

USU UWLP Releases Research on Utah Women and Skilled Trades

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As Utah's population and economy grow, workforce shortages in key industries are becoming urgent, particularly in the skilled trades, where demand is outpacing supply. Despite strong wages and advancement opportunities, women remain underrepresented in these careers. Expanding access for women in these fields is both a practical solution to labor gaps and a strategic priority for the state's economy.

To better understand the current state of Utah women in the skilled trades, the Utah State University [Utah Women & Leadership Project \(UWLP\)](#) recently published a research snapshot titled "[Utah Women and Skilled Trades](#)." The report examines job demand in these trades, trends in women's participation, and ways to increase opportunities for Utah women in these careers.

"To fill this large worker shortage, those involved in training the next generation of employees will need to challenge the outdated assumptions that blue-collar jobs are just for men," said Susan Madsen, UWLP founding director and co-author of the report. "They would be wise to look to traditionally underrepresented groups, specifically women, as part of the solution."

The report listed several areas of consideration regarding Utah women and the skilled trades.

Skilled Trades Employment Projections: Nationally, women make up 50% of the workforce, but as of December 2023, they represented only 10.8% of employees in skilled trades and construction – including office roles such as legal, insurance, and administrative positions. Women working specifically in construction trades account for just 4.3%. In 2024, U.S. women comprised 3.5% of construction laborers, 4.2% of

carpenters, 2.9% of electricians, and 3.2% of plumbers, pipefitters, and steamfitters. Utah reflects a similar pattern of women holding a small share of construction roles. Despite this, many skilled trades offer wages that rival or exceed those of some white-collar careers, making them an increasingly attractive and financially viable option.

The Skilled Trades in Utah: In fall 2023, UWLP surveyed 3,505 Utahns on perceptions of challenges and opportunities for girls and women. Of 2,196 respondents who shared views on opportunities, 37.8% cited work and employment, especially skilled trades, reflecting changing attitudes: "Many trades are really seeking out women and girls, when they did not before." In year three of the study, 78.3% agreed that trade jobs are good career choices for women. Supporting this, Utah's Career and Technical Education programs offer career exposure and skills training in hundreds of schools and colleges, enrolling over 187,580 students in 2023–2024.

The Trades Pipeline: As demand for skilled trades grows, so does the need for apprenticeships, which combine paid, hands-on work with study. Yet many women considering the trades may not know where to start. Approximately 42% of apprentices enter through family or friends, leaving those outside this network unsure of how to begin. In Utah, programs provide apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship opportunities to raise awareness of career options. In 2024, the Utah Department of Workforce Services reported 4,731 active apprentices across all industries, and only 5.9% were women.

Shifting Cultural Perceptions: While social factors contribute to the low percentage of women in skilled trades, attitudes are shifting as the idea that blue-collar work is "just for men" becomes outdated. Data from the National Student Clearinghouse show vocational community college enrollment rose 16% in 2023, with construction trade programs increasing about 23%. The growing appeal of trades is also linked to labor market changes, including the rise of AI, with 77% of Gen Z citing careers resistant to automation as a top priority.

Challenges Facing Women in the Trades: Women entering skilled trades face significant barriers. High earnings are appealing, but sexism, harassment, and workplace isolation often push them to reconsider. Safety risks are heightened by male-designed Personal Protective Equipment, which can reduce comfort and performance for women. "Macho" workplace cultures add further strain. Finally, childcare is another barrier. Nearly 70% of tradeswomen with children under 18 have left or considered leaving their careers due to difficulties finding reliable care.

Although women still make up a small share of the skilled trades workforce, their numbers are growing, and with continued support, mentorship, and training, along with efforts to raise awareness, ensure workplace safety, and focus on retention, they are reshaping perceptions of these careers and their future.

“Jobs in the skilled trades are critical to both the U.S. and the Utah economy and should reflect the top talent of both men and women,” said Madsen. “While the majority of tradespeople have historically been male, by actively recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce that includes women, companies are not just making the right move—they are making a strategic one.”

April Townsend, research fellow, Utah Women & Leadership Project, is co-author of the report.

The “[A Bolder Way Forward](#)” initiative provides opportunities for Utahns to learn and contribute to meaningful change across 18 areas of focus. For more information, visit the UWLP website at utwomen.org. The UWLP is affiliated with [USU Extension](#).

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