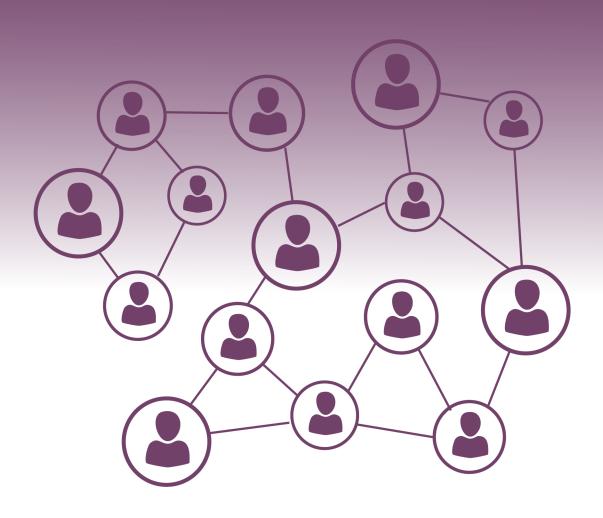
Tots and Tomorrow

How a Focus on Future
Generations Generates Social Capital







TOTS AND TOMORROW

HOW A FOCUS ON FUTURE GENERATIONS GENERATES SOCIAL CAPITAL

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About the Utah Foundation

Since 1945, leaders, legislators, and community members have relied upon the **illuminating**, **independent**, **and nonpartisan public-policy research** produced by the Utah Foundation to support informed decision-making on topics that matter most. As a 501(c)3 with broad community support and a 60-member board, the Utah Foundation exists to empower **civic engagement as the foundation for enhanced quality of life for Utahns**.

Research Report 833

Social Capital: Simply put, social capital refers to the ways in which people utilize networks and social connections to benefit themselves and their communities. Social capital has numerous direct and indirect benefits, as highlighted in the introductory report of the Utah Foundation's Social Capital Index project: *Foundations and Frameworks: A Primer on Social Capital and Why It's Important.*

INTRODUCTION

The extent to which a society meets the needs of its children says much about its effort to build social capital into the future. If children are neglected, a family withers on the vine – and the same can be said about a society more generally. If children are nurtured and given opportunities to reach their physical and mental potential, a society will tend to thrive.

Building social capital from an early age will help maximize the opportunities for meeting – or exceeding – one's potential. The extent of a community's focus on the next generation also says something about how socially invested people are in the future of a place.

This installment of the Social Capital Index project seeks to measure the extent to which Utah is focused on the needs of the next generation. Future focus is measured by birth rates and spending efforts in parks and recreation, schools, and youth development organizations.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS REPORT



- Utah's focus on future generations is the fifth-highest in the nation.
- Utah's high ranking for its focus on future generations is largely driven by its high birth rates (the highest in the nation) and high level of parks and recreation funding effort (third in the nation).
- Utah's sub-index score for focus on future generations has declined by 60% over the past 12 years.
- Two-thirds of Utah's decline in its focus on future generations from 2013 to 2015 was driven by falling birth rates, even as Utah continues to have the highest birth rates in the nation.
- All but two states (Vermont and North Dakota) have seen declines in their focus on future generations from 2013 to 2025.
- The decline in a focus on future generations is particularly high in Mountain States. Six of eight Mountain States are among the top ten states with the biggest drop. All Mountain States have declined more rapidly than the nation at large.

BACKGROUND

In 2019, the Utah Foundation hosted Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam to keynote its annual luncheon. He is widely viewed as one of the most influential scholars on the topic of social capital. The topic of Putnam's address focused on the widening opportunity gap among American children, with declining interactions between social classes and growing disparity in educational and recreational offerings. The consequences project into adulthood.¹

For instance, Putnam noted that team sports were once wide open to all children, but equipment and participation fees now form a barrier. The latest data as of 2025 shows families spent \$1,016 on their children's sports, a 46% increase since 2019.² This means many children are missing out on the chance to build soft skills like grit and teamwork – and have reduced opportunities to build social capital.

This is but one concern. American birth rates are on a downward slide. Investments in schools, parks and recreation, and youth organizations are also in decline.

While these trends raise concerns, efforts to invest in the future generation and build social capital are continuing. Youth organizations, for example, can play a pivotal role in promoting child development. One of many groups working toward this goal is PROG Development Center. This organization helps adolescents in the greater West Valley City area by offering career readiness programs and tech certifications through providing community-based support. Such organizations and efforts taken to help future generations will not only provide children with the skills to help them in their own lives, but also provide them with the skills to strengthen social capital in their community.

