

What Can I Do?

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What Women's Networks and Groups 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 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 Utah girls and women.

This idea sheet is based on a 2018 gathering of 65 leaders of women's networks, groups, and organizations in Utah in many arenas. It provides an overview of opportunities to influence cultural attitudes in ways that are relevant in all settings, followed by specific ideas and solutions to advance and empower women and girls in more distinct environments.

CULTURE

Several major themes emerged as areas where women's groups can positively influence Utah culture in order to strengthen the impact of girls and women. Influencers can help their communities to do the following:

Rethink gender stereotypes and rigid or limiting roles.

- Create positive messaging that supports women making various life choices personally, professionally, and in their communities.
- Promote the idea of an integrated life for women ("and" rather than "or").
- Engage family members to share unpaid work more equally, which will reduce the burden experienced by many women and give them room to aspire.
- Encourage men to see themselves as allies in promoting gender equality.
- Initiate public dialogue and reinforce the message that women's engagement and leadership is crucial to healthy families, neighborhoods, businesses, communities, and governments.

Help girls and women develop confidence, increase aspirations, and become aware of possibilities.

- Enable young girls to envision the wide range of possibilities ahead of them, both through education and enrichment activities.
- Highlight powerful role models coming from a wide variety of backgrounds.
- Ensure young women have accurate information about their likely labor force participation so they can make informed choices.
- Encourage girls and women to take risks, volunteer for challenging assignments, and face failure in order to grow in confidence.
- Help women find and use their voices to influence and lead, and "tap" women to help them recognize and realize their potential.

Work to reduce both blatant and subtle forms of sexism.

- Inform communities about sexual harassment and discrimination, and work to combat it in all settings.
- Empower women to feel confident in their choices and to support others as well, in order to reduce women's internalized sexism.
- Encourage positive messaging to keep momentum strong and reduce "fatigue" with gender equity efforts.

Address additional challenges for women of color, the LGBTQ community, and members of diverse religious, ideological, and socioeconomic groups.

- Help influencers and stakeholders understand that diversity improves outcomes in every area.

- Encourage women in power to use their position and amplify other women's voices.
- Make sure teams, boards, and any public outreach efforts include women from many backgrounds.
- Enable all girls in Utah to see role models with whom they can identify.
- Engage female college students as volunteers; this will provide them with professional development opportunities as well as the chance to network, mentor, and serve as role models.
- Build on the current climate of strong female leadership in higher education to inspire girls and young women to see themselves as leaders.

BUSINESS & PROFESSIONAL

In addition to broad efforts, women's groups can work to address issues within their own spheres. To help women thrive in workplace settings, women's business networks and professional organizations can:

- Advocate for professional innovations and solutions that are conducive to women's success, including high quality childcare, flexible work schedules and career pathways, and mentoring programs.
- Provide and facilitate training and professional development for women at all stages of careers, including young professionals, returning workers, and executives. Include skill-building in negotiation, self-advocacy, and technical expertise.
- Contribute to a climate of "abundance" that normalizes women's success and reduces women's negative interactions with each other.
- Make targeted, organized efforts on behalf of group members to increase visibility and advancement, including awards, appointments to boards and commissions, and promotions.
- Provide opportunities for high-quality networking where women can establish relationships with professionals (men and women) at all levels and in various companies and industries.
- Address pipeline issues by actively engaging in the community and encouraging girls and women of all ages to explore varying options, especially high-paying fields with few women.

EDUCATION

Leaders of women's groups know that education is key to strengthening the impact of girls and women from the earliest ages through college. Leaders can do the following:

- Work with K-12 educators and administrators to teach girls to explore and aspire, focusing on motivation and positive communication.
- Emphasize that higher education is an investment rather than an expense, and teach young women to save money for college.
- Create and sponsor extracurricular programs in key areas such as communication, financial literacy, balancing personal and professional goals, and developing a leadership identity.
- Form stronger partnerships between K-12 and higher education to ensure a clear, consistent message of the importance of college and career planning for girls.
- Begin college students' career planning early, and strengthen retention and completion efforts.

COMMUNITY & NONPROFIT

Utah has many organizations working for the good of girls and women in a wide range of areas. To influence and empower their communities, they can:

- Identify challenges and work toward solutions for issues that affect many Utah women, including poverty, education, wage gaps, sexual violence, mental health, substance use disorders, and social justice inequities of all kinds.
- Communicate and collaborate with other Utah organizations to maximize resources, reduce overlapping services, and identify gaps in order to best serve their communities.
- Work directly with girls and women within their spheres to raise awareness, broaden perspectives, and inspire self-determination.
- Contribute to positive conversations about women in Utah, including their past contributions, current successes, and potential future impact; public messaging should be diversity-focused and include women from all backgrounds.

POLITICS

Utah ranks poorly in terms of women running for and serving in political office. Women's political groups and networks can make a difference by doing the following:

- Educate all Utahns on the critical importance of having more women serving in public office.
- Promote and expand training programs for women on how to run for office and win.
- Leverage networks and resources to help women fundraise more effectively and make connections with power brokers and influencers.
- Build the pipeline for women in statewide political leadership by supporting grassroots efforts.
- Engage male allies in the cause of expanding women's political participation at all levels.

CONCLUSION

Utah is home to a large number of women's groups and networks working in various arenas. These organizations are currently making substantial and successful efforts to strengthen the impact of women and girls in the state, and through increased awareness and collaboration, their potential to move the needle for women will continue to grow. By so doing, they will improve the lives of women personally, professionally, in their communities, and in the state as a whole.

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