

USU's Utah Women & Leadership Project Releases Research on Utah Employers Championing Women

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The Utah State University [Utah Women & Leadership Project](#) (UWLP) released a new research and policy brief, [2026 Companies Championing Women: Best Practices for Utah Employers](#), which summarizes the latest data from the statewide Companies Championing Women (CCW) initiative. The report highlights how Utah employers are adopting flexible, family-friendly, and women-focused policies that strengthen recruitment, retention, and advancement for women across industries.

The CCW initiative – originally launched as *100 Companies Championing Women* in partnership with the Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity – continues today under the stewardship of City Journals community newspapers, with the UWLP and Sego Leadership serving as partners.

For the fourth consecutive year, the CCW initiative recognized companies that demonstrate meaningful commitment to supporting women in the workplace. In 2026, 145 companies were honored, representing sectors such as finance, education, healthcare, manufacturing, technology, nonprofit, retail, arts and culture, and human services.

"Utah's long-term economic success depends on workplaces that better support all Utahns," said Susan R. Madsen, founding director of UWLP and lead author of the report. "This year's CCW cohort shows that many employers are stepping forward with policies and practices that help women thrive at work, strengthen leadership pipelines, and improve overall workplace culture."

Key Findings

Demographics. The 145 recognized companies reflect broad statewide participation. Nearly 59% were based in Salt Lake County, 15.9% in Utah County, and the remainder were distributed across Summit, Davis, Weber, and other counties. The organizations ranged from small businesses to employers with more than 1,000 employees. Of these, 54.5% were for-profit, 37.9% were nonprofit, and 6.2% were government.

These demographics illustrate the CCW initiative's growing reach and employers' commitment across Utah to advance women in the workplace.

Family-Specific Policies and Benefits. Family-friendly policies remained a cornerstone of CCW participation. The most common offerings included transition back-to-work support (64.8%), paid maternity leave (64.1%), paid paternity leave (53.8%), paid family leave (46.9%), and unpaid family leave (44.1%). Companies also reported childcare support (28.3%), adoption and fertility benefits (20.7%), and return-to-work or reentry opportunities (36.6%).

Employers described flexible schedules, phased return-to-work programs, lactation accommodations, caregiver resources, and innovative offerings such as infant-at-work policies and transition coaching. These supports help retain women through major life transitions and reduce barriers to workforce participation.

Flexible Work Policies and Benefits. Flexible work arrangements were among the most widely adopted practices, such as flexible hours (87.6%), remote work (85.5%), and quality part-time positions (72.4%).

Other offerings included compressed workweeks, part-time roles with benefits, and job-sharing programs. Employers emphasized that flexibility improves recruitment, retention, productivity, and employee well-being – particularly for women balancing caregiving responsibilities.

Professional Development and Leadership. Many companies were investing in leadership pathways and development opportunities for women, including gender diversity at mid- and senior-level leadership (67.4%), women serving on boards (54.2%), mentoring or sponsorship programs (45.1%), women-focused professional development (38.2%), unconscious bias training (36.1%), and women's employee resource groups (ERGs) or networks (25.7%).

Employers reported that diverse leadership teams strengthen decision-making, innovation, and organizational performance. Leadership academies, coaching, stretch assignments, and structured recruiting strategies help expand women's representation across industries and roles.

Other Workplace Practices: Additional practices included pay equity efforts (73.6%), tuition reimbursement for employees (35.2%), unlimited PTO (17.9%), and tuition reimbursement for dependents (6.2%).

These policies reflect growing recognition that equitable compensation, career development, and supportive benefits are essential to attracting and retaining women in the workforce.

Implications for Utah Employers

The findings highlight several opportunities for Utah employers to strengthen workplace culture and advance women's careers. These include: expanding flexible and family-friendly policies, investing in leadership development and sponsorship for women, increasing women's representation in executive and board roles, strengthening pay equity and transparent compensation practices, and building inclusive cultures through ERGs, allyship initiatives, and bias training.

"As Utah continues to navigate workforce shortages in some industries, demographic shifts, and rising employee expectations, these findings underscore both progress and urgency," Madsen said. "Employers that champion women strengthen their organizations, their communities, and Utah's economic future."

Additional co-authors of the report are Brie Sparks, associate director, UWLP, and Deborah Lin local outreach and resource manager, UWLP.

The [Utah Women & Leadership Project](#) strengthens the impact of Utah girls and women through research, resources, and statewide engagement. Its premier initiative – [A Bolder Way Forward](#) – creates opportunities for Utahns to learn, collaborate, and drive 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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