

# THE 2011 UTAH FOUNDATION QUALITY OF LIFE INDEX

## FIRST BIENNIAL SURVEY REVEALS STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES

### HIGHLIGHTS

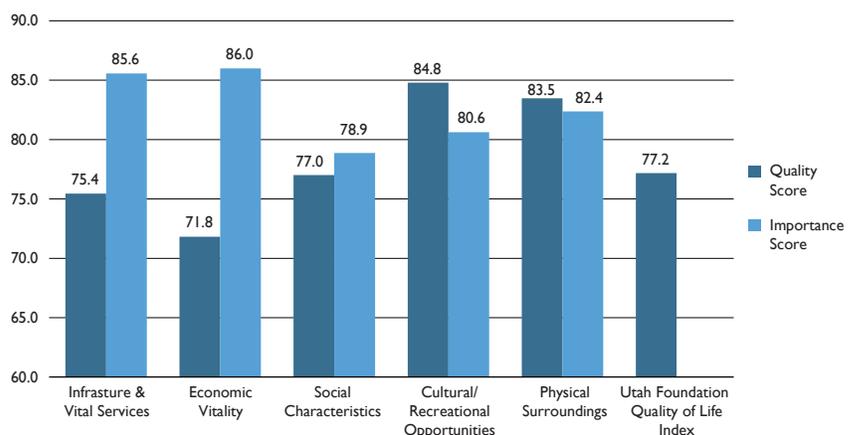
- To better understand the quality of life in Utah, and the factors that contribute to or detract from it, Utah Foundation has collaborated with Intermountain Healthcare to create the Utah Foundation Quality of Life Index.
- Utah Foundation's first biennial Utah Quality of Life Index stands at 77.2, out of a possible 100 points, for 2011.
- The factors Utahns feel are most important to their community quality of life are: safety and security from crime, public schools, air and water quality, quality healthcare and opportunities for good jobs.
- Five factors should be considered action items, in that they rated high in importance, but below average in quality. These factors are: availability of good jobs, public education, living costs, affordable housing, and how much people are accepting of differences. Availability of good jobs had the largest gap between importance (88.1) and quality (62.2), a clear reflection of the problems in the national and world economy.
- Four factors rated high in importance and quality, placing them among Utah's successes. They were: higher education, availability of quality healthcare, how much people support and help each other, and safety and security from crime.

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.

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It is often said that Utah has a high quality of life. Many people born in Utah live here their entire lives, and those who leave the state for education or employment reasons often return some years later. What is it that makes Utah such an appealing place to live? In a survey completed by Utah Foundation and Intermountain Healthcare regarding community quality of life, one respondent said, "I've lived here for 68 years, and I've lived other places, but we always come back here." Others from outside of Utah are drawn to this state, often citing its beauty, recreation or employment opportunities as their reason for moving here. It is not only Utahns who have noticed this; Forbes Magazine and other organizations often rank Utah as one of the best places in the country to live or work.

Figure 1: Utah Foundation Quality of Life Index



To better understand the quality of life in Utah, and the factors that contribute to or detract from it, Utah Foundation has collaborated with Intermountain Healthcare to create the Utah Foundation Quality of Life Index, a measure that will be updated every two years to track how quality of life changes and the reasons for those changes. Quality of life is an expression of the general well-being of an individual, community or society, and can be a subjective concept, difficult to measure and quantify. After reviewing numerous studies and ideas about quality of life from around the country and considering various methods to produce such a measure, Utah Foundation and Intermountain Healthcare designed, conducted and analyzed the results of a survey that measures which factors Utahns think are most important to their quality of life, and the perceived quality of those factors.

The Quality of Life Index was created by surveying Utahns about 20 factors that influence quality of life and how they currently rate the quality as well as the importance of each factor. Each factor was carefully selected based on an extensive literature review of other quality of life surveys and ideas, a focus group in which participants discussed the many important elements of quality of life, and discussion among experts regarding this topic. Survey respondents first rated each factor on a five-point scale, with one signifying the poorest quality and five being best. The averages of these scores were then calculated to create individual scores and an overall index, with a possible 100 points for each. Using this methodology, Utah Foundation's first biennial Utah Quality of Life Index stands at 77.2 for 2011. In addition to rating the quality or performance of each factor, survey respondents were then asked about the importance of each factor in influencing the quality of life in their communities. In this assessment of importance, it was found that the factors Utahns feel are most important to quality of life in their communities are: safety and security from crime, public schools, air and water quality, quality healthcare and opportunities for good jobs.

