

Flexible and Family-Friendly Policies at Utah's "Best Places to Work"

Setting the Stage

The COVID-19 pandemic that reached Utah in March of 2020 has had an enormous impact on the way companies do business. Perhaps the biggest change for employees came in the widespread shift to remote work as a public health measure, but many companies adjusted work practices and policies in other ways to support their employees during a challenging time. Many changes focus on flexibility and family-friendly policies, which have traditionally been a double-edged sword for working women. Though such offerings have made it possible for some mothers to remain in the workforce,¹ taking advantage of such programs has often placed women on the "mommy-track," where they are seen as being less committed to their careers.² Yet these programs are not for women only, and men who utilize family-friendly benefits have also experienced backlash.³

Generational attitudes have begun to transform this landscape somewhat over the past decade, as millennial workers are more likely than Baby Boomers or Gen-X to consider workplace flexibility to be essential.⁴ This shift, combined with a growing emphasis on the value of diversity within organizations, has created momentum toward increasing these types of offerings.⁵ But COVID-19 forced companies across the world to transition to remote work almost overnight, a phenomenon that many believe will revolutionize the way employees work moving forward.⁶ In this dynamic climate, Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) researchers designed a study to highlight what types of flexible and family-friendly arrangements are available at a variety of Utah businesses; the study also addresses the impact these policies are having on companies and their employees now and into the future.

Study Background

In the fall of 2020, UWLP researchers collected data from 100 companies related to their flexibility and family-friendly policies and offerings. Participating companies were chosen from several "Best Places to Work in Utah" lists from the *Salt Lake Tribune*, *Utah Business Magazine*, and the Women Tech Council Shatter List, as well as Utah companies listed in similar national rankings from *Forbes* and *Glassdoor*.⁷ These companies were selected because they had been publicly recognized for offering benefits to meet their employees' needs. Hence, this study should not be seen as describing Utah businesses generally but as examining best practices of companies that are leading the way in terms of employee satisfaction.

We contacted (or attempted to contact) each company on the lists mentioned above, reaching out to 186 businesses. For the

purposes of this survey, we focused on for-profit businesses (even though some educational and non-profit organizations were also ranked).⁸ We closed the survey after receiving 100 responses (see Appendix for list of participating companies). The surveys were completed by human resource professionals or other company representatives who have deep knowledge of company policies and their general effects on the businesses.

Data were collected through an online survey designed to capture information about companies' flexible and family-friendly arrangements and offerings. The survey asked companies to provide basic demographic information and to choose appropriate responses from the following questions:

1. What flexibility and/or family-friendly arrangements do you currently offer at your company?
2. What flexibility and/or family-friendly arrangements do you plan to offer over the next 12 months?
3. Which of the following benefits (if any) has your company experienced as a result of offering flexibility and/or family-friendly arrangements to your employees?
4. Which of the following challenges (if any) have you faced with implementing flexibility and/or family-friendly arrangements for your employees?
5. Aside from implementing work-from-home practices, did you make any changes to your flexibility/family friendly options because of COVID-19? If yes, do you plan on making any of these changes permanent after the crisis?

To maximize the likelihood that companies would finish the survey, we kept questions simple and brief, ensuring the entire survey could be completed in 10 minutes. However, participants were also invited to share additional information, if desired, and many did so. All quantitative and qualitative data were thoroughly analyzed, and the highlights are included in this report.

Company Demographics

Of the 100 companies who took the survey, 98 completed the four demographic questions regarding company location, number of employees, number of years in operation, and organization type (i.e., public or private, including funding sources). Demographic data are important components in determining which companies are most likely—and best equipped—to provide best-in-class flexible and family-friendly benefits and work arrangements. The demographic breakdown of participating companies is as follows:

- *Location by County*: Salt Lake (50.2%), Utah (29.6%), Weber/Davis (10.2%), Other (8.2%)
- *Number of Employees*: 1–24 (2.0%), 25–49 (11.2%), 50–99 (17.3%), 100–249 (21.4%), 250–499 (13.3%), 500–

