The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vast need for paid family leave among the American workforce. Currently, only 21 percent of U.S. workers have access to paid leave, stifling our economic potential and undermining the health and economic opportunity of working families. In Ohio, even unpaid leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act is inaccessible for 61 percent of working people.

In the absence of a state or national standard, business and nonprofit leaders have been stepping up to provide paid leave policies to their employees. As places for innovation and forward-thinking, businesses and organizations can serve as leaders in the paid leave space.

Paid family leave has been tied to improved employee retention, job satisfaction, and productivity. Access to paid leave policies also promote economic stability and workforce participation among workers, particularly for women who often play a dual role of caregiver and breadwinner within their households. Paid leave is the right thing to do, and it’s a smart investment in workers, families, and our economy.

At the individual employer level — even for small businesses and nonprofit employers — paid leave can engender workplace loyalty, save on the costs of attrition, and align employer practices with employer values. The details can seem daunting, and that’s where this guide comes in; serving as a resource for your organization as you take steps to update your paid leave policy.
Policy Recommendations

COMPREHENSIVE COVERAGE FOR LEAVE

Provide a comprehensive leave policy that covers **parental** (birth parents, foster parents, and adoptive parents), **caregiving** (care for another individual with a serious health condition), and **personal medical leave** (addressing own health condition).

GENDER NEUTRAL LANGUAGE

Utilize gender-neutral language to provide access to the same coverage of paid leave for employees of all genders, ensuring policies will meet the needs of diverse parents, family structures, and caregivers across the gender spectrum (i.e. parental leave policies should apply equally to moms and dads).

JOB PROTECTION

Ensure job protections, anti-retaliation, and anti-discrimination policies for all individuals who take leave so that employees will utilize the leave policy without fear of retaliation.

ADEQUATE WAGE REPLACEMENT

Policies should allow for adequate wage replacement so that employees are able to take leave without facing economic hardship. If possible, policies should include full wage replacement for the duration of leave.

ACCESSIBLE ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Setting accessible and generous eligibility requirements ensures that employees who need to utilize leave are not left out of the policy.
INCLUSIVE DEFINITION OF FAMILY

Including a broad definition of family in your company’s leave policy to provide inclusive coverage for diverse family structures, including individuals who are “chosen” family to ensure that everyone can give and receive care that is needed.

ADEQUATE LEAVE TIME

Policies should extend adequate leave time for all forms of leave covered under the program to allow for an employee to take the time needed to give or receive care. For reference, the benchmark for public policy is set at 12 weeks of comprehensive leave (allowing an employee to utilize up to 12 week for their parental, family caregiving, and/or personal medical needs), however, child development and labor market research recommends a minimum of six months if possible.

PROVIDE CONTINUAL HEALTH BENEFITS

Maintaining health care benefits is crucial during leave, and the loss or disruption of health care coverage may lead to damaging health outcomes, cause financial stress, or discourage an employee from taking leave.

ALLOW LEAVE TO BE TAKEN INTERMITTENTLY

A policy should also be flexible for unique caregiving and medical needs, allowing for the option of utilizing the leave all at once or on an intermittent schedule as needed.
Along with the above key policy components for crafting a paid family leave policy within your business or nonprofit organization, we recommend the following best practices as you move forward.

- **Talk and listen to your employees:**
  - By engaging in an open conversation with your employees about the leave policy to seek input and feedback, you can better meet their needs and address any gaps in your current policy that are not working.

- **Be consistent and put the policy in writing:**
  - Your company’s leave policy should apply consistently to all employees across the board. When updating or enacting a new policy, it should be available to new talent and current employees, and it should be made available in writing (as part of an updated handbook or benefits package).

- **Plan ahead:**
  - Setting a plan ahead of when employees utilize leave is crucial to ensuring a smooth transition for employees and continuing productivity while members of your team are out on leave. Whether you plan to hire temporary support, pause projects, or shift work to other employees, make sure you create a plan with buy-in from your employees.
  - This planning should also include realistic expectations for when someone returns from leave, allowing for the flexibility and space for them to get back up to speed from when they were out.

- **Engage in public policy advocacy on paid leave:**
  - It is crucial that the voices of business and nonprofit leaders are included in the public policy discussions on paid family leave. Setting state or national standards on paid leave is good for business and levels the playing field for small organizations.
**Additional Resources**

**Fairygodboss**
- **Database of different policies:** A resource listing company policies that are helpful for companies to use as a template

**Geben Communication**
- **Rewrite the Rules:** An initiative started by a small business owner in Columbus to serve as a resource for paid family leave templates

**Innovation Ohio Education Fund**
- **A Guide For Cities and Employers: Determining the Long-Term Savings and Short Term Costs of Paid Parental Leave:** A tool for elected officials and HR professionals to determine the costs of paid parental leave for their business or municipality.
- **IO Analysis: The Benefits of Paid Parental Leave:** This is a report that lays out the state of paid leave in Ohio (from 2015) and the benefits of enacting a policy

**PL+US: Paid Leave for the United States**
- **Paid Leave Workshop:** A workshop tool for employers to determine the cost-analysis of enacting a paid family leave policy, including:
  - Step-by-Step Guide to making a case for paid family leave at your workplace
  - Sample paid leave proposal template
  - Cost Benefit Analysis calculator to help you estimate how much a paid leave policy will actually cost
- **PL+US 2018 Employer Scorecard:** A review of some of the top employers across the country and their paid family leave policies

**The National Partnership for Women & Families**
- **Companies with New or Expanded Paid Leave Policies:** A breakdown of policies of U.S. businesses with paid family leave
- **Fact Sheet: Paid Family and Medical Leave is Good for Business:** This resource makes the business case for enacting paid family and medical leave policies.
The Human Services Chamber of Hamilton County: The Human Service Chamber of Franklin County provides advocacy and professional services for over 130 health and human services nonprofit organizations in the Columbus Region.

Geben Communication: Geben Communication is a communications firm that helps organizations accelerate growth and impact through PR, social media and digital marketing services. In 2016, Geben rolled out their 'Geben Loves Families' Policy, allowing up to 10 weeks of paid parental leave for birthing, non-birthing, and adoptive parents. More recently, Geben updated its policy to include up to 12 weeks of paid parental leave and up to 4 weeks of caregiving leave, as well as an extended bereavement policy.

The Ohio Women’s Public Policy Network: We are a coalition unlike any group in the state. Formed in 2015 as a project of the Innovation Ohio Education Fund, we bring together nearly 40 partners to collaboratively advocate for public policy solutions that build economic opportunity for women and their families.