

Leadership Development

What Utahns Need to Know

RESEARCH SUMMARY

UTAH WOMEN & LEADERSHIP Project

NO. 69 | AUGUST 31, 2026

Despite abundant research highlighting the advantages and importance of women in leadership roles, Utah continues to have low representation of women leaders in nearly all domains. Women remain underrepresented in leadership across business, education, and government sectors, as well as elected office, in some cases by margins as wide as nine to one. Contributing factors include Utahns’ perceptions of leadership, limited male allyship, individual bias, and women’s access to leadership development opportunities. Leadership development for Utah’s women and girls is essential.

ASPIRATIONS

Utah women and men differ significantly in their aspirations to be leaders, whether they see themselves as leaders, and whether they feel there are opportunities and resources to help them develop to be a leader. 54.5% of Utah women aspire to be a leader compared to 65.9% of men; younger women and those with college degrees had greater aspirations to lead. While 52.2% of Utah women see themselves as a leader, 65.3% of men do. Opportunities and resources to help develop leadership skills also differ, with 56.6% of women and 71.4% of men believing there are opportunities and resources to develop leadership skills.

HOME

Utah’s mothers are leaders in the home and in the community. Unpaid work is vitally important to the foundations of strong families, communities, and nations; in fact, such domestic work has been called “the work that makes all other work possible.” The monetary value of women’s unpaid work is estimated to be \$10.8 trillion each year. They use leadership skills for everything from advocating for their children in schools to managing household finances and schedules. At the same time, they develop skills that are valuable throughout life.



WHY THIS MATTERS

“As we continue to focus on increasing women’s representation in positions of influence within Utah, it is vital to understand how we can develop and strengthen girls and young women in all arenas. If we do not, Utah will continue to miss many of the benefits that come when men and women work, serve, and lead together. “

Dr. Susan R. Madsen
UWLP Founding Director

COMMUNITY

There are many ways women lead in Utah, including in the community. While often not as visible as corporate or government leaders, these roles have a long-term impact and provide leadership development opportunities that translate to other opportunities. Utah ranks first in the nation for percentage of residents who regularly volunteer at 51%, and women in Utah and nationally volunteer at higher rates than men. Utah also ranks first in the nation for its parent volunteer rate at 63.5%. It is not surprising, then, that Utah women are well-represented in the leadership of nonprofit organizations.

KEY FACTS

- More than half of Utah women (54.5%) aspire to be leaders.
- 52.2% of Utah women see themselves as a leader.
- Women hold 20% of top leadership roles in Utah companies.

IMPACT

Developing women leaders strengthens organizations, but in 2024, women held only 20.4% of top leadership roles in Utah companies with 100 or more employees. The range of benefits from having women leaders cannot be overstated.

First, organizations that have women in management and on boards have improved financial performance. This includes increased profitability, faster debt reduction, and better stock growth. Second, the organizational climate is strengthened when women are in leadership, with higher employee satisfaction, smaller gender pay gap, increased productivity, higher customer satisfaction, and more ethical decisions. Third, there is increased corporate social responsibility, including greater philanthropic responses and improved corporate reputation. Fourth, talent is leveraged as women bring different experiences, think more holistically, seek win-win solutions, and focus on teams and cooperation. Finally, women bring enhanced innovation and collective intelligence including improved creativity, better team decision making, higher social sensitivity, and greater team problem solving.

IMPACT OF EDUCATION

College completion is linked to the development of women leaders. Women with college degrees are more likely to aspire to be leaders and see themselves as leaders. College graduates are more likely to be involved civically, voting and volunteering at twice the rate of those without college degrees. Intellectual development is a positive by-product of higher education. The impact in the home is seen as elementary school children of educated mothers are more prepared academically. In many ways, a mother's educational background is foundational to her influence.

FULL-TIME MISSIONS

Young women who serve full-time missions for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints have meaningful leadership development. 87% report gaining interpersonal or relationship skills; 86% gain professional and practical skills; and 60% gain courage and confidence. As an increasing number of Utah's young women serve missions due to lowering the age to 18, they will have long-term impacts as leaders.

REMOVING BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Encourage Role Models and Mentors. Increase the visibility of women leaders and expand opportunities for mentorship. Positive role models, mentors, and allies help girls and women envision themselves as leaders, build confidence, and navigate career and community leadership pathways.

Increase the Number of Women in Leadership. Encourage and support more women to serve in leadership positions across organizations. Greater representation creates a ripple effect by challenging stereotypes, broadening perspectives, inspiring future leaders, and demonstrating that women belong in positions of influence and decision-making.

Expand Leadership Development Opportunities. Invest in leadership training, networking opportunities, and skill-building programs for girls and women at every stage of life. Accessible leadership development builds confidence, strengthens communication and decision-making skills, and helps women develop meaningful professional relationships.

Recognize the Impact of Culture. Acknowledge and address the cultural and societal norms that can limit leadership opportunities for girls and women. Gendered expectations can discourage women from seeking leadership positions or being viewed as qualified leaders. Create more inclusive environments where diverse leadership styles are valued.

SUPPORTING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

You can help strengthen Utah by addressing internal and external barriers to women and girls becoming leaders. See below for calls to action and resources that support women's leadership development and help Utah be a place where all can thrive.

Data Sources: [UWLP Research & Policy Brief No. 1 \(2010\)](#), [UWLP Research & Policy Brief No. 10 \(2015\)](#), [UWLP Research & Policy Brief No. 21 \(2020\)](#), [UWLP Research Snapshot No. 32 \(2021\)](#), [UWLP Research Snapshot No. 54 \(2024\)](#), [UWLP White Paper No. 21 \(2026\)](#).

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Learn More:** Explore resources in the UWLP Leadership Development [Resource Kit](#).
- **Review:** Find goals, perceptions, and community partners on the Leadership Development Spoke [webpage](#).
- **Get Involved:** Connect to the grassroots initiative, [A Bolder Way Forward](#).
- **Take Action:** Help move the needle and discover additional [Calls to Action](#) for individuals, groups, organizations, and communities.



Host a group of 3-5 women in an engaging discussion series titled "[Exploring Your Purpose: Talents, Callings, and Influence](#)."



Talk to girls and young women in your life about what leadership is, how they can lead, and how to prepare to become leaders.



Encourage men of all ages to participate in an interactive course titled "[Male Allyship: A New Conversation](#)."

Learn more at www.utwomen.org

Authors: Deborah Lin & Dr. Susan R. Madsen