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# WILD FOREVER FUTURE CAMPAIGN

BRIEFING PAPER

## Rejuvenation & Reflection: A Sabbatical Program for Wilderness Advocates

We are not slowing down a force that inevitably will destroy all the wilderness there is. We are generating another force, never to be wholly spent, that renewed generation after generation will be always effective in preserving wilderness. We are not fighting progress. We are making it. We are working for a wilderness forever.

**HOWARD ZAHNISER, 1961**

*Author of the Wilderness Act*

# Rejuvenation & Reflection: A Sabbatical Program for Wilderness Advocates

*observations and recommendations provided by Anne M. McCaw*

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# Introduction

As part of a comprehensive training and mentoring program, the Wilderness Support Center of The Wilderness Society is contemplating the creation of sabbatical program for long-time wilderness advocates. Planning is in an early stage, but the essence of the initiative is to provide a unique professional growth opportunity to veterans of the movement. For some period of time yet to be determined, these leaders will step out of their current role to: (1) discuss the movement as a whole with peers and other experts; (2) research emerging trends, opportunities, and challenges in public land protection; and, (3) ultimately conceptualize new approaches to advance the movement.

In order to assist the Wilderness Support Center to create a framework for this sabbatical program, I have conducted a shallow scan of sabbatical programs across various sectors, including the religious community, corporate world, nonprofit organizations, and universities. Provided in this paper is an overview of different kinds of sabbatical programs (sprinkled with specific examples), a brief discussion of issues to consider in building the program, and recommendations for a structure for the Wilderness Support Center's initiative.

## Types of Professional Sabbatical Programs

The fundamental goal of a sabbatical is to allow professionals to leave their current positions for a period of time to rejuvenate, reflect, and pursue activities that they otherwise cannot within the confines of their job. Sabbaticals are usually no less than four weeks in length and can last as long as 18 months. They are widely offered by religious institutions and universities and less commonly in the corporate and nonprofit sectors. As you can imagine, the structure and specific objectives of sabbaticals vary, depending on the needs of the institution offering them. The following are the basic categories of sabbatical programs.

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### *Personal renewal*

McDonald's was the first corporation to embrace the idea that professionals of long standing within the company need a break from their jobs for more than two weeks of vacation. So in the 1960s, they began to offer employees who had worked with the company for more than 10 years up to eight weeks of paid leave to do as they pleased. Since then, many companies offer unstructured, paid sabbaticals that allow employees to rest. There are no strings attached; employees take the time off and then come back to their positions at the end of the sabbatical. Corporations and companies known for their high-pressure environments – law firms, financial institutions, and consulting firms especially – often offer sabbaticals, usually to employees who have worked for seven to ten years with the company.

The foundation community and some nonprofit organizations are just now embracing the idea of restful sabbaticals for nonprofit leaders. The Rasmussen Foundation offers up to \$30,000 to allow a nonprofit leader in Alaska to take a six-month paid leave of absence. The California Wellness Foundation offers executives from California-based nonprofit groups working on health issues a \$30,000 grant for six months of paid leave. In addition, the foundation offers up to \$5,000 to provide professional development assistance to employees who will step in to new roles and responsibilities as the executive leaves.

## *Community service*

Xerox is the pioneer of this kind of sabbatical, where employees take paid leave to work for a nonprofit organization. Through its Service Learning Program – first established in the 1970s – Xerox provides full pay and benefits to select employees to work up to one year for a nonprofit of their choice. Cisco Systems and Goldman Sachs offer similar programs. Cisco Systems offers selected employees two-thirds pay to work for a nonprofit organization for a year. Through its Public Service Program, Goldman Sachs grants executives a year-long sabbatical to assist a social services organization anywhere in the world. The United Way offers a similar opportunity to its corporate partners, linking corporate executives into community service through its Loaned Executive Program. Corporate partners lend their executives for a period of months to help United Way run its solicitation program.

## *Research*

Nearly every university in the country offers faculty the opportunity to take some time away from their teaching to pursue research in their field of expertise. Faculty must have taught continuously for some period of years, usually six, to qualify for a paid sabbatical of either a semester or a year. Usually, universities offer reduced pay for a year-long sabbatical. Some universities (including the most prestigious, like Cornell, Harvard, and Yale) automatically grant a sabbatical every seventh year of service. At other universities, such as the University of Southern California, the onus is on the faculty member to develop a research proposal that is evaluated by a review committee. Faculty must outline their research project, explain the benefits to the university and to the faculty member's professional growth, and the deliverable (often a paper or book) of the research. Upon return, faculty members usually submit a report on their sabbatical activities.

