

What to Expect When You're an
Expecting Architect:
the Pandemic Years

AIA Austin's
Women in Architecture
Parenthood Panel

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AIA Austin

2021 Panel FAQs

What are your legal rights around maternity leave?

- **Government Resources for Legal Rights:** the Department of Labor, Texas Workforce Commission and EEOC.
- **Maternity leave rights:** If a firm (regardless of size) has a maternity leave policy, you're entitled to receive those benefits. The smaller the firm, the fewer legal requirements apply. The larger the firm, the more legal requirements apply.
- Government protections around maternity leave: **The Pregnancy Discrimination Act**, tied to Title 7, applies for **firms with 15+ employees**. The **Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)** applies to **firms with 50+ employees**.
- In order to qualify for these protections, **you must have worked at the firm for at least a year**, and you must have worked a certain number of hours in that year.
- Maternity leave can be paid or unpaid, that is specific to each firm.

What are your legal rights around maternity leave?

- You may have rights to an extended maternity leave based on the circumstances of the birth of the child. Ex: medical complications during the birth or towards the end of your maternity leave. There are some rights defined under the Americans with Disabilities Act, and may apply in certain circumstances.
- Texas is a business-friendly state. Often it's on the business and the employees to work out issues on their own, rather than turning to the law for guidance.
- Rights during Maternity Leave: Under FMLA leave you have rights around availability, and it's illegal for a firm to impose consequences for not being available during leave. For a smaller firm this is more of a gray area. It's important to set boundaries about what is ok or not ok with you and your firm before you take your maternity leave. However, some mothers may want to be available to answer these questions about their projects while on leave.

What does maternity leave look like in our industry and in Austin?

- It is not uncommon for small firms in Austin to not have a maternity or parental leave policy in place.
- Most AIA firms offer approx 3 weeks of paid maternity leave. Outside of our industry, it is more common for firms to offer approximately 6 weeks of paid maternity leave.
- Architecture firms are starting to realize that family benefits are very important to employee retention. In the last 3-4 years there's been a big shift in that our industry has gone from 59% to 75% of firms looking at including family friendly benefits.

What can we do to influence maternity leave policies?

- Firms are dealing with turnover and a shortage of trained talent. It's a competitive job market, so firms may be willing to work together to find the best fit for everyone.
- It is important to do research when looking at a new firm. Ask what their maternity leave policies are.
- A small firm may offer more flexibility than a large firm, even if it can't offer the same paid benefits. Since they operate on a different model, it's important to learn your firm's policies.
- Larger firms have to deal with an equitable work week across a more diverse population. A smaller firm can offer more specific flexibility to each employee.
- If a firm isn't the right fit for you - go try another firm. It's a talent market right now.
- It's very difficult to negotiate and advocate for maternity leave without information. Conversations about maternity and parental leave policies can benefit both employees and firm leaders as they learn about different strategies and options.

How do I handle the interview process if I'm pregnant?

- During the interview process you do not have to disclose any of your private details about being pregnant. It's your choice to disclose a pregnancy or not. Legal protection exists around this. Ultimately, it's a personal judgment call.
- To best prepare for that conversation with a potential employer, try to put yourself in their shoes, and size up the firm you're speaking to. Are they big or small? Do they have bandwidth to cover your responsibilities while you're on maternity leave?
- Try to find out about the culture at a firm before or during the interview process. This can lend helpful insights into how a pregnancy will be received.

Re-entry Strategies after maternity leave

- Try not to over promise! Many women go back to work with expectations of “I can do it all”. Be clear, don’t be afraid to speak up when your workload or schedule is not working.
- Be prepared for re-entry as a new mom to be difficult at times, and exhausting. Schedules are more complicated with pumping requirements, childcare, etc.
- Think of your community of people who can help you when you go back to work. Family, co-workers, friends, partners. Try to have a support structure in place.
- Small firms may be better equipped to handle the flexibility that new moms are looking for. Hourly pay as a part-time employee may be preferred to salary pay, if it offers the right schedule for a new parent. However, a lot depends on the culture of the firm. This applies to both big and small firms.

