scenario-based training on the following:
 - Lockout/tagout
 - Confined space protocols
 - Emergency response situations
- **Building Trust Through Honest Incident Reviews**
 - Shift from blame-based investigations to learning-based reviews:
 - Focus on system gaps, not individual fault
 - Include frontline employees in debriefs
 - Share findings transparently across sites
- **Facilitating the Conversation on High Risk Work & Mental Health**
 - Openly discuss employees in the water and energy sectors may face:
 - Extended shifts
 - Exposure to traumatic events
 - Disaster response pressure
 - Public scrutiny during disruption to services
 - Human Resources and leadership teams should:
 - Normalize mental health discussions
 - Provide counseling resources
 - Train leaders to identify burnout risk
 - Monitor workload equity during emergency operations

Embedding Psychological Safety

- **Climate Pulse Surveys**
 - Send out quarterly or annual short surveys, or include the following items in your organization’s engagement survey:
 - Comfort speaking up
 - Confidence in incident reporting process
- **Near-Miss Ratio Monitoring**
 - Promote a healthy reporting culture that includes:
 - High-near miss reporting
 - Low severe incident rates
- **“Stop Work Authority” Reinforcement**
 - Ensure all employees:
 - Understand their authority to halt unsafe work
 - Experience zero retaliation using it
 - See leadership publicly support such decisions

Leadership Behaviors that Strengthen Both Forms of Safety

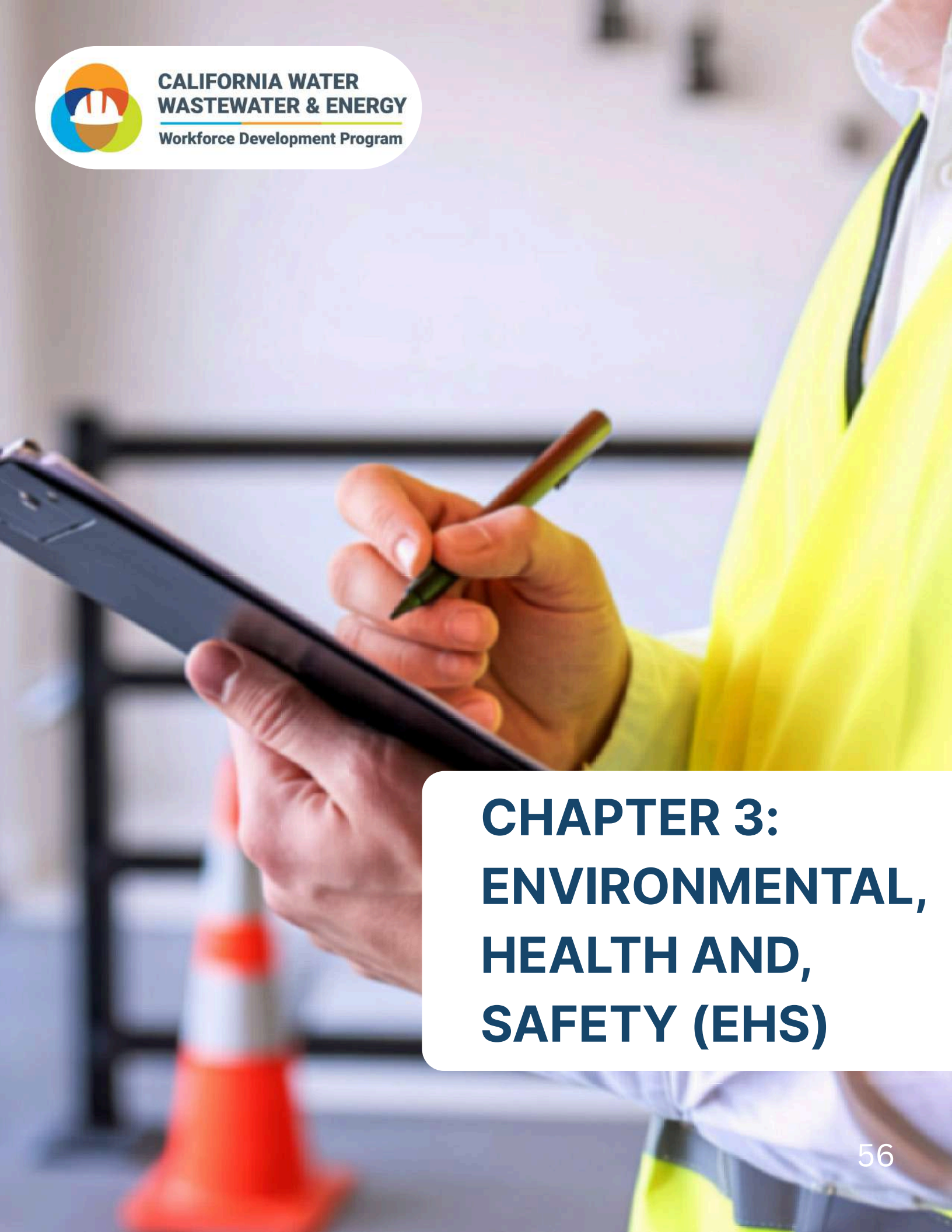
- Leaders in the water and energy sectors should:
 - Promote an environment where employees can speak up
 - Respond appreciatively to difficult news
 - Share lessons from their own errors
 - Follow through visibly on reported concerns
 - Avoid punitive responses to honest mistakes

Warning Signs of Psychological Unsafety

- Human Resources, safety teams, and leaders should monitor:
 - Low participation in safety meetings
 - Repeated “human error” labels in reports
 - High turnover in operational teams
 - Rumors instead of formal reporting
 - Employees bypassing formal safety channels

Key Takeaway

In water and energy operations, physical hazards are visible. Psychological hazards are often silent. The organizations that prevent catastrophic events are not just those with strong procedures—but those where employees feel safe enough to use them.



**CHAPTER 3:
ENVIRONMENTAL,
HEALTH AND,
SAFETY (EHS)**

ENVIRONMENTAL, HEALTH AND, SAFETY (EHS)



In any high-risk sector like water, wastewater, and energy, the health and safety of employees are of utmost importance. Establishing a safe and compliant work environment requires robust and continuous training and awareness programs. These programs are essential for complying with regulatory requirements and fostering a culture where safety is everyone's responsibility.

HR plays a critical role in coordinating and ensuring that all employees, from field operators to office staff, receive the necessary training to remain safe, healthy, and aware of environmental compliance standards. This involves organizing mandatory safety training, supporting emergency drills, and ensuring employees are equipped with knowledge and resources to prevent and manage workplace hazards HR must also ensure that safety is truly inclusive. Employees must feel psychologically safe to report concerns.

Training and Awareness Programs

Training and awareness are among the most critical HR-related safety responsibilities. HR plays a central role in coordinating and ensuring employees receive required training to support health, safety, and environmental compliance across the organization.

Key HR-led training and awareness practices include

- **Mandatory Safety Training:** In partnership with safety and operations teams, HR ensures all complete safety training documentation is maintained in a safety file according to record retention guidelines (e.g., hazard communication, PPE use, confined space entry).
- **Emergency Response Drills:** In partnership with safety and operations teams, HR ensures completion of regular emergency drills to ensure employee participation and compliance with safety regulations.
- **Environmental Compliance Training:** In partnership with safety and operations teams, HR ensures completion of training related to environmental compliance.
- **Heat Illness Prevention Training:** In partnership with safety and operations teams, HR ensures completion of mandatory heat illness prevention training for outdoor and high-risk workers in accordance with Cal/OSHA requirements.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Safe Work Practices

HR supports employee awareness of PPE requirements and ensures policies and procedures are in place to promote safe work practices.