Corporations may also offer research sabbaticals, especially in industries where innovation is a core value, service, and product. Alexander Interactive – a web design and engineering firm – offers its employees a mini-sabbatical of up to three weeks to work on a computer engineering projects. Hallmark, the greeting card company, offers an intensive research sabbatical, putting together small teams to research a social trend for three to six months. The premise is that these research projects nurture a deeper level of creativity among the company's graphic artists and writers and helps the company internalize cultural trends. For example, in the mid-1990s a team of writers and designers from Hallmark explored the role of ethnic identity in society. They traveled to different ethnic neighborhoods in major cities, attended folk festivals, and discussed the issue with experts. Upon completion of these sabbaticals – termed "rotations" at Hallmark, teams must present findings back to their peers and managers in the form of videos and designs.

## *Personal reflection*

Religious institutions – both congregations and supporting organizations – consider it an imperative to provide ministers, pastors, rabbis, and lay people who have emerged as leaders in their community periods of time to reflect and meditate. Thus, there are a wide variety of sabbatical programs exclusively for this purpose. While allowing time alone, these sabbaticals are somewhat more structured. Sabbatical participants usually take up residence at a retreat center or educational facility, where they are offered a range of different classes and group discussions, followed by periods of contemplation. The Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University offers a residential sabbatical program for up to 25 people at a time over a semester. It begins with a spiritual retreat, followed by group discussions and calls to prayer. Participants choose from a wide range of workshops and classes throughout the semester. They also gather for social events and field trips. The Lilly Endowment offers a \$45,000 grant for this kind of reflective, spiritual sabbatical at an academic institution. To be eligible you must be a theologian with a Master's Degree or Ph.D.

There are also spiritual retreat centers sprinkled across the country that offer structured sabbatical programs for personal reflection. The onus is placed on the participant to pay their way for their residency and classes. The Redemptorist Center of Renewal is located in the Sonoran Desert, and centers its seven-week sabbatical program around its environment. Residents are given private rooms, but have no television or telephone. They attend two-hour workshops in the morning, Monday through Friday, but time is otherwise unscheduled, other than meals. Classes focus on the religious and restorative history and nature of the desert. The cost is \$7,000 for seven weeks.

Unstructured sabbatical programs that many corporations offer are meant to provide an opportunity for personal reflection, although that is not a requirement. Wells Fargo Personal Leave Program is slightly more structured, where employees who have worked for the company for ten years apply for three months of paid leave to pursue an activity for personal growth, but they must demonstrate an active interest in that activity prior to the sabbatical. Employees must also submit an application for the sabbatical that is reviewed by a committee assembled by the human resources department.

## *Professional development*

Many teaching institutions offer paid leave to pursue professional development activities, most often coursework that will expand skill sets. Public school districts have established these kinds of sabbaticals in order for teachers to obtain or maintain their teaching credentials or to prepare teachers for administrative positions. For example, the Mississippi legislature created a paid, one-year sabbatical program for selected teachers to enroll in a full-time training program for administrators. Sabbatical candidates complete coursework at an approved university and also engage in an administrative internship.

Like its research sabbatical, Hallmark offers a unique opportunity for professional development. Teams of ten people are given four months to pursue a new artistic skill, from glassblowing to ceramics to engraving to embroidery. Hallmark built a separate facility next to its headquarters, called its Innovation Center, with numerous art studios to facilitate these artistic explorations.

## *Idea exchange*

Finally, universities and think tanks have established partnerships with corporations, nonprofits, and other educational organizations to create exchange programs, where faculty of one institution collaborates with executives or other experts on research or implementation of an innovative program. These kinds of exchanges are common in the science and engineering. Stanford University offers a residential sabbatical through its Global Climate and Energy project for engineers and scientists around the world involved in energy-related research. For a semester, sabbatical candidates teach at Stanford and collaborate with the project's scientists. The Filene Research Institute – a think tank devoted to fostering innovation in the credit union market – brings in professionals from credit unions to implement new projects focused on strengthening the industry. For example, an academic collaborated with the think tank's staff to create initiatives to attract people under 30 to enroll with credit unions.

