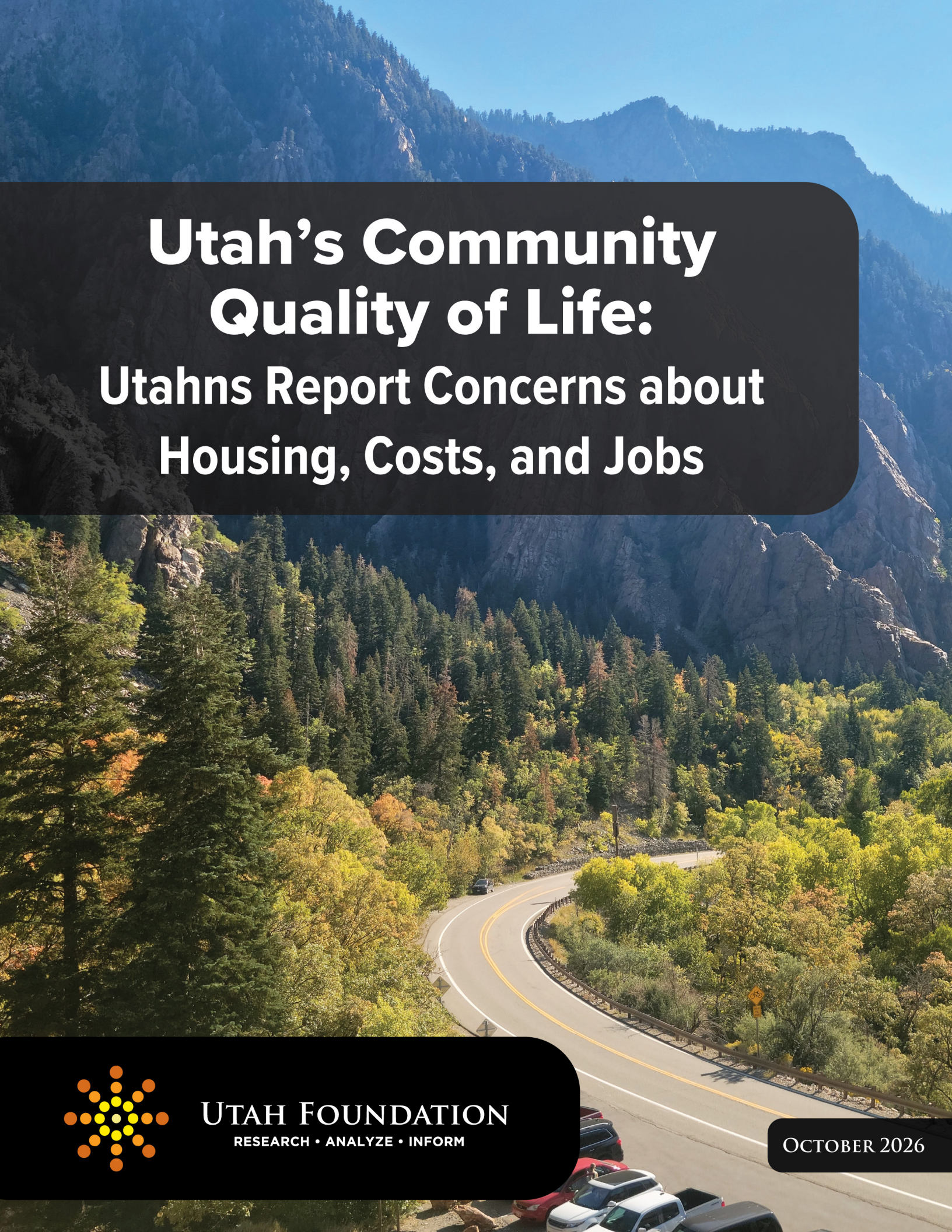




Utah's Community Quality of Life: Utahns Report Concerns about Housing, Costs, and Jobs



UTAH FOUNDATION
RESEARCH • ANALYZE • INFORM

OCTOBER 2026

UTAH'S COMMUNITY QUALITY OF LIFE

UTAHNS REPORT CONCERNS ABOUT HOUSING, COSTS, AND JOBS

This project is produced in partnership with:



This project is supported by:

