

PARENTAL LEAVE

*Healthier Babies, Resilient Families and
Parents Who Thrive Personally and Professionally*



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of our mission to ensure more children and young people survive and thrive, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation advocates for women and children's health and equality and supports interventions and policies that benefit maternal, newborn, and child health around the world. Through this work, we have learned about the multiple, cumulative benefits associated with parents spending substantial time with children in their first year of life.

In late 2015, we asked: How could the foundation's internal processes and behaviors toward employees who are new parents apply this knowledge and reflect who we are as an organization? What would parental leave look like if we designed it around a commitment to healthier babies, strong and resilient families, and parents who can thrive personally and professionally?

In just weeks, our co-chairs (Bill Gates, Melinda Gates, and William Gates Sr.) and our CEO (Sue Desmond-Hellmann) approved a parental leave program offering up to 52 weeks of paid time off for mothers and fathers in the first year of a child's birth or adoption. The program would be implemented immediately, and parents who were currently on

leave were grandfathered into the program. Not surprisingly, employees were enthusiastic about the foundation's principled stance and strong commitment to mothers, fathers, and children. The program also created distinct challenges for staffing, planning, and meeting goals. It raised questions about how we move and develop employees. And, of course, there were costs associated with the many benefits.

Now that we have more than two years of experience with the 52-week parental leave—and 222 new parents participating—we see that our program is working because of its dual focus:

Supporting families AND supporting career development.

This paper presents the foundation's approach to extended parental leave, including our talent management processes and lessons learned, such as:

- Include the right people, early on, every time.
- Recognize which positions are replicable versus unique.
- Empower managers and support employees.
- Create well-defined processes and communication around internal movement.
- Realize perfection is not needed for launch.
- Build on the culture.

Parental leave can benefit both families and organizations. Even so, we recognize that it is not easy to implement a robust parental leave program. By describing our approach and experience so far, we hope to encourage employers to learn more about the options that will make parental leave work for them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Introduction
- Rethinking Parental Leave: What Matters Most?
- Filling the Gap: How to Staff and Plan
- Parental Leave By the Numbers
- Managing Transitions: Supporting Parents and Backfill Employees
- The Feedback
- Improving the Process: Recommendations and Lessons Learned
- Parental Leave: A Commitment that Counts

INTRODUCTION

Parents and children need time together. Multiple, cumulative benefits are associated with parents spending substantial time with children in their first year of life, including lower infant mortality, physically and emotionally healthy babies, and a deep connection between parent and child.¹

These outcomes are significant and meaningful to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as we pursue our vision for a world in which all people have the chance to live healthy productive lives. As an employer, we seek to reflect our missions and values through our internal culture, processes, and programs as well. In late 2015, the foundation announced it would extend the duration of parental leave from 12 weeks to up to 52 weeks of paid time off for full-time employees, both mothers and fathers, who are bringing a new child into their family. This would enable parents to participate more fully in their children's lives, while also allowing them the flexibility and financial security to meet the needs of their growing families.

The program also brings value to the foundation as a whole. When employees are supported both personally and professionally, we know they will be eager and able to take on the foundation's boldest aspirations. In addition, as colleagues take time off with their families, opportunities open up for other employees. As we backfill for parents on leave, another employee may take on new tasks, assignments, or roles that contribute to their development and career goals. A single parental leave may create opportunities for several employees to learn new skills, or give different roles or functions a trial run. Internal moves and developmental experiences are also opportunities to share knowledge and ideas, expand relationships and informal networks, and strengthen a culture of collective success.

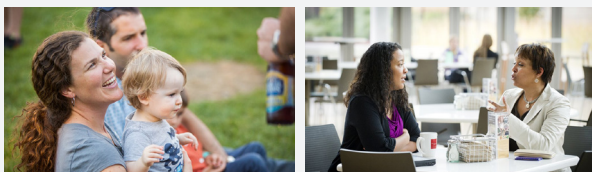
Our experience with extended parental leave is still new, and we are learning how to make parental leave work for families and for the foundation.

THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION PARENTAL LEAVE PROGRAM

Our focus is on healthier babies; strong, resilient families; and parents who are able to thrive professionally. The program has two goals:

1. SUPPORTING FAMILIES

- Supporting employees and their families in the first year of a child's life is consistent with the foundation's missions.
- All full-time employees are eligible to take up to 52 weeks of 100% paid time off during the first year of their child's birth or adoption.
- The program is open to both mothers and fathers. If both parents work at the foundation, they are both eligible for the full year and may take it concurrently.
- There is no waiting period or maximum number of parental leaves an employee may take.



2. SUPPORTING CAREER DEVELOPMENT

- As parents vacate roles while on leave, the foundation has increased opportunities to provide meaningful developmental assignments for our employees.
- Backfilling may involve a single employee making a lateral move or taking on a stretch assignment, or several people taking on parts of a role.
- In many cases, a single parental leave by one employee creates multiple opportunities for other employees, as one backfill decision opens up another role to be filled.
- Developing and expanding our employees' capabilities through stretch assignments or lateral moves requires engaged partnership between the employee, the team, and both the "donor manager" and the "receiving manager."
- It is preferable to have a few weeks of overlap between the departing parent and the backfill employee prior to the leave and upon the parent's return.

¹ Gates, 2015.

RETHINKING PARENTAL LEAVE: WHAT MATTERS MOST?

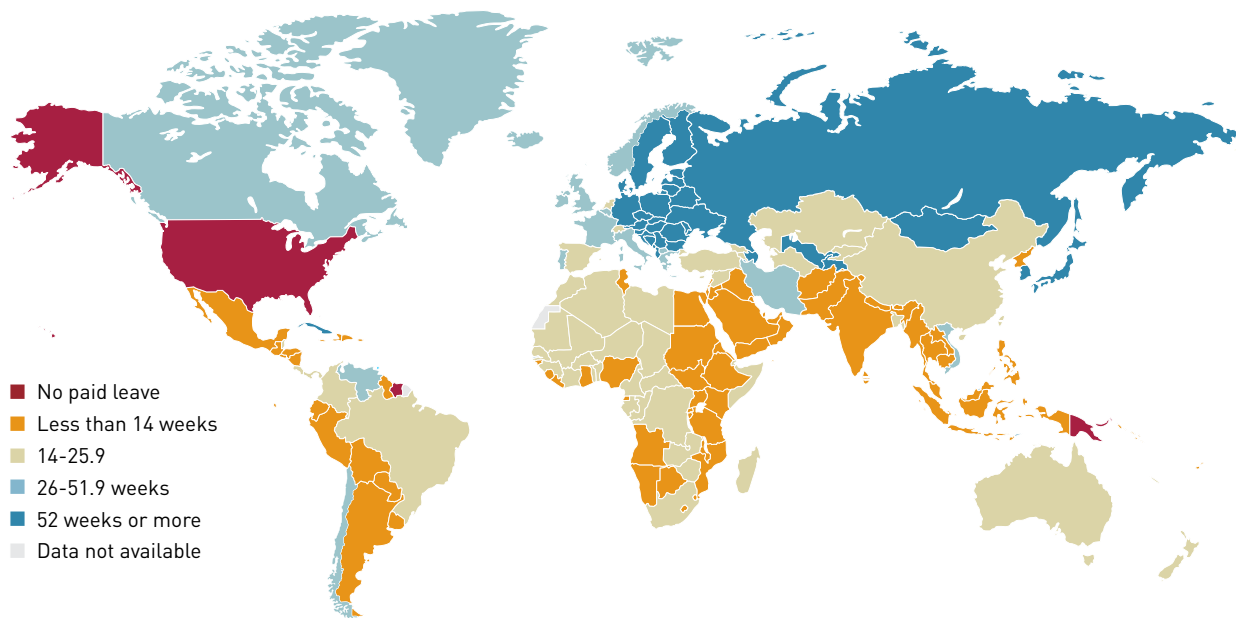
For the foundation, the most important reason for introducing up to 52 weeks of paid time off is that it is good for families. A parent's presence during the first year of a child's life has a positive impact on the health and well-being of both children and parents. The whole family benefits when mothers and fathers have paid time off from work after the birth or adoption of a child. The associated positive outcomes of parental leave include:²

- Babies have higher birth weights and lower rates of mortality.
- Babies are more likely to receive well-baby medical visits and vaccines.
- Mothers breastfeed more often and longer, which is beneficial for babies' short-term and long-term health.
- Mothers and fathers form a strong attachment with their child, which is important for successful development for the child and for the long-term emotional health of both parents and children.