The indicators in this report demonstrate the degree to which Utah is investing in the next generation. They also serve as a starting point to identify ways to grow and support younger Utahns.

¹ For a full discussion, see Putnam, Robert D., Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016.

² Solomon, Jon, 2025, "Project Play survey: Family spending on youth sports rises 46% over five years," https://projectplay.org/news/2025/2/24/project-play-survey-family-spending-on-youth-sports-rises-46-over-five-years.

³ PROG Foundation, "Community Programs," https://progfoundation.org/community/.

PARKS AND RECREATION FUNDING EFFORT

Access to parks and recreation is a critical indicator for public health. In a 2010 study, researchers suggested that more government spending on parks and recreation has positive implications for overall mortality rates.⁴ Parks also provide social value for communities, including children.

Opportunities for recreation in various parts of Utah abound. The state is well known for its skiing and mountain biking. It has five National Parks, eight National Monuments, and a National Recreation Area. It has numerous National Forests, state parks, and city parks. In addition, the state has recently put large financial support behind the "Utah Trail Network," which focuses on connecting existing trails that are the easiest for Utahns to access, those running near parks and rivers, and just over the fences of some of our own backyards.⁵

The Utah Foundation defines "parks and recreation funding effort" as the amount spent by state and local governments on parks and recreation in terms of the state's level of personal income. This means that for every \$1,000 earned by a Utahn, \$3.89 was collected by a state or local government and spent on parks and recreation in 2023. Data were gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. For more information, view the Appendix.



Lodestone Park, Kearns

⁴ J. Tom Mueller et al., "The relationship between parks and recreation per capita spending on mortality from 1980 to 2010: A fixed effects model," PMC, (2019). www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6377401/

⁵ Utah's 2023-2050 Unified Transportation Plan, https://unifiedplan.org/utah-trail-network/.

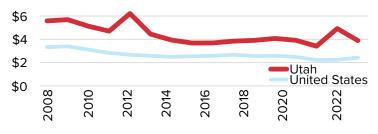
PARKS AND RECREATION FUNDING EFFORT DASHBOARD

Utah's parks and recreation funding effort fluctuates, but trends down since 2000s.

Figure 1.1: State and Local Expenditures on Parks and Recreation per \$1,000 of Personal Income, Utah and the United States: 2008-2023

Colorado leads the Mountain States by a substantial margin.

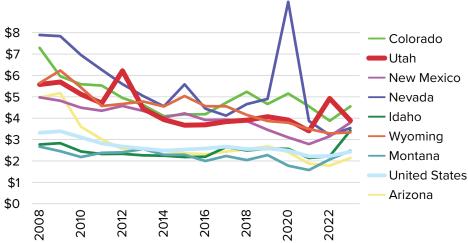
Figure 1.2: State and Local Expenditures on Parks and Recreation per \$1,000 of Personal Income in the Mountain States, 2023





Most Mountain States' parks and recreation funding effort declined from 2008 to about 2021.

Figure 1.3: State and Local Expenditures on Parks and Recreation per \$1,000 of Personal Income, Utah and the Mountain States: 2008-2023

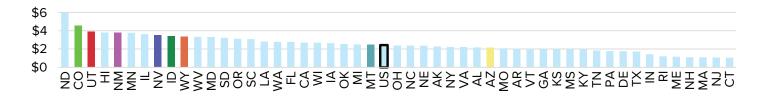




\$3.34

Six of eight Mountain States are among the top ten in the nation.

Figure 1.4: State and Local Expenditures on Parks and Recreation per \$1,000 of Personal Income by State, 2023



Utah's Parks and Recreation Funding Effort Over Time

Utah's relative parks and recreation funding effort declined from 2008 to 2015. While there was an increase in 2022, effort again dropped below \$4 per \$1,000 of personal income by 2023.

Parks and Recreation in the Mountain States

Six of the eight Mountain States ranked in the top 10 nationally for parks and recreation expenditures per \$1,000 of personal income. Only Montana and Arizona did not. The high spending in the region may reflect the strong outdoors ethos of Western states. As of 2023, Colorado led the Mountain States by a substantial margin.

