

What Can I Do?

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What Washington County Leaders and Residents Can Do To Strengthen the Impact of Girls and Women in Their Area

UTAH WOMEN & LEADERSHIP
Project

Washington County is full of engaged, passionate individuals who frequently ask the question, “What can I do to strengthen the impact of girls and women in this area?” To provide specific answers to that question, the Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) and Women’s Influence Network (WIN) hosted a think tank to collect ideas for individuals, groups, and organizations interested in supporting and empowering girls and women in their area.

This idea sheet is based on a 2023 gathering of 42 leaders in Washington County. Girls and women face challenges unique to the area in which they live, and the goal of this think tank was to identify those barriers and determine strategies and initiatives that local leaders and residents can implement to address them. This document includes recommendations in the following areas: home and family, education, politics and community engagement, business and economics, and culture.

HOME & FAMILY

In Washington County, parents and families are recognized as powerful influences on the lives of their daughters and society. Recommendations for families include:

- Be good examples in our families of getting an education.
- Empower girls by giving them charge and authority over their own bodies so they know they can set boundaries and can say no.
- Model healthy relationships by having a partnership between men and women at home.
- Raise resilient children by stopping intensive mothering and allowing children to fail.
- Show daughters there are options beyond what they see in the community, including STEM.
- Teach children about consent at a young age. Provide expectations of what is acceptable.
- Treat daughters the same as sons, including teaching them not to act dumb or dumb down.

EDUCATION

Leaders in Washington County emphasized the essential role schools and education play in developing leadership, confidence, and competence in girls and young women. Recommendations include:

- Boost both STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) to increase the pipeline for tech jobs since girls are often drawn to the arts so they can be exposed more to opportunities.
- Do not assume that there are two parents at home or that all mothers stay at home when planning school activities so that parents can be more engaged.
- Empower girls by teaching them they are in charge of their own bodies. Provide maturation classes on boundaries and have K-12 leaders engage with parents and the state school board. Teach parents what to explain and at what age. Institutional buy-in is critical to affect change in talking to kids.
- Encourage girls to continue their education beyond high school, finish college, and understand that decisions in early college years can limit future options.
- Encourage girls to take classes in areas that are typically outside gender norms.
- Have healthy relationship education in schools to prevent domestic violence and sexual assault, including what is acceptable, how women should be treated, and how to have hard conversations, collaborate, and partner in relationships.
- Open girls’ eyes to the broad options of careers by showing examples and providing modules of career opportunities.

POLITICS & COMMUNITY

Residents recognize the importance of having girls and women engaged civically and politically in Washington County. Recommendations include:

- Create a pipeline for younger people to enter politics at all levels in the state.
- Educate them about policy changes needed for support.
- Educate young women regarding the importance of local elections and getting to the polls.
- Empower women and elected leaders to have conversations and disagree respectfully.
- Encourage conversations among people with the facts and get data to elected officials.
- Increase ongoing voter awareness in educational settings, from voter registration to primaries.
- Rename politics so that we can focus on the problem.
- Support women in politics and be less partisan.

BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

In the business sector, Washington County women struggle with a variety of issues, with the pay gap and childcare being at the forefront. Recommendations for businesses and government include:

- Complete gender wage gap analyses throughout the county; start with government entities so it will trickle down to businesses.
- Explore and expand childcare options for small businesses to give more women the option to work, including co-ops and drop-in childcare options.
- Have childcare assistance at all levels.
- Help women feel welcome and confident to apply to jobs even when they are not 100% qualified for the job.
- Increase flexibility in the workforce by giving companies models, practices, and human resource policies to draw both men and women to jobs.
- Increase women starting businesses by providing resources, tools, and support.
- Provide better options for maternity and paternity leave by having chambers/professional associations provide examples of how to best support new parents.
- Recognize that increased pay for women and girls will open more opportunities, and have pay transparency to decrease favoritism among employees -- including the good old boys' club.
- Strengthen current assistance programs to help families.

CULTURE

Concern over the influence of cultural norms on girls and women in Washington County emerged as a primary theme. The think tank attendees acknowledged that the culture (why and how we do what we do) in Washington County is heavily influenced by religion. Recommendations include:

- Change the cultural bias of Utah religions, including having more support from the religious leaders for women and girls and encouraging them to lead.
- Compliment girls on things they do, not how they look.
- Empower women to be assertive and confident.
- Encourage girls to do hard things in school, work, and extracurricular activities -- even when they are not confident or do not feel ready.
- Establish what is acceptable in terms of domestic violence and how women should be treated; help women know that "where they are now is not where they will be."
- Expand male allyship to help men be more supportive of women's education and careers.
- Give girls and women permission to choose a career for any reason and to make decisions for themselves based on their goals and values.
- Recognize more women in leadership in churches, schools, and other settings so girls see themselves in these roles.
- Lose judgment of men who stay at home and help men see they do not have to be assigned "roles" by blurring the lines of social norms.
- Make feminism okay again, meaning equal rights and equal pay. Remove the stigma.
- Promote the idea that girls and women should celebrate being smart and strong, and not to look cooler if they act dumber.
- Recognize and support single parents, whether men or women.
- Recognize that all family income matters, and do not assume male income trumps female income.
- View being a wife and a mother as a choice, not an either/or, and respect and value this role.
- Underscore to young women that higher education is valuable, even if a woman chooses to stay home to raise her family, and that women can choose what they want to do.

CONCLUSION

When we listen and respond to concerns regarding the needs of girls and women in Washington County, we will be better able to change harmful or ineffective policies and programs, continue effective action, support effective leaders, identify and solve local problems, and create responsive initiatives. The UWLP encourages leaders and residents to use this document to affect change.

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Thank you to the Women's Influence Network and to the many collaborators and partners in Washington County who supported the community conversation.
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