- Fathers become more involved in child-rearing, both during their time off and after they return to work, contributing to more gender-equitable choices and trade-offs within working families. Over time, children show better cognitive achievement, higher test scores, fewer behavior problems, and improved mental health outcomes.
- Fathers are more likely to be satisfied with their lives and are at lower risk for depression and drug abuse, and their partners are healthier, happier, and more satisfied in their relationships.
- Mothers are more likely to return to full-time work when fathers take leave, leading to greater household income over the long term.

Paid leave for mothers and fathers is enormously valuable to families, and by extension, to communities and society overall. Parental leave programs and a work culture with leadership that encourage taking that time are necessary for its success. Offering and supporting parental leave equally for mothers and fathers allows for greater

The U.S. is one of the few countries without mandated paid maternity leave; fewer than half of countries provide paid paternity leave.³



² These findings are built on numerous studies and reported in a variety of articles, including: CNN (Wallace, 2015), TIME (Sifferlin, 2015), The Wall Street Journal (Wojcicki, 2014), Parents (Gates, 2015), Fatherly.com (Gates, 2016), State of America's Fathers (Heilman, 2016), Paternity Leave Policy Brief (U.S. Department of Labor).

³ Paternity Leave Policy Brief (U.S. Department of Labor).



95% of low-wage workers in the U.S. do **not** have the option of taking paid family leave.⁵



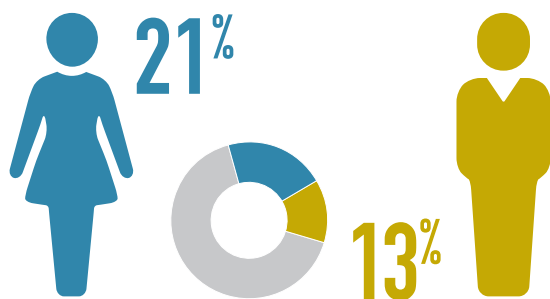
gender equity within the organization, helps families tailor caregiving to their needs, and counters the myth that caregiving is primarily a maternal role.

Paid parental leave increasingly is proving to benefit organizations, too. Benefits that support personal circumstances and help further life goals are a powerful incentive to remain a contributor with an organization.⁴ In many organizations, family leave is paying off with an increase in engagement, productivity, and talent retention.⁵ For example, when Google extended their paid maternity leave from 12 to 18 weeks, they saw a 50% increase in employee retention among women who had babies.⁶ In contrast, insensitivity and lack of “civil organizational behavior”—such as showing little support for new parents—can “cause employees to lose focus, be less engaged, and have health problems,” none of which are good for individuals or organizations.⁷

With extended leave, parents have more time to build the network, relationships, and support systems they will need (regular and back-up child care, new parent groups, etc.) when they return to work. Parents also return to work with appreciation of their time with their child and of the contributions of others who supported or filled in for them. Many are refreshed and return to work with renewed commitment to their careers, their colleagues, and to their work.



25% of women in the U.S. return to work fewer than **10 days** after giving birth.⁸



21% of U.S. women and 13% of U.S. men who took parental leave **received pay**.⁹



38% of men in the U.S. report **no option** to take paternity leave, paid or unpaid.¹⁰

⁴ These findings are built on numerous studies and reported in a variety of articles, including: CNN (Wallace, 2015), TIME (Sifferlin, 2015), The Wall Street Journal (Wojcicki, 2014), Parents (Gates, 2015), Fatherly.com (Gates, 2016), State of America's Fathers (Heilman, 2016), Paternity Leave Policy Brief (U.S. Department of Labor).

⁵ Wojcicki, 2014.

⁶ Wojcicki, 2014.

⁷ Bronznick, 2016.

⁸ Wojcicki, 2014.

⁹ Paternity Leave Policy Brief (U.S. Department of Labor).

¹⁰ Matos, 2016.

FILLING THE GAP: HOW TO STAFF AND PLAN

The foundation operates in a complex and rapidly changing environment, with more than 1,500 employees based in eight offices globally, supporting work in more than 100 countries. Staffing decisions are integral to success. Many colleagues possess unique and specialized skills that are often difficult to replace. The foundation's previous parental leave benefit enabled up to three months of paid leave. With a history of 65 to 80 employees participating in leave programs annually, we had some experience in how to get work done while employees were on leave, but backfilling roles for up to 52 weeks required an entirely different process.

