

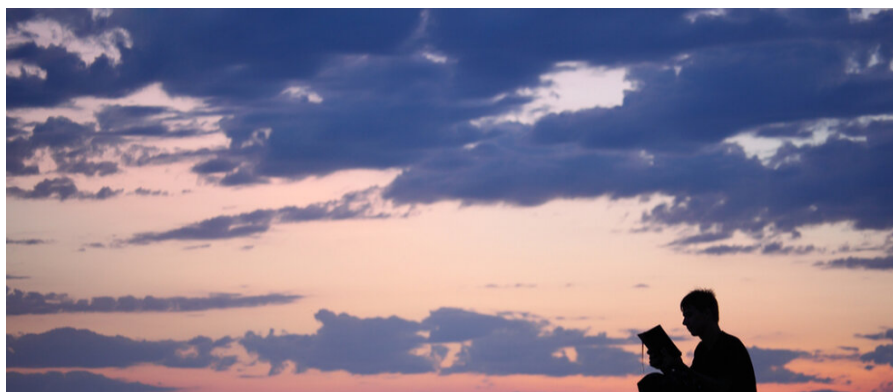
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Need a Break? Here's the (Short) List of Funders Who Back Sabbaticals for Nonprofit Leaders

Dawn Wolfe



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While reporting our [recent story](#) on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on both the need for and availability of funding for sabbaticals, I couldn't help but wonder: How many funders are out there making it possible for nonprofit leaders to take a real break from their stressful positions? And who and where are they?

A search of available resources, including Candid, Google, and other sabbatical funders, yielded a less-than-encouraging answer. Sabbatical champion the **Durfee Foundation** and a few of the other funders I spoke with may be seeing a slight uptick in contacts from their peers exploring sabbatical funding as an option, but right now, the pickings remain slim. I was able to find 14 funders that seemed to have offered funding for sabbaticals at some point. Out of these candidates:

- Eight currently offer programs that we could confirm.
- Three programs had been closed, paused, and in one case, ended when the sponsoring organization merged with another.
- Two didn't respond.
- One responded to say they do not, in fact, offer sabbaticals.
- And, perhaps ironically, a contact at one of the

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Current sabbatical offerings are place-based and leadership-focused

In addition to the sparse number of offerings overall, to qualify for a sabbatical, one needs to work in the right location and for the right kind of organization. Non-leadership staff need not apply, and a few sabbatical funders only accept nominations, not applications, for their programs. Further, two funders —Boston's **Barr Foundation** and the **Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust** in Phoenix—provide sabbaticals as part of longer-term fellowships.

When it comes to location requirements, some sabbatical funders have statewide reach. The **Rasmuson Foundation** in Alaska, for example, requires applicants (and nominees; they accept both) to have been a resident of that state for at least five years. **California's O2 Initiatives**, on the other hand, limits its program's geographic reach to nonprofit executive directors of organizations headquartered in San Francisco, Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

The sabbatical program RIP list

At least two former sabbatical programs are definitively dead. The Alston/Bannerman Fellowship Program, once the granddaddy of all sabbatical programs, is one of them. Alston/Bannerman, launched in 1988 to grant \$25,000 for three-month sabbaticals to nonprofit activists of color, first became part of the Center for Social Inclusion in 2008. The

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Forward does, however, offer sabbaticals to its own staff and has a [Fellows program](#).

In D.C., the Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation ran a trial sabbatical program, but that ended in 2018.

Another sabbatical program may be on life support. The **California Wellness Foundation** told me they have paused their program and that “we hope to engage with our grantees to find out what they would find helpful.” Given the [special kind of burnout](#) so many are experiencing courtesy of COVID and other emergencies of the past year and counting, you can imagine what Cal Wellness’ grantees would *like* to say during that engagement. We hope to see that program back on its feet.

How much money are we talking about?

Many of the funders that provide sabbaticals include funding, not just for leaders themselves to get away, but to bolster the needs of the interim staff left behind. Amounts available to leaders range from \$20,000 to \$95,000 depending on the awardees’ salaries. In other words, if you are one of the few people in the right place who is eligible for one of the limited sabbatical slots available, you should be able not just to rest, but recreate a bit, as well.

Upcoming sabbatical application deadlines

If you’re a nonprofit leader in search of a sabbatical, two funders are accepting applications right now, and others will be available in the future.

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- **The Colorado Health Foundation:** If you and your nonprofit are both located in Colorado, this funder provides a total of up to \$95,000, divided between the leader who will be away and the interim staff who will need to step up. [Applications for this program](#) are open until January 31, 2022.
- **The Rasmuson Foundation:** Looking further west (and *much* further north), this Alaska funder is offering up to \$40,000 to selected “tribal executives and nonprofit CEOs/executive directors with time away from the office for rest and personal renewal.” The deadline for this one is this September 15.

Looking ahead, the **Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation** in North Carolina told me that they will open [their application process](#) later this fall.

O2 Initiatives in California is [ramping theirs up](#) in June 2022.

The Clare Rose Sabbatical Program will reopen applications in 2023, with a January 30 deadline. Before that, they'll have to support the existing awardees whose sabbaticals were interrupted by COVID—including one who had to be evacuated from Spain just as his time away was getting started.

And don't forget the **Durfee Foundation**, one of the leading funders of sabbaticals, with a program that dates back to 1997. Durfee awards \$50,000 to awardees and \$10,000 to organizations to support

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Other Programs:

While **The Healing Trust** in Nashville does offer \$20,000 in sabbatical funding to organizations that have already received funding from the trust, the funder's website says that it has temporarily paused its grantmaking process as Q3 and Q4 grants have already been approved.

Candid lists California's **S.H. Cowell Foundation** as a sabbatical funder, but we weren't able to confirm that's the case.

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