

UTAH FOUNDATION  
RESEARCH • ANALYZE • INFORM

# Research Report

Report Number 730b, June 2015

## Millennials and Boomers

How Utah's Generations Compare to Each Other and the Nation  
*Part II: Finances and Workplace Preferences*



Bryson Garbett, Chairman  
Brent Jensen, Vice Chairman  
Douglas Matsumori, Treasurer  
Stephen J. Hershey Kroes, President  
Shawn Teigen, Research Director

10 West Broadway, Suite 307, Salt Lake City, UT 84101  
801.355.1400 • [utahfoundation.org](http://utahfoundation.org)

**The mission of Utah Foundation** is to promote a thriving economy, a well-prepared workforce, and a high quality of life for Utahns by performing thorough, well-supported research that helps policymakers, business and community leaders, and citizens better understand complex issues and providing practical, well-reasoned recommendations for policy change.

# Millennials and Boomers

## How Utah's Generations Compare to Each Other and the Nation

### Part II: Finances and Workplace Preferences

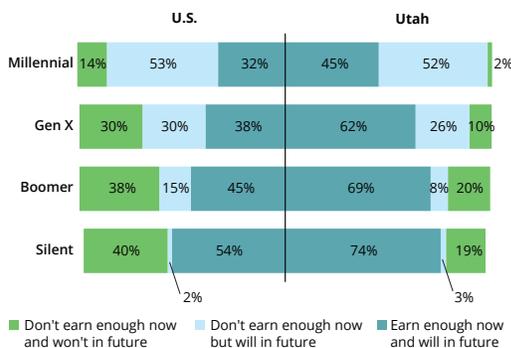
Projections show that in the next decade, Millennials will make up 75% of the U.S. workforce. But what do Millennials want out of the workplace, and how does that differ from other generations? How does student debt affect workplace preferences? And how do Utahns feel about their current employers and incomes?

In an effort to answer these questions, Part II of this report compares Utah Foundation survey findings with recent national surveys regarding attitudes about finances and the workplace for Millennials (18-34 year olds), Gen Xers (35-50 year olds), Boomers (51-69 year olds) and members of the Silent Generation (70 to 87 year olds). Over 1,300 Utahns participated in the Utah Foundation survey.

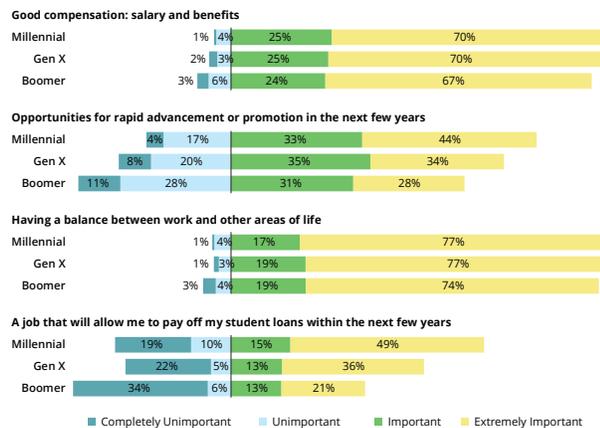
### FINDINGS

- Utahns seem to be more content than their national peers regarding their current incomes and more optimistic about their potential for future earnings. (see pages 2 and 3)
- While student debt burden has increased significantly for Utahns in the past decade, the average returns on higher educational attainment are already being seen by Millennials (see pages 3 and 4)
- Utahns are more content than their national peers with current employers; Utahns with families are less likely than their unmarried and/or childless counterparts to want different employers. (see page 5)
- Millennial Utahns are more likely than older generations to think that finding a job they want will be very easy. (see page 6)
- Millennials, Gen Xers, and Boomers have similar attitudes regarding attributes of their ideal jobs – good compensation and having a good work-life balance were both high priorities. Millennials placed a higher level of importance on jobs that would allow them to pay off student loans quickly. (see pages 7 and 8)

Comparison of Attitudes toward Current and Future Financial Situation, Utah and U.S.