Utah and the Nation

Utah has consistently outspent the nation on parks and recreation funding effort. Over the past decade, the national effort stabilized just above \$2, while Utah's funding effort has typically been below \$4 per \$1,000 of personal income since 2014. Still, as of 2023, Utah ranks third in terms of relative parks and recreation funding effort.



Memory Grove. Credit: Wikipedia User Another Believer under license (CC BY-SA 4.0)

PUBLIC SCHOOL FUNDING EFFORT

Education spending may be the most direct investment a society can make in its children. A successful public school system prepares its students to succeed in a post-secondary setting, where they will acquire the skills that allow for middle-class employment. A successful school system will thereby open the way for economic mobility and the acquisition of social capital.

It should be noted that the success of a system does not depend entirely on funding levels. As Utah Foundation research has previously revealed, higher levels of investment do not always correlate with higher performance.⁶ However, at a certain point, spending can become decisive, and effectively targeted programmatic investments will yield positive results. And, more importantly for this report, school spending provides an important indicator for examining a community's commitment to the next generation.

The Utah Foundation uses the education spending effort based on income, rather than the popular method of per-pupil spending, because it provides a more direct indication of a state's relative focus on education spending. Please note that Utah is typically last of all 50 states in per-pupil spending, due in part to Utah's larger family size. Further, while private schools and post-secondary institutions are critical components of a society's efforts in this regard, K-12 public education investments provide the most straightforward barometer, allowing for simple equivalent comparisons.

The Utah Foundation defines "public school funding effort" as the amount spent by state and local governments on the K-12 education system in terms of the state's level of personal income. This means that for every \$1,000 earned by a Utahn, \$37.91 was collected by a state or local government and spent on the K-12 education system in 2023. Data were gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. For more information, view the Appendix.

⁶ See Utah Foundation, Making the Grade? K-12 Outcomes and Spending in Utah, August 2019, www. utahfoundation.org/reports/making-the-grade-k-12-outcomes-and-spending-in-utah/.

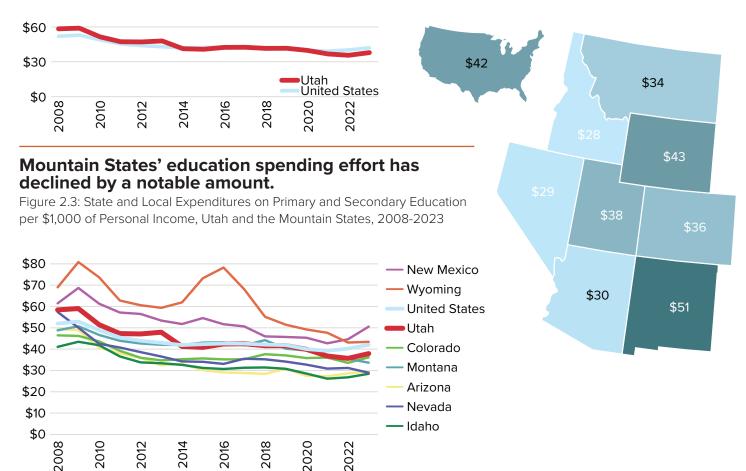
PUBLIC SCHOOL FUNDING EFFORT DASHBOARD

Utah's education spending effort has declined by a notable amount.

Figure 2.1: State and Local Expenditures on Primary and Secondary Education per \$1,000 of Personal Income, Utah and the United States, 2008-2023

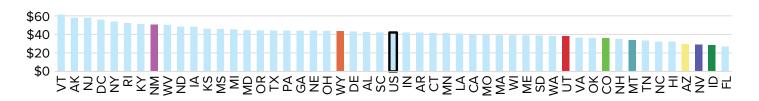
Utah ranked third among the low-funding-effort Mountain States.

Figure 2.2: State and Local Expenditures on Primary and Secondary Education per \$1,000 of Personal Income in the Mountain States, 2023



Utah is in the bottom third of states for school funding effort.

Figure 2.4: State and Local Expenditures on Primary and Secondary Education per \$1,000 of Personal Income by State, 2023



Utah's Public School Funding Effort Over Time

Utah's state and local expenditures on primary and secondary education per \$1,000 of personal income declined by a notable amount from 2008 to 2023, falling from \$58.52 to \$37.91.

Public School Funding Effort in the Mountain States

Five out of eight Mountain States are among the bottom ten states with the lowest funding effort. Only New Mexico and Wyoming stand out with a K-12 public education funding effort in the top half of states.