## HISTORY OF MEASURING QUALITY OF LIFE

The study of quality of life began in earnest in the twentieth century, but philosophers dealt with it centuries before. Plato and Aristotle wrote about nature of the good life for both individuals and communities, and reasoned that harmonious societies created happier people. Over 2,000 years later, Jeremy Bentham tried to construct a "felicific calculus" in 1789, that would allow decision makers to calculate the net pleasure or pain a certain decision or action would cause. Some argue that the utility theory of economics, which measures general satisfaction, is an heir to Bentham's ideas.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from philosophical debates, social scientists did not attempt to measure quality of life in earnest for another 150 years. In the 1930s, a sociologist named Stuart Chapin devised a "social status scale," devised to rate families based on the presence or absence of various common household items and the cleanliness or orderliness of their homes. Studies followed that tried to imitate this, for instance one created a scale of the level of living on Oklahoma farms based on physical aspects of the house, and another studied the level of living and social participation of Ohio farm families.<sup>2</sup>

Social indicators gained intellectual legitimacy in the United States in the 1960s, especially since the government became more interested in them. NASA, in cooperation with the National Commission on Technology, Automation, and Economic Progress, measured the

social costs and benefits of innovation, social problems, and the creation of "performance budgets" of social needs such as housing, education and welfare. Shortly after, the government set up the Panel on Social Indicators, which used economic indicators to reflect the well being of the nation.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1970s and 1980s, researchers began to combine social measures with quality of life. Factors such as socio-economic status, social participation, income, education, religious commitment and marital status were now being integrated to study the overall quality of life. At this time, researchers also began to publish health-related quality of life studies. Researchers in this field have been quite prolific, and have studied how health issues and other patient-centered outcomes affect the quality of life of an individual. For instance, the Gallup Healthways Well-Being Index takes into account medical conditions, access to healthcare coverage and services, along with other factors. Individuals and communities receive an overall well-being composite score based on each of the six sub-indices: life evaluation, emotional health, physical health, healthy behavior, work environment and basic access.<sup>4</sup>

Currently, there are many organizations and researchers that study very specific types of quality of life, and try to rate which places are the best for business, work, or to live. For instance, Forbes Magazine publishes annual reports which rate the best places to live, the best places for business, and the best cities to work in. The business cost index weighs expenses related to labor, energy, taxes and office space. The best places to work index is based on costs of doing business, crime rates, educational attainment, living costs and projected income and job growth. The best places to live index evaluates characteristics like the number of museums, parks, bars and restaurants and other cultural institutions per capita. Similarly, Money Magazine's Best Places to Live ranking takes into account such factors as housing, job growth, commute time, environment and the age of the population. Finally, the Annie E. Casey Foundation publishes KIDS COUNT annually, a national and state-by-state effort to track the status of children in the United States.<sup>5</sup> KIDS COUNT uses hundreds of indicators on topics such as education, employment, income, healthy, poverty and other youth risk factors, to track the well-being of children over time.

In 2008, Gallup and the Knight Foundation released a report that measures overall community well-being, overall life satisfaction, community commitment and social ties in the community. The study found that three main qualities attach people to place: social offerings, such as entertainment venues and places to meet, openness (how welcoming a place is) and the area's aesthetics (its physical beauty and green spaces). Quality of life studies have emerged from simplistic ideas that regarded quality of life as a construct of a single, unitary entity, into more complicated studies that considered it to be composed of several discrete domains.<sup>6</sup>

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The objective of this project was to develop a measure of key factors that impact the quality of life in Utah. Originally, the index was envisioned with greater weight or emphasis assigned to those factors perceived by residents as having greater importance. However, once the survey was completed, it was clear that all the factors were given similar scores in importance. With importance scores for each of the factors clustered between 71 and 93, the weighting only changed the overall index by less than one point. Because of the minimal impact

**Figure 2: Utah Foundation Quality of Life Index, Details by Factor**

	Importance Score	Quality Score
<b>Infrastructure &amp; Vital Services</b>	<b>85.6</b>	<b>75.4</b>
Safety & Security	92.7	80.0
Public Schools	90.7	73.5
Air & Water Quality	89.4	75.6
Quality Healthcare	89.0	82.2
Higher Education	86.7	83.5
Traffic Conditions	78.4	66.5
Public Transportation	72.1	66.9
<b>Economic Vitality</b>	<b>86.0</b>	<b>71.8</b>
Jobs	88.1	62.2
Affordability of Other Living Costs	86.1	71.2
Good Affordable Housing	85.8	69.0
Good Stores	83.9	85.0
<b>Social Characteristics</b>	<b>78.9</b>	<b>77.0</b>
People Support & Help	85.8	80.2
People Accepting of Differences	84.4	72.2
Family Nearby	73.8	80.2
People Share Values	71.4	75.4
<b>Cultural/Recreational Opportunities</b>	<b>80.6</b>	<b>84.8</b>
Spiritual / Religious Activities	80.8	89.4
Recreational & Cultural Events	80.4	80.1
<b>Physical Surroundings</b>	<b>82.4</b>	<b>83.5</b>
Good Parks	84.7	85.2
Natural Surroundings	84.4	87.4
Buildings & Streets	78.0	77.8
<b>Utah Foundation Quality of Life Index</b>		<b>77.2</b>