- 999 (11.2%), 1,000+ (23.5%)
- *Years in Operation:* 3 years or less (1.0%), 4–8 years (13.3%), 9–15 years (28.6%), 16 years or more (57.1%)
- *Organizational Type:* Private: bootstrapped or angel funding only (28.6%), Private: including VC funding (32.7%), Public (20.4%), Other (18.4%)

Flexibility and Family-Friendly Policies

In questions #1 and #2, participants were given a list of 17 flexibility or family-friendly workplace arrangements and asked to report which ones they currently offered to their employees and which ones they planned to offer over the next 12 months. All 100 companies answered Question #1, and 90 companies answered Question #2. The percentage of companies that answered each question and offer these specific arrangements, now and in the coming year, can be seen below in Table 1.

Table 1: Flexibility and Family-Friendly Policies

Policies/Arrangements Offered	Current	Future
Remote work/flexibility with work location	92.0%	91.1%
Flexibility with working hours (full-time employees)	86.0%	80.0%
Paid maternity leave	75.0%	71.1%
Part-time roles (entry-level)	72.0%	70.0%
Paid paternity leave	64.0%	63.3%
Paid family leave (general)	59.0%	50.0%
Unpaid family leave	56.0%	54.4%
Tuition reimbursement (employees)	55.0%	53.3%
Transition back-to-work support after maternity leave	47.0%	41.1%
Part-time roles (higher level positions)	44.0%	47.8%
“Unlimited” PTO	34.0%	32.2%
Compressed work week	26.0%	31.1%
Other	25.0%	20.0%
“Returnships” or other programs for returning workers (formal or informal)	20.0%	21.1%
Childcare support (e.g., onsite childcare, childcare reimbursement, emergency/back-up childcare)	17.0%	21.1%
Formal job-sharing program	4.0%	10.0%
Tuition reimbursement for dependents/family members	3.0%	4.4%

As expected, due to COVID-19, the most common arrangement is remote work, followed closely by flexible work hours, which are offered by the vast majority of companies (with plans to continue through the next twelve months). In addition to allowing companies to adhere to public health recommendations, these adjustments also support the health, welfare, and mental wellbeing of employees as schools and

childcare centers have been closed, and as individuals are facing high levels of uncertainty and distress generally.

As the companies we surveyed are known for their best-in-class employee benefits, we were not surprised to see that the companies strongly support new parents in the form of maternity, paternity, and general family leave. Three of four companies offer some form of maternity leave, with around 60% of companies extending that leave to fathers or for accommodating other kinds of familial support. The leave takes various forms; some companies combine sick leave, disability, or other PTO to provide paid leave for new parents. More than half of companies also provide unpaid leave (though this is required by federal law for most of the companies included in the study). Nearly half the companies also report some type of transitional back-to-work support for new mothers. Despite most companies offering policies to support new parents, fewer than one-fifth of companies provide childcare support. This relatively low percentage underscores the reality that childcare is one of the most complex challenges for working parents in Utah—and one that will require commitment from numerous stakeholders to address successfully.⁹

Varieties of other arrangements supporting employees who want or need flexibility were reported by study participants. Part-time roles for entry-level workers are plentiful (offered at 72% of companies), but such roles are much less common at higher levels (44%). This is relevant to the “leaky pipeline” phenomenon, wherein women are less likely to be employed in higher level positions. Utah women work part-time at much higher rates than women nationally,¹⁰ and if part-time roles are not available at senior levels, women may choose to forgo promotions or leave their companies rather than transition to full-time roles. Finally, a compressed work week, “unlimited” PTO, “returnships,” and formal job-sharing were also included as flexibility options.

With the understanding that companies of varying sizes and circumstances may have different capacities to offer certain arrangements, we analyzed results according to demographics. As expected, some of the most expensive benefits were more likely to be available at larger companies. For example, 35% of the largest companies (those with 1,000+ employees) offer childcare support, versus only 3% of companies with 99 or fewer employees. Further, 78% of the largest companies offer tuition reimbursement for employees, versus 37% of companies with 99 or fewer employees. However, smaller companies are still able to provide many of the perks of flexibility, especially those that are less cost prohibitive. For companies with 25 or more employees, we see very high rates of location and schedule flexibility (80–100%). Newer offerings such as “unlimited” PTO are actually more common at smaller companies (54% of those with fewer than 50 employees) than at the largest companies (17% of those with 1,000+ employees). Companies in our survey with 500–999 employees show distinct support for new parents; 100% of this group offers paid maternity leave, and 91% offers paid paternity leave.