- **PPE Compliance:** In partnership with safety and operations teams, HR ensures employees receive appropriate PPE.
- **Safe Operating Procedures (SOPs):** HR may support the development and communication of safety-related SOPs, reinforcing adherence to safety protocols, including the storing and updating of **Safety Data Sheets (SDS)**.

Risk Assessment and Hazard Identification

- **Job Hazard Analysis (JHA):** HR collaborates with EHS teams to ensure job roles and tasks are clearly defined and that identified hazards are addressed through training and safety measures.
- **Routine Risk Reviews:** HR helps ensure changes to roles, processes, or equipment that affect employee safety are reflected in updated risk assessments, safety protocols, and job descriptions.

Employee Wellness and Ergonomics

HR is directly involved in employee wellness programs and ergonomic assessments to prevent workplace injuries and enhance productivity. Best practices in this area include:

- **Ergonomic Assessments:** HR typically oversees or arranges ergonomic assessments to prevent injuries, especially in physically demanding roles. This includes providing ergonomic tools and ensuring proper workstations for office-based employees.
- **Health Surveillance Programs:** HR partners with safety and operations teams for monitoring employee health, ensuring that surveillance programs (such as chemical exposure testing or hearing tests) are in place for high-risk roles.

Contractor and Subcontractor Management

HR may be involved in the selection, onboarding, and training of contractors and subcontractors, ensuring they adhere to the organization's EHS policies. Key HR-related tasks include:

- **Pre-qualification of Contractors:** HR may assist in vetting contractors and ensuring they have adequate safety programs in place before they are hired.
- **Contractor Safety Training:** HR is often responsible for ensuring that contractors receive the same safety training as full-time employees, especially when working on-site.
- **Regular Audits of Contractors:** HR may help enforce regular audits to ensure that contractors comply with safety and HR-related policies.

Safety Management Systems

Safety management systems (SMS) intersect with HR when it comes to ensuring compliance with safety policies and procedures, incident reporting, and corrective actions:

- **Incident Reporting and Investigation:** In partnership with safety and operations teams, HR conducts or support investigations to identify the root cause of incidents, including any safety-related hotline complaints, adhering to established investigation protocols to ensure a speedy resolution, including proper employee communication and safety risk mitigation.
- **Continuous Improvement through KPIs:** HR is involved in tracking and reporting metrics such as injury rates, lost-time incidents, and employee safety engagement to staff and the Board of Directors as requested.

Emergency Preparedness and Response

HR's role in emergency preparedness is crucial for employee safety and ensuring that policies and procedures are in place for swift action during emergencies:

- **Emergency Action Plans (EAPs):** HR is often responsible for communicating and enforcing emergency action plans, ensuring that employees understand the procedures for evacuations, fire drills, or hazardous material spills.
- **First Aid and Medical Support:** In partnership with safety and operations teams, HR ensures that key in-office and field personnel are trained in first aid and that medical support resources are available on-site, as required.

Compliance with Labor and Safety Regulations

HR is typically responsible for ensuring that the organization complies with labor laws and safety regulations. This includes:

- **Adherence to Cal/OSHA Standards:** In partnership with safety and operations teams, HR ensures compliance with labor-related regulations such as proper workplace safety practices, hazard communication, and adherence to state-specific requirements (e.g., Cal/OSHA standards).
- **Legal Compliance Audits:** HR helps conduct audits to ensure compliance with labor and safety regulations, particularly in environments governed by Collective Bargaining Agreements and regarding employee rights to a safe workplace.

Job Descriptions Updates

- In partnership with Safety and Operations, HR periodically reviews and updates the physical requirements in job descriptions. When needed, HR conducts a job analysis to document changes in physical demands. Any updates that may affect represented employees will be communicated to the appropriate bargaining units in advance.

Workers Compensation Program

- If a workplace injury occurs, HR works with safety and operations to provide required documents (e.g., DWC-1) and inform the employee about leave rights, benefit claims, job status updates, and notifications.
- Upon return, HR coordinates re-onboarding and ensures proper return-to-work documentation is secured, along with required ergonomic equipment.

How AVO Shows Up

Access, Visibility, and Opportunity are present by ensuring employees have access to a safe work environment, required and up-to-date PPE, and knowledge of what to do in case of an emergency.

Recommended Metrics

Safety and Compliance Metrics

- **Total Recordable Incident Rate (TRIR):** Tracks OSHA-recordable incidents.
- **Lost Time Injury Rate (LTIR):** Measures injuries that result in lost workdays.
- **Near-Miss Reporting Rate:** Tracks reported near-miss events to promote proactive safety measures.
- **Safety Training Completion Rate:** Percentage of employees completing mandatory safety training.
- **PPE Compliance Rate:** Measures adherence to PPE policies during inspections.
- **Audit Compliance Rate:** Tracks successful safety and regulatory audits, ensuring Cal/OSHA compliance.

Employee Engagement Metrics

- **Safety Survey Scores:** Measures employee perceptions of safety and management's commitment to it.
- **Safety Program Participation Rate:** Tracks employee involvement in safety initiatives (e.g., safety committees, improvement programs).
- **Wellness Program Participation:** Monitors engagement with wellness initiatives, such as ergonomic assessments and health resources.

Contractor Safety Metrics

- **Contractor Training Completion Rate:** Ensures contractors meet the same safety training standards as full-time employees.
- **Contractor Safety Performance:** Monitors safety incident rates among contractors compared to employees.

Operational Efficiency and Improvement Metrics

- **Corrective Action Closure Rate:** Measures the speed of resolving safety non-compliance issues.
- **Safety Observation Reporting Rate:** Tracks employee-submitted safety observations and improvement suggestions.
- **Absenteeism Rate:** Monitors absenteeism as an indicator of potential safety or health-related concerns.



CHAPTER 4: COMPLIANCE

COMPLIANCE



Compliance is a critical cornerstone for the water, wastewater & energy sectors, where adherence to local, state, and federal regulations ensures operational integrity, environmental sustainability, and public safety. This section of the HR Playbook outlines the compliance standards and best practices that employees and management must follow to meet regulatory obligations and mitigate risk.

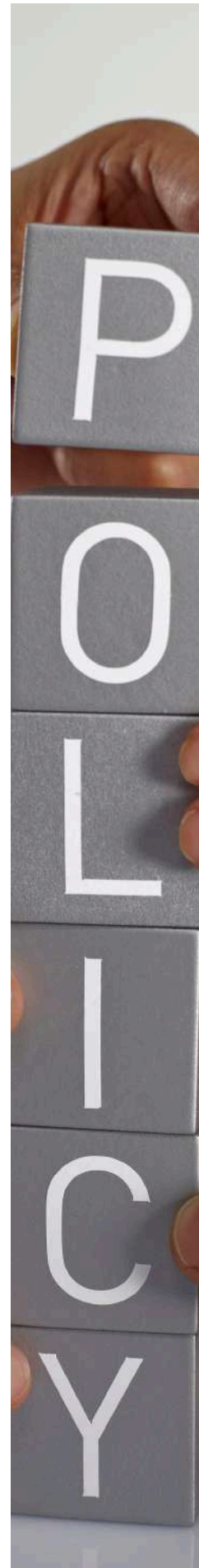
The guidelines and policies provided in this section are designed to help the utility stay informed about changes in regulations, maintain accurate documentation, and ensure that employees are properly trained to fulfill their roles in a compliant manner. From environmental compliance to labor laws and safety standards, this framework supports the operational excellence that is vital to California's water, wastewater & energy sectors.

Consulting with legal counsel is essential to ensure that the utility is fully compliant with applicable employment laws and policies, as they can vary by jurisdiction and industry, requiring expert interpretation to avoid legal risks and ensure proper implementation.

HR Compliance Best Practices

The following best practices outline how HR teams support workforce-related compliance and risk mitigation within water, wastewater, and energy utilities. These practices focus on HR's role in policy implementation, training, documentation, and cross-functional coordination.

