

What Can I Do?

A SERIES TO HELP UTAHNS ENGAGE



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What Salt Lake County Leaders and Residents Can Do To Strengthen the Impact of Girls and Women in Their Area

UTAH WOMEN &
LEADERSHIP
Project

Salt Lake County is full of engaged, passionate individuals who frequently ask the question, “What can I do to strengthen the impact of girls and women in this area?” To provide specific answers to that question, the **Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP)** and Salt Lake County, the USU Extension - Salt Lake County, United Way of Salt Lake City - Women United, and the Salt Lake Community College Women in Higher Education Network (UWHEN) hosted a think tank to collect ideas for individuals, groups, and organizations interested in supporting and empowering girls and women in their area.

This idea sheet is based on a 2024 gathering of 65 leaders in Salt Lake County. Girls and women face challenges unique to the area in which they live, and the goal of this gathering was to identify those barriers and determine strategies and initiatives that local leaders and residents can implement to address them. This document includes recommendations in the following areas: education, home and family, health and wellbeing, government and community engagement, business and economics, and culture.

EDUCATION

Leaders in Salt Lake County emphasized the essential role schools play in developing leadership, confidence, and competence in girls and young women. They recognize the essential role graduating from college plays in a woman's life. Recommendations for schools and the community include:

- Advance universal preschool access for all children and resources for before and after-school care.
- Combat math and reading deficiencies.
- Emphasize at earlier ages the importance of higher education.
- Encourage mental health screenings, starting in elementary school, to students each year with school registration. Integrate more support from nurses and social workers.
- Establish girls' and women's empowerment clubs at all education levels.
- Formalize leadership courses and include women's history courses as part of the curriculum.
- Mentor and give career direction to girls and women. Increase focus on STEM programs by encouraging young women to take the YouScience test to recognize strengths.
- Offer summer and after-school programs that focus on STEM and other nontraditional fields.
- Prioritize women and girls entering male-dominated fields by offering scholarships, decreased tuition, or reimbursement.

- Promote structured career pathways to students.
- Provide better education for young women's health. Enhance sexual education to discuss signs of abuse and resources as well as consent and teen dating violence.
- Recognize at-risk girls sooner and have interventions.
- Revisit classes on living independently, including life skills.
- Strengthen support systems for first-generation college students and single mothers.
- Urge more adult women to return to school to complete their education.
- Value more women getting master's degrees and Ph.D.s, not just bachelor's degrees.

HOME & FAMILY

In Salt Lake County, parents are recognized as one of the most powerful influences on the lives of their daughters. Recommendations for parents and society include:

- Align the workday schedule with school schedules to strengthen family time together.
- Encourage girls to advocate for themselves and for their education.
- Equip daughters and sons, and youth generally, to have healthy relationships, including understanding boundaries and how to enforce them.
- Have open communication around tough topics, including the dangers of social media.
- Share household chores and caregiving tasks equally between men and women. Highlight the value of men partnering vs. helping with home and family work.
- Teach caregiving to sons.
- Utilize parenting courses at younger ages, before having children.

GOVERNMENT & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The importance of involving girls and women in civic activities and getting support from government in Salt Lake County emerged as primary themes. Recommendations for government and the community include:

- Advocate for the importance of voting and researching the candidates and issues, especially local issues.
- Create opportunities for youth to engage with government officials -- to learn, engage, participate, and be heard, and have real-world experiences in local government.
- Empower women to run for office to impact changes and increase representation.
- Encourage legislation that allows more conversations in schools to prevent teen dating violence.
- Ensure the community is aware of where to find resources and what is available, including using organizations embedded in the community to distribute resources.
- Establish a dashboard of resources with opportunities to connect with others with similar needs. Reach immigrant communities by providing easier access to resources that are needed.
- Expand affordable and safe childcare options.
- Offer training to identify sex trafficking behavior.
- Promote free financial literacy classes and lifeskills courses such as interview skills, healthy relationships, sex education, social/emotional learning, and salary negotiator tools.
- Provide access to Promotora trainings to community members to allow more resources for cultures experiencing higher rates of sexual violence.
- Share success stories.

BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

In the business sector, Salt Lake County women struggle with professional opportunities, as well as with childcare and equity barriers. Recommendations for society, employers, and the workplace include:

- Champion corporations that address gender barriers and discourage sexism.
- Create financial incentives for women-owned or operated businesses.
- Encourage women to get certifications in fields that need more diverse leadership.
- Enlist employees to have respect for all genders in the workplace.
- Ensure recruitment language in job postings fosters the hiring of diverse teams.
- Have pay equity. Provide performance-based pay opportunities when applicable.
- Improve family leave policies and parental leave benefits. Encourage fathers to take paternity leave.
- Incorporate work-from-home, flexible scheduling.
- Increase benefits for employees who work part-time.
- Promote mentoring opportunities at all levels, from entry-level positions to senior management. Encourage networking and create support structures for women employees.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

Concern over the mental health and emotional well-being of girls and women in Salt Lake County emerged as a primary theme. Recommendations for healthcare and society include:

- Address loneliness and social anxiety. Increase access to mental health resources.
- Elevate the partnership between social work and healthcare and increase the number of counselors and victim advocates.
- Equip male healthcare providers to better care for women and girls.
- Have healthcare workers identify and intervene during visits where abuse is suspected and identify victims of relationship violence or abuse.
- Include screenings for sexual abuse in emergency rooms and urgent care facilities.
- Start discussion of family planning earlier.

CULTURE

The think tank attendees acknowledged that the culture (why and how we do what we do) in Salt Lake County is heavily influenced by religion. Leaders are concerned about the limitations and decreased value culture has placed on women and girls. Recommendations include:

- Address unconscious bias, including valuing unpaid work at home and negative attitudes towards stay-at-home moms.
- Change the culture of sexualization of women and girls.
- Emphasize flexible gender roles where men are not always the main breadwinners.
- Encourage men and boys to uplift women and girls.
- Have open conversations about safe and healthy relationships.
- Normalize education of women and girls, especially within religious groups.
- Prioritize women in religious organizations with representation in higher positions.
- Recognize men who are allies for creating a better culture for women in Utah.
- Use social media to increase awareness of the status of Utah's women and girls and as a tool to educate about the importance of gender equality.

CONCLUSION

When we listen and respond to concerns regarding the needs of girls and women in Salt Lake County, we will be better able to change harmful or ineffective policies and programs, continue effective action, support effective leaders, identify and solve local problems, and create responsive initiatives. The UWLP encourages leaders and residents to use this document to affect change.

Thank you to Salt Lake County, the USU Extension - Salt Lake County, United Way of Salt Lake City - Women United, and the Salt Lake Community College Women in Higher Education Network (UWHEN) and to the many collaborators and partners in Salt Lake County who supported the community conversation.