Though fewer participants answered Question #2 than Question #1 (90 of the 100), the overall percentage of respondents who planned to continue offering various arrangements over the coming 12 months did not change substantially (see Table 1). With few exceptions, the percentage of companies planning to offer flexible options decreased slightly in their projections over the coming year. In terms of flexibility, we see decreases in companies that plan to continue offering flexible work hours and “unlimited” PTO. However, there is a slight increase in the percentage of companies that plan to offer a compressed work week, perhaps in response to physical space concerns related to COVID-19.

In terms of parental and family support, there are several planned decreases in offerings. Fewer companies intend to offer maternity leave, paternity leave, and general family leave over the next 12 months, and there are reductions in plans to offer transitional back-to-work support for new mothers. However, the data do show a slight uptick in plans to offer certain policies: we see an increase in the percentage of companies looking to offer higher level part-time roles and formal job-sharing programs, as well as the share of companies who intend to offer childcare support. These policies will provide welcome relief to the tens of thousands of working mothers who will face enormous pressures over the coming year and might otherwise be forced to leave their jobs.

Additional Offerings

Survey participants were invited to share additional flexibility arrangements at their companies, in addition to those listed in Questions #1 and #2. Thirty companies reported a wide variety of offerings, ranging from initiatives focused specifically on families to other programs supporting individual wellness and growth:

1. **Support for new parents:** Benefits for new parents include external programs supporting fertility, maternity, and post-partum assistance; infant-at-work policies; mother’s/lactation rooms; breast milk shipping; care packages for new babies; adoption assistance (financial and logistical); year’s supply of diapers and wipes; meals and cleaning service for new parents; and dedicated expectant-parent coordinators.
2. **Additional family support:** Companies reported supporting caregivers through paid and unpaid leave to care for family members; dependent care assistance plans and childcare FSAs; eldercare coordination; childcare location assistance; concierge services to support individuals and families; access to specialists for children with challenges; summer camps for children; virtual family programs; bereavement leave; and special programs to support various family transitions.
3. **Wellness:** Businesses reported supporting employees’ general health and wellness by offering employee assistance programs with mental health and related benefits; paid time off for volunteering; mental health holidays; virtual mental health services; reimbursements for wellness expenses; employment sabbaticals; on-site café and

fitness center; and access to emotional well-being specialists.

4. **Education and training:** Companies showed commitment to their employees’ education by offering student loan repayment programs; scholarship opportunities (including for underrepresented groups such as single mothers); paid training and bonuses for additional certifications; college support services; and dedicated learning budgets for employees.
5. **Other:** Survey respondents also reported offering financial assistance to set up home offices, full employee benefits for part-time workers, and support for returning members of the military in the form of internships and transition support for both veterans and their families.

Benefits for Companies

Utah’s “best places to work” are seeing numerous benefits from offering flexible and family-friendly arrangements to their employees. Eighty-nine survey respondents answered Question #3, which invited participants to choose any applicable answers from among eight possible benefits related to their flexibility policies. The percentage of companies that answered this question and reported specific benefits is found in Table 2.

Table 2: Benefits for Companies that Offer Flexible and Family-Friendly Policies and Arrangements

Benefits	%
Higher employee satisfaction	94.4%
Increased employee retention	79.8%
Higher employee engagement	71.9%
Increased productivity	65.2%
Improved recruitment success/higher quality candidates	60.1%
More diverse teams	50.1%
More women in high levels of leadership	47.2%
Increased profitability	33.7%

Mirroring national reports about employees’ desire for greater workplace flexibility, the vast majority of respondents are seeing higher employee satisfaction and increased retention, including one respondent who had heard from employees that “no other company has given them the flexibility to attend to family matters and that this keeps them around.” Another stated that flexibility leads to “more loyal employees who know we care about them and their families.” Further, 71.9% of respondents reported higher employee engagement, and 65.2% noted increased productivity. One participant illustrated the long-term impact of these findings by stating, “As many of our employees have transitioned to work-from-home during the pandemic, we have experienced increased productivity, satisfaction, and retention. Although remote work wasn’t a strategic employment practice prior to the pandemic, it will be in the future.”