- **Monitor and Communicate Regulatory Changes**
 - HR should stay informed of employment, labor, and workplace safety regulations and communicate relevant updates to employees and managers through onboarding, training, and internal communications.
- **Maintain Clear and Accessible HR Policies**
 - HR is responsible for ensuring workforce-related policies are current, accessible, and consistently applied, and for embedding compliance expectations into job roles, supervisory responsibilities, and performance processes.
- **Deliver and Track Required Training**
 - HR coordinates mandatory compliance and safety training for new hires and existing employees, ensuring completion is tracked and refresher training is provided as required.
- **Manage Compliance Documentation and Records**
 - HR maintains accurate records related to training, employee acknowledgements, and workforce compliance activities, ensuring records are organized, confidential where required, and readily accessible for audits or reviews.
- **Partner on Audits and Safety Compliance**
 - HR serves as a key partner in labor law and workplace safety audits by supporting documentation, employee communications, and training verification, while collaborating with EHS and Operations on technical or field-based compliance requirements.



HR Compliance Best Practices (Continued)

- **Ensure Labor Law and Wage Compliance**
 - HR is responsible for maintaining compliant wage, hour, classification, and pay practices, and for regularly reviewing these practices to ensure alignment with federal, state, local, and collective bargaining requirements.
- **Support HR Systems and Data Continuity**
 - HR partners with IT and Legal to ensure HR systems, employee data, and records are managed securely, with appropriate access controls, data protection practices, and continuity planning.
- **Address and Investigate Non-Compliance**
 - HR establishes clear reporting channels for compliance concerns, supports confidential and anonymous reporting where required, and leads or partners on investigations and corrective actions related to workforce-related non-compliance.
- **Coordinate Regulatory Audits and Inquiries**
 - HR supports audits and regulatory inquiries by preparing workforce documentation, coordinating employee communications, and partnering with Legal, EHS, and Operations as appropriate.
- **Promote Ethical Conduct and Accountability**
 - HR reinforces ethical behavior and accountability through policy design, training, performance expectations, and consistent application of corrective action processes.

External regulatory engagement, enforcement actions, and formal responses are typically led by Legal and executive leadership. HR's role is to support these efforts through accurate records, employee communications, and workforce readiness. As a best practice HR should steward the organization's record retention policy and schedules to ensure necessary documents can be located and surfaced when necessary to respond to a written request.

How AVO Shows Up

Access, Visibility, and Opportunity are present in the area of compliance by ensuring employees have access to the latest policy changes, complete their required trainings, and have the opportunity to ask questions to experts in their field.

Employee File Best Practices

In Summary

Effective employee file management is a core HR responsibility and a key component of compliance, risk mitigation, and operational efficiency. HR teams should maintain accurate, well-organized, and secure employee records throughout the employment lifecycle.

HR Best Practices for Employee Files

- **Maintain Employment and Onboarding Records**
 - HR maintains hiring and onboarding documentation such as applications, offer letters, agreements, and acknowledgements to support consistent hiring practices and compliance.
- **Document Performance and Corrective Actions**
 - Performance evaluations, disciplinary actions, and commendations should be updated regularly and retained to support performance management, employee development, and fair decision-making.
- **Track Training and Certifications**
 - HR is responsible for maintaining records of required training, certifications, and licensure to ensure workforce readiness and regulatory compliance.
- **Manage Separation and Offboarding Records**
 - HR maintains documentation related to employee separations, including exit processes and separation agreements, to support compliance and reduce dispute risk.
- **Secure and Separate Sensitive Records**
 - Records containing medical, accommodation, leave, or other sensitive information must be stored separately from general personnel files, with restricted access in accordance with privacy requirements.
- **Apply Consistent Retention and Access Practices**
 - HR ensures employee files are retained, accessed, and disposed of in accordance with applicable laws, internal policies, and legal guidance.

Employee file practices should be reviewed regularly and aligned with California and federal employment requirements. When questions arise regarding access, disclosure, or retention, HR should partner with legal counsel for guidance.

Employment and Onboarding Records

This section outlines HR best practices for managing records created during the recruitment, hiring, and onboarding process. These records support compliance, consistency, and clarity throughout the employee lifecycle.

HR should maintain employment and onboarding records in a structured and secure manner, ensuring records are accurate, accessible for legitimate business needs, and protected in accordance with privacy and data protection requirements.

Common Employment and Onboarding Records

- **Application and Resume**
 - Retain the employee’s application or resume to document qualifications and hiring decisions.
- **Offer Letter**
 - Maintain a copy of the employment offer outlining key terms such as position, compensation, and start date.
- **Job Description**
 - Store the job description to clarify role expectations and support performance management and classification decisions.
- **Employment Agreements**
 - Retain signed agreements such as confidentiality, conflict of interest, or other employment-related acknowledgements, as applicable.
- **New Hire Checklist**
 - Document onboarding steps to demonstrate completion of required hiring and orientation processes.
- **Employee Handbook Acknowledgement**
 - Maintain acknowledgement that the employee has received and reviewed the most current version of the organization’s handbook.
- **Drug Testing and Background Check Consents**
 - Retain signed consent forms related to pre-employment or post-offer testing and background checks, in accordance with applicable policies and laws.

Certain records—such as background check results, medical information, or employment eligibility verification documents—may be subject to additional privacy or storage requirements and should be maintained separately from the general personnel file.

Performance Management Records

Performance records support employee development, consistency in decision-making, and fair application of corrective action. HR plays a central role in establishing documentation standards and ensuring records are maintained appropriately.

Performance-Related Records

- **Performance Evaluations**
 - Maintain formal performance evaluations to document feedback, progress, and development over time.
- **Employee Self-Assessments**
 - Retain self-evaluations submitted as part of the formal performance review process, where applicable.
- **Formal Disciplinary Actions**
 - Maintain records of formal corrective actions, such as written warnings, performance improvement plans (PIPs), suspensions, or terminations, in the official HR personnel file.
- **Supervisor Notes and Informal Documentation**
 - Supervisors may maintain working notes related to coaching or performance conversations. These notes are typically not part of the official personnel file unless they result in formal action or are relied upon in employment decisions.
- **Investigations and Supporting Documentation**
 - Records related to investigations or sensitive corrective actions should be maintained in a separate, confidential file in accordance with organizational and legal requirements.
- **Awards and Recognition**
 - Maintain documentation of formal awards or recognition programs to support equitable and consistent recognition practices.



Training and Certification Records

Maintaining accurate training and certification records is essential to workforce readiness and regulatory compliance, particularly in safety-sensitive and licensed roles.

Common Training and Certification Records

- **Required Certifications and Training**
 - Track completion of mandatory certifications, licenses, and industry-specific training.
- **New Hire Orientation Records**
 - Maintain onboarding and orientation checklists to confirm required training and information were provided.
- **Safety Training**
 - Include job-specific and general safety training records to confirm compliance with safety regulations.
- **Harassment Training**
 - Maintain acknowledgment of harassment prevention training, which is often legally mandated.



Separation and Off-boarding Records

When an employee separates from the organization, HR plays a key role in documenting the offboarding process in a consistent, accurate, and legally sound manner. Proper separation records help ensure compliance, support continuity, and reduce dispute risk.

Common Separation and Offboarding Records

- **Resignation or Separation Notice**
 - Maintain written notice of resignation or documentation of involuntary separation as the official record of employment end.
- **Reason for Separation (HR Record)**
 - Document the reason for separation at a high level for HR and reporting purposes. Employees are not required to provide a reason for voluntary separation.
- **Exit Interview Records**
 - Retain exit interview summaries, where conducted, for internal analysis and improvement purposes. Detailed notes should be factual and limited in scope.
- **Separation Checklist**
 - Maintain a checklist confirming completion of offboarding steps such as return of property, system access removal, and final pay processing.
- **Unemployment and Related Documentation**
 - Retain records related to unemployment claims, responses, and determinations.
- **Separation Agreements**
 - Store signed separation or settlement agreements, as applicable, in accordance with confidentiality and retention requirements.
- **Reference Release Forms**
 - Maintain any signed reference or release authorizations provided by the employee.