of weighting, it was determined that a simpler, unweighted formula was more straightforward and clear. To develop this measure, the research team conducted an extensive review of academic articles on the topic and a number of existing measures such as those mentioned above. Through this review, the value of measuring the impressions of Utah residents was recognized, rather than simply relying on more objective indicators of Utah's quality of life, such as data collected on crime, traffic, schools, etc. For example, it is not enough to simply analyze crime data; it is also important to know how safe people feel in their communities.

To measure such subjective impressions and opinions of Utah residents, the research team created a survey with questions developed to reflect quality of life factors that have been identified elsewhere. The survey consists of questions that ask respondents to rate the area in which they live in terms of 20 different factors to quality of life, such as the availability of quality healthcare services, opportunities for good jobs, quality of the public schools, etc. Respondents were then asked to rate each of those same factors in terms of their importance to quality of life in their communities. The remaining questions include an overall rating of their area as a place to live, a question that asks respondents to explain that overall rating, and a question that asks what would be the most important change elected leaders could make to improve quality of life in their area.

The study followed a cross-sectional survey design. Specifically, the survey was conducted by phone with a statewide

randomly selected sample of 621 adult Utah residents (18 years and older), resulting in a margin of error of +/-4.2%. Attention was given in conducting the survey to represent as accurately as possible the Utah population in terms of key demographics such as sex, age, income, and geographical region. While a sample of survey respondents that seemed to match reasonably well with the Utah population was achieved (based on 2010 census data), the results are also statistically weighted to achieve a better alignment between the sample and the population.

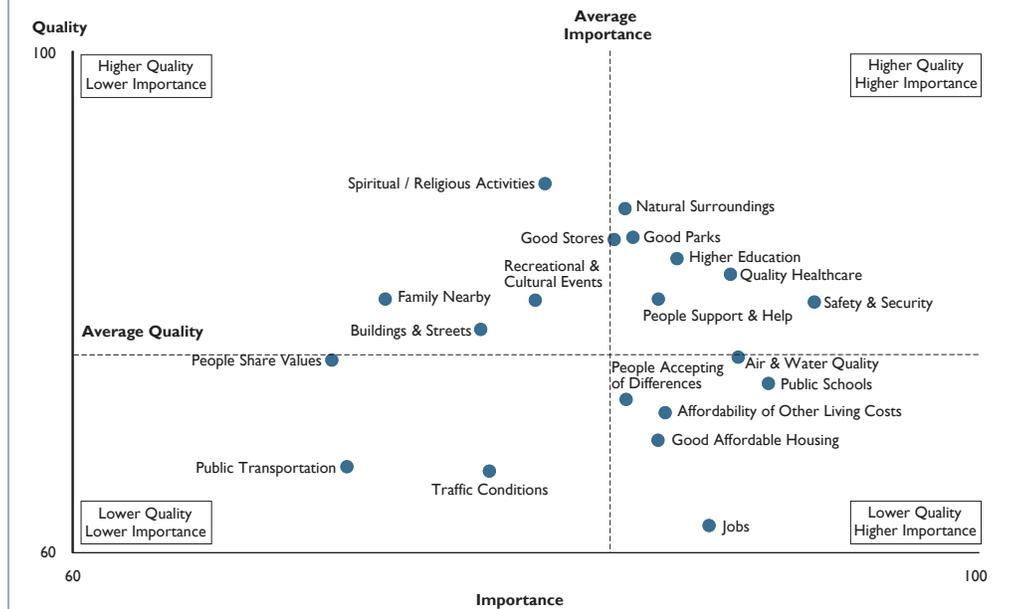
**RESULTS**

Survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, e.g., average scores, with special attention paid to how respondents rated the importance of factors, as well as their quality. Survey respondents rated each factor on a five-point scale, with one signifying poorest quality and five the best possible score. Scores were then converted into a scale of 100 points, with 100 being the best possible quality rating that could be achieved. The Quality of Life Index was then created by averaging these scores.

Using this methodology, the first biennial Utah Foundation Quality of Life Index stands at 77.2 for 2011. In addition, based on factor analysis and independent judgment on how the factors relate to each other, the 20 factors were organized into five sub-groups: Infrastructure and Vital Services, Social Characteristics, Economic Vitality, Cultural/Recreational Opportunities, and Physical Surroundings.