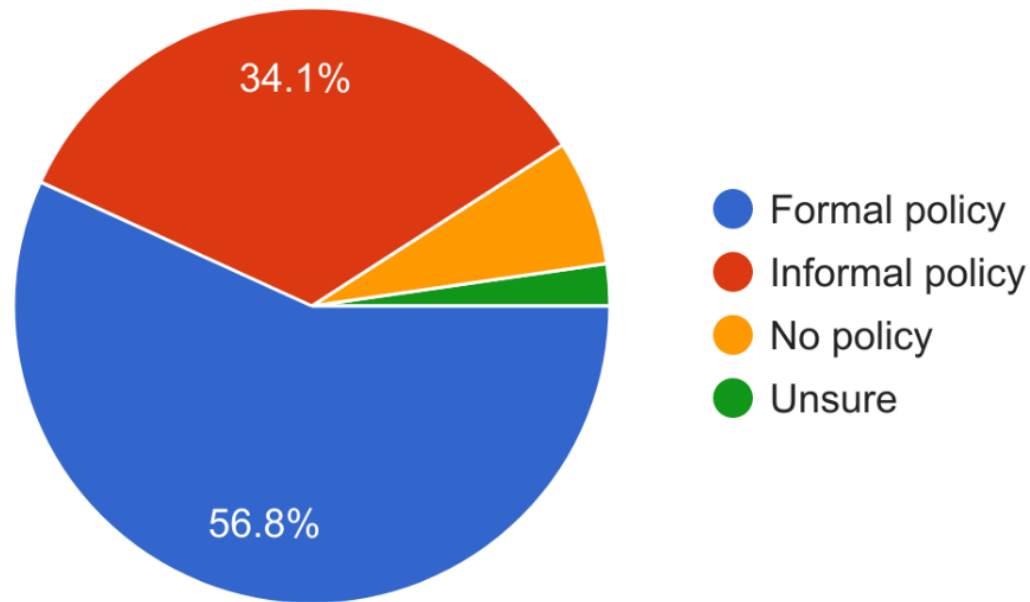
Re-entry Strategies after maternity leave

- If you are on maternity leave or extended maternity leave - it can help to check-in with your firm, on your projects, every few weeks. Can be a quick email. It lets the firm know that you're still interested in the work.
- Expressing vulnerability can give you power. Sometimes we need to advocate for ourselves by showing co-workers exactly what we are going through when coming back from maternity leave.
- Identify mentors and other people who are going through the same situation to help you through this process!

