

Seven Top Opportunities for Utah Girls and Women: A 2026 Update

Setting the Stage

Decades of scholarship—within Utah and across national and global contexts—demonstrate that expanding opportunities for girls and women begins with understanding where those opportunities already exist and where they can be strengthened. Building this awareness creates the foundation for strategic, high-impact action. In Utah, the Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) plays a central role in this work, producing hundreds of research reports that surface ongoing challenges¹ while simultaneously highlighting the conditions, possibilities, and pathways that support girls, women, and families.

To further this mission, UWLP researchers launched the first of three annual statewide studies in fall 2023 to establish a baseline of public perceptions related to awareness, understanding, and attitudes about the opportunities and challenges facing Utah girls and women. The survey was administered online to Utah residents using both a representative sample and a broad convenience sample. To monitor changes in public perceptions over time, the study was conducted again—with modest refinements—in fall 2024 and fall 2025.

The 2025 survey instrument included 83 items aligned with the 18 areas of focus in UWLP’s statewide initiative, *A Bolder Way Forward* (BWF). It also included 13 demographic questions and two open-ended items inviting narrative responses about the greatest opportunities and challenges facing women and girls in Utah. Additional methodological details are available in the Research Methods, Appendix A, and Appendix B sections of the five UWLP research white papers (Nos. 20–24) published between January and March 2026.²

In the 2025 survey, 5,212 Utahns completed the survey, and 3,518 respondents provided written comments to the open-ended question: “What do you think are the greatest opportunities for women and girls in Utah?” Because the same question was asked in 2023,³ this report not only presents the 2025 analysis but also compares it with the previously published 2023 findings. The following section summarizes the themes that emerged from a rigorous qualitative analysis conducted using a cloud-based platform designed for qualitative and mixed-methods research.

Findings – Perceived Opportunities

Table 1 summarizes the seven most frequently cited categories. The table reports the total number of mentions for each category, the percentage of all comments (N = 3,165), and the corresponding percentages from the 2023 survey. Because many responses addressed multiple issues, individual comments

were often coded into more than one category, resulting in some overlap across categories. The following subsections provide additional detail and illustrative examples for each of the identified opportunities.

Table 1: Perceived Opportunities for Utah Women & Girls

Categories	2025 #	2025 %	2023 %
1. Education and training	1,186	37.5	33.7
2. Work and employment opportunities	919	29.0	37.8
3. Embrace potential (includes being an entrepreneur)	667	21.1	28.1
4. More women in leadership and public office	516	16.3	16.8
5. Support for personal choices (includes support network and male allies)	417	13.2	21.5
6. Increase awareness of community resources/support	303	9.6	16.7
7. Connect and work together for change	269	8.5	17.0
Miscellaneous	79	2.5	23.6

Category 1: Education and Training

The most common category cited as an opportunity for Utah girls and women, at 37.5% (N=1,186), related to education and training. In 2023, this category ranked second at 33.7%. Comments within this category identified that the biggest opportunity for girls and women was pursuing a formal education and/or training. Some comments highlighted the need for help accessing financial assistance or low-cost/free tuition. Examples include the following:

“Education of girls and young women is the key. Through education, women have the opportunity to rethink outdated roles and paradigms so they can come to see themselves as powerful agents.”

“Closing the gender gap in high-paying professions and bringing about long-lasting change can be achieved by expanding girls’ access to STEM opportunities and quality education.”

“I think the greatest opportunity for women and girls in Utah is the colleges and tech schools that are available. I also feel that online education is a huge opportunity for women and girls in Utah.”

“Women and girls who pursue college degrees should be encouraged to use them to build careers and financial independence, not just view college as a stepping stone to marriage. If

a woman doesn't take full advantage of her education, she and any children she may have could face real financial vulnerability in the event of divorce or other life changes."

"I think it's great that there are a lot of opportunities in schools for girls to be able to access higher-level classes, career classes, and be on a path to either go to college or other vocational schools. But they have to be able to access that whether it's having the financial means, supportive families, or simply the knowledge that these programs exist and the value of accessing them at that time. Once they leave high school, it becomes more of a challenge unless there's a strong support network."