But, we did not want to delay the change until we had the details ironed out. The announcement to offer extended parental leave was made in October 2015. Parents already on leave and those with children less than a year old were allowed to extend their time off up to the child's first birthday.

Very quickly, the Human Resources (HR) team set a direction for backfilling for parents on leave. The approach was guided by several factors:

- *Minimal Disruption.* How will we meet the obligations of the role being vacated in the best possible way with the least possible disturbance to other work or roles?
- *Proactive People Managers.* How will managers be equipped to navigate and influence effective solutions?



- *Employee Development.* How can a loss of one person for up to one year create an opportunity for others to learn and grow through experience?
- *Knowledge and Talent Retention.* How will we maintain access to—or transfer—employee knowledge and expertise?
- *Talent Exposure.* How will we utilize talent across the foundation, not just within existing teams or functions?

We also expected managers and employees to collaborate and find innovative solutions that would generate the most benefit—the answers would not come from HR alone. In doing so, we hoped to strengthen the foundation's collective talent management muscle and gain deeper involvement and ownership from managers. To that end, backfill processes could not be overly rigid. We gave managers guidelines, based on three steps:

1. **Define the work.** The process for managers, employees, and HR staff begins with defining the work by the tasks and business need—not by the person currently in the role. This involves honest and thoughtful conversation with the manager and employee, but also others on the team or in interdependent roles. Key questions include: What are work priorities, goals, and critical deadlines? What are the components of the work? What are the tasks, the knowledge, and the relationships that are most essential? What are the least pressing? What components of the work are the most specialized? What is more generalized?

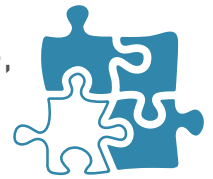
One team recognized that the content of the work was more important than the location of the person performing the role in a backfill capacity. The manager worked with a colleague within a grantee organization who could take on the assignment for 12 months. While this may not be a frequently-used solution, it shows how creative thinking about a role and the components of the work are important to resolving the challenge of backfilling for an employee on leave.

¹¹ Bronznick, 2016.

2. **Consider the options.** Once the work has been defined, managers can fill the role in a variety of ways. There is no single best approach.

- **Redistribute work.** Backfill the role in component parts. Can one piece go on hold? Other aspects to several different team members? Could a junior employee step up and their role backfilled more easily? Shifting and sharing the work within a team is helpful for maintaining relationships or for very specific content expertise. Feasibility may be dependent on workload and other staffing considerations. Redistribution could also involve shifting elements of work to a partner organization or grantee, or bringing in a consultant to handle a project. A manager may supplement the team by bringing in a temporary employee to “float” and fill-in as needed as the team reconfigures roles and responsibilities.
- **Find an internal backfill.** Recruit from within the foundation to fill the role as an interim assignment. Could talent from other groups provide knowledge and skills? For whom could this be a valuable developmental experience? How could a win-win scenario be created to meet the current need and provide opportunity for colleagues? Filling roles with internal talent is also helpful when foundation knowledge, systems access, and existing relationships are an advantage.
- **Bring in alumni.** Hire former foundation employees or interns as limited-term employees for the duration of the assignment. The

More than 80% of the time, U.S. employees are **not** replaced when on leave.¹¹



foundation has an active alumni network that creates a pool of excellent backfill candidates. Alumni are great for highly specialized roles and, again, foundation knowledge is often an advantage. They may already have relationships within the hiring manager’s team, or with the foundation’s external partners. They may have process or subject-matter expertise that is difficult to identify and recruit. And, they bring additional skills and new perspective back into the foundation, having had experiences working and leading in different organizations.

- **Hire temporary external talent.** Recruit outside candidates as limited-term employees, or in contract roles filled by the foundation’s partner recruiting/temporary agency. This option is available when positions cannot be filled internally or from the alumni network. Finding outside talent and on-boarding them is usually more time consuming and often the most expensive solution. Even so, it is an important option. Sometimes candidates with valued skills have already been identified, but a full-time role is not open. Or, roles that are less specific to the foundation, such as operations, facilities, IT or administration, may also be filled by external talent fairly easily.