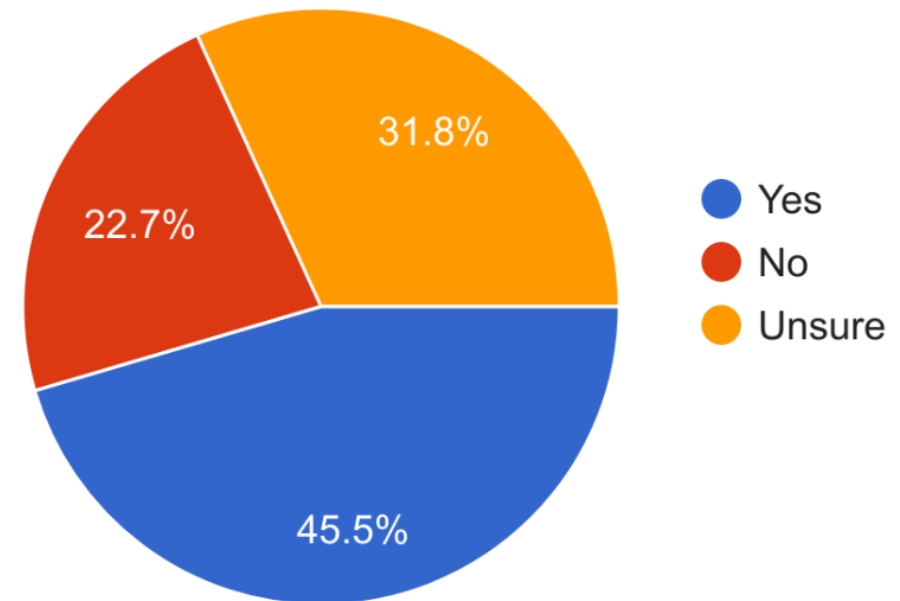
2022 Parental Leave Survey

2022 WiA Survey Results

Does your company have a formal or informal family leave policy, process, or plan?

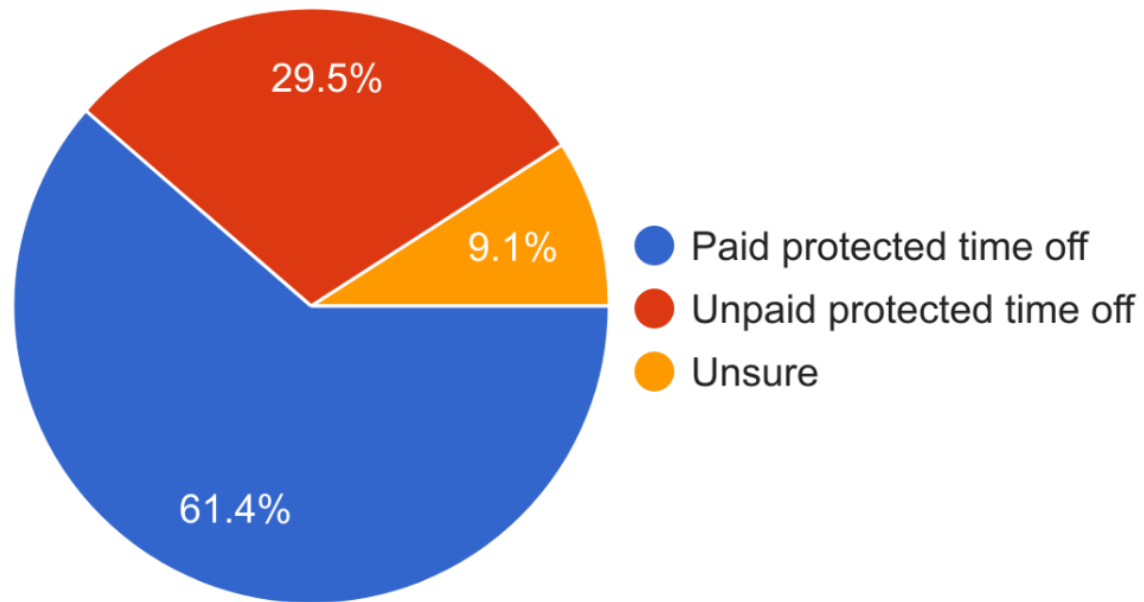


Is the plan available to both parents (gestational and non-gestational) as well as adoptive parents?