"There is a robust university network here that is much more affordable when compared to other states. I think Utah is a place that offers opportunity for higher education with a relatively lower barrier to entry, and that's a positive thing."

"Availability of more affordable higher education than other states, although secondary education costs are still very high and oftentimes are not affordable for those who have parents who are in the middle class so they don't qualify for financial aid, but their parents can't afford tuition either."

Category 2: Work and Employment Opportunities

The second most frequently identified opportunity for Utah women and girls related to work and employment opportunities. Of the total comments offered by participants, 29.0% (N=919) related to this category. In comparison, in 2023 this category ranked first at 37.8%. Participants felt that Utah employers could do more to provide women with equal access to work and advancement opportunities, including higher paying jobs. Equivalent compensation for men and women for equal work was a related concern. Respondents also called for more employers in Utah to adopt family-friendly workplace policies to better support parents—specifically, offering parental leave, schedule flexibility, and on-site childcare. Some also identified the need for workplaces to be more proactive in supporting women returning to the workforce. For example, participants shared,

"I believe girls should have equal opportunities in the various fields that up to now have been mostly for men. They should have just as many chances to achieve what you want and receive equal pay and just as much notice as men."

"The key opportunity moving forward is to create workplace cultures through flexible schedules, equitable advancement policies, and inclusive leadership development programs that reflect women's lived realities. Strengthening this support will not only benefit women but also enhance the stability and well-being of Utah families and communities."

"The state has seen tremendous economic diversification and growth, which does create real opportunities. The breadth of opportunity is significant. This diversity means women aren't pigeonholed into just a few traditional sectors. There are entry points across different education levels, skill sets, and interest areas."

"Women have the chance to work in flexible jobs, including remote work, which helps to balance career and family personal life easier."

"Improved work and employment policies where employers are adopting family-friendly policies (flexible scheduling, parental leave, on-site childcare) that can open up many more opportunities for women. They also provide equal access to advancement and higher-paying jobs."

"There are a lot of women-only or returning-moms type programs that I feel are amazing to help women and moms get back into the workplace after having children."

Many comments identified specific fields that create opportunities for girls and women, particularly jobs in the trades or STEM fields:

"The Silicon Slopes investments in Utah open many possible STEM opportunities for Utahns of all genders. STEM educational investments are so important. It would be wonderful to have women employed in different STEM fields speak to classes or assemblies, and to do field trips to places students might be able to work."

"Trades. I think women are afraid of trades because they're historically male fields. There is a huge need for skilled tradespeople, and I think those careers could offer some flexibility for women who are able to be self-employed as plumbers, electricians, welders, etc. Those fields are high paying, stable, and have high self-reported job satisfaction."

"There is an increasing focus on encouraging women to pursue careers in nontraditional fields, such as construction and manufacturing."

"This is a great time for women to pursue careers in STEM or the skilled trades. There's a clear shortage of workers in the trades, and this creates a perfect opportunity for women to start new, well-paying careers."

"When I think about the greatest opportunities for women and girls in Utah, I see the potential that comes from the state's rapid growth and economic development. Utah has attracted new businesses, particularly in technology and other high-demand fields. This growth creates a wealth of opportunities for women and girls who want to pursue careers in STEM, business, healthcare, and other expanding industries. In theory, the sky is the limit—the economic foundation is in place, and Utah is well-positioned to offer women numerous paths to success."

Category 3: Embrace Potential

At 21.1% (N=667), the third most frequently mentioned opportunity was encouraging Utah girls and women to embrace their potential by believing in themselves, acknowledging their abilities, and taking control of their own destiny. In 2023, this category was also ranked third at 28.1%. Some participants encouraged women and girls to use their voices and speak up for what they want. Others called for girls and women to become financially literate, specifically with their personal finances, so they could become self-sufficient and

independent. Participants also encouraged girls and women to pursue enriching life experiences and develop life skills. Comments in this area included the following:

“The greatest opportunity is for them to follow their dreams and to not give up and continue pushing forward to achieve those dreams. Another opportunity is to speak up in support of their rights and not be afraid to speak their mind.”