The Infrastructure and Vital Services sub-group contained four of the five most important factors. Each factor in this grouping rated lower in quality than in importance. The same phenomenon occurred in the Economic Vitality sub-group, with the rating of quality below that of importance for the overall rating and for all but one of the factors. It also represents the largest gap between the importance score and the quality score of all the sub-groups. The Social Characteristics sub-group also received a quality rating below importance, but the gap was much smaller. The final two sub-groups,

**Figure 3: Quality of Life Factor Matrix**



Cultural/Recreational Opportunities, and Physical Surroundings, performed better, as Utahns rated the quality of these groupings above their importance. Each of these groupings will be discussed in further detail below.

Figure 3 displays each of the quality of life factors, comparing their importance rating with their quality rating. The quadrants created in the figure are useful for understanding which areas need attention and which are already Utah's strengths. For example, the upper right quadrant shows that quality healthcare, higher education, and safety and security are all high importance and high quality, along with other factors related to Utah's social characteristics and physical surroundings. These are among Utah's successes, and care should be taken to not interfere with that success with public policy changes.

The lower right quadrant in Figure 3 shows factors that were given higher importance but lower quality compared to other factors. These should be considered higher-priority action items for public policy change or other efforts to improve. This quadrant includes public schools, affordable housing and other living costs, the availability of good jobs, and the social factor of people being accepting of differences.

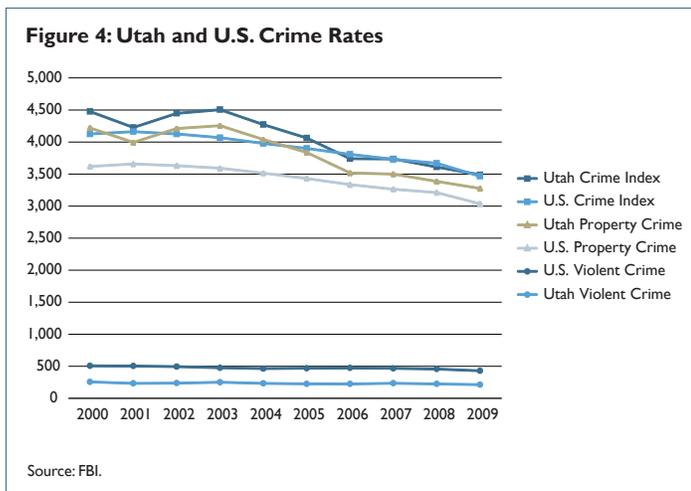
### Infrastructure and Vital Services

The Infrastructure and Vital Services sub-group contains safety and security, public schools, higher education, air and water quality, quality healthcare, traffic conditions, and public transportation. Utahns rated this sub-group 85.6 in importance, above the quality rating of 75.4. Of the factors in this sub-group, four ranked as the most important to quality of life in Utah.