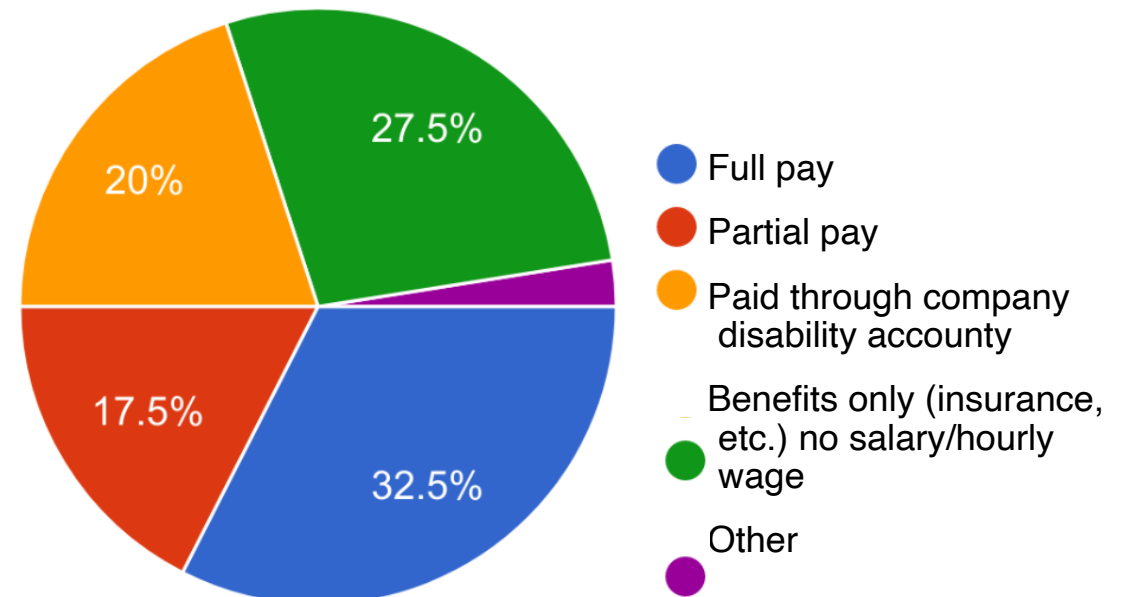


2022 WiA Survey Results

Does it include protected time off only, or is there some portion of pay associated with it?

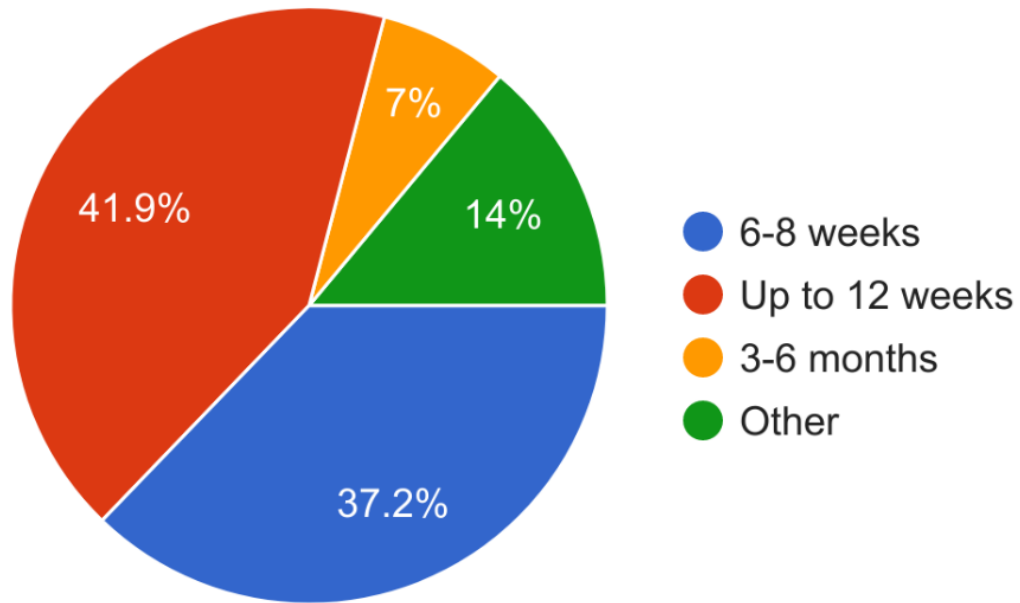


If pay is included, what portion of the salary and benefits are included?