# What to Consider When Establishing a Sabbatical Program

Beyond rejuvenation for the overworked, there are a myriad of benefits of a sabbatical program, especially for a nonprofit organization. There are, however, pitfalls as well, especially given the limited resources of nonprofits. Based on my research, I suggest that the Wilderness Support Center take the following into consideration in planning its sabbatical program:

- **Benefits will be manifold for conservation groups and the movement, especially if The Wilderness Support Center recruits executive directors for its sabbatical program.** According to The Chronicle of Philanthropy – which profiled sabbatical programs for nonprofit executives – sabbatical programs not only help an executive director recover from burnout and approach their jobs with a new perspective, but they also provide a professional development opportunity for the staff that take on new leadership responsibilities. The executive director may walk back into a fundamentally different role that allows them more creativity. Moreover, the organization begins a plan for succession.
- **A sabbatical program provides a unique opportunity for collaboration and partnership.** Research and exchange sabbaticals allow experts to pursue partnerships that they might not have time to otherwise, or conceptualize partnerships that they simply would not have even considered if they didn't step out of their current roles to reflect on their work. The Wilderness Support Center should consider these newly formed partnerships as a major asset created by a research sabbatical and look to cultivate unusual partnership with academics, social entrepreneurs, business and religious leaders, among others.
- **Sabbaticals for nonprofit leaders are more successful if resources are available to assist staff in filling the leadership gap at the organization.** Unlike corporations or universities, most nonprofit organizations do not have the capacity to immediately fill in for its experts and leaders. So a sabbatical program can either drain an organization of its institutional knowledge and key spokespeople or put a huge burden on already over-worked staff. Moreover, nonprofit executives on sabbatical are often called back into service if no plan is put in place to fill the leadership gap, thereby defeating the purpose of the sabbatical. In planning a sabbatical for nonprofit professionals, the Wilderness Support Center needs to put time and resources into developing the transition of wilderness advocates into a sabbatical.
- **Long-time activists will need some guidance to push them out of their comfort zones, to reflect, evaluate, and consider new directions.** Given the character of advocates and the nature of their work, wilderness activists will need additional guidance to step away from their reflexive stance of acting and reacting. A facilitated retreat at the beginning of the sabbatical would be of enormous benefit. The retreat could allow advocates to discuss and re-assess core values of the movement, provide tools for brainstorming and research, as well as help establish research partnerships.
- **Thoughtful project proposals are crucial to ensuring the success of a research sabbatical.** A proposal development process – where wilderness advocates submit a detailed research plan – confirms a commitment to the research and also offers a road map for completion. The plan should detail why the research is of benefit to the sabbatical candidate, as well as to the wilderness movement. It should also detail some kind of deliverable, whether a position paper, a campaign plan, or a memorandum of understanding between partners. At the very minimum, sabbatical participants must develop presentations of their research findings.
- **A process for implementing ideas, strategies, and recommendations should be a part of a sabbatical program focused on research and idea generation.** The Wilderness Support Center should work with foundations, sabbatical participants, and partner organizations to apply research and put ideas into action. The Center may want to consider creating a working group of conservation organizations and foundations focused exclusively on implementation.

# A Potential Sabbatical Model

The Wilderness Support Center is proposing a research sabbatical to a group of conservation leaders who are not necessarily engaged in research on a regular basis. This new sabbatical program also offers a rare and unique opportunity for professional growth for more experienced advocates. I therefore suggest that the Wilderness Support Center create a more structured sabbatical than that implemented at most universities.

A potential model is the one offered by the Barr Foundation for its fellows, who are selected leaders from nonprofit organizations in the greater Boston area. Over three years, these leaders engage in learning activities designed to encourage reflection, develop a peer learning network, and foster creative thinking. The program includes a three-month sabbatical at the beginning of the fellowship. The following is a description of the sabbatical from the Barr Foundation's website ([http://www.barrfoundation.org/fellows/fellows\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=376197](http://www.barrfoundation.org/fellows/fellows_show.htm?doc_id=376197)):

“A three-month sabbatical anchors the three-year [fellowship] program. Fellows spend the first two weeks of their sabbaticals on a trip to the Global South organized by the Berkana Institute. The trip is structured to immerse Boston's leaders as a group in an entirely different learning context where Fellows are free to think differently. They also build new networks and come to better understand the perspectives of some of Boston's immigrant populations.

After the two-week trip, Fellows have the option of continuing their travel independently or in pairs by partnering with an Ashoka social entrepreneur working in the Global South. This is a chance for Barr Fellows to exchange ideas with emergent leaders working on similar issues in radically different environments. Fellows who do not choose to extend their travel have access to a limited pool of funds for alternative approved learning and writing opportunities.