### Safety and Security

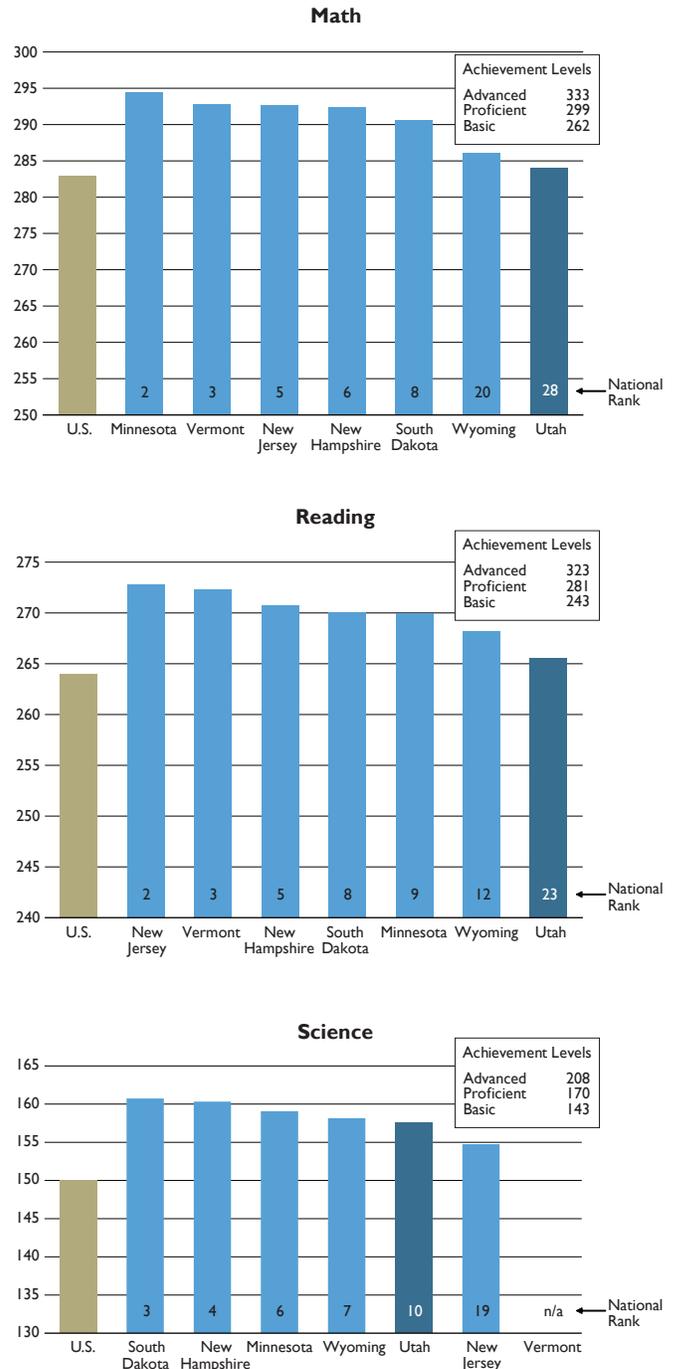
Among all the 20 items that survey respondents considered, most important to their quality of life was the level of safety and security from crime in their area. On a 100-point scale, with 100 indicating highest possible importance, the average rating of safety and security was 92.7. As for the perceived quality in this area, Utahns rated it 80.0, ranking it 10th among the 20 variables.

Most of Utah's crime rates are consistently low when compared to the national average and to other states. Utah has some of the lowest rates of violent crime, murder, robbery and aggravated assault in the country, making Utah's Violent Crime Index much lower than the national average. In addition, its rates of burglary are well below



the national average. However, Utah has comparably high rates when it comes to property crime, forcible rape, and larceny-theft. Historically, Utah's crime index has decreased consistently since the mid-1990s, except for a small spike in the early 2000s due to increased rates in property crimes, burglary and vehicle theft.

**Figure 5: Utah's Overall Demographic Peer States and Their Performance on 8th Grade NAEP Math, Reading, and Science Tests, 2009**



Note: Math and reading score rank is based on 50 states plus D.C., using 2009 assessments. Science score rank is based on 46 participating states, using the 2009 assessment. The scale for the math and reading assessments is 0 to 500; the scale for the science assessment is 0 to 300.

Source: NCES, NAEP.

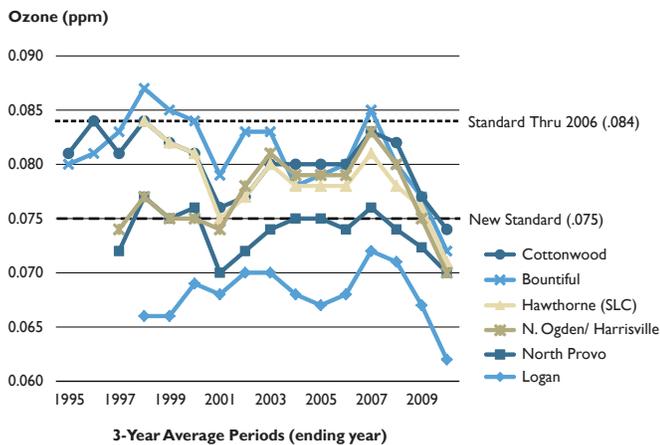
## Education

Utahns rated the importance of public schools to their community quality of life at 90.7, or second highest among all factors. They rated the quality of public schools at 73.5, or 14th among the 20 factors. Respondents confirmed this in the open-ended portion of the survey. When asked what the single most important thing that elected leaders could change to improve quality of life, the most common answer was to improve education. This is consistent with recent research done by Utah Foundation. Voters consistently rank education as a very high priority in the Utah Priorities Survey that is performed each gubernatorial election.<sup>7</sup> Despite this, Utah lags behind other states when it comes to funding of education. Utah has had the lowest per pupil expenditure of all 50 states since 1987, and though its funding effort used to be more robust, the proportion of the state's personal income that is now invested in education has diminished significantly.<sup>8</sup>

Utah Foundation has also published research on how Utah students' standardized test scores compare to national averages. This research determined that though Utah's students typically achieve at or above the national average on standardized tests, Utah's demographic characteristics indicate Utah students should score significantly higher. This is shown by comparing the test scores of Utah's students to those of states that are demographically similar – states with similar levels of student poverty, similar education levels of parents and similar ethnic profiles. The results show that Utah's students often rank last among these peer states.<sup>9</sup>

Utahns ranked higher education as having high importance and quality. In fact, higher education was ranked sixth highest in importance, and fifth in quality, making it one of only three factors that ranked in the top ten for both quality and importance. The other two factors were quality healthcare and whether people support and help each other, which will both be discussed below. Utah has seven public institutions that offer four-year degrees, one public community college, and three major private institutions. These schools offer an array of degrees at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. In addition, Utah provides many opportunities to receive certificates and other types of training.