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
FOUNDATION

GEORGE S. AND DOLORES DORÉ ECCLES
F O U N D A T I O N

Utah Foundation Board of Trustees

*Carlton Christensen, Chair**
*Denise Dragoo, Vice Chair**
*Jonathan Campbell, 2nd Vice Chair**
*Benjamin Brown, Treasurer**
*Kelly Mendenhall, Previous Chair**

Gretchen Anderson
Nathan Anderson
Ryan Andrus
Melissa Ballard
Scott Barlow
Dirk Burton*
Michelle Carroll
David Connelly
J. Philip Cook
Cameron Cowan
Bill Crim
Chris Dallin
Aaron Dekeyzer*
Cameron Diehl

Michael DiOrio
Alex Eaton
Mark Edgley
Stephanie Frohman
Shawn Frye
Bryson Garbett
Michael Gregory*
Kris Griffith
Andrew Gruber*
Andrew Haaland
Ben Horsley
Suzanne Hyland*
Perna Jain
Alex Janak
Michelle Judd
Catherine Kanter*
Derek Kearl
Geoff Landward
Drew Maggelet
Peter Mann

Brian Monsen
Nate McDonald
Jared Myers
Jeremy Oller
Melissa O'Malley
Angie Osguthorpe
Scott Parson*
Mary Catherine Perry
Bryn Ramjoue'*
Jennifer Robinson*
Tim Sheehan
Harris Simmons
Dominic Spaethling
Nick Starn
Austin Summers
Henrie Walton
Chad Westover*
Kevin Wilson
Thomas Young

** Executive Board members*

Report Staff

Christopher Collard, *Research Director, Author*
Shawn Teigen, *President, Author*
Parker Banta, *Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute
Public Policy Analyst, Author*
Ashley Marshall-Cantor, *Research Analyst, Analyst*
Lauren Johnson, *Research Intern, Analyst*
Owen Nebeker, *Research Intern, Analyst*

Research Report 847

Cover Photo Credit: Big Cottonwood Canyon by Wikipedia user
GyozaDumpling under license CC BY-SA 4.0, photo cropped.

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.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Utah Community Quality of Life Index measured 63 out of 100 in 2026. This is the lowest point since the survey began in 2011.

The Index draws on a statewide survey that measures 20 community quality-of-life factors. **All but two of those factors declined since 2013.** Concerns about housing affordability and the cost of living contributed most to the decline in quality of life since 2013. Opportunities for good jobs was the only factor to decline significantly from 2022 to 2026.

Housing affordability, cost of living, and opportunities for good jobs sit among the poorest-performing factors in the 2026 results, along with traffic, public transit, and air and water quality. When asked what would most improve the quality of life in their communities, Utahns mentioned each of these issues and the need to manage growth at a higher rate than other factors.

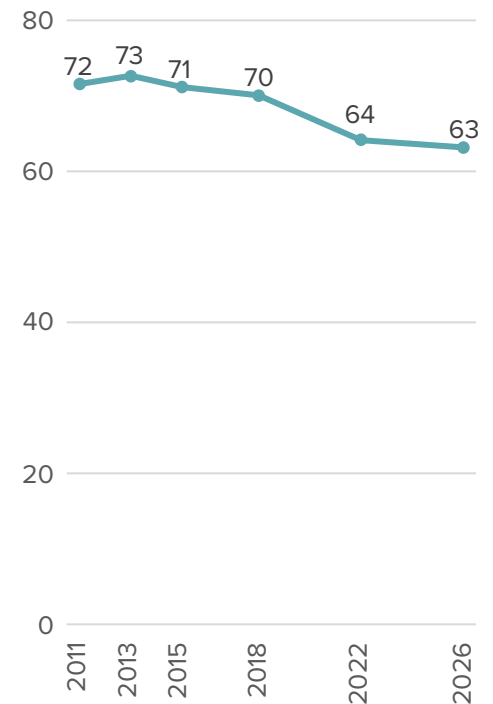
Despite these declines, Utahns report that their communities perform relatively well in religious activities, natural surroundings, and parks and recreation. Additionally, **community support is the most important factor** in determining Utahns' overall quality-of-life rating.

However, not all Utahns share the same experience. Actively religious and higher-income Utahns report higher quality of life than their counterparts, while ratings of individual factors can vary widely across demographic characteristics.