4 WAYS TO FILL THE GAP

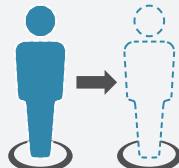
1

Redistribute
Work



2

Find an Internal
Backfill



3

Bring in
Alumni



4

Hire Temporary
External Talent



One leader was trying to plan for multiple parental leaves, along with other staffing challenges, within a single department. The solution was to hire a floater position that could rotate across vacancies of a similar level as they became available, with the individual earning valuable experience that could then be reinvested back into the team's core work.

- 3. Match the talent.** Finding the right talent to meet the need starts with identifying the people who are closest to the work. Where does the potential talent with the sector expertise and organizational ability reside? We thought of it as a series of concentric circles. The solutions closest to the center would likely have the highest number of candidates with the necessary and applicable knowledge and competencies, with the barrier to implementation being the lowest. The degree to which the most important roles

could be filled through avenues closest to the work would drive program success. Other considerations include an individual's interest and readiness for developmental opportunities. Both stretch assignments (when employees take on responsibilities at a level higher than their current role) and lateral movement (when employees function in their same role, but in a different team) are considered valuable.

One small team was faced with an immediate need to find solutions, as several colleagues would be extending their leave. An employee who had been lending a hand and understood the work was given an official role in the department for six months. This solidified the person's responsibilities, empowered them to move the work forward, and provided a development opportunity as well.



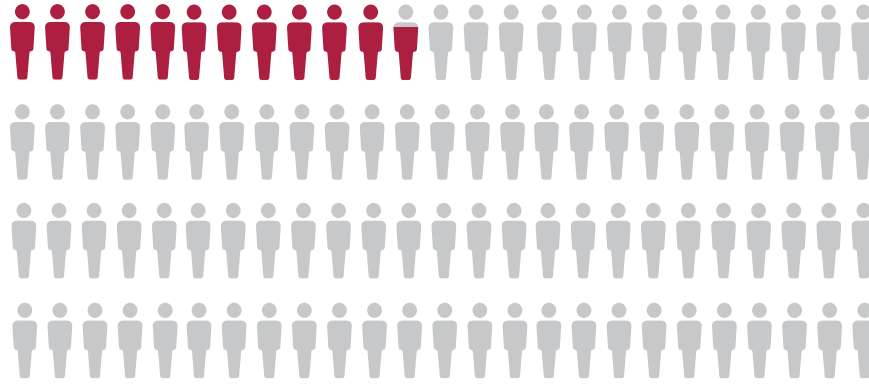
PARENTAL LEAVE BY THE NUMBERS

Since the program launched, 222 parents have participated in the leave program. These employees come from across all divisions, all regions, and all

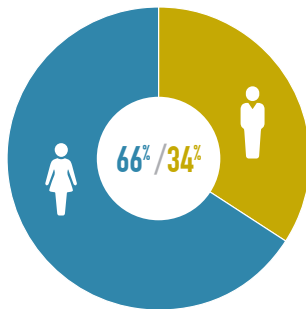
levels (except for our 12-person Executive Leadership Team) and reflect the broader employee population.



222 of 1546 employees (14%) have participated in the leave program.



Foundation employees **overall** are 66% female and 34% male.



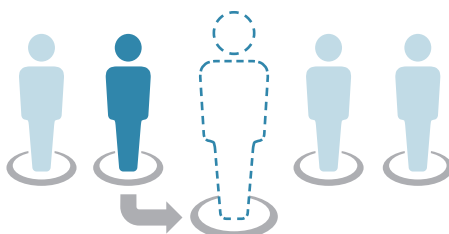
Those who have taken paid leave at the foundation are **71% women** and **29% men**.



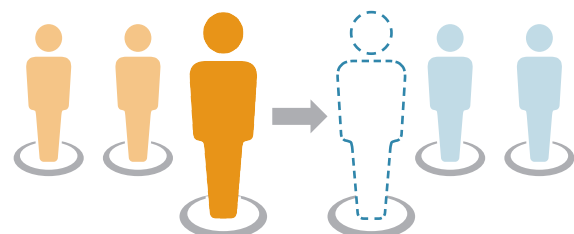
Currently, 34% of backfill roles are filled with internal candidates. In over half of these cases, employees take on responsibilities at a higher level than their current role, enabling them to stretch and grow. In others,

employees are functioning in the same role but in a different team. This gives them broader exposure and helps spread best practices.