**Figure 6: Three-Year Average Fourth-Highest Eight-Hour Ozone Concentration**



Source: Utah Division of Air Quality. Graph created by DAQ with modification by Utah Foundation.

## Air and Water Quality

Air and water quality ranked as third most important among all 20 factors, with an importance rating of 89.4. However, the quality rating for this factor was quite low, at 75.6, ranking it 12th. Air quality is a major environmental concern for Utah. Poor air quality, exacerbated by winter and summer inversions, not only limits visibility but can be hazardous to health. High ground-ozone levels typically develop during summer months when sunlight is strong and air is trapped in the same region for several days. Since the 1990s, ozone levels appear to be decreasing to be in accordance with standards adopted by the Environmental Protection Agency.

## Quality Healthcare

The fourth most important factor to quality of life for Utahns was quality healthcare services, which was rated 89.0. Utahns also felt the quality of this factor was quite high, rating it 82.2, which ranked it sixth among all factors. Data regarding the health and healthcare of Utah's citizens reveals an interesting picture. According to the Commonwealth Fund Annual Report Card, Utah's overall healthcare system ranked 19th best among all 50 states and the District of Columbia. In the access category, which measured whether Utahns were insured and were able to afford healthcare, Utah ranked 31st. The prevention and treatment category accounted for whether children, the elderly, and at-risk patients received preventive or required treatment; Utah ranked 35th in this area. The avoidable hospital use and costs category studied numerous types of hospital admissions and studied whether they were potentially avoidable. Utah ranked first in this category, meaning it had the lowest rate of avoidable hospital admissions in the country. The equity dimension assessed whether people with different incomes, insurance coverage or of different race or ethnicity have access to healthcare, and Utah ranked 45th in this category. The healthy lives section measured several types of mortality rates and other important health factors, such as percent of suicides, people who smoke, and children who are obese. Utah ranked second best in the nation, confirming the long-held belief that Utahns lead healthy lifestyles.

**Figure 7: Scorecard on Health System Performance, 2009**

Category	Rank
Overall	19
Access	31
Prevention and Treatment	35
Avoidable Hospital Use and Costs	1
Equity	45
Healthy Lives	4

Source: The Commonwealth Fund.

## Transportation

Two factors that were ranked low in importance and also low in quality were public transportation and traffic. However, respondents noted that the transportation system needed to be improved in the open-ended portion of the survey, making it the third most common response when asked what elected leaders could change to improve quality of life. This is somewhat surprising since recent reports have praised Utah's public transportation system. U.S. News and World Report ranked Salt Lake City as the sixth best city for public transportation because of its heavy investment in FrontRunner and Trax, which serve a large suburban population.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the Brookings Institution found that 89.0% of Salt Lake City metro-area residents have access to public transportation, the eighth highest rate in the nation.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 8: Economic Indicators**

Total Nonfarm Employment (in Thousands)										
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
U.S. Average	132,469	130,591	130,266	130,420	132,453	135,094	137,094	137,996	133,563	129,281
Utah	1,085	1,077	1,073	1,087	1,125	1,178	1,236	1,261	1,220	1,174
Rank	24	34	34	35	35	34	33	33	32	32

Annual Job Growth										
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
U.S. Average	1.3%	-1.4%	-0.2%	0.1%	1.6%	2.0%	1.5%	0.7%	-3.2%	-3.2%
Utah	2.2%	-0.7%	-0.4%	1.3%	3.5%	4.7%	4.9%	2.1%	-3.3%	-3.7%
Rank	14	15	34	9	6	4	1	7	32	34

Unemployment Rate										
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
U.S. Average	4.7%	5.8%	6.0%	5.5%	5.1%	4.6%	4.6%	5.8%	9.3%	9.6%
Utah	4.4%	5.8%	5.7%	5.1%	4.1%	2.9%	2.7%	3.7%	7.1%	7.7%
Rank	22	35	27	25	14	2	1	5	14	16

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

### Economic Vitality

The Economic Vitality sub-group is composed of the availability of good jobs, good affordable housing, affordability of other living costs, and good stores. Economic Vitality rated 86.0 in importance, and nearly 15 points below, at 71.8, in quality.