Addressing housing affordability, the cost of living, and opportunities for good jobs could meaningfully improve Utahns' quality of life. Further, targeted investments in transportation, public transit, and air and water quality could also help address the community quality-of-life concerns. Finally, fostering ways for people to support one another can enable Utahns to build a better quality of life.

Utah's community quality of life is at its lowest point.

Utah Community Quality of Life Index



Note: Index represents data for the six survey waves collected over the past 15 years.

Source: Utah Foundation

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Key Findings	1
Potential Policy Improvements	2
Community Quality of Life Index	2
Long-term Trends	4
Demographic Trends	4
The Most Important Factors	5
Utahns' Opinions	6
Conflicting Priorities	7
Improving Quality of Life	8
Spotlight: Good Jobs	4
Spotlight: Housing Affordability	5
Spotlight: The Cost of Living	6
Appendix A: Complete Factor Language	9
Appendix B: Population Differences	10
Appendix C: Open-Ended Question Responses	12
Grouping Responses	12
Themes	13
Subthemes	14
Appendix D: Additional Figures	15
Quality of Life Matrix	16
Appendix E: 2026 Methodology	19
Survey Methodology	19
Index Methodology	19
Importance Methodology	20
High-Potential Methodology	20
Open-Ended Survey Methodology	21

INTRODUCTION

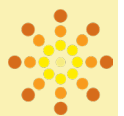
In 2011, the Utah Foundation created a comprehensive survey to understand how Utahns feel about their quality of life. In 2026, the Utah Foundation, in partnership with the Utah Chamber and the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, administered the statewide Quality of Life Index survey for the sixth time. The survey asks respondents to rate factors that contribute to their community's quality of life.

The Utah Community Quality of Life Index draws on Utahns' ratings of their community, or the areas within 30 minutes of their home, across a series of 20 factors. (See Figure 2 for the list of 20 factors and Appendix A for each factor's complete text as presented in the survey.)

This report examines the survey data, including long-term trends in community quality of life, demographic differences, and the importance of each factor, and summarizes Utahns' opinions on how to improve quality of life. Additionally, it lays out suggestions for improving quality of life through six general approaches.

Appendices at the end of the report include additional data and analysis on demographic differences (Appendix B), the survey's open-ended question (Appendix C), a matrix of the 20 community quality of life factors (Appendix D), and more information on the survey and data analysis methodology (Appendix E).

KEY FINDINGS



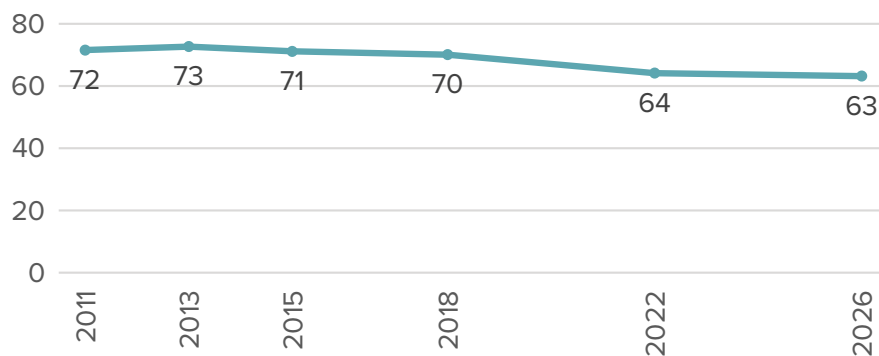
- **Long-Term Downward Trend** – In 2026, the Utah Community Quality of Life Index reached an all-time low of 63, a 10-point decline over the previous 13 years.
- **Driving the Decline** – While housing affordability and the cost of living declined the most, all but two factors have significantly dropped since 2013.
- **Decreasing Good Job Opportunities** – Utahns' rating of opportunities for good jobs was the only factor to decline significantly from 2022 to 2026.
- **Community Support Importance** – Community support stands out as the most important factor in a community's overall quality-of-life rating.
- **Divergent Experiences** – Actively religious Utahns rate their communities eight points higher on the Index, and those earning \$79,000 or more report a quality of life four points higher than their respective counterparts.