Attributes of Ideal Job by Generation, Utah



This report was written by Research Analysts Christopher Collard and Mallory Bateman. Additional assistance was provided by Research Director Shawn Teigen. Mr. Collard and Ms. Bateman can be reached for comment at (801) 355-1400 or by email at christopher@utahfoundation.org or mallory@utahfoundation.org.

As discussed in Part I, the past year saw a multitude of research related to generational differences. With Millennials overtaking Baby Boomers nationwide this year, these investigations into what makes each generation different will surely continue.<sup>20</sup> Utah Foundation conducted a statewide survey to see how Utah's generations compare with each other. The survey used questions from nationwide surveys in order to compare the responses of Utah's generations to their nationwide counterparts. The survey reached over 1,300 Utahns, asking questions about their housing, political leanings, feelings on social issues, finances, and preferences for the workplace.

Part II of this report focuses on finances and the workplace. Anecdotally, Millennials seem to confound older generations within the workforce. Different styles of communication, levels of technology use, and expectations for jobs have been the focus of studies by companies and research organizations alike.<sup>21</sup> Part of the focus on the differences between Millennials and other generations is driven by projections showing that Millennials will be 75% of the U.S. workforce by 2025.<sup>22</sup>

Figure 14: Definition of Generations

	Born Between	Age in 2015
Millennial	1981 – early 2000s	18 to 34*
Gen X	1965 – 1980	35 to 50
Boomer	1946 – 1964	51 to 69
Silent	1928 – 1945	70 to 87
Greatest	Before 1928	88 and up

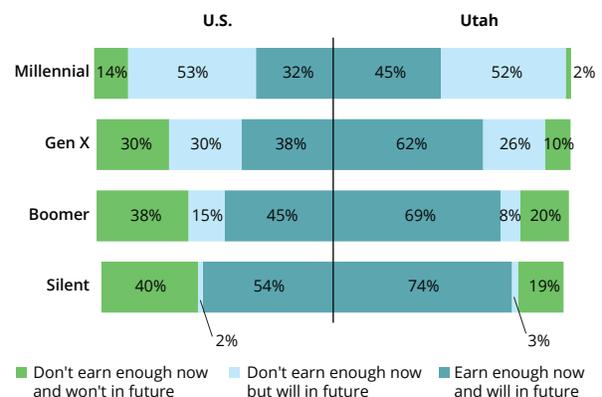
\*No chronological end point has been set for this group; this report uses a cut point of age 18 in 2015.  
Source: Pew Research Center.

Although various organizations have slightly different breakdowns for when the Millennial generation starts and ends, each part of this report utilizes the Pew Research Center's definitions of generations. Figure 14 outlines these definitions.

## FINANCES

A wide spectrum of researchers and analysts have examined the financial state of Americans in the period since the Great Recession. Over the last few years, these frequent and varied studies have addressed topics such as wage stagnation and income mobility. In a national study on generations by the Pew Research Center, the overarching theme about respondents' feelings toward their finances was that although Millennials may not be achieving their full wage attainment now, they are more optimistic than older generations that they will be able to reach their financial goals.<sup>23</sup> Similar trends arose when this question was posed to the Utah Foundation survey respondents. Only 14% of Millennials in the U.S. and 2% of Millennials in Utah feel they do not earn enough now and will not in the future. This compares to 30% of Gen Xers nationally and 9% of Gen Xers in Utah, and 38% of Boomers nationally and 18% of Boomers in Utah. One potential reason that younger generations would have more confidence in turning around their financial standing is because of the time they have to do so.

Figure 15: Comparison of Attitudes toward Current and Future Financial Situation, Utah and U.S.



Note: Groups do not add to 100% because figure excludes "don't know/refuse" responses.  
Survey Questions: Do you now earn enough money to lead the kind of life you want, or not? Do you think you will be able to earn enough money in the future to lead the kind of life you want, or not?  
Sources: Pew Research Center and Utah Foundation Survey.

Utahns across the board seem more content with their current earnings than their national counterparts. Part of this difference could be due to differing states of the economy. In early 2014 when the Pew survey was

administered, the national economy was still showing mixed signals while Utah's economy is currently one of the strongest in the nation. For example, 45% of Utah Millennials felt that they earn enough now and they will in the future, compared to 32% nationally. The starkest contrast is between Utah and U.S. members of the Silent Generation (74% compared to 54%). Figure 15 details these differences.