#### Good Jobs

Utahns rated opportunities for good jobs as one of the factors most important to their quality of life, with a rating of 88.1, ranking fifth most important. On the quality scale, this ranked last among all 20 factors, at 62.2. This sentiment was also expressed in the open-ended section of the survey; the fourth most common response was that elected leaders needed to improve the economy. This is a clear indication of problems in the national and world economy. Despite America's slow recovery from the 2007 recession, Utah's economy has actually fared better than many other states. Utah's unemployment rate is consistently below the nation's rate. In the last decade, the unemployment rate was always below the national average, except for in 2002 when it was level with the national average.

Throughout the 2000s, Utah also had very strong job growth, well above the national average, and ranked in the top 15 among all states, except in 2003. In 2007, Utah's job growth was the highest in the nation, at 4.8%. Utah's job growth slowed in 2008 to 2.1%, though it was still one of the highest rates in the country. This changed drastically

as the recession began to affect Utah in earnest, in 2009, in which Utah job losses of -3.3%, slightly worse than the national average of -3.2%. This trend continued the following year, and in 2010 Utah's year-over job growth was -3.7%, compared to the national average of -3.2%. However, in 2011 Utah's economy began to recover with 1.4% job growth, above the national average of 0.8%.

Utah's median income for persons who work full-time is just under the national average, with workers in Utah making 97% of the national average. Men in Utah who work full-time made almost as much as the national average between 2007-2009, at 99.5%, but women in Utah only made 88.3% as much as their national counterparts.

#### Housing

The affordability of good housing is another important factor that Utahns feel is performing poorly. According to the Census Bureau, the median value of owner-occupied homes in Utah in 2008 was \$236,000, well above the national average of \$197,600 and 18th highest in the country.<sup>12</sup> However, this was just before housing prices in Utah began to depreciate, and after the national housing market had begun to fall. According to the Federal Housing Finance Agency, the appreciation of home prices nationwide slowed dramatically in 2006, and began to lose value in 2007. Housing bubbles in Nevada, California, Arizona and Florida all began to burst in 2007 as well. Housing prices in Utah did not begin to fall until 2008. Data show that house prices nationwide continue to depreciate, though at a much slower rate than during the recession. In Utah, analysts are still uncertain as to whether housing prices have "bottomed out," or whether the housing market has begun to recover.<sup>13</sup> Cost of living data show that housing costs, which include costs for both homeowners and renters, for Cedar City, Logan, Ogden and St. George, are below the national average. However, housing costs for Salt Lake City are slightly above the national average.<sup>14</sup> This conclusion is confirmed by the National Association of Realtors, which estimates that the median sales prices of existing single-family homes in the Salt Lake Metropolitan Area was \$206,500, above the national average of \$173,100 in 2010.<sup>15</sup>

#### Other Living Costs

Another factor that scored high in importance but was rated poorly for quality in the survey was the affordability of other living costs. According to the Council for Community and Economic Research, which compiles cost of living data for cities across the United States, the cost of certain items can be more expensive in some Utah cities than the national average; however, overall living costs in Utah are lower than national averages. The cost of groceries is near or below the national average in Ogden, Salt Lake and St. George, but above it in Cedar City and Logan.<sup>16</sup> The cost of utilities is well below the national average for each city, except in Ogden. Transportation costs were near or above the national average for each of the five cities reported on, and the costs for health were below the national average for each city. When compared to other Western cities such as Boise, Phoenix, Tucson, Sacramento, Denver, Portland and Las Vegas, the cost of living in Salt Lake City was lower in almost every category.<sup>17</sup>

**Figure 9: Median Income for Persons Who Worked Full-Time Year-Round**

	05-07 Average	06-08 Average	07-09 Average
U.S. Average			
Total	\$39,920	\$41,036	\$40,691
Male	44,250	45,725	45,633
Female	34,103	35,356	35,380
Utah			
Total	\$37,846	\$39,322	\$39,514
Male	42,983	44,597	45,390
Female	30,547	31,348	31,256
Utah's National Ranking			
Total	25	26	24
Male	24	25	21
Female	35	35	35
Utah's Percent of National Average			
Total	94.8%	95.8%	97.1%
Male	97.1%	97.5%	99.5%
Female	89.6%	88.7%	88.3%

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey.