HR should avoid maintaining unnecessary narrative notes or speculative commentary in separation records. Documentation should be factual, objective, and aligned with organizational policy and legal guidance.

Sensitive Documents Stored Separately

Certain employee records must be stored securely and separately from the general personnel file due to confidentiality and privacy requirements.

Examples of Records Typically Stored Separately:

- Medical and accommodation records
- Leave of absence documentation (medical-related)
- Investigation and complaint files
- Background check results
- Employment eligibility verification (I-9 forms)

Access to these records should be limited to authorized personnel only and managed in accordance with applicable privacy and data protection standards.

Recommended Metrics

The following metrics can help HR teams assess the effectiveness and consistency of employee file management practices:

- **Onboarding Documentation Completion Rate**
 - Percentage of required new hire documents completed within 30 days of employment.
- **Performance Review Timeliness**
 - Percentage of performance evaluations completed according to the established review cycle.
- **Training and Certification Compliance**
 - Completion rate of required training and certifications across the workforce.
- **Separation Process Completion Rate**
 - Percentage of departing employees with completed separation and offboarding checklists.
- **Sensitive Document Compliance**
 - Results of periodic audits confirming that sensitive employee records are stored appropriately and in alignment with privacy and confidentiality requirements.

Required Workplace Posters

In Summary:

California employers are required to display workplace posters that inform employees of their rights related to wages, leave, safety, and anti-discrimination protections. HR plays a key role in ensuring required employment-related posters are current, visible, and accessible to employees.

HR Responsibilities

- **Employment Law Posters**

- HR is responsible for maintaining required employment-related posters addressing topics such as minimum wage, paid sick leave, family and medical leave, workplace discrimination and harassment, and employee rights.

- **Posting Accessibility**

- Required posters should be displayed in visible locations at worksites and made available electronically for remote or field-based employees, as applicable.

- **Public Utility and Safety-Related Posters (Partnership Role)**

- Public utilities may be subject to additional posting requirements related to safety, emergency procedures, and operational risks. HR partners with EHS and Operations to support posting compliance, while technical safety postings are typically owned by those functions.

- **Cal/OSHA and Safety Notices**

- HR collaborates with EHS to ensure required Cal/OSHA notices and employee safety postings are communicated and accessible.

- **Ongoing Review and Updates**

- HR should periodically review posting requirements to ensure materials remain current and aligned with regulatory updates.

Detailed posting requirements, organization-issued notices, and location-specific postings should be tracked through an internal compliance checklist or toolkit and reviewed in coordination with Legal and EHS as needed.

***How AVO Shows Up**
Access, Visibility, and Opportunity are present by making information accessible to employees, being transparent with policy updates, and addressing employee concerns in a timely manner.*

General California Employment Posters:

California employers, including public utilities, are required to display employment-related posters that inform employees of their workplace rights and protections. HR plays a key role in ensuring required posters are current, accessible, and updated as regulations change.



Common Employment Posters Include:

- **Minimum Wage and Pay Notices**
 - Posters outlining California minimum wage requirements and employee pay rights.
- **Family and Medical Leave Notices**
 - Posters describing employee rights related to family, medical, and pregnancy-related leave under applicable state and federal laws.
- **Paid Sick Leave**
 - Notices informing employees of their right to accrue and use paid sick leave.
- **Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation Protections**
 - Posters describing employee protections related to equal employment opportunity and workplace conduct.
- **Workers' Compensation**
 - Notices explaining how employees may report workplace injuries or illnesses and access benefits.
- **Unemployment, Disability, and Paid Family Leave**
 - Notices outlining benefits administered by the Employment Development Department (EDD).

Posting requirements are subject to change and may vary based on workforce size, bargaining unit status, or organization operations. HR should rely on current organization-issued posters and maintain an internal checklist or toolkit to track required postings.

- **Cal/OSHA Safety and Health Protection**
 - Outlines workplace safety and health standards as required by Cal/OSHA, ensuring employees work in a safe environment.
- **Whistleblower Protection**
 - Provides information on employees' rights to report illegal or unsafe practices without fear of retaliation.
- **Transgender Rights in the Workplace**
 - Educates employees on their rights concerning gender identity and expression under California law.
- **Time Off to Vote**
 - Inform employees of their right to take paid time off to vote in elections.
- **Mandatory Harassment Prevention Training**
 - Outlines the requirements for harassment prevention training for employers with five or more employees, ensuring compliance with California law.

Public Utilities-Specific Posters

In addition to the general posters required for all California employers, public utility companies must display posters tailored to their unique operational and safety requirements. These posters address issues like hazardous materials handling, electrical safety, and environmental compliance.

- **Utility-Specific Safety Posters (Cal/OSHA)**
 - Public utility employers must post additional safety notices required by Cal/OSHA, including those for high-voltage electricity, hazardous materials, and confined spaces. These posters explain the required use of personal protective equipment (PPE), lockout/tagout procedures, and emergency protocols.



Additional California Employment Rights Posters

In addition to core employment law postings, California employers may be required to display notices addressing specific employee rights and protections. HR is responsible for ensuring these notices are current and accessible to employees.

Common Employment Rights Posters May Include:

- **Workplace Safety and Health Notices (Cal/OSHA)**
 - Notices informing employees of general workplace safety and health protections.
- **Whistleblower Protection**
 - Posters outlining employees' rights to report unsafe, unlawful, or unethical conduct without retaliation.
- **Transgender Rights in the Workplace**
 - Notices informing employees of rights related to gender identity and gender expression under California law.
- **Time Off to Vote**
 - Notices describing employee rights related to paid time off for voting.
- **Harassment Prevention Requirements**
 - Information related to required harassment prevention training and employee protections, as applicable.

Some requirements may be satisfied through postings, policy distribution, or training. HR should rely on current organization guidance and internal compliance tools to determine the appropriate method.

Public Utility–Specific Safety Posters

Public utilities are subject to additional posting requirements related to operational safety and environmental risk due to the nature of the work performed. These postings support employee awareness of workplace hazards, emergency procedures, and required safety practices.

Common Utility-Specific Safety Posters (Cal/OSHA and Related)

Public utilities may be required to display safety postings addressing topics such as:

- **Hazard Communication (HazCom)**
 - Notices outlining the risks, handling procedures, and emergency response information for hazardous chemicals used in the workplace.
- **Emergency Evacuation Plans**
 - Postings detailing employee response procedures for emergencies such as fires, gas leaks, explosions, or other hazardous events.
- **Lockout/Tagout Procedures**
 - Notices explaining required procedures to prevent the accidental release of hazardous energy during equipment maintenance or repair.
- **Confined Space Entry**
 - Postings describing safety requirements, risks, and entry procedures for work involving confined spaces such as tanks, pipelines, or vaults.
- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Requirements**
 - Notices identifying required protective equipment for specific work areas or tasks, including hard hats, gloves, eye protection, and other safety gear.
- **Heat Illness Prevention**
 - Required postings outlining prevention strategies and employee protections for outdoor or heat-exposed workers.
- **First Aid and Medical Emergency Procedures**
 - Notices explaining first aid protocols and how to contact medical assistance in the event of an emergency.

Technical safety requirements, posting locations, and regulatory interpretations should be managed by EHS and Operations, with HR serving as a coordination and communication partner rather than the technical owner.