In further analysis of survey respondents, those with higher levels of educational attainment and higher income levels were more likely to say that they earned enough (see Figure 16). While it should be no surprise that individuals with higher levels of income are more likely to feel like they are earning enough, it is remarkable how confident Millennials are about their ability to earn enough income in the future.

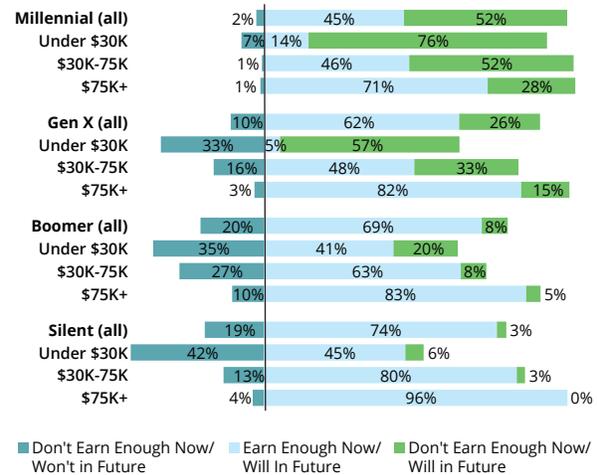
Married individuals were more likely to say that they were currently earning enough, possibly a factor of having two income sources. Higher levels of education had a positive impact on the confidence of those who felt that they were not currently earning enough. Among those who did not feel they were currently earning enough, whether they had student debt did not influence their confidence regarding future earnings.

### Student Debt

According to research conducted by the Pew Research Center, 37% of households headed by an adult younger than 40 currently have some student debt – which is the highest share on record.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, in 2010 student loan debt overtook credit card debt as the highest non-housing debt for Americans and by the end of 2014, Americans owed \$1.16 trillion in student debt.<sup>25</sup> Nationally, about 25% of the increase is due to increasing educational attainment, especially at the graduate level.<sup>26</sup> While the student debt burden increased throughout the 2000s, the rise has slowed in recent years.<sup>27</sup> This increasing student debt burden since the end of the recession has been listed as a key factor in Millennials waiting on major life decisions such as buying homes, getting married, or having children. Student debt is typically not their only burden; those with student debt are more likely to have other forms of debt (like vehicles and credit cards) than those without and are likely to have significantly lower net worth.<sup>28</sup>

In 2014, Utah's students graduated with an average debt of \$22,418, nearly double the amount of average debt in 2006 (\$12,884). This 74% increase is the second highest rate of growth in the nation.<sup>29</sup> Despite the enormous growth in student debt, Utah's debt burden was ranked forty-fourth lowest in the nation by The Project on Student Debt.<sup>30</sup> Although most Utahns have no student debt, about half of Millennial respondents indicated that they did (see Figure 17). Additionally, 31% of Gen Xers and 15% of Baby Boomers responded that their households had student

Figure 16: Confidence in Future Earnings, by Income Level, Utah



Note: The sample size for several of these categories is small. Source: Utah Foundation Survey.

Figure 17: Level of Student Debt by Generation, Utah, 2015

	Millennials	Gen X	Boomer	Silent
No Student Debt	47%	66%	82%	90%
\$1-10,000	20%	12%	8%	1%
\$10,001-22,500	9%	5%	3%	1%
\$22,501-40,000	9%	4%	1%	0%
\$40,001-100,000	6%	9%	2%	1%
Over \$100,000	4%	1%	1%	1%

Note: Columns do not equal 100% due to non-responders. Source: Utah Foundation survey.