In addition to the above-mentioned benefits that apply to individual employees, companies also reported the following

benefits to their companies more broadly: 60.1% said they were able to attract higher quality candidates due to their flexible benefits. In terms of internal diversity, 50.1% of participants said these policies led to more diverse teams, and 47.2% said it helped them place more women in leadership roles. One participant noted, “We have had women at different levels who still want to grow their careers have the opportunity to go part-time. We have retained good talent by providing flexible work schedules.” Retention of female talent can be a key factor in advancing more women into leadership later in their careers. Finally, 33.7% of respondents said that offering these benefits contributed to increased profitability. As many companies in the survey noted, they have had flexibility policies in place only for a short time (in reaction to COVID-19); it would be interesting to see if reports of increased profitability would grow over time, as employee engagement has been tied to higher profits.¹¹

While a large percentage of all survey participants cited various benefits related to flexible and family-friendly policies, it should be noted that several respondents commented that they had not conducted formal assessments of these benefits, hence their responses were subjective.

Related Challenges

Though many companies in the study reported numerous positive outcomes from offering flexibility, implementing the policies can be difficult, especially as some of the transitions happened with little time for preparation. Question #4 asked respondents about challenges their companies or employees have faced related to flexible or family-friendly arrangements. Seventy-eight participants answered this question, choosing from among seven possible answers (see Table 3). Around 60% of respondents reported two significant challenges: first, the loss of company culture that left employees feeling disconnected, and, second, the logistical challenges that come with managing schedules, workplaces, and equipment. Half of the respondents reported experiencing communication problems. The costs (in both money and time) to administer these policies was recognized by participants, as was some level of decreased employee engagement and productivity. The findings are not surprising, given that 2020 has been a uniquely challenging year.

Yet it is interesting to note that the percentage of companies experiencing decreased engagement is five times lower than companies reporting increased engagement, and the percentage of companies that reported decreased productivity is four times lower than those reporting increased productivity. However, it is beyond the scope of this study to determine what is making the difference among these experiences. Further, as this study was conducted during COVID-19, it is possible that these shortcomings are linked to pandemic-specific stressors rather than to challenges simply related to flexible workplace arrangements. Additional research would be useful in exploring circumstances that either improve or

impair engagement and productivity when a company is implementing flexible and family-friendly workplace policies.

Table 3: Challenges Related to Flexibility Policies

Reported Challenges	%
Loss of office culture and/or employees feeling disconnected	60.3%
Logistical challenges (i.e., managing schedules, workspaces, equipment)	59.0%
Communication challenges	51.3%
Increased costs	32.1%
Decreased productivity	15.4%
Decreased employee engagement	14.1%
Significant time/labor to manage	12.8%

Circumstances Related to COVID-19

Question #5 was open ended, asking what changes had been made in response to COVID-19 (aside from instituting work-from-home arrangements) and whether companies planned to make the changes permanent after the crisis has passed. Seventy-two companies responded. Many emphasized that working remotely had been the biggest pandemic-related adjustment for their companies, but several other important changes were also mentioned.

1. **Additional flexibility:** Twenty-one companies (29.2%) specifically noted they were granting extra flexibility in schedules, in many cases to support employees who were navigating heavy familial responsibilities.
2. **Time off:** Twelve companies (16.7%) have given their employees additional time off (both paid and unpaid) to manage the challenges related to the pandemic. In some cases, this occurred on an individual basis, and other companies have instituted company-wide long weekends, shorter workdays, or mandatory days off to support their employees.
3. **Supportive culture:** Deliberate efforts to create a more supportive company culture were mentioned by ten respondents (13.9%), including one company who noted that their internal communication had actually improved as a result of creative efforts to keep employees connected to one another. Other participants mentioned significant efforts to support employee mental health and wellness during this difficult time.