Following the sabbatical, the Foundation gathers the cohort of Fellows on semi-annual overnight retreats over the course of the three years. Gatherings continue to build the peer network of support and learning.”

Following the Barr Foundation model, and lessons imparted from other foundations who have established sabbatical programs for nonprofit organizations, the Wilderness Support Center should consider the following **recommendations**:

- **Create a formal process for selecting sabbatical candidates that requires the submission of a comprehensive application.** A rigorous application begins the process of pushing advocates out of their current mode of thinking and helps solidify their commitment to the sabbatical.
- **Prior to the start of sabbaticals, assist in developing transition plans for sabbatical participants as they prepare to leave their organizations.** The Center should also provide additional resources for the professional development needs of staff that will be taking over key leadership duties.
- **Begin the sabbatical with a facilitated retreat of at least a week to allow participants to relax and immerse themselves into a different mode of thinking.** The Wilderness Support Center could partner with a range of consulting groups and organizations to structure the retreat, including the Rockwood Leadership Program or the Interaction Institute for Social Change. The Wilderness Support Center should consider a retreat sight and activities that inspire reflection while taking sabbatical participants away from their comfort zones.
- **Following the retreat, assign each sabbatical participant a research partner, ideally an expert outside of the movement.** This could be an academic, religious leader, or a social entrepreneur. The Wilderness

Support Center should support the development of the partnership with facilitated meetings and training.

- **Assist sabbatical participants in developing and refining a research proposal that outlines the need for the research project, the benefits to the sabbatical participant and the movement, an action plan for completing research, and a deliverable.**
- **Provide additional professional development opportunities that support the research, such as a workshop on conducting different kinds of research (social science surveys, case studies, etc.), writing classes, or mentoring from an academic researcher.**
- **Create mechanisms for sabbatical participants to share their experiences.** These could include blogs, a list serv, and facilitated meetings.
- **Find opportunities (and funding) for sabbatical participants to present their work to other wilderness and public land advocates, as well as to foundations supporting public land protection projects.** Participants could also develop position papers, webinars, and videos to disseminate their findings.
- **Provide additional program planning assistance to organizations that can implement ideas generated during research sabbaticals.**
- **Convene sabbatical alumni several times after completing their research to mentor the next group of sabbatical participants, exchange ideas on implementation, and develop new research proposals, among other activities.**



# Exhibit: Sampling of Sabbatical Programs

(most are cited in this paper)

Please note that I did not include universities because virtually every university offers research and professional development sabbaticals. I am happy to provide sample sabbatical guidelines if that would be useful.

## Foundations

Rasmussen Foundation

(<http://www.rasmuson.org/index.php?switch=viewpage&pageid=159>)

Durfee Foundation

(<http://www.durfee.org/programs/sabbatical/recipients1998.html>)

Barr Foundation

([http://www.barrfoundation.org/fellows/fellows\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=376197](http://www.barrfoundation.org/fellows/fellows_show.htm?doc_id=376197))

California Wellness Foundation

([http://www.calwellness.org/leadership\\_recognition/sabbatical\\_program\\_overview.htm](http://www.calwellness.org/leadership_recognition/sabbatical_program_overview.htm))

Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation

([http://www.zsr.org/about\\_program.htm](http://www.zsr.org/about_program.htm))

## Theological Institutions

Loyola University Institute of Pastoral Studies

([http://www.luc.edu/ips/academics\\_sabbaticals.shtml](http://www.luc.edu/ips/academics_sabbaticals.shtml))

Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University

(<http://www.scu.edu/jst/academics/degreeprograms/newdirections.cfm>)

Redemptorist Renewal Center

(<http://www.desertrenewal.org/rrc/programs/sabbatical.html>)

## Corporations

Xerox

([http://www.xerox.com/go/xrx/template/009.jsp?view=Feature&ed\\_name=CSR\\_Feature\\_SSL&Xcntry=USA&Xlang=en\\_US](http://www.xerox.com/go/xrx/template/009.jsp?view=Feature&ed_name=CSR_Feature_SSL&Xcntry=USA&Xlang=en_US))

Goldman Sachs

(<http://www2.goldmansachs.com/citizenship/community-giving/programs/public-service-program.html>)

Hallmark

(<http://www.fastcompany.com/magazine/05/hallmark.html>)

Wells Fargo

(<https://www.wellsfargo.com/about/csr/team/leave>)

Alexander Interactive

(<http://www.alexanderinteractive.com/news/2008/01/07/ai-sabbatical-program-launched>)

Cisco Systems

## Think Tanks

Filene Research Institute