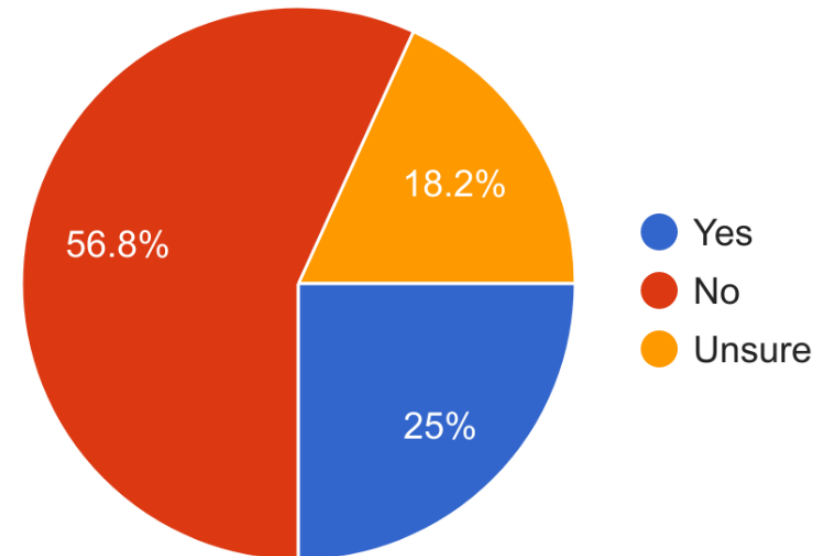


2022 WiA Survey Results

What time frames for protected time off are available to you?

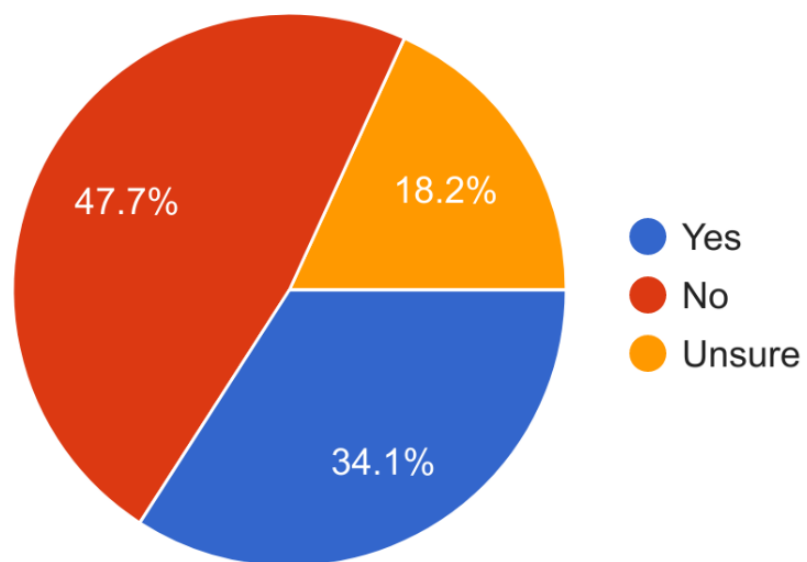


Is there a policy in place to help parents hand off projects/work load before going on parental leave?