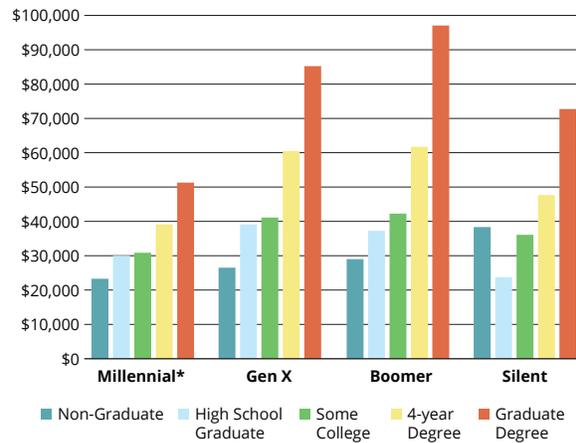
debt. The numbers of young adults moving back in with their parents has increased nationally since the recession due in part to student debt. However, when analyzing data on Utah Millennials, living at home is linked to marital status and level of income rather than the presence or level of student debt.

**Returns on Education**

Average student debt in Utah has nearly doubled in the past eight years and higher levels of student debt are delaying Millennials’ major life decisions ranging from purchasing cars to having children. However, obtaining college degrees pays off. Among 25 to 34 year old Utah Millennials, those with Bachelor’s degrees earned an average of almost \$10,000 more than those with only a high school diploma. Millennials who have completed graduate degrees more than double that gap earning about \$21,000 more than high school graduates (see Figure 18).

Nationally, 75% of households with student debt put less than 7% of monthly earnings toward loan repayment.<sup>31</sup> In these cases, returns to education offset the additional load of student debt.

**Figure 18: Educational Attainment and Average Income by Generation, Utah, 2013**



\* Only older Millennials (25-34) were analyzed in this dataset. Source: U.S. Census Bureau PUMS.

**EMPLOYMENT**

In recent years, Utah has had one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country.<sup>32</sup> While other top states have economies which are highly dependent on natural resource extraction, Utah has the benefit of a diverse economy that very closely mirrors the diversity of the nation as a whole.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the difference, Utahns across generations are generally similar in employment status to their national peers. The percentage of Utah’s Millennials equals their national counterparts for full-time employment, while Gen Xers and Boomers are both within 2% of national averages. Utah has higher percentages of stay-at-home parents for both Millennials and Gen Xers, and a lower non-working student population among Millennials than the U.S. (Utah 4% and U.S. 10%). The status with the most divergence is for part-time employees. Overall, 16% of Utahns are part-time employees, compared to 11% nationally. Millennials have the highest percentage of part-time employees in Utah (23%), which is 6% higher than their national peers. These differences could be explained in part by a greater proportion of Utah students working part-time. Figure 19 highlights Utah’s employment status by generation.

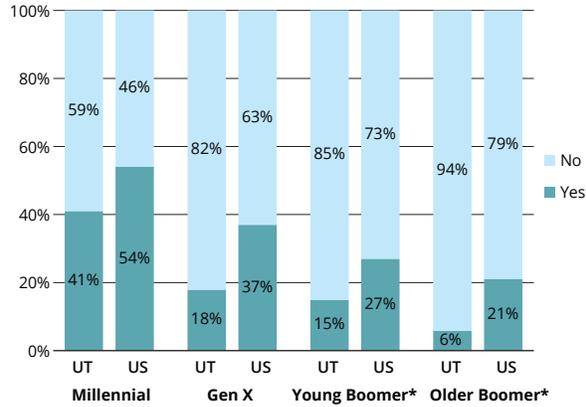
A 2013 MetLife study found that about one-third of full-time employees over 21 years of age were hoping to be working for different employers within two years; however, less than 25% of Utah employees over 21 responded similarly.<sup>34</sup> Nationally, there is a noticeable difference between Millennials and older generations. While Gen Xers and Boomers are closer to the one-third average, over half of Millennial respondents in the MetLife survey indicated they would like to be

**Figure 19: Employment Status of Utahns, 2015**

	Full Time	Part Time	Stay at Home Parent	Retired	Unemployment	Non-Working Student
U.S. (all)	50%	11%	4%	19%	3%	3%
Utah (all)	51%	16%	6%	16%	2%	2%
Millennials	52%	23%	9%	0%	4%	4%
Gen X	68%	14%	10%	2%	2%	0%
Boomer	52%	12%	2%	21%	1%	0%
Silent	5%	9%	0%	82%	0%	0%

Note: These data do not equal 100% because they exclude people with disabilities and people not in workforce. Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

**Figure 20: Desire for New Employer within Next Two Years, Utah and U.S.**



Survey Question: Are you hoping to be employed by someone else in the next two years?  
 \*Younger Boomers were born between 1956 and 1964 and Older Boomers were born between 1946 and 1955.  
 Source: MetLife and Utah Foundation survey.

employed elsewhere. When Utah Millennials were asked the same question, only 41% said they hoped to be employed elsewhere. In general, Utahns indicated that they were less likely to want to switch companies regardless of generation (see Figure 20).