Recommended Metrics

The following metrics help organizations monitor compliance, accessibility, and effectiveness of required workplace postings. Metrics should be reviewed periodically and scaled based on organizational size and operational complexity.

Compliance Metrics

- Poster Display Compliance Rate
 - Percentage of required workplace posters (general and utility-specific) correctly displayed across all applicable worksites.
- Inspection / Audit Pass Rate
 - Percentage of internal or external inspections completed without poster-related findings or violations.
- Poster Update Timeliness
 - Average time required to update or replace postings following regulatory or legal changes.

Employee Awareness and Accessibility Metrics

- Employee Awareness Check
 - Periodic pulse surveys or training confirmations assessing employee awareness of key workplace rights, safety notices, and emergency information.
- Poster Visibility and Accessibility
 - Spot checks or employee feedback assessing whether postings are visible, legible, and accessible to all employees, including field-based staff.

Risk Management Metrics

- Poster-Related Compliance Issues
 - Number of citations, fines, or corrective actions related to missing, outdated, or improperly displayed postings.
- Employee Inquiries or Concerns
 - Tracking and categorizing employee questions or complaints related to posting accuracy, availability, or visibility.

Responsibility for maintaining compliance with posting requirements typically rests with HR, EHS, or Operations, depending on the type of posting. Metrics should support coordination across functions rather than duplicating oversight responsibilities.

Employee Handbook Best Practices

The employee handbook must reflect key policies required under federal and California law. Federal regulations establish baseline protections related to non-discrimination, harassment prevention, leave entitlements, wage standards, and workplace safety. These policies form the foundation of a compliant and respectful workplace.

California law expands upon federal requirements with additional protections, including paid sick leave, domestic violence leave, lactation accommodations, pay transparency, and enhanced health and safety standards. Incorporating these state-specific requirements ensures the employee handbook provides a comprehensive and compliant framework for employees.

By including both federal and California-specific policies, the utility upholds required legal standards and reinforces a fair, inclusive, and equitable workplace. These policies support employee well-being while ensuring access, opportunity, and consistent treatment across the workforce.

For employees covered by collective bargaining agreements, terms and conditions of employment, including compensation, benefits, and working conditions, may differ by bargaining unit. In these cases, the provisions of the applicable Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) take precedence over the general policies outlined in the employee handbook. The employee handbook should clearly state that it is not intended to override union agreements, and employees should refer to their applicable MOU for specific terms of employment.

Each of the following policies must be included in your employee handbook:

Equal Employment and Anti-Discrimination Policy

- Ensures equal employment opportunities for all employees and prohibits discrimination based on race, gender, age, disability, and other protected characteristics.

Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) Policy (50 Employees)

- Provides up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for family and medical reasons and covers events such as birth/adoption of a child or serious health conditions.
- Applies to organizations with 50 or more employees.



Military Service Leave

- Provides job-protected leave for military duty or training under USERRA and ensures employees' jobs are held during their service.



Sexual Harassment Policy

- Zero tolerance for sexual harassment in the workplace.
- Employees can report harassment without fear of retaliation.
- Prompt corrective action is taken for any reported incidents.

Lactation Accommodation Policy

- Provides a private, non-bathroom space for breastfeeding employees.
- Complies with state and federal laws regarding lactation breaks.

California's required policies:

Adult Illiteracy Leave (25 Employees)

- Employers must provide reasonable accommodations to employees who are illiterate to help them improve their literacy skills without fear of job loss.

Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation Leave (25 Employees)

- Provides reasonable accommodation for employees voluntarily seeking treatment for alcohol or drug rehabilitation, ensuring job protection during the leave.

Bereavement Leave (5 Employees)

- Employers must grant employees time off after a family member's death, typically unpaid unless otherwise provided by company policy.

Business Expense Reimbursement

- Employers are required to reimburse employees for necessary business expenses incurred during the course of their job, including travel, supplies, or other work-related costs.

Civil Service and Air Patrol Leave

- Employers must provide leave for employees who are volunteer firefighters, emergency responders, or members of the Civil Air Patrol, allowing time off for service and training.

Crime Victim Leave

- Employees who are victims of a crime are entitled to take time off to attend legal proceedings or court hearings related to the crime.

Domestic Violence Leave (25 Employees)

- Allows employees who are victims of domestic violence to take unpaid leave for legal proceedings, medical treatment, or counseling without risking job security.

California Family Rights Act (CFRA) (5 Employees)

- Provides up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for family or medical reasons, such as caring for a family member or serious personal health conditions.

Health and Safety Policy

- Employers must maintain a safe and healthy work environment, complying with occupational safety regulations and providing training on health and safety protocols.

Home Office Reimbursement

- When remote work is encouraged or required, employers must reimburse employees for reasonable expenses related to it, such as internet, utilities, and office supplies. Employees must complete the appropriate reimbursement form.

Jury Duty Leave

- Employees are entitled to unpaid leave to serve on a jury without risk of job loss or retaliation. Employees are required to inform their employer of the summons.



Meal and Rest Breaks

- Employers must provide meal and rest breaks as mandated by state law, ensuring employees have the required time off during work hours to rest and eat.



Military Service Leave

- Provides job-protected leave for employees called to military service or training, ensuring their position is held upon their return.

Organ, Bone Marrow, and Blood Donor Leave (15 Employees)

- Employers must provide paid leave for employees donating organs, bone marrow, or blood, ensuring they can take time off for the donation process.

Paid Sick Leave (Berkeley, Emeryville, Los Angeles, Oakland, San Diego, San Francisco, Santa Monica)

- Employers must provide paid sick leave as per state law and local regulations, with specific accrual and usage requirements depending on the city.

San Francisco Paid Parental Leave (20 Employees Worldwide)

- Requires employers to provide supplemental compensation during parental leave in San Francisco, ensuring wage replacement for eligible employees.

Paid Time Off

- A comprehensive policy granting employees time off for vacation, illness, or personal matters, typically accrued based on length of service or work hours.

Pay Transparency Policy

- Employers must provide transparency in wage scales and compensation, ensuring employees and applicants have access to pay information and preventing wage discrimination.

Pregnancy Leave (5 Employees)

- Provides up to four months of job-protected leave for employees disabled by pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions.

School Activity Leave (50 Employees)

- Employees are entitled to take time off to participate in their children's school activities, such as parent-teacher conferences or school events.

Suitable Seating Policy

- Employers must provide suitable seating for employees when the nature of the work reasonably permits the use of seats during the course of employment.

School Appearance Leave

- Allows parents or guardians to take time off work to attend their children's school-related legal proceedings or activities.

Voting Leave

- Employers must provide time off for employees to vote in local, state, or federal elections if they do not have sufficient time outside of working hours to do so.

Optional policies to include:

- **Affinity Group Policy:** Supports the formation of employee groups to foster inclusion and create a sense of community around shared identities or interests.
- **Arbitration Policy:** The policy requires employees to resolve disputes through binding arbitration instead of court litigation, aiming for faster and less costly resolutions.
- **At-Will Employment Policy:** Establishes that employment can be terminated by either the employer or the employee at any time, with or without cause.
- **Background Check Policy:** Outlines the procedures for conducting background checks to ensure the qualifications and integrity of prospective employees.
- **Bereavement Leave:** Provides employees with paid time off to grieve and attend the funeral of a close relative.
- **Company Property Policy:** Defines the appropriate use and care of company-owned property, equipment, and resources.
- **Confidentiality and Trade Secrets Policy:** Requires employees to protect sensitive company information and trade secrets from unauthorized disclosure.
- **Desk Hoteling Policy:** Allows employees to reserve shared workspaces as needed, promoting flexible work arrangements.