Stretch Assignments

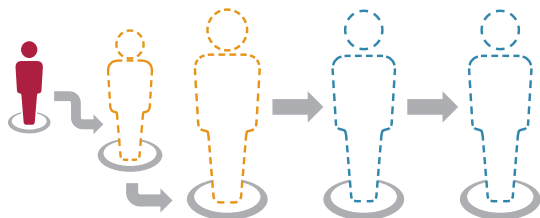


Lateral Movement



Backfilling parents on leave is not always a one-to-one replacement. In many cases, when an internal employee takes on a backfill assignment,

Opportunity Domino Effect



multiple development opportunities are created (another employee backfills that employee's open role, and so on).

This domino effect creates multiple opportunities for employees to try out different roles.

We believe this cross-pollination not only benefits the employees, but also benefits the organization as a whole, helping us to:

- Share knowledge and ideas
- Expand relationships and informal networks
- Strengthen our desired culture of collaboration

Managers acknowledge the complexity of what is required. Yet, our survey of hiring managers shows our process is working.

- 130 managers have been involved in supporting and guiding parents; supporting and managing teams with parents on leave; and identifying, transitioning, and mentoring backfill employees.
- 100% of hiring managers are satisfied or very satisfied with the dedicated recruiting support for both internal and external backfills.



MANAGING TRANSITIONS

Supporting Parents and Backfill Employees

Managers play a central role in making parental leave work for both families and for the foundation. In their implementation of the parental leave program, managers have clear responsibilities:

To employees and their teams:

- Allocate financial and people resources to their highest and best use, viewing them as fungible across teams and the foundation as a whole.
- Provide leadership and model behaviors consistent with our desired culture.
- Resource the work adequately.
- Ensure a safe and transparent environment for communication about what is/not working, focused on collaboration.

To new parents:

- Celebrate with employees that their families are growing.
- Support and encourage parents to take up to 52 weeks of leave. This is to maximize both goals of the program: to allow parents to care for and bond with their children for the full year, and to provide developmental opportunities for other employees. It is often less disruptive for the team when a role is backfilled for a full year rather than for a shorter amount of time.
- Plan for transitioning the work before leave, expecting parents to completely disconnect from work while on leave—including not reading email or answering questions. Gain a shared understanding of the scope of work, the priorities, and the approach. Confirm critical deadlines, identify stakeholders and collaborators, and discuss potential ways to support the work and/or provide development for colleagues. Create a plan to document work during the transition, the leave, and upon return from leave.

- Be flexible and supportive during the transition back to work, while addressing business needs. Returning to work and transitioning to another form of child care can be a big adjustment to make for parents. Provide flexible working arrangements for the first few weeks if possible and be attentive to re-entry needs during the first 30 days.
- Offer career coaching and advocacy. Parents can perceive taking time off as slowing down their career in the short-term. When managers and parents engage in conversations and coaching about career opportunities, we expect that taking leave won't have a long-term negative impact on their career trajectory.

To backfill employees taking leave:

- Follow a fair and transparent process for selection, including promoting new openings to all employees via the internal job link. Interested employees first receive their manager's approval, then apply to the job.
- Develop a comprehensive onboarding and training plan. To agree upon transition timing and process, hiring managers need to talk with the backfill employee as well as their current manager.
- Provide clear goals, regular performance feedback, and meaningful career development experiences and coaching. The backfill employee took this role to develop in their career. Set up one-on-one meetings to have conversations about their career, capabilities, contributions, and connections throughout the assignment.
- Partner with the donor manager to ensure smooth transitions, career advocacy, and continued progress on development goals. Debrief at the end of the assignment, and celebrate accomplishments.

THE FEEDBACK

What Parents Are Saying

They Are Deeply Appreciative of Their Time Away

"Being on leave was amazing. I loved it, in a way that I didn't expect to love it. Then, I also loved coming back to work when the leave was up ... Once I made the decision [to take a year of leave], I sort of threw myself into it ... Having that choice was so empowering an incredible opportunity and gift."

"The process of being on leave as a first-time parent is hard to put into words. It's chaotic and joyful and exhausting and rewarding, and it was one of the most meaningful times in my life ..."