While Utah ranked third among the Mountain States, the region as a whole exhibits a low education funding effort. All eight states have seen a decrease in funding effort from 2008 to 2023.

Utah and the Nation

Utah's relative public school funding effort has closely tracked the nation at large over time. However, by 2023, it stood below the national average, putting Utah in the bottom third of states.



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BIRTH RATES

Utah's exceptionally large families are emblematic of its culture. They bespeak a direct focus on the next generation – the very essence of parenthood. Family itself is a key source of social capital, with larger families often forming the threads for larger social networks. The built-in network of siblings, cousins, and other family members often allows for lifelong relationships that can help weave a large network of connections. However, the size of the Utah family is not what it used to be. And there is little to suggest that the trends in place now are about to change.

Birth rates refer to the number of children born per year per 1,000 residents. Data were gathered from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For more information, view the Appendix.

Gillies, Val, and Lucey, Helen, "It's a connection you can't get away from': Brothers, Sisters and Social Capital," *Journal of Youth Studies*, Vol. 9, Issue 4, 2006.

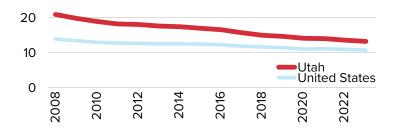


Flixr user "Bureau of Land Mangement - Utah," (PDM)

BIRTH RATES DASHBOARD

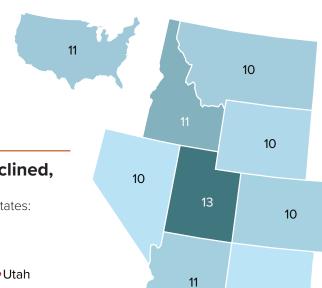
Utah's birth rate has declined rapidly.

Figure 3.1: Birth Rate per 1,000 Residents, Utah and the United States: 2008-2023



Utah's birth rate exceeds all other Mountain States.

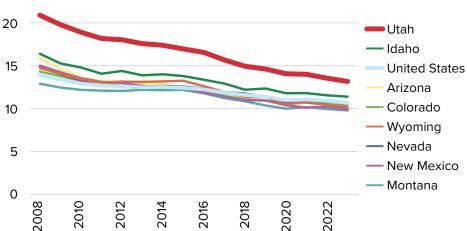
Figure 3.2: Birth Rate per 1,000 Youth Aged 5-17 in the Mountain States, 2023



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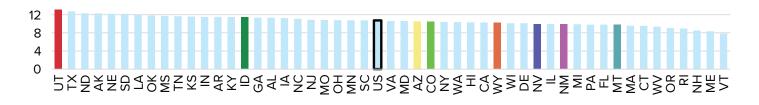
While all Mountain States' birth rates have declined, Utah has dropped the most rapidly.

Figure 3.3: Birth Rate per 1,000 Residents, Utah and the Mountain States: 2008-2023



Utah had the nation's highest birth rate in 2023.

Figure 3.4: Birth Rate per 1,000 Residents by State, 2023



The Trend in Utah's Birth Rate

Utah's birth rate dropped rapidly from 2008 to 2023, from 21 births per 1,000 residents to a little over 13. This represents a major reconfiguring of Utah's population that will manifest in countless ways during the coming years, in areas ranging from education to public health to employment.

Birth Rates in the Mountain States

The Mountain States do not have particularly high birth rates. In fact, with the exceptions of Utah and Idaho, all are below the national average. Despite its decline, Utah's remarkable birth rate far exceeded all other Mountain States in 2023. The lowest birth rate among all Mountain States is in Montana, which ranks ninth lowest in the nation.

Utah and the Nation

Birth rates have been in decline nationally. Part of this stems from a reduction in teen pregnancy. The birth rate for teenagers in Utah in 2023 fell to eight births per 1,000 teenage girls aged 15 to 19, down nearly 70% since 2007. The Utah teen birth rate was far lower than the national average, at 13.2 per 1,000 teens.⁸

Utah's decline in birth rates significantly exceeds the national decline. Whereas the nation has seen only a modest decline, from 13.9 births per 1,000 residents to 11.4, Utah has seen its birth rate drop by nearly one-third. Still, Utah's birth rate remains well ahead of the nation's at large, and as of 2023, it was the nation's highest.

