

# What Can I Do?

A SERIES TO HELP UTAHNS ENGAGE



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## What Male Allies Can Do to Strengthen the Impact of Utah Women in Workplace Settings

**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 (UWLP)** 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 2018 gathering of 25 professional men at various stages in their careers, all of whom have committed to supporting and advancing women professionally. Understanding that male engagement is critical in reducing workplace gender imbalances, these suggestions focus on what men can do in professional settings to create awareness, rethink systems, build capacity (in both women and men), foster developmental relationships, and advocate for necessary cultural change.

### AWARENESS

Male allies recognize that in order to move the needle for women in the workplace, companies must first identify current gaps and raise awareness of critical issues. Men can encourage their companies to:

- Conduct internal audits to assess overall gender balance, percentage of women in leadership positions, and existing gender pay inequities.
- Show commitment to change by taking the ElevateHer Challenge, Parity Pledge, or similar public steps that spotlight important issues.
- Hold town hall meetings and create additional opportunities for women and men to share concerns (publicly or anonymously). Ensure issues are openly acknowledged and addressed so employees will continue to give feedback.

- Make conversations about women’s success a regular part of company culture at all levels.
- Set clear expectations and visible goals for all employees focused on recruitment, retention, and advancement.
- Conduct research specific to their own industries and companies to learn what factors may be halting women’s progress.

In addition to encouraging company-wide change, men can also raise awareness individually as they:

- Learn to identify, expose, and discourage sexist/biased comments, behaviors, and stereotypes, and do their part to ensure a safe and welcoming environment for all employees.
- Become educated about challenges facing women in their industries, professions, and companies, and share what they have learned.
- Seek to actively listen to the experiences and concerns of their own female colleagues.

### SYSTEMS & PROCESSES

Existing policies may be contributing to workplace inequality. However, a careful analysis of current systems, along with the thoughtful use of technology and up-to-date best practices, can reduce bias and support women’s advancement. Male allies can influence processes at their companies as they apply the following.

- **Advocate for better recruiting practices:** use software to screen job listings for gendered language, consider gender-blind technologies where practical, expand standard search/recruiting locations to ensure a more diverse pool of candidates, set goals to interview women for each open position (at all levels), include women on interview panels, distinguish between core competencies and "nice-to-haves" that could be taught to a strong candidate.
- **Establish fair and inclusive policies surrounding pay, benefits, and advancement:** eliminate salary history questions from negotiations, mandate equal pay for equal work across all levels of the organization, ensure "merit-based" rewards systems are free from implicit biases that favor certain groups, create salary and benefits packages specifically designed to attract and retain women, and create clear, quantifiable metrics for performance evaluations and advancement.
- **Adopt gender-informed best practices for meetings, communication, and workspaces:** ensure key company information is being shared with all employees (including remote/flex workers), avoid gender exclusive locations for recruitment, networking, or team building activities, lay ground rules that enable women to speak up in meetings, and create workspace environments suited to employees with varying preferences.
- Be willing to be the first follower when they see a woman who is ready to lead.
- Use their networks, influence, and power to sponsor women for new opportunities.
- Commit to mentoring women in meaningful ways, such as eliminating personal assumptions, seeking to understand challenges and opportunities, and supporting with long-term planning and goals.
- Establish mentoring guidelines early, including planned interactions, benefits, and expectations.
- Be bold in challenging women they mentor, but communicate openly to ensure the relationship is productive and respectful.
- Invite women to participate in traditional networking activities (e.g., golf), but also vary the types of activities held to promote inclusivity.

## CAPACITY BUILDING

Male allies can strengthen their female colleagues through encouraging stretch projects. They can:

- Ensure women have professional development opportunities, including technical training, higher education, and career-building instruction in topics like negotiation and networking.
- Encourage women to seek opportunities for challenging assignments, promotions, speaking/presenting at conferences, and board service.
- Partner with women's professional groups to network and provide training and development.
- Support women as they discover their own diverse and unique leadership style.
- Promote varying career pathways to long-term success; professional women who may not want to move into management can continue to grow as valuable individual contributors.

Men can also build their own capacity as allies by listening to and mentoring women; they will also benefit by receiving training in various topics, including advocacy, unconscious bias, critical conversations, mentorship, sponsorship, followership, peer coaching, and strategies for dealing with those who are unsupportive of ally efforts.

## DEVELOPMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

One of the most effective ways male allies can empower women is through developmental relationships. Men at any career stage can:

## CULTURAL CHANGE

Negative cultural factors must be reduced for widespread change to occur. Male allies can:

- Establish a "tone from the top" that is firmly committed to supporting and advancing women.
- Create a male allies group where men can explore ideas and learn how to support colleagues.
- Engage in community activities that encourage girls and young women to explore all available opportunities, sponsor and support programs focused on personal and educational growth, and persuade young women to reframe what is possible.
- Participate in programs and activities that will grow the pipeline for women in all industries and sectors.
- Encourage women of all ages to explore fields where they are underrepresented; advocate for diversity training and cultural improvements in industries where women are a minority.
- Combat social pressures that undermine women's success; normalize discussions about outside responsibilities for both women and men.
- Speak out against harassment, discrimination, benevolent sexism, and microaggressions in various forms and at any level of an organization.
- Inform stakeholders that diversity drives results.
- Foster a culture where women will find and use their voices, and where they are enabled to develop confidence and lead.

## CONCLUSION

Male allies can make valuable contributions to the cause of strengthening the impact of women in workplace settings. From a temporary intern to a CEO, all men can become engaged in these efforts as individuals, within their companies, and in the broader community. By so doing, male allies will be a powerful force in assuring the increased success of Utah women, not just in their professional pursuits but in all aspects of their lives.

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