Of the 72 companies that answered Question #5, 46 gave an indication of whether they planned to make COVID-related changes permanent in their workplaces. Five companies (10.9%) said the changes were temporary, nine (19.6%) said they were still considering whether or not to implement changes permanently, and 32 (69.6%) said these changes will continue after the pandemic crisis has ended. One company had considered remote work policies for years, but it took a crisis to get them to implement the policy. Another respondent stated that because of COVID-19, increased work from

home “will become the norm and an expectation from employees.”

Moving to the Next Level

While every organization is unique and differently equipped to offer flexible and family-friendly arrangements, companies of all sizes and types would do well to emulate many of the specific benefits and offerings mentioned by Utah’s “best places to work” throughout this report—including paid leave and flexibility with location and work schedule. Yet research has shown that for all working women to thrive, businesses must address additional factors:

1. **Childcare:** Though childcare support was one of the least common benefits offered by companies in our study (likely because of complexity and high costs), childcare is consistently recognized as the most significant barrier to working mothers’ professional progress.¹² The pandemic has exacerbated this challenge, and the necessity for good childcare will continue long after the crisis is over. Support can come in a variety of ways, including on-site care, subsidies, back-up care assistance, and childcare FSAs. Organizations like [Care About Childcare](#) and the [Utah Child Care Cooperative](#) can provide valuable support for companies looking to assist working parents.
2. **Flexibility for employees at all levels:** A common complaint about flexible work policies is that they are sometimes offered unevenly. When lower level employees see that flexibility is only an option for management, it can decrease morale and employee retention. While not all offerings are feasible for employees in specific roles, deliberate actions to provide critical benefits fairly and equitably throughout organizations will do much to improve loyalty and retain women at lower levels, which can then serve to strengthen the overall pipeline.¹³
3. **Make COVID-19 adjustments permanent:** Despite the devastating effects of the pandemic, a few positives have emerged from this crisis, notably an openness to new ways of working. Companies that embrace flexibility and family support for their workers will protect themselves against the dramatic loss of female talent occurring nationwide.¹⁴ The pandemic has brought severe challenges to working parents, but the opportunity to disrupt outdated workplace norms can counterbalance these stressors and create new opportunities for women.

Conclusion

This survey was conducted to explore and highlight flexible and family-friendly arrangements at Utah companies, but it can also serve to inform other organizations about how they can emulate the “Best in Class” businesses that are working hard to meet their employees’ needs. With the effects of COVID-19 predicted to continue well into 2021, these benefits have never been more important. Further, such policies can be particularly valuable for women, as remote and flexible work are instrumental in women’s availability to stay

engaged in the workforce even while women shoulder other responsibilities. The pandemic has shown companies that flexible work does indeed work, and these policies will be a key advantage for businesses looking to attract top talent. As more and more companies embrace these new ways of working, in addition to adding to their family-friendly benefits, it will create additional opportunities for women’s workforce engagement, advancement, and success, while still allowing women to prioritize other areas of their lives, including their families. This shift will, in turn, strengthen our businesses, communities, and the state as a whole.

¹ Loubier, A. (2017, June 8). Gender and work: The power of flexibility. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrealoubier/2017/06/08/gender-and-work-the-power-of-flexibility/?sh=3a896a8b7c0f>

² Janes, E. (n.d.). Yes, being “mommy tracked” is a real thing—but you don’t have to put up with it. *The Muse*. <https://www.themuse.com/advice/mommy-track-what-to-do>

³ Miller, A. (2013, December). Stigma hinders workplace flexibility, reports special issue. *American Psychological Association* 44(11), 11. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2013/12/stigma>

⁴ Schwantes, M. (2019, August 7). Bill Gates says you must offer this perk if you want to hire the best people. *Inc.* <https://www.inc.com/marcel-schwantes/bill-gates-says-companies-that-offer-this-perk-to-employees-will-have-a-clear-edge.html>