“Opportunities exist for women to become financially literate and develop skills for personal and professional growth through online learning and community resources.”

“With a good education and a determination to become the best they can be, I believe all careers are a possibility for them.”

“I believe the greatest opportunity for women and girls in Utah is to connect deeply with their inherent power, capabilities, worthiness, and desires. I believe women and girls in Utah would benefit greatly from believing they can build the life they want with someone by their side (not above them) or alone. They are wise, strong, resilient, and can develop skills to sit at the top of whatever mountain they are willing to climb. I believe women and girls in Utah would benefit from deeply believing they can achieve whatever THEY want in life vs. achieving what they are told they are good enough for.”

“The biggest opportunity women now have in Utah is to become financially secure as soon as possible. Work hard in school, be advantageous and driven, be creative and inventive, and you definitely have opportunity to strive and become successful.”

“Women and girls can do whatever they want to do if they put their minds to it, even despite pushback.”

“I think the sky is the limit for both women and girls. The crux is that women and girls must demand that a male-dominant society accepts them as equals not second class.”

A large group of participants felt there was considerable support for women and girls in Utah to become entrepreneurs and start their own businesses:

“I am now a business owner, and the liberating feeling of being able to be in control of my own destiny is something that has been life changing for me, and I only wish I had done it sooner.”

“I believe women in Utah do have a good environment to become entrepreneurs and small business owners. There are successful women at the top of the corporate world here, and more and more small businesses are being opened by moms or women who want a path outside the corporate world. Utah is more supportive of small businesses than other states, and I think the creative energy here lends itself to a lot of business ideas becoming possible.”

“Utah is justifiably proud of its entrepreneurial spirit, and I think Utah has proved to be a good place for women to start their own businesses. Part of this success, however, is due to the fact that traditional workplaces are difficult for women to thrive in while they are raising their families. Instead, Utah

women look for alternative ways to earn a living, with varying degrees of success.”

“The greatest opportunities would be for women and girls to own their own business, become CEOs, and be successful! Be independent and make their own money!”

“Utah’s growing ecosystem of support for women entrepreneurs includes the Women’s Business Center of Utah, directories of women-owned businesses, networks, and free training/advice, all of which are helping more women launch and sustain businesses.”

“Research indicates that women-owned businesses in Utah are increasing in number and economic influence, which suggests growing opportunity for growth in this area.”

Category 4: More Women in Leadership and Public Office

The fourth most frequently identified opportunity for women and girls in Utah, at 16.3% (N=516), focused on supporting more women to become leaders, including running for and being elected to public office. In 2023 this category was ranked sixth at 16.8%. There was a call for more women to hold positions of power, citing the importance of their being role models for young girls and boys. Examples included the following:

“I want to see more representation in politics! I don’t know if it’s our greatest opportunity, but we need to strive towards a lofty goal of a 50/50 split of women and men in elected offices.”

“Female role models show girls what is possible and encourage them to aim for big goals, and they provide examples that make pursuing dreams feel achievable.”

“Women need more women representing them in Utah. If we want change, we can’t just keep asking. We have to demand it.”

“More focus on empowering women and girls to strive for and be successful in their leadership and advocacy. I would love to see more women in politics in Utah. If women don’t know how to break into the world of politics, they will continue to be absent from these spaces, which means that the status quo will continue. We need women in politics if we are going to see a shift in laws and policies that actually empower and uplift women and those with marginalized and minoritized identities.”

“Through college, grad school, and my career, I’ve met so many incredible and talented women. These women care about their communities, want to improve them, and lead with compassion and logic. They are so capable and yet have to work twice as hard to earn leadership positions as their male counterparts.”

“Sharing the achievements of Utah women who have surmounted obstacles may encourage others to fearlessly go for their goals.”

“I hope there can be more platforms and resources to amplify women’s voices in Utah, especially in policymaking and community development. It would be great to see more

collaborative efforts to turn discussions about challenges and opportunities into real, impactful changes for women and girls.”