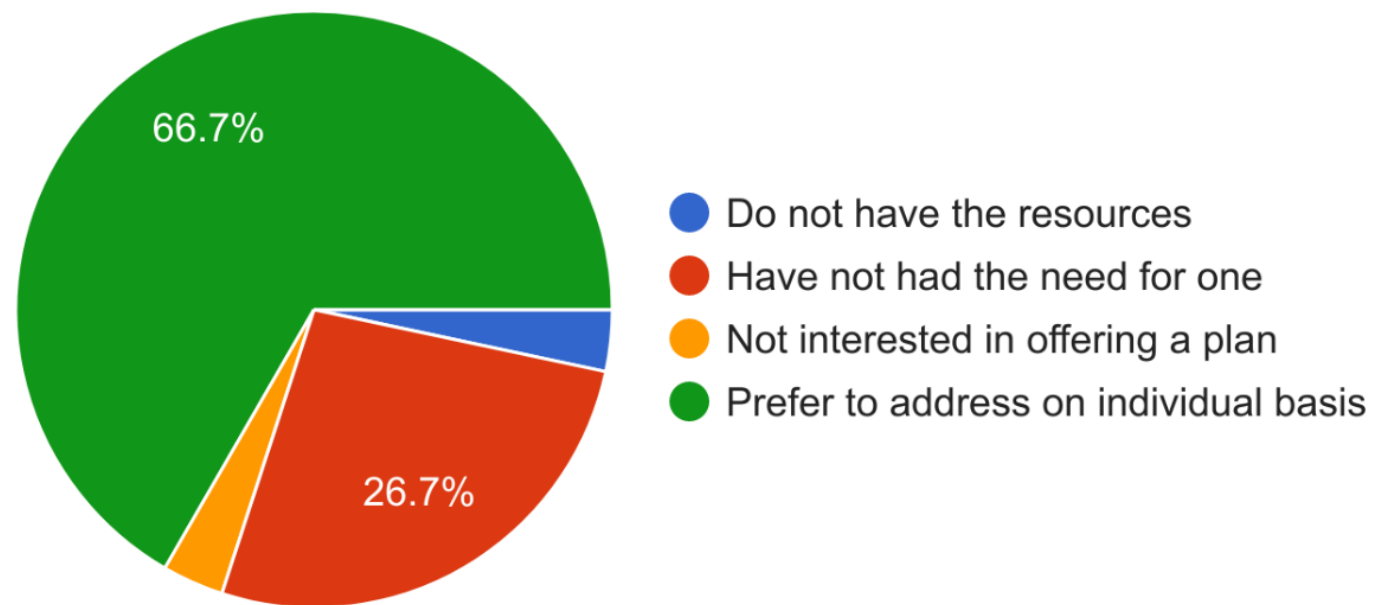


2022 WiA Survey Results

Is there a policy for reentry after parental leave?
This may include re-onboarding, discussing adjusted schedules, providing privacy for pumping, etc.



If your company does NOT have a policy, process, or plan, are there barriers to creating one?



2022 WiA Survey Results

If your company does not have a universal plan, does it work with people on an individual level?
What does this look like?

- Most companies without a formal plan are meeting with employees individually to find a solution that works for both parties.
- Solution is customized to person's responsibilities and needs
- Some firms offer open ended return dates (unpaid), but employees typically need to return quickly due to finances.

