

USU UWLP Study Shows Seven Top Opportunities for Utah Girls and Women

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National and statewide studies continue to show that Utah women and girls are not thriving in many critical areas. Committed to finding solutions, the Utah State University [Utah Women & Leadership Project](#) (UWLP) wanted to better understand Utahns' perceptions regarding opportunities for women and girls in the state.

The UWLP collected data from 5,212 Utah men and women ages 18 and older between Oct. 1 and Nov. 19, 2025. The 83-question survey drew on existing literature and surveys, expert guidance, and baseline data to assist leaders of A Bolder Way Forward (BWF), a Utah initiative that helps break down barriers that keep women and girls from thriving. Survey data served as the basis for the recent report, ["Seven Top Opportunities for Utah Girls and Women: A 2026 Update."](#)

Susan Madsen, UWLP founding director and a report author, said the purpose is two-fold.

"We hope to educate readers on the many challenges and opportunities Utah girls and women experience, and we hope to harness collective efforts and resources to mitigate the challenges and amplify the opportunities," she said.

Madsen said at the end of the survey, 3,470 respondents provided written comments to the open-ended questions to share their perceptions of the most significant opportunities for Utah women and girls. Below are their top seven opportunities in order of perceived importance.

1. **Education and Training.** These were the most cited opportunities for Utah women and girls (37.5%). Many respondents expressed support for women pursuing formal education and training and called for help accessing financial assistance or low-cost/free tuition. One respondent said,
"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 Through education, women have the opportunity to rethink outdated roles and paradigms so they can come to see themselves as powerful agents."
2. **Work and Employment Options.** These were the next most-cited opportunities (29%). Respondents called for more employers in Utah to adopt family-friendly policies to better support parents. They highlighted the importance of parental leave, scheduling flexibility, equal access to advancement and higher-paying jobs, and on-site childcare. One person commented, "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."
3. **Embrace Potential.** One in five respondents (21.1%) mentioned encouraging Utah girls and women to embrace their potential by believing in themselves, acknowledging their abilities, and taking control of their destinies. Some noted the importance of financial literacy, calling on girls and women to seize existing opportunities to build it so they can become self-sufficient and independent. Many participants believe there is considerable support for women and girls wanting to own businesses or become entrepreneurs.
4. **Support Women in Leadership and Public Office.** Respondents supported more women becoming leaders, including running for and being elected to public office (16.3%). One participant wrote, "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."
5. **Support Personal Choices.** Many commented on the need for those in their lives to support their personal choices (13.2%). One respondent stated, "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."
6. **Increase Awareness of Community Resources/Support.** These were cited by 9.6% of respondents. Also noted were increasing community resources that provide education and support on abuse, violence, consent, safe dating, mental health, and reproductive health.
7. **Connect/Work Together for Change.** These were cited by 8.5% of those surveyed. "Women build differently, and that is the opportunity," said one. "We build through community, intuition, creativity, collaboration, and connection. Our way is not

linear or hierarchical, and that's exactly what makes it powerful."

In addition to these seven categories, other opportunities were noted. Some identified Utah's growing economy as a resource that brings more diverse perspectives to the state. Others viewed sports and outdoor recreation as valuable opportunities.

"By identifying and understanding the opportunities noted in the study, we hope to focus our efforts and resources on the common good of supporting women," Madsen said. "When we strengthen the impact of Utah girls and women, we strengthen everyone."

April Townsend, research associate, Utah Women & Leadership Project, co-authored the report.

The "[A Bolder Way Forward](#)" initiative provides opportunities for Utahns to learn and contribute to meaningful change across 18 areas of focus. The UWLP is affiliated with [USU Extension](#).

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