- **Direct Deposit Policy:** Encourages employees to receive their pay via direct deposit for convenience and efficiency.
- **Dress Code Policy:** Specifies acceptable workplace attire, depending on the company culture and the nature of the job.
- **Drug and Alcohol Abuse Policy:** Prohibits the use of drugs or alcohol at work and outlines consequences for violations to maintain a safe workplace.
- **Electronic Devices While Driving Policy:** To ensure safety, the company prohibits the use of mobile devices while driving on company business.
- **Employee Benefits Policy:** This policy outlines the company's benefits, including health insurance, retirement plans, and other perks.
- **Employee Classification Policy:** This policy defines employee categories (e.g., full-time, part-time, exempt, non-exempt) to clarify eligibility for benefits and overtime.
- **Employee Dating Policy:** This policy regulates workplace relationships to prevent conflicts of interest and maintain a professional work environment.
- **Employee References Policy:** Provides guidelines for offering references for current or former employees while protecting the company from liability.
- **Employment of Relatives Policy:** Limits the employment of relatives in certain positions to avoid conflicts of interest or perceptions of favoritism.
- **Exit Interview Policy:** Conducts exit interviews to gather feedback from departing employees and improve workplace practices.
- **Gifts Policy:** This policy regulates the giving and receiving of gifts to prevent conflicts of interest or unethical behavior in business dealings.
- **Health and Safety Policy:** This policy ensures compliance with safety regulations and promotes a healthy, hazard-free workplace environment.
- **Holidays:** Lists the official company holidays when employees are entitled to paid time off.

- **Immigration Law Compliance:** Ensures that all employees have legal authorization to work in the country by complying with immigration laws.
- **Marijuana Policy:** Specifies the company's stance on marijuana use, including prohibitions in the workplace, in accordance with state and federal law.
- **Off-Duty Use of Facilities:** This section clarifies the conditions under which employees may use company facilities outside of working hours.
- **Overtime Policy:** Establishes the conditions under which non-exempt employees are eligible for overtime pay.
- **Payment of Wages Policy:** Details how and when employees will be paid, including the frequency of payments.
- **Payroll Deductions Policy:** This policy specifies the legal and voluntary deductions that may be taken from employees' wages, such as taxes and benefits contributions.
- **Performance Review Policy:** Describes the process and frequency of performance evaluations to provide feedback and set goals for employees.
- **Personnel Files Policy:** Outlines how employee records are maintained, updated, and accessed while ensuring confidentiality.
- **Pets in the Workplace Policy:** Defines the conditions under which pets may be allowed at work, considering safety and employee comfort.
- **Progressive Discipline Policy:** Provides a step-by-step approach to addressing employee misconduct or performance issues before termination.
- **Public Relations Policy:** Establishes guidelines for employees interacting with the media and the public to ensure consistent and accurate messaging.
- **Punctuality and Attendance Policy:** This policy sets expectations for employees' attendance and punctuality, including procedures for reporting absences.

- **Salary Pay Policy:** Outlines how salary-based employees are compensated, including pay structure and frequency.
- **Social Media Policy:** Regulates employee use of social media to protect the company's reputation and ensure compliance with policies.
- **Solicitation and Distribution of Literature Policy:** This policy limits solicitation activities and the distribution of materials in the workplace to prevent disruptions.
- **Technology Systems Policy:** Governs the appropriate use of company technology systems, including computers, networks, and email.
- **Telecommuting Policy:** This policy defines eligibility and expectations for employees who work remotely, including equipment and communication standards.
- **Temporary Relocation Policy:** Addresses employee rights and company obligations in the event of temporary work relocations.
- **Timekeeping Policy:** This policy details the process for tracking employee hours worked, including the use of timekeeping systems.
- **Video Conferencing Policy:** This policy provides guidelines for the professional and secure use of video conferencing tools in conducting business.
- **Workers' Compensation Policy:** This policy ensures that employees are covered for medical expenses and lost wages in the event of a work-related injury.
- **Workplace Violence Policy:** This policy prohibits violent behavior in the workplace and outlines procedures for reporting and handling incidents.
- **Workplace Visitor Policy:** Regulates visitors to the workplace to ensure safety and minimize disruptions to business operations.
- **Workweek and Work Schedules Policy:** Defines the standard workweek and schedules, including flexible arrangements and overtime expectations.

By incorporating these federal and California-specific policies, along with additional optional practices, you ensure compliance and foster a supportive, structured work environment in California's water, wastewater & energy sectors.

2026 California Employment Law Updates

Effective January 1, 2026

As of January 1, 2026, several California employment law updates take effect, impacting wages, compensation structures, pay transparency, and workforce practices. Public agencies and utilities should review and update policies, payroll systems, and HR processes to ensure compliance.

Key 2026 Employment Law Changes

Minimum Wage Increase

- California's statewide minimum wage increases to \$16.90 per hour, regardless of employer size.
- Employers must continue to comply with higher local minimum wages where applicable.

Exempt Salary Threshold Adjustment

- The minimum annual salary for exempt "white-collar" employees increases to \$70,304, tied to the statewide minimum wage.
- Employers must review exempt classifications to avoid misclassification risk.

Ban on Training Repayment Agreements (AB 692)

- Employers may not require employees to repay training costs through "stay-or-pay" or similar repayment agreements as a condition of employment.
- Applies broadly to employer-required training tied to continued employment.

Pay Transparency and Equal Pay Updates (SB 642)

- Pay ranges listed in job postings must be reasonable, accurate, and reflect genuine compensation expectations.
- Strengthens enforcement of California's Equal Pay Act and aligns transparency with equity standards.

Recommended Actions for HR & Compliance Teams

- Consult with your organization's employment law attorney.
- Update payroll systems to reflect the new minimum wage and exempt salary threshold.
- Review job classifications, compensation structures, and employment agreements.
- Eliminate prohibited training repayment provisions.
- Audit job postings and recruiting materials for pay transparency compliance.
- Train HR staff and hiring managers on 2026 requirements.

2025 Employment Law Updates: Ensuring Compliance and Best Practices

Overview

As of January 1, 2025, several new employment laws have taken effect in California, impacting wage requirements, anti-discrimination protections, employee rights, and workplace policies. This section outlines key updates and how they apply to the water, wastewater, and energy sectors, ensuring compliance with state and federal regulations. Employers must review and update their policies, procedures, and training programs accordingly. Consult with a legal attorney for further clarification and application of the new laws.

Key 2025 Employment Law Changes

Minimum Wage and Salary Adjustments

- **Statewide Minimum Wage:** Increased to \$16.50 per hour for all employers, regardless of size.
- **Local Minimum Wages:** Certain cities and counties have set higher rates—employers must comply with the highest applicable wage.
- **Exempt Employee Salary Threshold:** Increased to \$68,640 annually to maintain exempt status under California wage laws.
- **Action Required:** update payroll practices, job classifications, and employment contracts to reflect these changes.

Expanded Anti-Discrimination Protections

- **Intersectional Discrimination:** The law now explicitly prohibits discrimination based on the intersection of multiple protected characteristics (e.g., race and gender combined).
- **Assembly Bill 1815** defines “race” to include traits associated with race, including but not limited to, hair texture and protective hairstyles. This legislation removed the phrase “historically associated with race” from the coverage definition. This change may impact employers’ dress code and grooming policies.
- **Driver’s License Requirements:** Employers cannot require a driver’s license as a condition of employment unless driving is an essential job function.
- **Action Required:** HR teams should review job descriptions and hiring practices to eliminate unnecessary barriers and ensure compliance with anti-discrimination laws.

2025 California Employment Law Updates

Summary for Reference

Effective January 1, 2025, several California employment law changes took effect, impacting wages, employee protections, leave entitlements, workplace practices, and compliance requirements.

Wage and Compensation Updates

- Statewide Minimum Wage increased to \$16.50 per hour for all employers.
- Local Minimum Wages in certain cities and counties exceed the state rate and continue to apply where higher.
- Exempt Salary Threshold increased to \$68,640 annually, aligning with California wage-and-hour exemption requirements.