Utah Health Department, "Health Indicator Report of Birth Rates," https://ibis.utah.gov/ibisph-view/indicator/view/BrthRat.Age.html.; Hamilton, Brady E., Joyce a Martin, and Michelle J.K. Osterman, "Births: Provisional Data for 2023," Vital Statistics Rapid Release, April 2024, https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/vsrr/vsrr035.pdf.

FUNDING EFFORT FOR YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

Community engagement among youth can have positive impacts on their development. Studies suggest that young people who are engaged in their community show a higher capacity to resolve social and interpersonal issues. Further, there is a positive relation between youth community involvement and their future contributions to civil society.⁹

Youth involvement is an important indicator of social capital, as it implies a more engaged and tight-knit society. The extent to which a society mobilizes organizational support and resources for youth is also indicative of its focus on future generations. Most of the support and resources geared toward youth organizations, specifically funding, may provide an estimate as to the adequacy and effectiveness of these organizations in helping future generations.

The Utah Foundation defines the "funding effort for youth organizations" as the amount of income reported by non-profits dedicated to youth development in terms of the state's personal income. This means that for every \$1,000 earned by a Utahn, \$0.22 was spent on, earned by, or donated to a non-profit focused on youth development in 2023. Data were gathered from the Urban Institute which processed data from the IRS. For more information, view the Appendix.

Balsano, A., "Youth Civic Engagement in the United States: Understanding and Addressing the Impact of Social Impediments on Positive Youth and Community Development," *Applied Development Sci*ence, Vol. 9, No. 4; pp. 188-201, 2005.



FUNDING EFFORT FOR YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS DASHBOARD

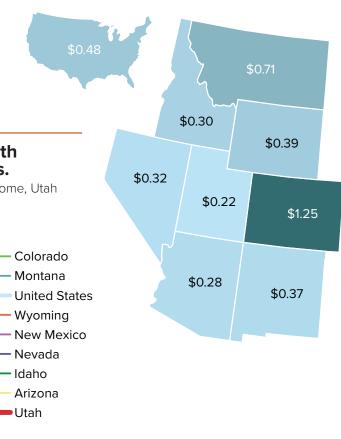
Utah youth organization funding effort has decreased over the years.

Figure 4.1: Youth Organizations Funds per \$1,000 of Personal Income, Utah and the United States: 2009-2022

\$0.60 \$0.40 \$0.20 \$0.00 \$0

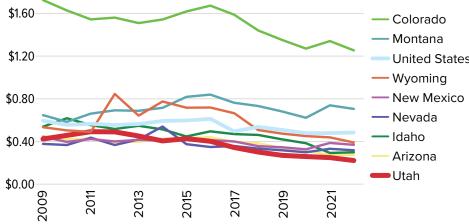
Utah has the lowest funding effort for youth organizations of all the Mountain States.

Figure 4.2: Youth Organization Funds per \$1,000 of Personal Income in the Mountain States, 2022



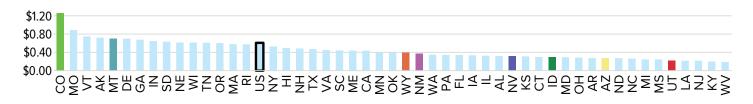
The Mountain States' funding efforts for youth organizations have decreased over the years. Figure 4.3: Youth Organizations Funds per \$1,000 of Personal Income, Utah

Figure 4.3: Youth Organizations Funds per \$1,000 of Personal Income, Utal and the Mountain States: 2009-2022



Utah is among the states with the lowest funding effort for youth organizations.

Figure 4.4: Youth Organizations Funds per \$1,000 of Personal Income by State, 2022



Funding Effort for Utah Youth Organizations, Over Time

Utah has seen a notable decrease in funding effort for youth development nonprofits. On average, youth organizations in Utah receive just 22 cents for every \$1,000 of personal income. From 2008 to 2022, the funds per \$1,000 of personal income decreased by 60%.

Funding Effort for Youth Organizations in the Mountain States

The Mountain States show a wide range of performance when it comes to youth organizations' funds per \$1,000 of personal income. Colorado is the top state among the Mountain States – and the nation – as the only state exceeding \$1. Montana also proves to be a top-performing state nationally and regionally, but there is a 54-cent difference between Montana and Colorado. The other Mountain States are below the national average.

Utah and the Nation

Utah's funding effort for youth organizations remains far below the national effort. As of 2022, Utah had one of the nation's lowest levels of youth organization income per \$1,000 personal income, ranking fifth lowest of all states.