COMMUNITY QUALITY OF LIFE INDEX

The Utah Community Quality of Life Index reached an all-time low of 63 out of 100 points in 2026, slightly lower than in 2022. (See Figure 1.) While small shifts in the Index, such as the drop from 2022 to 2026, may not be meaningful, the long-term decline warrants concern. Since 2013, Utahns statewide have continued to report a deteriorating quality of life in their communities.

Quality of life in Utah communities remains below pre-pandemic levels.

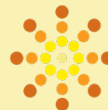
Figure 1: Utah Community Quality of Life Index



Note: Index represents data for the six survey waves collected over the past 15 years.

Source: Utah Foundation.

POTENTIAL POLICY IMPROVEMENTS



- Foster the community culture of supporting and helping one another.
- Promote the production of quality, affordable housing and explore other ways to reduce the cost of living.
- Focus on developing job skills and job creation to maintain a robust Utah economy.
- Build on policies and programs aimed at improving air quality.
- Invest in transportation and transit infrastructure and programs to reduce traffic and improve the quality of roads and highways.

In 2026, the lowest-performing factors in Utah’s communities were housing affordability, the cost of living, traffic, and public transit. These remain unchanged from 2022. Meanwhile, the three highest-performing factors were religious activities, natural surroundings, and parks and recreation. These factors also remain unchanged from 2022. (See Figure 2.)

From 2022 to 2026, Utahns’ ratings of their communities’ opportunities for good jobs saw the only meaningful change across all 20 factors. The decline in opportunities for good jobs represents a 10% decrease and accounts for a half-point decrease in the Utah Community Quality of Life Index.

Utahns report high marks for religious activities, natural surroundings, and parks.

Figure 2: Utah Community Quality of Life Index Factors

Category	Factor	Average Ranking	Rank Range
Excellent	Religious activities	1	1-3
	Natural surroundings	2	1-5
	Parks and recreation	3	1-5
Good	Stores	4	2-7
	Safety	5	2-7
	Higher education	6	4-9
	Family proximity	7	4-10
	Social or cultural events	8	6-11
	Health care	9	6-11
	Community support	10	7-11
	Community attractiveness	11	8-11
Fair	Public schools	12	12-14
	Shared values	13	12-14
	Community acceptance	14	12-14
Poor	Jobs	15	15-17
	Air and water quality	16	15-17
Very Poor	Public transit	17	15-19
	Traffic	18	17-19
	The cost of living	19	17-19
Extremely Poor	Housing affordability	20	20

Note: Rank range reflects the uncertainty of the error margin of the survey. While the average ranking of community support ranks it in 10th place, it could vary between 7th and 11th.

Source: Utah Foundation

Long-term Trends

From 2013 to 2026, the individual ratings for nearly all community quality-of-life factors declined significantly. The five largest decreases, from largest to smallest, are:

- Housing affordability
- Cost of living
- Traffic
- Public transit
- Air and water quality

Parks and recreation and community safety did not see the same significant decline as the other factors. Each of these factors continues to receive similar quality ratings over time.

Demographic Trends

Various demographic characteristics link to how individuals rate their community's quality of life. Most important were religion and income.

Actively religious Utahns report significantly higher quality-of-life ratings across 15 factors. After accounting for other demographic factors, the Utah Community Quality of Life Index of actively religious Utahns sits eight points higher than that of their non-active or non-religious counterparts. Actively religious Utahns had an Index score of 69, while their non-active or non-religious counterparts had an Index score of 61.

Income had a smaller, but still substantial effect with a four-point difference. After accounting for other demographic factors, the Index equaled 66 for those earning \$79,000 or more, while the Index was 62 for those earning less.

Education, age, gender, race, and location also affect how Utahns rate specific factors of their community's quality of life. For a full breakdown of community quality of life factors by demographic characteristics, see Appendix B.

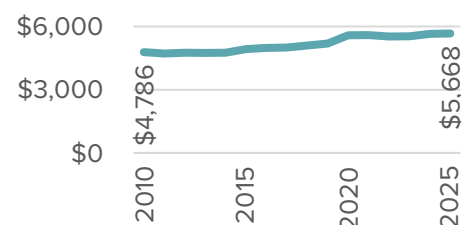
Additionally, urban and rural Utahns report differences on specific factors of their community quality of life. Utahns in more rural counties rated air and water quality, traffic, shared values, and natural surroundings higher than Utahns in more urban counties. Meanwhile, Utahns in more urban counties rated stores, public transit, higher education, good jobs, and healthcare higher than Utahns in more rural counties.