Expanded Anti-Discrimination Protections

- Intersectional Discrimination is explicitly prohibited, recognizing discrimination based on multiple protected characteristics.
- Expanded Definition of “Race” includes traits such as hair texture and protective hairstyles (e.g., braids, locs, twists).
- Driver’s License Restrictions prohibit requiring a license unless driving is an essential job function.

Employee Leave and Time-Off Changes

- Paid Family Leave may not be delayed by requiring employees to use accrued vacation first.
- Paid Sick Leave may be used for jury duty or court appearances as a witness.
- Victims of Crime Leave expanded to include time off related to qualifying acts of violence affecting employees or their family members.

Workplace Rights and Protections

- Captive Audience Meetings: Employers may not require attendance at meetings focused on political or religious matters, including union-related discussions.
- Freelance Worker Protections require written agreements, timely payment, and multi-year record retention for independent contractors.
- Workers’ Compensation Notices must inform employees of their right to consult legal counsel regarding claims.

Enforcement and Compliance Updates

- PAGA Reforms reduce penalties for employers that proactively correct labor code violations.
- Emphasis continues on transparency, documentation, and lawful employment practices.

Record Retention

In Summary:

- **Record Retention for Compliance:** Proper record retention is essential for meeting legal obligations and maintaining operational efficiency.
- **Recruitment and Hiring Records:** Must be retained for four years or until claims/litigation are resolved, ensuring compliance with Title VII, FEHA, ADA, ADEA, and other laws.
- **Wage and Payroll Records:** Retained for three to four years to comply with FLSA, California Labor Code, and state-specific payroll regulations.
- **Leave Records:** Family and medical leave documentation must be stored for four years under FMLA and CFRA.
- **Employee Contracts and Union Agreements:** Held for three years to comply with FLSA regulations.
- **I-9 Forms:** Must be retained for three years after hire or one year after termination, per the Immigration Reform and Control Act.
- **Personnel Files and Harassment Training:** Personnel files are kept for four years post-termination, while harassment training records must be retained for two years.
- **Health and Safety Records:** Employee health records are retained for five years (30 years for chemical exposure), governed by OSHA and Cal/OSHA.
- **COVID-19 Records:** Kept for two to three years to meet Cal/OSHA and California Labor Code requirements.
- **Benefits Data:** Retained for six years, with retirement records kept indefinitely per ERISA.
- **Workers' Compensation and Legal Proceedings Records:** Workers' compensation records are retained for five years, while records related to claims and investigations are kept until resolution.

Child Labor Certificates and Notices

Child labor certificates and notices must be kept for three years. These records are regulated by the **FLSA** and the **California Labor Code**.

Union and Employee Contracts

Union agreements and employee contracts must be retained for three years. These records are regulated by the **FLSA**.

Employment Eligibility Verification (I-9 Forms)

I-9 forms, which verify employment eligibility, must be retained for the later of three years from the employee's hire date or one year after the termination date. These records are required by the **Immigration Reform and Control Act**.

Mandatory Harassment Prevention Training Records

Records of harassment prevention training must be kept for two years. This is in compliance with **California Code of Regulations (CCR) section 11024**.

Employee Personnel Files

Employee personnel files, including all employment-related documents, must be kept for four years after the employee's termination. These records are regulated by **California Labor Code section 1198.5, the California Fair Pay Act, Title VII, the ADEA, FEHA, the ADA, and GINA**.

Payroll Records

Payroll records must be kept for four years. The relevant laws include the **FLSA, the California Unemployment Insurance Code section 1085, and California Code of Regulations section 1085-2**.

Affirmative Action Programs and Documents

Affirmative action records and related documents are recommended to be kept for five years. These records fall under **Title VII and Executive Order 11246**.

Employee Health Records

Employee health records must be retained for five years, with the exception of chemical safety and toxic exposure records, which must be kept for 30 years. These records are governed by **OSHA and Cal/OSHA**.

COVID-19 Records

Records related to COVID-19 exposure must be kept for three years, while records of COVID-19 cases must be retained for two years. These are regulated under **California Labor Code section 6409.6** and **California Code of Regulations section 3205**.

Employee Benefits Data

Employee benefits data must be kept for six years, although records related to retirement benefits must be retained indefinitely. These records are governed by **ERISA** (Employee Retirement Income Security Act).

Unlawful Employment Practices, Claims, Investigations, and Legal Proceedings Records

Records related to claims of unlawful employment practices, investigations, and legal proceedings must be retained until the case is resolved. These records fall under **Title VII, FEHA, ADEA, ADA, GINA, the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA)**, and the **FLSA**.

Workers' Compensation Records

Workers' compensation records must be retained for five years after the end of the year in which they are relevant. These records are governed by sections 6400 and following of the **California Labor Code** and sections 14300 and following of the **California Code of Regulations**.

This retention schedule ensures compliance with federal and state laws, helping employers mitigate risks and manage employee records effectively.

Recommended Metrics

Compliance Metrics

- **Audit Success Rate:** Percentage of successful internal or external audits with no record retention violations.
- **Record Retention Compliance Rate:** Percentage of records maintained in accordance with federal and California state laws (e.g., FLSA, Cal/OSHA, ERISA).

- **Timeliness of Record Retention:** Percentage of records properly retained or disposed of within the required timelines.
- **Document Expiry Management Rate:** Percentage of outdated or expired records properly disposed of on schedule.

Operational Efficiency Metrics

- **Record Retrieval Time:** Average time taken to locate and retrieve specific records during audits or legal proceedings.
- **Digital vs. Physical Record Storage:** Percentage of records stored digitally versus physically, promoting operational efficiency.
- **Error Rate in Record Keeping:** Frequency of missing, incomplete, or misfiled records over a set period.

Risk Management Metrics

- **Legal Claims Related to Record Retention:** Number of legal claims or penalties arising from non-compliance with record retention laws.
- **Litigation Support Efficiency:** Percentage of cases where relevant records are provided on time during legal disputes or investigations.
- **Data Breach Incidents:** Frequency of data breaches involving sensitive employee information, ensuring secure storage of records.

Training and Awareness Metrics

- **Employee Training Completion Rate:** Percentage of HR and relevant staff who complete training on record retention policies and legal compliance.
- **Employee Awareness Survey Scores:** Measures staff understanding of record retention requirements and responsibilities.



CONCLUSION

Fostering a Workforce that Powers the Future of California's Water, Wastewater, and Energy Sectors

California's water, wastewater, and energy utilities are central to public health, environmental stewardship, and economic stability. Meeting the complex challenges of these sectors—regulatory change, environmental pressures, and workforce evolution—requires a workforce that is innovative, equitable, and resilient.

This HR Playbook serves as a strategic guide to help organizations optimize human capital, ensuring they can adapt, innovate, and deliver operational excellence. By providing guidance across the full employee lifecycle—from recruitment and onboarding to development, retention, and offboarding—the playbook equips utilities to build a high-performing, inclusive workforce that meets California's ambitious sustainability and equity goals.