Category 5: Support for Personal Choices

The fifth most frequently mentioned opportunity available to women and girls in Utah, at 13.2% (N=417), focused on the need for those in their lives to support their choices, whether their decision was to be a mother, to pursue a career, or to combine the two. In 2023, this category ranked fourth at 21.5%. Comments included the following:

“The choice to be a full-time caretaker or homemaker should absolutely be honored and respected; however, true equality requires that all women are equally supported and encouraged to pursue education, professional aspirations, and leadership opportunities if they so choose. Empowerment lies not in prescribing one path for women, but in ensuring that every path is open, valued, and supported.”

“To get their education and choose what paths they themselves want to be in their lives. They should know they have choices.”

“To experience life and to be supported. If they don’t want to have kids that should be okay. If they don’t want to get married, that should be okay. If they want to travel the world with a fur baby, that should be okay.”

“Personal choice support: Whether it is being a mother, pursuing a career, or a combination of both, there is a growing recognition of the need to support personal choices.”

When talking about supporting the choices of girls and women, parents were seen as a foundational source of that support, but others were also seen as playing an important part of a support network, including extended family members, teachers, and mentors:

“As a girl who worked to get a college education, I was able to fulfill my choices with the wonderful support of family and close friends.”

“Having parents that are supportive of their interests and recognizing when they excel. They should help them foster what they love by finding programs and being willing to find schools that are better suited.”

“I have experienced so much support from other women in Utah. Every female-identifying mentor, teacher, leader, boss, and co-worker I’ve had has been concerned about ‘holding the door’ for the people behind them. Women in Utah care for and support one another’s success. We help each other get more opportunities and realize there is strength in building each other up.”

“Thank goodness for mentors. I was raised in the home of an alcoholic father. One male mentor helped me go away to college, and that made all the difference. I have tried to help others along the way as I have been helped.”

“There’s also a tremendous opportunity in connection and collaboration. Utah’s close-knit networks could make it easier

to build meaningful mentorship relationships, start new ventures, and influence change at both local and statewide levels. As more women support one another across industries, from tech to education to public service, we can accelerate progress and redefine what leadership looks like here.”

Some participant comments encouraged women to find a supportive partner who treated them as an equal:

“Girls need to see that finding a partner that supports your goals and ambitions is not impossible, that a women’s role isn’t only in the home and can be anywhere.”

“Girls and women are increasingly being seen as equal partners with boys and men, whether in school, sports, or the home.”

“So much progress with my children in their homes. My sons are equal participants with childcare and household duties. So much better than their father!”

Finally, a considerable number of participants identified including boys and men in conversations around equality as a valuable opportunity, and encouraging men to become allies was a vital component. For example,

“I am grateful that I have mostly been surrounded by men who are allies and supportive of me in my pursuits. I credit my dad for setting high standard of respect for women and girls, and he taught me to pursue my dreams. Dads can play a pivotal role in their daughters’ lives if they model respect to women and encourage their daughters.”

“There are so many men who are listening and are willing to go to bat for women, especially the younger generation of men coming up. Let’s capitalize on that.”

“I love the ‘allies’ initiative and regularly thank the men in my life who are allies.”

“I personally had a male college teacher create an internship opportunity for me nearly 10 years ago that built my career path. Males can be and *are* amazing advocates.”

Category 6: Increase Awareness of Community Resources and Support

The sixth most frequently mentioned category related to the opportunity to increase awareness and access to available resources and support, at 9.6% (N=303). In comparison, this category was ranked seventh at 16.7% in 2023. Many felt that girls and women in Utah were not aware of the resources available in the community, and increasing access to information was seen as creating significant opportunity. On a related note, a few also observed the benefits of volunteering. For example,

“Utah does have organizations that support and elevate women and girls, but I’m not sure they are really well known. I think the work that these organizations do is very important, and elevating them and giving them more awareness would help women and girls in Utah.”

“I think we have many resources in our community. I participate by volunteering in many facets of our community for the betterment of us as a whole; this is a great way to engage with our leaders.”

“Utah’s culture is uniquely strong in volunteerism and community service, which presents an opportunity to design sustainable, low-cost programs that draw upon the service of community. By mobilizing this existing spirit of giving, the state could create accessible, community-based opportunities that empower girls across all income levels, ensuring every child and youth has a pathway to develop confidence and purpose, to gain the skills to contribute meaningfully to society.”