SPOTLIGHT: GOOD JOBS

Utahns' ratings of opportunities for good jobs declined significantly from 2022 to 2026. After adjusting for inflation, average monthly wage growth flatlined to 0.6% from 2024 to 2025 (see Figure 3), potentially contributing to the lower rating of the opportunity for good jobs.¹ Among other benefits, workers continue to view pay as an important predictor of job quality, potentially influencing decisions to seek opportunities for job change and advancement.² Beyond evaluating future jobs, slow wage growth can also impact workers' purchasing power, potentially affect their perceptions of their current jobs, and contribute to broader economic concerns.³

Utah wages flat for previous two years.

Figure 3: Real Average Annual Monthly Nonfarm Wage, Utah, 2010-2025



Note: Dollars adjusted for inflation using 2025 data from the Consumer Price Index from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Source: Utah Department of Workforce Services.

1 Utah Department of Workforce Services and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://jobs.utah.gov/wi/data/library/wages/annualprofilewages.html>.

2 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2026/article/what-makes-a-job-better-survey-evidence-from-job-changers.htm>.

3 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://www.bls.gov/cpi/factsheets/income.htm>.

THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS

In addition to measuring the quality of each community quality-of-life factor (summarized by the Utah Community Quality of Life Index), survey data help calculate the importance of each factor, adding another layer of valuable analysis. In 2026, the three most important factors in determining an individual's overall community quality-of-life rating included community support, community attractiveness, and the cost of living. Community support has been the most important factor since 2018. In 2026, it is the most important by a substantial margin.

Meanwhile, the three least important factors were public transit, traffic, and family proximity. Since 2018, public transit and traffic have remained the least important factors. As a result, even though Utahns rate these factors below average, they have a small effect on an individual's community quality.

For more information on which qualities were most important, please see Appendix D.



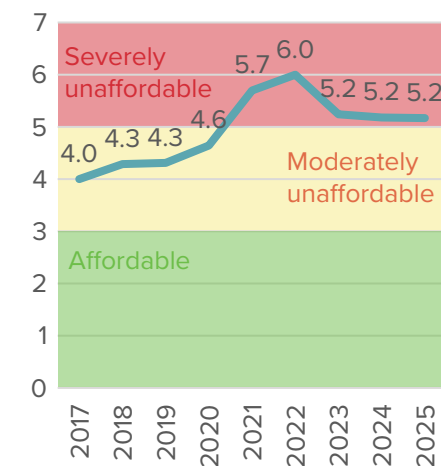
1983 flood in Salt Lake City

SPOTLIGHT: HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Housing affordability is the worst-performing factor on the Index. Higher home prices hurt new buyers' quality of life by reducing affordability, while increasing the wealth of current homeowners. At the beginning of 2026, the median sales price of a single-family home in Utah ranked among the ten most expensive in the U.S. at \$544,000.⁴ Utah's home prices sit in the severely unaffordable range (see Figure 4).⁵ While rent affordability improved, a growing number of renter households remain priced out of a median-priced home – 91% in 2026, up from 59% in 2015.⁶ Ongoing housing affordability problems threaten Utahns' quality of life and, if not addressed, may worsen as the population grows.

Home prices are now “severely unaffordable.”

Figure 4: Home Price Median Multiple, Utah, 2017-2025



Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute.

4 Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute and National Association of Realtors, Figure 2 <https://d36oiwf74r1rap.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/StateOfState-Sep2026-Revised.pdf>.

5 Ibid., Figure 17

6 Ibid., Figure 28



Credit: View of Downtown Provo, Utah by Wikipedia User Poodledoodledude, Under license CC BY-SA 4.0

Utahns’ Opinions

Much of this survey calculates measures based on factor ratings and correlations. Survey respondents also received an open-ended question to highlight what they felt would most improve their communities. Responses were categorized into up to three categories, depending on how many factors each respondent listed.

When grouped into broad categories, nearly half of all respondents mentioned something about housing or growth. Nearly 40% of all respondents mentioned transportation or infrastructure. Two additional important categories included the “economy and the cost of living” and the “environment and natural resources,” each mentioned by around 20% of respondents.

