

What Can I Do?

A SERIES TO HELP UTAHNS ENGAGE



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What Business Leaders Can Do to Strengthen the Impact of Utah Girls and Women

UTAH WOMEN &
LEADERSHIP
Project

Utah is full of engaged, passionate individuals who frequently ask the question, “What can I personally and/or professionally do to strengthen the impact of Utah girls and women?” To provide specific answers to that question, the **Utah Women & Leadership Project** team hosted a series of “think tank” gatherings to collect best practices for various stakeholders interested in supporting and empowering Utah girls and women.

This idea sheet is based on a gathering of 25 women CEOs and top executives from Utah companies to discuss ways business leaders can use their influence to strengthen the impact of Utah girls and women. Their insights focus on things leaders can do in their own companies, through engaging with educational institutions, in the community, and in the Utah corporate culture at large.

COMPANIES

For business leaders, one of the most important spheres of influence is within their own companies. They can help create a positive and inclusive organizational culture that hires, retains, develops, and promotes women. More specifically, company leaders can do the following:

- Set a positive “tone from the top” with explicit and consistent communication that diversity is a high priority.
- Ensure top leadership recognizes both the business case for a diverse workforce and leadership teams as well as the corporate social responsibility to promote inclusion and diversity.
- Encourage both men and women managers at all levels to prioritize diversity in their hiring, retention, and promotion efforts.
- Offer training in recognizing and minimizing unconscious bias.
- Create and follow an internal diversity “best practices” protocol.
- Encourage and support informal and formal mentorship, sponsorship, and peer-coaching activities; recognize the various types of developmental relationships and assist employees in getting support that will be most beneficial.
- Normalize varied expectations and diverse priorities among all employees; make sure both men and women feel free to talk about their lives outside of work.
- Create deliberate and explicit day-to-day schedules and long-term professional pathways that enable variety and flexibility for all.
- Conduct internal, data driven audits in key areas such as compensation metrics and the percentage of women in leadership and on boards.
- Ensure that there are workplace policies in place that provide a safe environment for women.
- Encourage and expect best practices in diversity among vendors, partners, and clients.
- Recognize and reward different managerial/leadership styles, especially those that may traditionally have been gendered.

EDUCATION

Utah's top business executives are powerful role models for the next generation of leaders, and this is particularly true for the influence women executives can have on girls and young women. Female executives can inspire young women to graduate from college and enter high-impact industries when they:

- Speak regularly at educational institutions (from K-12 to college campuses), engaging audiences of both genders to show what strong women leaders look like.
- Present to female students specifically highlighting the opportunities, possibilities, and realities of careers where women have traditionally been underrepresented.

All business leaders can also:

- Assist in identifying and promoting a larger pool of powerful speakers and visible role models so young people can envision a diversity of backgrounds, experiences, and pathways to success.
- Educate young women and men about the realities of the Utah labor force; data show that women work for many years, so they should make informed plans for the future.
- Sponsor educational enrichment programs, workshops, and seminars to help girls and young women recognize the myriad opportunities available in education and career choice.
- Promote STEM workshops, business competitions, and other industry-specific events to give girls the chance to "see what they can be."
- Use their influence to encourage hiring and promoting more women into top educational leadership, both among faculty and administrators, so their positive impact on students will increase.

COMMUNITY

Many business leaders have a high community profile, and they can use this megaphone to promote women's interests in a variety of ways. Leaders can:

- Spotlight individual women who are excelling in business settings.
- Work with media outlets to highlight and promote companies that are doing great things for women.
- Speak out publicly on issues of concern to professional women, such as the gender wage gap, discrimination, and the relatively low numbers of women on corporate boards and in top levels of leadership.
- Champion women making bold choices and achieving in all areas (e.g., politics, philanthropy, education, business, government, community, and family).

- Mentor and sponsor emerging women leaders in community, government, educational, and political roles.

UTAH'S CORPORATE CLIMATE

Utah's top executives are uniquely positioned to move the needle toward greater female achievement in the state's corporate climate. Business leaders can:

- Encourage the creation of new women-owned businesses.
- Serve as mentors for incubator programs and other trainings for new entrepreneurs.
- Network and advocate for female founders as they seek funding.
- Leverage relationships across industries to find and place key mentors and sponsors in areas where they are greatly needed.
- Host women-only events, trainings, or workshops where women can develop deeper relationships, explore challenges, and work toward shaping a local corporate environment where more women can thrive.
- Utilize their leadership in professional organizations to ask such questions as "What can Utah do to attract more female talent?" "How do we address gaps in diversity?" and "How can we foster a culture that creates pathways for more women leaders within Utah's distinct climate?"
- Create and distribute diversity best practices protocols that can be shared and used across industries.
- Inform management teams from global companies about cultural pressures distinct to Utah and encourage public dialogue on how to move forward in positive ways.
- Continue to emphasize the business case for diversity and inclusion publicly and encourage all businesses to do more.
- Support and sponsor research activities that uncover areas where Utah is doing well and where we need to do better as a state when it comes to women's overall success.
- Ensure your company takes a visible commitment like the ElevateHER Challenge or the ParityPledge, and encourage other businesses to do so as well.

CONCLUSION

As more top business leaders recognize and leverage the potential of women to influence and shape the professional arena within their own companies, in educational and community settings, and within Utah's overall corporate climate, they will be better able to strengthen the impact of girls and women throughout the state of Utah.