**Figure 10: Cost of Living Index**

Index	Composite	Grocery	Housing	Utilities	Transportation	Health	Miscellaneous
Cedar City, UT	87.8	101.6	71.3	84.6	95.3	87.3	95.6
Logan, UT	93.7	103.8	65.1	85.7	112.7	97.1	111.2
Ogden, UT	93.2	91.6	85.3	102.2	101.6	90.4	96.0
Salt Lake City, UT	97.8	96.5	101.8	73.8	100.3	99.2	101.3
St. George, UT	94.8	99.8	90.3	87.4	97.8	87.9	99.0
Boise, ID	97.6	101.9	85.3	100.3	104.7	103.2	103.0
Phoenix, AZ	99.4	109.3	89.0	99.5	106.8	106.5	101.6
Tucson, AZ	95.6	97.0	88.5	86.4	104.0	98.5	101.2
Sacramento, CA	116.3	111.1	137.3	113.4	113.8	112.4	102.1
Denver, CO	104.6	102.3	111.1	95.0	95.7	106.4	105.1
Portland, OR	112.3	108.7	129.5	87.4	109.5	114.2	106.9
Las Vegas, NV	101.0	106.8	91.4	94.6	105.1	108.7	107.1
U.S. Average	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: ACCRA Cost of Living Index Comparison.

### Shopping

The final factor within this grouping is access to good stores. Utahns rated this as having average importance, but very good quality.

### Social Characteristics

The Social Characteristics sub-group includes questions that asked Utahns whether people are accepting of differences, whether people support and help one another, whether people share the same values, and whether they have family nearby. It was rated 78.9 in importance, and 77.0 in quality.

A social factor that ranked high in importance and lower in quality was whether people were accepting of differences. This is an area of concern in a state like Utah where there is a large racial majority, as well as a religious majority. However, minority groups are growing and making Utah more diverse. In recognition of the state's changing social fabric, efforts have been made to boost tolerance and acceptance. For example, the Alliance for Unity seeks "to foster a more unified community in which all Utahns are included and valued, regardless of affiliations or differences."<sup>18</sup>

A social factor that ranked high both in importance and quality was whether people support and help one another. This result is supported by the fact that Utah traditionally has high volunteering rates. Utah has had the highest volunteer rate in the country since 2002, with a rate of 43.5% between 2006 and 2008. Utah residents also served the largest number of volunteer hours per resident at 80.1 hours annually between 2006 and 2008.<sup>19</sup>

### Cultural/Recreational Opportunities

The Cultural/Recreational Opportunities sub-group assesses the availability of recreational and cultural events and spiritual/religious activities. Utahns rated this grouping at 80.6 in importance and slightly higher in quality, at 84.8. Both of the factors in this grouping were ranked as less important, but high in quality. The high quality ranking both of these factors received is understandable, since Utah has ample recreation opportunities at its many parks and other public lands. In addition, many cities have made efforts to improve their running and biking trails, such as the Bonneville Shoreline Trail and the Legacy Parkway Trail that both stretch through Salt Lake and Davis counties. The availability of spiritual/religious activities was given the highest quality score of all 20 factors, at 89.4.

### Physical Surroundings

The final sub-group is Physical Surroundings, which includes buildings and streets, good parks, and natural surroundings. This

category was rated 82.4 in importance, and slightly above at 83.5 in quality. The attractiveness of buildings of streets was rated as having below-average importance, but both access to good parks and the attractiveness of the natural surroundings were rated as important. All three of these factors were given high marks for quality.

### HOW TO IMPROVE UTAH'S QUALITY OF LIFE

One of the final questions asked of survey respondents was "What is the single most important thing that elected leaders could change to improve the quality of life of your area?" The most common answer to this question was that public education needed to be improved. One respondent even said, "Public education is the single biggest thing they can do." The second most common response was that government needed to be fixed, with many respondents saying public officials needed to listen to residents, spend less public funds, or spend more wisely. The third most common response was to improve the transportation system, and fourth, to improve the economy, highlight the low quality rating respondents gave these factors. Finally, the fifth most common response was that people simply didn't know what elected leaders should do.

### CONCLUSION

The Utah Foundation Quality of Life Index shows that Utahns are most concerned with safety and security, public schools, air and water quality, quality healthcare and access to good jobs. Interestingly, all of these factors except quality healthcare ranked relatively low on the quality scale, showing that improvement is needed. In addition to healthcare receiving high ratings in both importance and quality, so did higher education and whether people support and help each other, these indicate some of Utah's strengths. Utahns gave very high marks to factors in the Cultural/Recreational Opportunities and Physical Surroundings sub-groups, and to a few of the factors in the Social Characteristics sub-group as well. This is important to note because many of the anecdotal reasons people say they enjoy living in Utah, such as having family nearby, or access to recreation, were housed within these sub-groups, and performed quite well.

### ENDNOTES

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