⁵ Tanden, N., & Weinberger, M. (2014, August 23). Driving workplace flexibility for all. *HuffPost*. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/working-families-summit_b_5519875

⁶ Tappe, A. (2020, November 12). The economy as we knew it might be over, Fed Chairman says. *CNN Business*. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/12/economy/economy-after-covid-powell/index.html>

⁷ See the complete lists here: <http://topworkplaces.slttrib.com/>; <https://www.utahbusiness.com/2019-best-companies-to-work-for/>; <https://www.womentechcouncil.com/shatter-list/>; <https://www.forbes.com/best-employers-by-state/#31058ff7487a>; https://www.glassdoor.com/Award/Best-Places-to-Work-Salt-Lake-City-LST_KQ0,19_IL_20,34_IM755.htm

⁸ A small number of non-profit organizations were included, as they operate in a similar environment (and in similar ways) to that of for-profit companies.

⁹ Scribner, R. T., & Madsen, S. R. (2018, September 5). Childcare: What Utahns need to know. *Utah Women & Leadership Project*. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/25.pdf>

¹⁰ Madsen, S. R., & Scribner, R. T. (2016, December 2). Labor force participation among Utah women. *Utah Women & Leadership Project*. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/snapshot/17.pdf>

¹¹ Sorenson, S. (2013, June 20). How employee engagement drives growth. *Gallup*. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236927/employee-engagement-drives-growth.aspx>

¹² Meppen, D., & Bergevin, A. (2017, January). The status of women in Utah: Economic choices & challenges. *Women in the Economy Commission*. <https://www.utah.gov/women/documents/Status-of-Women-in-Utah-2017.pdf>

¹³ Bligh, M., & Ito, A. (2017). Organizational processes and systems that affect women in leadership. In S. R. Madsen (Ed.), *Handbook of research on gender and leadership* (pp. 287–303). Elgar.

¹⁴ Sumpter, D., & Zanhour, M. (2020, November 12). 3 ways companies can retain working moms right now. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2020/11/3-ways-companies-can-retain-working-moms-right-now>

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APPENDIX Participating Utah Companies*

1-800 Contacts	FranklinCovey	O.C. Tanner
97th Floor	Gallagher	Ogden Clinic
Abundant Dental Care	Goldenwest Credit Union	OptConnect
Access Development	GPS Capital Markets	Orbit
Ace Disposal, Inc.	Grant Victor	Pluralsight
Achieve Today	Groove Entertainment Technologies	PrincePerelson
Alpha Warranty Services, Inc.	Harmons Grocery	Qualtrics
America First Credit Union	Health Catalyst	RainFocus
Ancestry	HireVue, Inc	SelectHealth
Anonymo Labs	Hyatt Centric	SirsiDynix
ARUP Laboratories	Ident Solutions	Smith's Food & Drug Stores
AvantGuard Monitoring Center	Instructure	SoFi
BambooHR	Intermountain Healthcare	Squire and Company, PC
Boostability	JourneyTEAM	Tesani
BrainStorm Inc.	Kodiak Cakes	TestOut Corporation
C.R. England	Kuali	ThomasARTS
Chatbooks	LendingClub	Twistlab Marketing
CHG Healthcare Services	Lendio	U.S. MRI
Colliers International	LogMeIn	Vivint Smart Home
Cotopaxi	Love Communications LLC	WCF Insurance
Degreed	Lucid Software Inc.	Weave
Dell Technologies	MarketStar	Women Tech Council
Disruptive Advertising	Micro Focus	Workfront
Diversified Insurance Group	Monumetric	Xima Software
Drip IV Utah	MX	Xyngular
eBay, Inc.	Myriad Genetics	Young Automotive Group
Encompass Health - Home Health & Hospice	Nav Technologies	Zamp HR
Fidelity Investments	Nearmap	Zions Bancorporation
First Step House	Northeastern Counseling Center	Zonos
Foursight Capital, LLC	Northrop Grumman	

**11 companies chose to participate anonymously*