"One of the most rewarding things about being a stay-at-home dad is the opportunity to establish and build a bond with your child. What was most surprising to me as a dad while on parental leave was the experience and depth of love that I discovered for my child. It makes you feel so vulnerable, but yet it makes you feel so alive."

"It's an option and it's a flexible option. For our family, we really liked being able to do some part-time, some changing around. There was a lot of flexibility in the program."

"It's a gift I never could have imagined."

"The program was amazing; for me what made it possible was support of the colleagues and culture here ... the culture here makes all the difference in the world ... I'm really grateful that people encouraged me to take the full time."

They Need Support When They Return to Work

"I was glad to have two weeks of overlap with my backfill to really understand what was happening with our work and what had changed over the last year. It was hard, however, to navigate the changes that had happened over the last year."

"[I had] understanding by my manager and teammates that there is some 're-onboarding' required after being on leave for a year and planning for this as part of my transition back."

"It was a very strange feeling coming back to work after being gone a year to working with new people, having a new manager and to the things that have changed ... I struggled with being a long-term employee but at the same time feeling like I was being viewed as a new employee to those who didn't know me before."

They Are Generally Positive About Being Back

"Being away for a year helped with my workload because the situation forced other people on my team to take over some of my responsibilities, which effectively accelerated their progress and my ability to delegate. It's enabled me to come back and take up some of what I did before but also operate at a higher level. We can also balance workload better as a team, because we have the experience of covering for each other. I also feel like I bring new perspective and efficiency to my role having been away for a year. I am able to see some things from different angles now."

"The process of returning for me was challenging in some ways—I moved to another team and was stepping into another role ... It was also exciting because it created a new chapter to my career rather than just a continuation of an existing role."

"I feel more grounded at work today because I had time to take care of myself and my family for a year."

What Backfill Employees Are Saying

"I filled in for a role for someone who was the backfill for someone on parental leave, someone still in the building ... [I had the] great opportunity

to learn from her, see how she thinks ... It's been something of a practical PhD for me ... a professional advancement opportunity."

What Managers Are Saying

"It made me feel good in a very concrete way as how this can be a net good for people who are out with their families and the people who are internal, the backfills ... that we can actually make it work well, even with high volumes of people ... that in the end, will help make our work better by giving more exposure, giving more skills across the foundation."

"It does take a lot of work to engineer the moves. The most amazing thing is to use this as an opportunity to get people into new positions and think about their development, etc., but it does take a lot of time."

"It was a crystalline opportunity to take a look at what your colleagues do really well ... It was OK to talk about it being a challenge; it was lucky challenge."

"Don't be daunted by the complexity that it creates. It certainly created complexities for us, there are lots of moving parts. See it as not only an opportunity to allow a family member the incredible opportunity to spend a year with a new child, but also see the opportunities for your team members to explore new skills and new roles. Be flexible about that, be creative about that. Don't be afraid of it."



IMPROVING THE PROCESS: RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Although our parental leave program is relatively new, we have learned much. We have worked with managers and employees from a cross-section of teams and roles to orchestrate creative solutions to ensure the most essential work is handled skillfully while parents are on leave. We have listened to diverse voices, addressed a range of needs, and developed a variety of solutions. Some of our lessons learned include:

- **Include the right people, early on, every time.** In working with specific leave situations, ensure appropriate colleagues are involved early. Different perspectives are needed to define the work, identify what is required of the backfill candidate, and to provide advice on what is possible, given program guidelines. Involving the right people early on also helps in the smooth transition of work when the employee's leave begins.
- **Recognize which positions are replicable versus unique.** Find the patterns or categories of work that could be more quickly or easily filled—and adjust the process or options accordingly. We realized that operations roles (e.g., Finance, HR, IT) are easier to backfill because candidates are more readily available in the market; we decided short-term placement agencies were a source for interim talent for these roles if internal talent was not readily available. In contrast, foundation alumni are ideal for roles that are highly specialized or unique to the foundation (e.g., grantee-relations and program strategy work related to global vaccine development and delivery, or K-12 education in the U.S.).
- **Empower managers and support employees.** Strike a balance of empowering, light-touch processes and ensuring managers and colleagues feel supported and accountable to achieve a solution. Traditional communication to employees and managers is important. We also found managers wanted guidance on how to hold conversations with employees who are planning to take leave and with those who were interested in backfilling. We created simple materials to help managers prepare for these conversations. At the same time, the foundation was shifting to

a conversation-based approach to performance management for all employees. This reinforced the expectation that managers and employees have regular conversations about their career and next steps, which is especially valued by returning parents. We found they needed significant support navigating their careers and roles, and managers should expect to be highly engaged with parents as they return from leave.