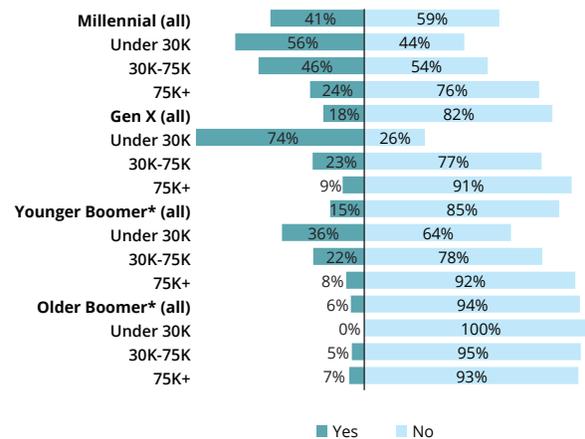
Some of the variation between generations can likely be attributed to the members of younger generations still being in early stages of determining their career paths. The higher expected turnover among younger generations could also be due to the rapid creation of new job fields and younger generations having the skill sets for those positions. The fact that Utahns appear to be more stable could also be related to Utah's strong economy. With an employment rate under 4%, it is an economy that favors workers. Utahns may have been able to negotiate themselves into better positions or have obtained employment in more desirable organizations.

Outside of a low unemployment rate, personal factors also affected whether Utahns would prefer to work for other employers. For those respondents with children, there is a correlation between the number of children and their desire to change employers. For each additional child, the likelihood of wanting to change employer decreased by 3.5%. After accounting for marital status and parenthood, attributes such as homeownership and educational attainment had no relationship to this question. However, it should be no surprise that income levels did impact desire to be employed elsewhere. Figure 21 clearly demonstrates that low-wage earners among nearly all generations are more likely to want to work for different employers in the near future.

Utah Foundation borrowed a series of employment-related questions from a national Net Impact survey in 2013.<sup>34</sup> However, those questions were asked of undergraduate students so the national results are not included in the survey analyses that follow.

Survey responses show that regarding employment, Millennials are more optimistic than other generations. Utah Millennials responded 21% of the time that finding a job that they really want would be very easy, compared to 15% of Gen Xers and 13% of Boomers. Conversely, only 8% of Utah Millennials responded that finding a job that they really want would be very difficult, compared to 9% of Gen Xers and 26% of Boomers.

**Figure 21: Impact of Income on Desire to Change Employer in Next 2 Years, Utah**



\*Younger Boomers were born between 1956 and 1964 and Older Boomers were born between 1946 and 1955.  
 Note: The sample size for several of these categories is small.  
 Source: Utah Foundation survey.

Millennial women in Utah were 14% more likely than their male counterparts to believe that finding a job they would enjoy would be somewhat or very easy. Although Utah's Millennial women are achieving

higher educational attainment than men and higher attainment than previous generations, they are still lagging behind national attainment averages.<sup>35</sup>

Positive outlooks were higher for respondents who had children or were married. For those with children, every additional child increased the likelihood by 3% that respondents believed finding a job they would enjoy would be somewhat or very easy. This percentage nearly doubled for Gen Xers – 6% per child. For those respondents who were married, they were 10% more likely to believe that it would be somewhat or very easy to find a job they would enjoy. Those Gen Xers who are married with no children had an inexplicably negative outlook on finding jobs they really want. However, there are a small number of them and therefore they did not affect the overall Gen X outlook. Figure 23 illustrates the differences between generations based on marital and parental status.

For those who answered previously that they did not believe they would make enough in the future (see Figure 15), respondents were 18% more likely to think finding a job would be difficult. Interestingly, for each additional level of education attained by Boomers, their belief that it would be difficult to find a desirable job increased by 6%.

