

What Can I Do?

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What Mayors 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 (UWLP)** hosts “think tank” gatherings to collect best practices for various stakeholders interested in supporting and empowering Utah women.

OVERVIEW

This idea sheet is based on input from 20 former and current mayors representing a variety of cities and towns across Utah. Discussions in the spring of 2021 focused on a myriad of ways mayors can increase the impact of Utah girls and women. For example, mayors discussed the importance of mentorship starting at a young age and continuing into adulthood, as well as building strong networks and relationships. They also discussed the need to champion more inclusive and family-friendly policies and programs. Participants recommended community outreach strategies and ways to support women leading in their community. These mayors insisted that local elected officials can play an important and influential role in strengthening the impact of girls and women in their communities.

MENTOR & EMPOWER

Mentoring and empowering women of all ages will help more girls and women identify as leaders and encourage their involvement in civic and political roles. Engaged mayors can:

- Mentor and coach. Recognize leadership skills and talents in women of all ages and encourage them to civically engage and lead.
- Build networks of female leaders and facilitate opportunities for girls and women to interact with and learn from each other. Offer leadership opportunities to help women gain a better understanding of the political process.
- Conduct leadership trainings and offer networking opportunities for female city employees and women in the community.

- Create and cultivate environments where women are more likely to speak up and share their perspectives.
- Recruit women to serve and advocate for issues they are passionate about.
- Help women and girls navigate ways to be involved without forgoing other priorities. Promote a paradigm shift from an “either/or” to an “and” mentality. Remove barriers that may prevent women from civic engagement.
- Treat women as potential leaders and clarify expectations that male colleagues follow suit.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Encourage women and girls to lead by demonstrating public leadership. Illustrate the political process and the variety of ways they can serve their community. Strategies to do so include:

- Meet with youth city council, boy and girl scouts, religious youth groups, or invite those groups to shadow you in your role as mayor.
- Engage K-12 schools in your municipality. Discuss what it's like to be inspired to run for office—and win; speak of the good things that local government can accomplish.
- Share materials with students on how to engage in municipal politics and the policy process. Include engaging marketing materials such as a “Future Mayor” sticker.

- Partner with the Utah Women & Leadership Project and other groups to host events with a focus on leadership development and educational opportunities for girls, young women, and women.
- Build strong partnerships with school districts, community centers, food pantries, and other civic centers.
- Exemplify service leadership by hosting city beautification and service projects.
- Listen closely to the people you interact with and demonstrate that you genuinely care about each of them.
- Remove impediments to civic engagement and participation. For example, offer remote options for meetings if possible.
- Build relationships with city staff, city council members, and other community leaders.

POLICIES & PROGRAMS

Policies and programs inspire women's participation. Champion inclusive policies and promote diversity in decision-making processes. Mayors can lead by doing the following:

- Ensure that equitable pay best practices are in place for municipal employees.
- Review job descriptions, hiring processes, and work practices to encourage more female applicants. Champion policies that strengthen the city's parental leave program and empower employees as parents of growing families.
- Advocate for public-private partnerships with childcare centers and provide opportunities for city employees and elected officials who are parents of young children.
- Create after-school programs that promote education, wellness, recreation, and community building for young people. Provide enriching cultural learning opportunities for youth, particularly girls and young women.
- Establish an active youth city council and encourage participation from young women. Provide mentorship and leadership development training.
- Identify ways that municipalities can provide better resources for victims of domestic violence. Work with city law enforcement and community partners to ensure their needs are being met.
- Increase resources to families, women, and children in areas of need.

DIVERSITY & REPRESENTATION

Create an environment that encourages diversity and inclusivity. Policy outcomes are improved by having diverse perspectives at the table. Lead by example. Some ideas for moving forward:

- Educate staff on diversifying teams and on how broader representation can lead to better, more inclusive decision making.
- Diversify your boards, committees, commissions, volunteers, and city/town workforce departments to better match and represent the

demographics within your community. Recruit and train women to serve in various capacities in your municipality.

- Engage the whole community, particularly under-represented groups, and ask for their participation and input. Listen to feedback and remove impediments for participation if needed.

RECOGNITION & SUPPORT

Promoting and highlighting the contributions of women and girls in the community fosters leadership identity and growth. Mayors can support women in their communities by doing the following:

- Formally recognize girls and women for their achievements in your community. Invite the media and business community to attend.
- Support female city employees, first responders, and frontline workers. Find ways to highlight their contributions and service publicly.
- Highlight women-owned small businesses in your municipality, and spotlight groups or individuals who serve the community in a newsletter or on social media.
- Support women elected officials by recommending them for assignments and jobs that are aligned with their strengths.
- Review such things as the pictures on the walls in your city office, park names, and building names and find ways to highlight women who have made valuable contributions to the community. Cultural artifacts matter.

FEMALE MAYORS

- Be seen. It's important for people to see women in leadership positions. Get in front of groups, attend events, and volunteer to speak as much as possible.
- Be a role model.
- Use your background and experience to empower others to lead in your city or town.
- Practice and demonstrate courage; don't shy away from difficult conversations and using your own leadership skills.
- If you find yourself the only female in the room, point it out and ask what can be done to get more women in the discussions.
- Have open dialogue with people you meet and build relationships.
- Go to lunch, support, network, and share ideas and best practices with other female mayors and elected officials.

CONCLUSION

When girls and women meaningfully participate and engage in their communities and in civic life, decision making and problem solving flourish. As mayors recognize their influence and use their voices, they can create a culture of inclusion, raise awareness of issues, remove barriers, and take action to increase the impact of women and girls in their communities and throughout the state.

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