- **Create well-defined processes and communication around internal movement.** The HR teams managing benefits, talent, and recruiting need to coordinate and communicate as one—and provide greater transparency about the internal talent pool across the organization. Managers and employees need clear guidance about backfill processes and expectations. Easy access to information about open backfill positions and clear employee communication about parental leave are needed. We updated and improved our HR information system, aligned dedicated recruiting resources to help support the backfill process, and increased foundation-wide awareness of interim/backfill opportunities through posting and links on the foundation's intranet. Employees are learning to think critically about which roles represent a good stretch to learn new content or skills, while considering how their existing abilities or knowledge would be beneficial in an interim role.



- **Realize perfection is not needed for launch.**

Waiting for all the details of the program to be ironed out will slow down launch. There is never a perfect time to start. We found what worked for our organization by only experimenting and adapting. Unexpected questions and scenarios arose, and they were often indicators of how to improve the program. As we responded to parents, managers, and other employees, decisions for one situation were often good for everyone and were added to our guidelines and processes. For example, we updated a backfill employee's title to reflect the interim role, creating clarity for internal and external colleagues seeking information or decisions. Another example: If the parent started leave on the day their child was born, the end of 52 weeks is their child's first birthday; we have since adjusted the leave duration to 366 days (instead of 365 days), providing parents the flexibility to celebrate their child's first birthday before returning to work.

- **Build on the culture.** On many levels, this is the most influential element that can impact the success of filling parental leave vacancies. The degree to which colleagues feel comfortable discussing their career interests with their managers and a commitment from the foundation to developing talent from within are important cultural elements contributing to success. Initially, some managers were hesitant to backfill internal talent from outside their teams—feeling guilty about potentially creating problems for another team or manager to solve. As the benefits of employee development and cross-pollination of ideas, knowledge, and networks are experienced across the foundation, the work of backfilling is increasingly viewed as a shared task and shared opportunity for collective impact. Managers are interested in helping other teams find solutions to their talent gaps and know their efforts will be reciprocated. The culture is evolving so managers and employees are having more frequent, open conversations about career journeys and development. This allows opportunities for employee development and cross-team backfills to be identified and supported whenever possible.



PARENTAL LEAVE: A COMMITMENT THAT COUNTS

At the foundation, we know the lasting value of allowing employees the freedom take leave when bringing a new child into the family. We are also confident that our support of families will be a vehicle for growing internal talent, sharing knowledge, retaining employees, and strengthening our culture foundation over the long term.

We also understand many organizations will have factors to consider that are very different than those

of the foundation. The nature of the work and the industry, the organizational structure and culture, the talent management systems, and direct and indirect costs are all considerations in creating an effective parental leave program. Even so, whatever business you are in, we encourage you to think seriously about parental leave and explore ways to overcome challenges and objections.

Based on our experience, we suggest three things:

- 1. Take action.** Start with a commitment to do something to make paid parental leave available and feasible for your employees. You may not be able to jump in with 6 or 12 months of paid time off, but try 8 or 12 weeks. Start with as much as you think your business can handle and expand as you learn. Also, don't over-engineer the plan and delay action. At the foundation, we moved from decision, to announcement, to rollout within three months. Our approach has been to be clear about what we are doing and why it matters, while being flexible and creative in our process and solutions.
- 2. Create benefit for families and for the organization.** Place parental leave in the context of the larger employee experience—both for those taking leave and for those working in new ways or taking on new assignments.
- 3. Stay involved.** Parental leave isn't about launching a program and moving on. It requires more than managers, leaders, and HR functions; all employees need to trust one another, engage in meaningful conversations, and co-create effective processes for collective success.

When employees can thrive both personally and professionally, families, organizations, and society benefit. By offering paid parental leave, employers have the opportunity to lead the way and have a powerful, positive impact.

Parental Leave: Healthier Babies, Resilient Families and Parents Who Thrive Personally and Professionally is one of a series of papers created by the Human Resources function of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The series is designed to communicate our perspectives and the actions we believe in to align people strategies for impact in a global and interdependent world.

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