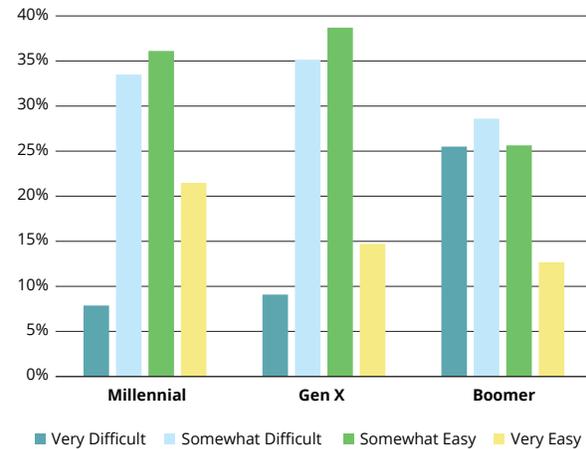
### WORKPLACE PREFERENCES

When Utah Foundation survey respondents who were currently employed or seeking employment were asked about potential attributes of their ideal job, findings were not particularly surprising. People overwhelmingly felt that good compensation and having a good work/life balance were very important. The majority of respondents felt that opportunities for rapid advancement were important or very important, with Millennial respondents placing a higher value on that opportunity than older generations. Lastly, jobs that allowed respondents to pay off student loan debt within the next few years were most important to Millennials. Figure 24 illustrates these responses on a scale from completely unimportant to extremely important.

#### Good Compensation

Younger generations were more likely to rank good compensation as important. Possible explanations might involve high levels of debt and low levels of savings. In a nationwide survey by Wells Fargo, 47% of Millennials

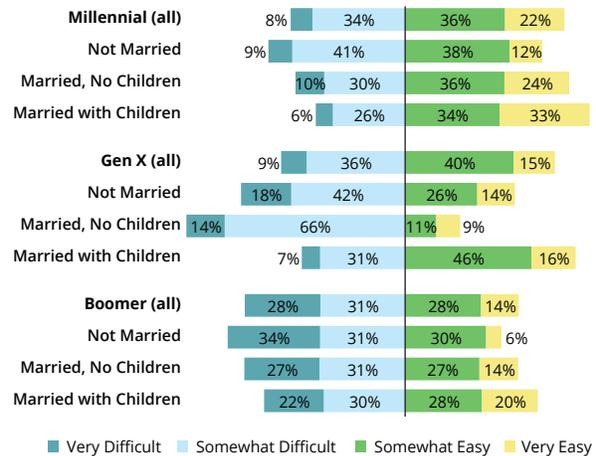
**Figure 22: Anticipated difficulty for Utahns to Find Jobs they “Really” Want**



Survey Question: Do you think finding a job that you really want to do will be very easy, somewhat easy, somewhat difficult, or very difficult?

Source: Utah Foundation survey.

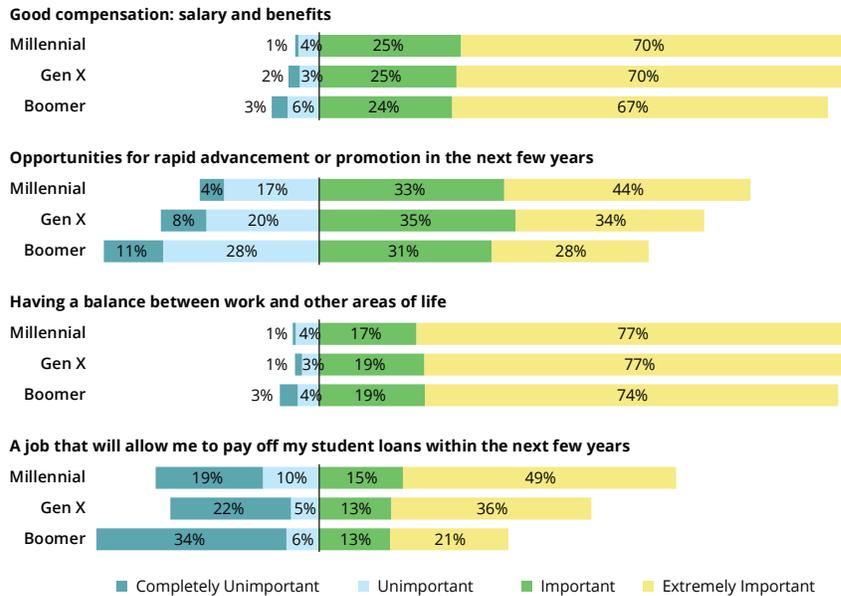
**Figure 23: Anticipated difficulty for Utahns to Find Jobs they “Really” Want by Marital and Parental Status**