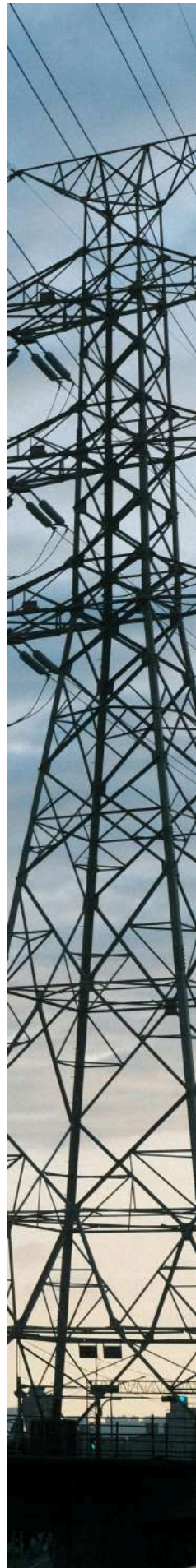
Access, Visibility, & Opportunity (AVO): A Business Imperative

Access, Visibility, and Opportunity (AVO) are foundational to building resilient, high-performing utilities. When integrated into systems and leadership practices, AVO delivers broader perspectives, drives innovation, and strengthens community trust. By cultivating a workforce that reflects California's varied experiences, utilities enhance operational performance and problem-solving capacity.

Leadership plays a central role in advancing AVO by:

- Embracing outreach and recruitment efforts to a wide variety of audiences
- Implementing safety practices that ensure all employees can perform their jobs
- Ensuring the organization makes data-drive decisions around people and culture

These approaches foster fairness and also enhance the organization's strategic edge in an ever-evolving landscape.



Data-Driven Decision Making: Measuring Progress and Ensuring Accountability

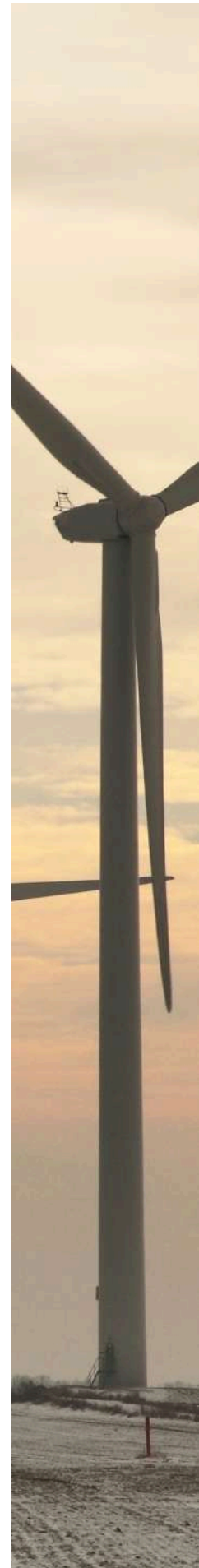
Being informed by robust data drives both operational excellence and workforce equity. By monitoring KPIs in recruiting, compliance, engagement, and development, organizations gain actionable insights into workforce trends, highlight gaps in opportunity, and guide strategic interventions. This approach enables continuous improvement, supports AVO-aligned decision-making, and ensures the workforce remains capable, engaged, and aligned with organizational goals.

Sustainability and Innovation: Driving the Future of the Industry

California's utilities are central to achieving environmental and sustainability priorities. HR ensures the organization has a skilled, adaptable workforce capable of meeting climate, resource, and regulatory challenges. By integrating targeted training, development programs, and equitable access to opportunities—and linking workforce goals to sustainability metrics—utilities can drive innovation, operational resilience, and measurable environmental impact, while reinforcing a trusted brand with stakeholders.

Looking to the Future: A Workforce Built for Resilience, Innovation, and Equity

This HR Playbook is more than just a guide. It is a blueprint for building a workforce prepared to meet tomorrow's challenges. The journey doesn't end here. The future of these essential industries will be shaped by those who recognize the value of their people. Together, we can build a future where access fuels potential, visibility elevates talent, and opportunity drives progress. Safety ensures continuity, and sustainability powers growth. Let's forge a path where every employee feels valued, supported, and empowered. Every action moves us closer to a stronger, more resilient, and equitable future for California's water, wastewater, and energy sectors.



GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

- **Access**
 - Ensures that employees and jobseekers can reach the people, tools, information, and systems they need to succeed. This includes digital access, communication channels, physical spaces, and professional relationships—regardless of role, language, or work location.
- **ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act)**
 - Federal law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in employment, public accommodations, transportation, and more.
- **At-Will Employment**
 - An employment arrangement where either the employer or employee may terminate the relationship at any time, with or without cause or notice, unless otherwise stated in a contract or MOU.
- **Belonging**
 - A workplace environment where employees feel respected, connected, and valued for who they are—reinforcing access to inclusion, visibility of voice, and opportunity to contribute, all of which support a culture of trust and shared purpose.
- **Cal/OSHA**
 - California Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Responsible for enforcing workplace health and safety regulations across the state.
- **Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA)**
 - A legally binding agreement between an employer and a union that outlines wages, hours, working conditions, and other employment terms for union-represented employees.
- **Confidential Personnel File**
 - A secure and private file containing documentation such as performance evaluations, discipline, and employment history—distinct from medical or I-9 files, which must be stored separately.
- **Diversity**
 - Refers to the presence of differences within a workforce—including race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, veteran status, and more. The AVO framework focuses on how systems ensure access, visibility, and opportunity for individuals across these dimensions.
- **EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity)**
 - The principle that all individuals have an equal chance for employment, promotion, and training based on merit—without regard to protected characteristics such as race, sex, age, or religion. AVO reinforces this by embedding fairness into how systems deliver access, visibility, and opportunity across the employee lifecycle.

- **Employee Resource Group (ERG)**
 - Voluntary, employee-led groups that foster community, elevate underrepresented voices, and create visible pathways for leadership and engagement, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable workplace culture.
- **FMLA (Family and Medical Leave Act)**
 - A federal law providing eligible employees with up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for specified family or medical reasons (for employers with 50+ employees).
- **Harassment Prevention Training**
 - Mandatory training required by California law (for employers with 5+ employees) to educate employees and supervisors on identifying, preventing, and addressing harassment and abusive conduct in the workplace—ensuring all employees have access to a safe and respectful environment.
- **IIPP (Injury and Illness Prevention Program)**
 - A written safety program required by Cal/OSHA, designed to identify, evaluate, and correct workplace hazards.
- **Inclusion**
 - The act of ensuring that all employees—regardless of background—are welcomed, respected, supported, and able to fully participate in all aspects of the organization. AVO reframes inclusion by building structures that provide meaningful access, elevate voice, and expand opportunity across all levels.
- **Job Analysis**
 - A structured process to identify the essential functions, skills, knowledge, and qualifications required for a specific role, often used to ensure fairness and job-relatedness in hiring and promotion.
- **MOUs (Memorandums of Understanding)**
 - Agreements negotiated between employers and labor unions detailing employment conditions for represented staff. These take precedence over employee handbook policies in areas of conflict.
- **Opportunity**
 - Opens doors for advancement, skill-building, and leadership. Opportunity is about removing systemic barriers and supporting a variety of career pathways—so that every employee, not just the well-connected, can grow and lead.
- **Reasonable Accommodation**
 - Any change or adjustment to a job or work environment that allows an individual with a disability to apply for a job, perform job functions, or enjoy equal employment benefits.

- **Retention**
 - The organization’s ability to keep talent over time, particularly by supporting career development, equitable practices, and employee engagement. Within AVO, retention is often driven by consistent access to growth, visibility of contributions, and real advancement opportunities.
- **Safety-Critical Role**
 - A position where employee performance directly impacts the safety of the individual, co-workers, or the public. These roles require additional training and adherence to safety standards.
- **Visibility**
 - Elevates individuals and contributions that have historically been overlooked. Visibility ensures that talent is seen, heard, and valued—especially across frontline roles, multilingual teams, and those operating outside of traditional leadership networks.
- **Workforce Pipeline**
 - Strategic partnerships and initiatives (e.g., internships, apprenticeships) designed to recruit, train, and advance talent—especially from underrepresented communities—into key industry roles. Pipeline efforts should focus on equitable access, meaningful visibility, and sustained opportunity.



**CALIFORNIA WATER
WASTEWATER & ENERGY**
Workforce Development Program