“Creating a community outside of religious-centric community where women’s voices and lived experiences are trusted and centered. Where people can come together within that community and have civil discourse about the problems facing this state, and all Utahns, because women and girls are not properly supported and safe.”

Included in this category was recognition of existing community resources that provide education and support regarding abuse and violence, while others noted the need for more communication regarding these resources:

“I feel like there’s opportunity for women to get access to resources if there is any domestic violence or substance abuse. More and more women are standing up to be supportive of one another.”

“I discovered Saprea, an organization that supports adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Attending a Saprea retreat was transformative. For the first time, I felt seen, heard, understood, and supported on my healing journey. Simply being connected to a valuable healing resource has helped me feel safer and more hopeful in my own community.”

“Communication. Make women aware of the resources available. Whether it is help finding a job, exploring better opportunities, networking, support for abuse, etc. There are many resources out there that women are not aware of.”

“I’m thankful there is funding for the support of victims of sexual violence and domestic violence, and that there are laws in place to hold criminal behavior accountable.”

Finally, participants called for providing resources and support that address the overall well-being of girls and women in Utah, including both mental health and reproductive health:

“Being open about supporting women’s mental health may reduce stigma and make it easier for girls to ask for support when they need help.”

“Efforts are underway to increase awareness and access to community resources, including support for mental health and reproductive health, in addition to education on issues like abuse and violence.”

“Women need more knowledge and options in Utah! About education, employment, childcare, reproductive health, birthing choices, ways to be involved in community, and on and on! There’s need for more programs, but there are so many good programs out there with resources, education, and support that I think people just don’t know about. I encounter

them all the time. I would love to see more visibility for programs to get in front of women’s (and men’s) eyes. Every exposure to the resources and the ideas helps and adds up to real change in awareness and opinion.”

“It’s vital to inform or establish healthcare services and support groups for women, girls, single mothers, and others.”

“High levels of depression and stress among Utah women (especially young women) are not only mental health concerns—they are economic barriers. Mental health resources, trauma-informed schools, community support groups, and workplace flexibility should be considered fundamental parts of any strategy to help women thrive, not optional ones.”

Category 7: Connect and Work Together for Change

Finally, the seventh most frequently cited category related to opportunities to connect, network, and work together for change, coming in at 8.5% (N=269). In 2023, this category was ranked fifth at 17.0%. Numerous participants specifically acknowledged the benefits of girls and women connecting with each other. Some highlighted the power of women coming together to collaborate, which reinforced a sense of community. Others acknowledged there has been some progress towards gender equality but encouraged women and male allies to use their voices to continue moving the work forward. For instance,

“I’ve seen firsthand how women are lifting one another by sharing experiences, advocating for change, and creating new opportunities that didn’t exist before. In my own experience, being part of these groups has shown me the power of community. I’ve realized that every connection we make matters. By starting at a young age to teach girls to support instead of to compete, we can change the culture before it starts. When girls grow up seeing collaboration as strength, they become women who build others up rather than feeling they have to fight for the chair at the table.”

“Women build differently and *that* is the opportunity. We build through community, intuition, creativeness, collaboration, and connection. Our way is not linear or hierarchical, and that’s exactly what makes it powerful.”

“Equally important is fostering a culture of solidarity. When women support one another in the workplace, share knowledge, and mentor the next generation, it strengthens everyone and creates lasting progress.”

“Utah’s greatest opportunities for women and girls lie in community and collective progress. As women gain access to education, leadership, and economic independence, there’s also a chance to transform how power is shared. Community becomes the bridge, where collaboration replaces competition and women use their influence to open doors for others. Real progress will come when success isn’t about proximity to existing hierarchies, but about reimagining them, where women stand with, not above, one another, and the strength of one uplifts the whole.”

“It’s important to keep listening to diverse voices, especially women of color, rural residents, and young girls, when shaping policy and programs.”