It appears counterintuitive that such a youthful state has such a low funding effort for youth organizations, given its young population. But it may be because a single entity – the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints – is so strongly engaged in the lives of its youth members.

FOCUS ON FUTURE GENERATIONS SUB-INDEX SCORE

The Utah Foundation standardizes the indicators discussed in this report to create an index score ranging from 0 to 14. This scale was standardized to 2016 levels. Since the index is standardized to 2016 levels, if states improve or decline over time, they can achieve index scores outside this range. Additionally, several states have indicators so far outside the norm that they may also fall outside this range.



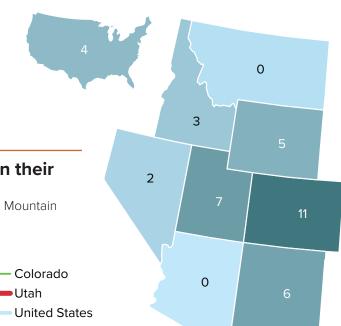
SOCIAL COHESION SUB-INDEX SCORE DASHBOARD

Utah's focus on future generations has dropped by 60% over the past 12 years.

Figure 5.1: Focus on Future Generations Sub-index, Utah and the United States: 2013-2025

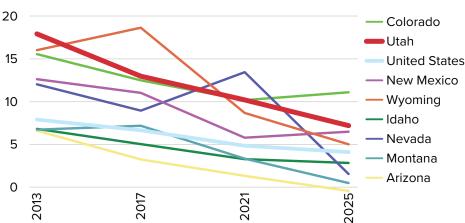
Mountain States vary widely in their focus on future generations.

Figure 5.2: Focus on Future Generations Sub-index in the Mountain States, 2025



The Mountain States have steeply declined in their focus on future generations.

Figure 5.3: Focus on Future Generations Sub-index, Utah and the Mountain States: 2013-2025



Utah ranks fifth in the nation for its focus on future generations.

Figure 5.4: Focus on Future Generations Sub-index by State, 2025



Focus on Future Generations over time

Utah's focus on future generations has fallen significantly from 17.9 to 7.2 from 2013 to 2025. This represents a 60% decrease. This decrease over time is a result of Utah's decline in performance on all four indicators. However, the largest share of the decrease is from birth rates. Utah's declining birth rates account for two-thirds of the total decline from 2013 to 2025. Although Utah's birth rates have declined over the past 12 years, Utah still has the highest birth rate in the nation.

Focus on Future Generations in the Mountain States

The Mountain States show a large range in terms of their focus on future generations, from Colorado in second place to Arizona in forty-seventh. However, all Mountain States have seen serious declines in their focus on future generations. Six of the Mountain States are among the top ten states with the largest decline in their focus on future generations. While Colorado and Idaho were not among the top ten states with the largest decline, they still had declines faster than the nation.

Utah and the Nation

Utah ranks fifth in the nation for its focus on future generations. While Utah has seen steep declines over the past 12 years, it had a high starting point, and most states have also declined over the same period. In fact, only Vermont and North Dakota have improved their focus on future generations from 2013 to 2025. While Utah has outperformed the nation in the past, the gap is closing.

CONCLUSION

When looking at a focus on future generations, Utah performs well, ranking fifth among states. This ranking is largely driven by its high birth rate (first in the nation) and its high parks and recreation funding effort (third in the nation), which more than offset its low school funding effort (13th lowest in the nation) and its funding effort on youth organizations (fifth lowest in the nation).

Just as Utah is something of a mixed bag, so are the rest of the Mountain States. The Mountain States as a group tend to invest heavily in parks and recreation. Only the funding effort in Arizona is below the national average.

Relative school spending varies significantly across the region. New Mexico's K-12 public education spending effort is among the highest in the nation, and Wyoming has historically been among the top states for funding effort. In contrast, five Mountain States are among the lowest ten states in terms of K-12 public education spending effort.

The Mountain States are widely spread when it comes to youth development funding effort and birth rates. This mixed bag paradigm is evident in the region's overall focus on future generations, with states at the top and bottom of the range.

While Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico are among the top states for a greater focus on future generations, this obscures a widespread decline among states from 2013 to 2025. Every state except Vermont and North Dakota has declined in their focus on future generations during this period. The nation at large fell from a sub-index core of 8 to a score of 4 – a 50% decrease. The trend is even more focused among the Mountain States. Six of the eight Mountain States are among the top ten states with the largest decline in their focus on future generations. Utah had the third-highest decline, falling from a sub-index score of 17 to 7 – a decrease of 60%. Two-thirds of that decline is due to Utah's falling birth rates.