Survey Question: Do you think finding a job that you really want to do will be very easy, somewhat easy, somewhat difficult, or very difficult?

Source: Utah Foundation survey.

Figure 24: Attributes of Ideal Job by Generation, Utah



Note: Respondents were asked to answer using a 1-4 scale, where 1 was equivalent to completely unimportant and 4 was extremely important.  
 Source: Utah Foundation survey.

were spending at least half of their paychecks to relieve various debts.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, Millennials have a lack of savings and diversified investments due to a distrust for large financial institutions as a result of coming of age during the Great Recession.<sup>37</sup> This heightened importance on good compensation not only translates into a benefit for employees, but also for employers. A recent study found that Millennials built emotional connections with companies that provided increased transparency in compensation, which equated to employee retention.<sup>38</sup>

There were also a number of other factors among certain generations that impacted respondents' rating of compensation including employment status, marital status, and gender. For example, full-time Gen Xers were more likely to indicate that compensation was important or extremely important than did those who were employed part-time by 12%, self employed by 9%, and unemployed by 30%. Married Boomers were 13% less likely than single peers to rank compensation as important. Additionally, compensation was slightly more important to women in all generations; they were 3% more likely to indicate importance than men.

### Rapid Advancement

Differences between generations regarding their feelings toward rapid advancement could likely be explained by factors mentioned previously regarding the life stage of younger individuals. The importance of rapid advancement is a slight variation from national literature which suggests that Millennials desire for promotion or advancement gets trumped by a work-life balance – resulting in a higher demand for job rotation rather than promotion.<sup>39</sup> Millennials nationwide also show a preference for jobs which focus more on end results or production rather than time spent in the office.<sup>40</sup> For offices following more traditional structures for advancement or promotion, these attitudes might create an inadvertent barrier for Millennials to progress in similar pathways to previous generations.

### Work/Life Balance

Among Utahns, a work/life balance appears to be important to everybody, regardless of age. The differences between generations were not statistically significant. However, in some situations being married, full-time work, and home ownership tended to correlate with the respondents' desire for a work/life balance. For instance, married Boomers had a 10% lower likelihood of importance than their single peers. Self-employed

and unemployed Millennials were less likely (15% and 14%) than full-time employees to rank work/life balance as important. For Gen Xers, renters were 9% less likely than owners to rate work/life balance as important.

### **Student Loan Repayment**

The differences between generations in regard to the importance of jobs which allow respondents to repay their student loan debt is not surprising. Levels of student debt differ among generations, and this undoubtedly impacts respondents' rankings. With each increasing level of student debt, the likelihood that the ability to repay student loans would be important increased by 33% (see Figure 17). Gen Xers are more likely than Millennials to rank a job that facilitates repayment as important at each level of student debt.

### **CONCLUSION**

Regarding finances and workplace preferences, Utah does not have as large of a variation between generations as is seen nationally. All Utahns, regardless of age, seem to place a high value on good compensation, desire opportunities for advancement, and hope to achieve a work/life balance. It stands to reason that the one area where Millennials have a notable difference from other generations is with regard to student loans.

There are significant differences between Utahns and the nation. Utahns seem to have more positive outlooks on their financial futures than their national counterparts, which may be due in part to the impacts of marital status and parenthood. Utahns are also more content with their current earnings. This is likely due in part to Utah Foundation's more recent data and the state's robust economy.