“I think the greatest opportunities for women and girls in Utah are the support of other women and girls. No matter your circumstance, you can find someone who has been through it and find support.”

“Women and girls have bonded together to create clubs, organizations, and other gathering spaces that help to give them a space to be themselves and to uplift them and make advances in many aspects of their lives. Because of this, women and girls can rely on each other to help them with opportunities.”

“Utah has a strong sense of community and growing support networks that encourage women to pursue higher education, start businesses, and take on leadership roles. With increasing awareness of gender equality and more resources dedicated to women’s empowerment, there are more chances than ever for women and girls to use their talents, innovate, and make a lasting impact in their communities.”

Miscellaneous

The Miscellaneous category functioned as a catch-all for comments that were not mentioned frequently enough to warrant a stand-alone category. This involved 2.5% (N=79) of the overall comments.

Several respondents viewed sports and outdoor recreation as a valuable opportunity for Utah girls and women. On a cynical note, some felt that the best opportunity for women and girls is to leave Utah. There were also a handful who commented that girls and women are treated no differently than boys and men (as a reminder, women, men, and nonbinary individuals completed this survey). For example,

“Outdoor programs and sports encourage girls to be strong and independent.”

“Utah’s outdoor scene is huge, so girls have awesome opportunities to get into sports and adventure, which is great for confidence and networking.”

“Frankly, I don’t see any opportunities. That’s why I worked on an exit strategy for three years. I don’t feel supported, valued, or respected here.”

“Maybe the best thing for women in Utah would be to leave and set up somewhere else where they can get equal opportunities.”

“I believe women have the same opportunities as men, especially when it comes to education and jobs.”

“I think women and girls all have the same opportunities as men in Utah.”

Conclusions and Recommendations

This research and policy brief presents recent findings conducted in support of the UWLP mission and its ongoing effort to track shifts in public perceptions related to awareness, attitudes, and concerns about the opportunities available to Utah women and girls. This report highlights the top opportunities identified by survey participants and follows an [earlier brief](#) that examined perceived challenges. Additional resources addressing both challenges and opportunities across 25 areas of focus are available in the [UWLP Resource Library](#).

At its core, this brief serves two purposes. First, it seeks to deepen public understanding of the opportunities shaping the experiences of girls and women in Utah. Second, it aims to equip Utahns with the information needed to mobilize collective efforts that expand these opportunities and help mitigate the negative effects of the challenges identified in the study. Ultimately, when we strengthen the impact of Utah girls and women, we strengthen our communities as a whole.

¹ National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). *Achievement gaps 2011*. https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/studies/gaps/?utm_source=copilot.com; World Economic Forum. (2025). *Global gender gap report 2025*. https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2025/in-full/appendix-b-8aaa913d30/?utm_source=copilot.com; World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Closing data gaps in gender*. <https://www.who.int/activities/closing-data-gaps-in-gender/closing-data-gaps-in-gender>

² Madsen, S. R., & Townsend, A. (2026, January 8). *Women in the workplace in 2025: Utahns’ awareness, understanding, and attitudes*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/wp/no-20.pdf>; Madsen, S. R., & Townsend, A. (2026, January 22). *Utah women in the workplace: Entrepreneurship, workforce development, STEM fields, and leadership development*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/wp/no-21.pdf>; Madsen, S. R., & Townsend, A. (2026, February 5). *Women’s safety & security 2025: Utahns’ awareness, understanding, and attitudes*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/wp/no-22.pdf>; Madsen, S. R., & Townsend, A. (2026, March 5). *Women, finance, & education 2025: Utahns’ awareness, understanding, and attitudes*. Utah Women & Leadership Project.

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³ Townsend, A., & Madsen, S. R. (2024, May 21). *Seven top opportunities for Utah girls and women*. Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/56-top-opportunities-utah-girls-women.pdf>

Acknowledgements: This brief was made possible through the generous support of the Beesley Family Foundation, Tate Family Foundation, Nu Skin, Robert Coursey, Josh & Amber Bird, and Becky Edwards. We also thank Deb Thornton for her review and professional editing. We would also like to thank all Bolder Way Forward leaders and partners across the state who helped distribute this survey.

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