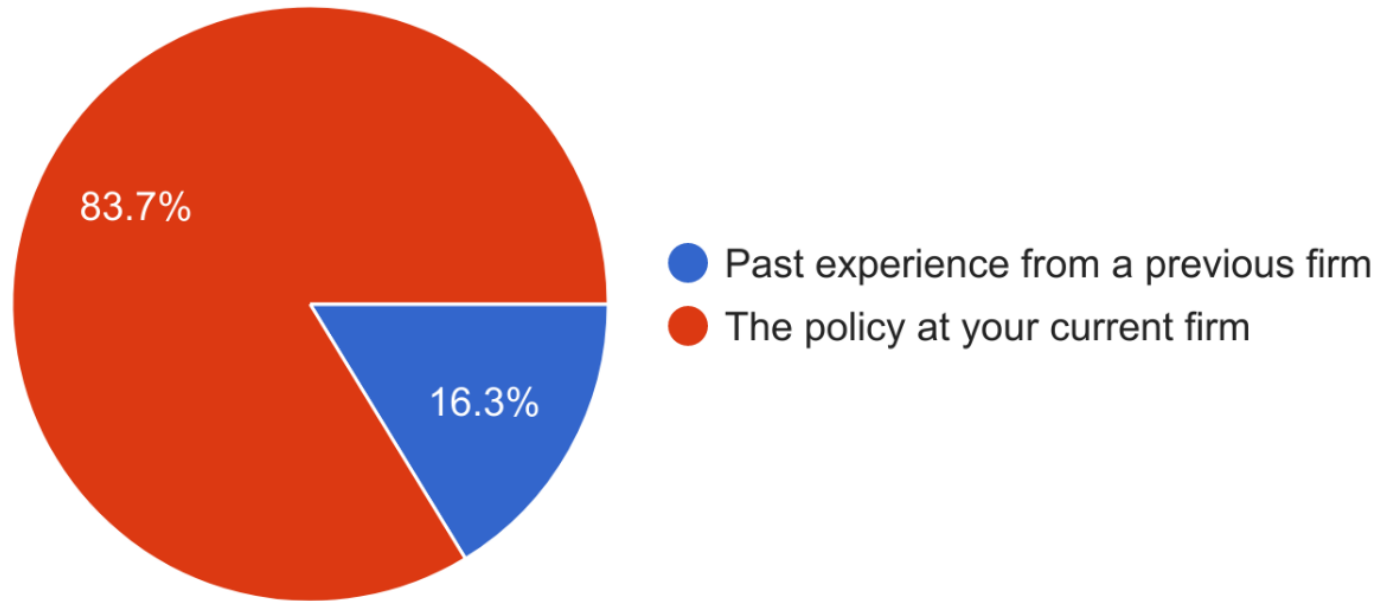
2022 WiA Survey Results

Aside from pay, what are some things that would help parents through this life transition? Adjusted hours, shortened hours, team support, unlimited sick time (daycare germs)?

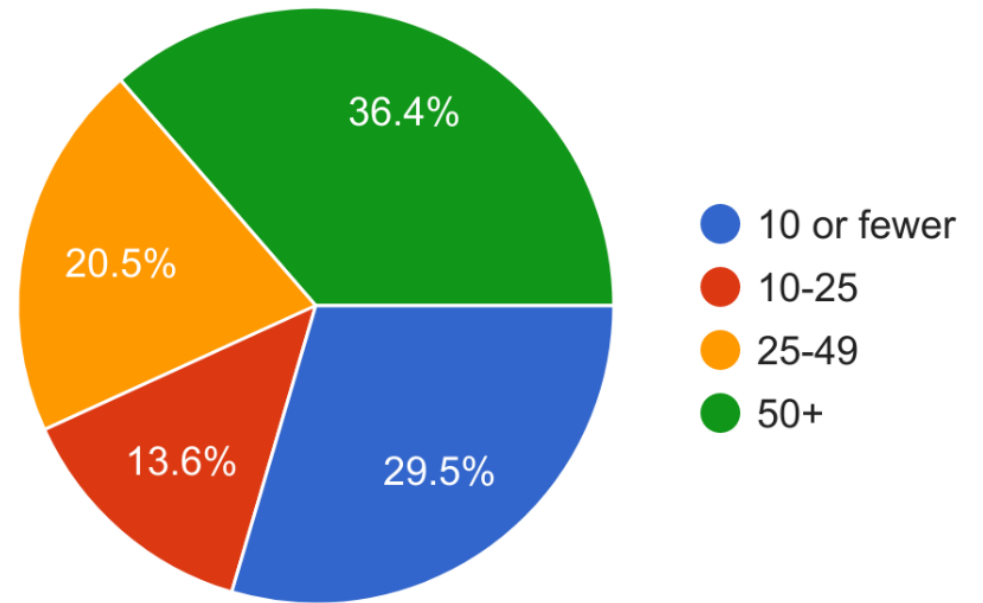
- Flexibility - when hours are worked along with hybrid/remote options
- Sick Time - Additional time to cover days when kids are sick
- Adjust Hour requirements - working with parents to reduce required hours or adjust as needed
- Communication - Open communication and check-ins, team support and mentorship
- Child care assistance - stipend or on-site care

2022 WiA Survey Results

The answers to these questions are based on:



How large is your company?



Thank You!

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