**ENDNOTES**

20. R. Fry, "This year, Millennials will overtake Baby Boomers," Pew Research Center, 16 January 2015.
21. S. Seppanen and W. Gualtieri, "The Millennial Generation: Research Review"(Washington: National Chamber Association, 2012) and Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood: Detached from Institutions, Networked with Friends," 7 March 2014.
22. F. Dews, "11 Facts about the Millennial Generation," Brookings, 2 June 2014 <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/brookings-now/posts/2014/06/11-facts-about-the-millennial-generation>.
23. Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood: Detached from Institutions, Networked with Friends," 7 March 2014.
24. R. Fry, "Young Adults, Student Debt and Economic Well-Being," Pew Research Center, 14 May 2014 <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/05/14/young-adults-student-debt-and-economic-well-being/>.
25. The Center for Microeconomic Data, "Household Debt and Credit Report," Federal Reserve Bank of New York <http://www.newyorkfed.org/microeconomics/hhdc.html#/2014/q4>.
26. B. Akers and M. Chingos, "Student Loan Update: A First Look at the 2013 Survey of Consumer Finances," Brookings, 8 September 2014.
27. Ibid.
28. R. Fry and A. Caumont, "5 Key Findings about Student Debt," Fact Tank, Pew Research Center, 14 May 2014 <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/05/14/5-key-findings-about-student-debt/>.
29. College Insight, Student Debt Database, May 2015.
30. Project on Student Debt, Utah.
31. B. Akers, "The Typical Household with Student Loan Debt," (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2014).
32. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Unemployment Statistics, <http://www.bls.gov/lau/data.htm> (accessed on May 15, 2015).
33. Eric Martinson, Utah Department of Workforce Services, Workforce Research and Analysis Division, "Utah Has Fourth Most Diverse Economy in the Nation," <http://economyutah.blogspot.com/2014/01/normal-0-false-false-false-en-us-x-none.html> (accessed on May 15, 2015)
34. MetLife, "10th Annual Study of Employee Benefits Trends," 2013.
35. Net Impact, "What Workers Want," 2013.
36. U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2013 1-year estimates.
37. Wells Fargo, "2014 Wells Fargo Millennial Study," 2014.
38. M. Winograd and M. Hais, "How Millennials Could Upend Wall Street and Corporate America, (Washington: Brookings, 2014)
39. "PwC's Next Gen: A global generational study," (University of Southern California and London Business School, 2013)
40. Ibid and S. Seppanen and W. Gualtieri, "The Millennial Generation: Research Review"(Washington: National Chamber Association, 2012) and M. Winograd and M. Hais, "How Millennials Could Upend Wall Street and Corporate America, (Washington: Brookings, 2014).
41. Ibid.

## Major Supporters of Utah Foundation

### Platinum Supporters

Boeing  
George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles  
Foundation  
Intermountain Power Agency

Love Communications  
Questar  
Rio Tinto  
Rocky Mountain Power

Sorenson Legacy Foundation  
Union Pacific  
Zions Bank

### Gold Supporters

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day  
Saints Foundation  
Overstock.com

Salt Lake City  
Salt Lake County  
Utah Transit Authority

### Silver Supporters

Ally Bank  
CBRE  
Chevron  
CIT Bank  
Fidelity Investments  
IASIS Healthcare

Intermountain Healthcare  
Management & Training Corp  
Molina Healthcare  
Mountainstar Healthcare  
Regence BlueCross BlueShield  
University of Utah Healthcare

Utah Community Credit Union  
Washakie Renewable Energy  
Wells Fargo  
Wheeler Machinery  
Workers Compensation Fund

### Bronze Supporters

Central Utah Clinic  
Centurylink  
Deloitte  
Deseret Management Corp.  
Dixie State University  
Energy Solutions  
Enterprise Holdings  
Ernst & Young  
Garbett Homes  
HDR Engineering

Holland & Hart  
Magnum Development  
Parsons Behle & Latimer  
Penna Powers  
Potash Ridge Corporation  
Ray Quinney & Nebeker  
Riverton City  
Salt Lake Community College  
Sandy City  
Staker & Parson Companies

Thanksgiving Point Institute  
University of Utah  
Utah State University  
Utah System of Higher Education  
Utah Valley University  
Wasatch Front Regional Council  
Webb Publishing  
Weber State University