APPENDIX

Public Parks and Playgrounds Funding Effort

Every five years (years ending with a 7 and a 2), the U.S. Census takes a census of local governments' expenditures and revenues. In all other years, it also publishes similar data based on a sample of governments. The Utah Foundation uses the expenditures listed as "Parks and Recreation" as the base of this indicator. The Utah Foundation made these raw expenditure data comparable by putting the expenditures in terms of the personal income in each state, per thousand dollars. This roughly translates as: for every \$1,000 of income earned by a resident, the government spends the reported amount on parks and recreation. Quarterly personal income data by state was pulled from the Bureau of Economic Analysis and roughly converted to a fiscal year by averaging the quarterly annualized personal income of the first two quarters of the year with the previous two quarters of the previous year. In

K-12 Public Schools Funding Effort

Every five years (years ending with a 7 and a 2), the U.S. Census takes a complete census of local governments' expenditures and revenues. Every other year, it publishes similar data based on a sample of governments. The Utah Foundation uses the expenditures listed as "Elementary & secondary [education]" as the base of this indicator. The Utah Foundation made these raw expenditure data comparable by putting the expenditures in terms of the personal income in each state, per thousand dollars. This roughly translates as: for every \$1,000 of income earned by a resident, the government spends the reported amount on elementary and secondary education. Quarterly personal income data by state was pulled from the Bureau of Economic Analysis and roughly converted to a fiscal year by averaging the quarterly annualized personal income of the first two quarters of the year with the previous two quarters of the previous year. The Utah Foundation as a sample of governments.

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, 2021, "Annual Survey of State and Local Government Finances," https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/gov-finances.html.

¹¹ Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2020, "Personal Income, Population, Per Capita Personal Income (SQINC1)," https://apps.bea.gov/iTable/iTable.cfm?reqid=70&step=1&isuri=1&acrdn=4#reqid=70&step=1&isuri=1&acrdn=4.

¹² U.S. Census Bureau, 2021"Annual Survey of State and Local Government Finances," www.census. gov/programs-surveys/gov-finances.html.

¹³ Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2020, "Personal Income, Population, Per Capita Personal Income (SQINC1)," https://apps.bea.gov/iTable/iTable.cfm?reqid=70&step=1&isuri=1&acrdn=4#reqid=70&step= 1&isuri=1&acrdn=4.

Birth Rates

Birth rate data were collected from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention database on Natality, 2007-2023. Hirth rates are calculated by looking at the births per 1,000 residents.

Funding Effort for Youth Organizations

Youth organization data are gathered from the IRS Business Master File, which lists nonprofit organizations registered or active with the IRS. The Utah Foundation used the files hosted by the Urban Institute. To ensure that we counted only active organizations, we restricted the count to organizations filing within the previous two years and those filing with more than \$0 in gross receipts. Nonprofit organizations are categorized based on the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) code. To look at just youth organizations, we restricted the count to those where the first NTEE digit is "O," which represents "Youth Development" organizations. In 2017, several states were missing data. In these cases, the data were calculated by averaging their 2016 and 2018 numbers.

The NTEE classification used to identify the type of organization is not complete in the IRS file, so the NCCS systematically created a version of the NTEE classification to fill in the gaps. Because these were not reported by the organizations themselves, there is a possibility of misclassification.

¹⁴ Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020, "Natality, 2007-2020 Request," https://wonder.cdc. gov/controller/datarequest/D66.

¹⁵ Urban Institute, 2020, "IRS Business Master Files," https://nccs-data.urban.org/data.php?ds=bmf#page-top.

¹⁶ Urban Institute, 2018, "Beginner's Guide to Using NCCS Data," https://nccs.urban.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/Guide%20to%20Using%20NCCS%20Data.pdf.



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Cottonwood Heights
Davis County Chamber
Denise Dragoo
Granite School District
HDR Engineering

Holland & Hart
Magnum Development
my529
Revere Health
Salt Lake Chamber
Salt Lake Community College
Sandy City
Snow College
Suazo Business Center

University of Utah
Utah Promise
Utah State University
Utah System of Higher Education
Utah Tech University
Utah Valley University
Wasatch Front Regional Council
Weber State University
West Jordan