Respondents focus on housing, growth, transportation, and infrastructure as top needs to improve quality of life.

Figure 6: What could most improve respondents’ areas as places to live?

Theme	Respondents	Percent of respondents
Housing & growth	239	47%
Transportation & infrastructure	193	38%
Economy & cost of living	110	21%
Environment & natural resources	102	20%

Note: Please note that many respondents offered more than one suggestion; the denominator is 513 respondents.

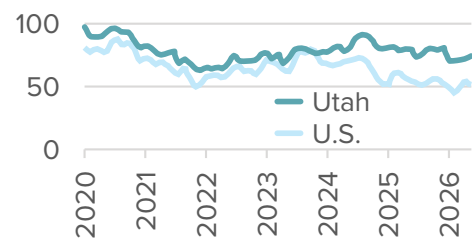
Source: Utah Foundation.

SPOTLIGHT: THE COST OF LIVING

Inflation, or the growth in the general price level of goods and services, remains stubbornly elevated nationwide. In August 2026, the U.S. Consumer Price Index increased by 3.4% over the previous 12 months.⁷ In 2026, the cost-of-living index for Salt Lake City equaled 101.4%, meaning goods cost, on average, 1.4% more in the Salt Lake City area than the national average.⁸ Consumer sentiment in Utah hit a multi-year low in early 2026, potentially representing general unease with the state of the economy (see Figure 5).⁹ Economic unease can impact quality of life as prices increase and people change spending and work habits.

U.S. and Utahn consumer sentiment trend downward.

Figure 5: U.S. and Utah Consumer Sentiment Index, 2020-August 2026



Source: Zions Bank and University of Michigan

7 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/cpi.pdf>.
8 The Council for Community and Economic Research Cost of Living Index, data published by Utah Department of Workforce Services <https://jobs.utah.gov/wi/data/library/wages/costofliving.html>.
9 Zions Bank Consumer Sentiment Survey, <https://gardner.utah.edu/zions-bank-consumer-sentiment-survey/>.

At a more detailed level, housing affordability remained the single most commonly mentioned factor. Nearly one-quarter of respondents highlighted housing affordability as the factor that could most improve their community. Approximately 10% of respondents mentioned the cost of living and traffic. Other commonly mentioned factors included development and growth, air quality, and public transit.

Respondents focus on housing affordability as a top need to improve quality of life.

Figure 7: What could most improve respondents’ areas as places to live?

Subtheme	Respondents	Percent of respondents
Housing affordability	116	23%
Cost of living*	53	10%
Traffic	53	10%
Development and growth	45	9%
Air quality	43	8%
Public transit	38	7%

Note: Many respondents offered more than one suggestion; the denominator is 513 respondents.

* This does not include “food costs” and “utility costs,” which were their own categories.

Source: Utah Foundation.

Conflicting Priorities

Many open-ended comments directly conflict with each other. One respondent wanted “denser housing and more urban development,” while another said, “Less high-density housing, everywhere is crowded.” Similarly, one respondent wrote, “There is too much development, so less development,” while another wanted “More businesses and places to eat, more residents.” Utahns resolve some of this conflict by sorting into different communities that prioritize different factors. Nonetheless, leaders will still need to navigate these conflicts when looking to improve residents’ quality of life.

IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE

Survey findings highlight several issues where a policy focus or targeted intervention could improve Utahns' quality of life in their communities, regardless of individual backgrounds.

These survey findings can help guide state and local government leaders, businesses, nonprofits, and community organizations as they seek to improve Utah's quality of life. The data suggest that the following actions have the greatest potential to improve Utahns' quality of life:

- Building on how much people support and help each other.
- Promoting the production of quality, affordable housing.
- Exploring ways to reduce the cost of living.
- Working to improve opportunities for good jobs.
- Improving policies and programs aimed at enhancing environmental quality, such as air and water quality.
- Investing in transportation and public transit infrastructure and programs to reduce traffic and improve the quality of roads and highways.

Survey partners encourage policymakers and civic leaders to continue to recognize the nuance of quality-of-life research. Some community quality-of-life factors, like having high-quality stores, do not represent a Utah-wide concern on the Index, but represent an area of concern for rural Utahns. On the other hand, public transit is a concern for residents living in more densely populated areas. Policymakers and state leaders can supplement these findings with other available resources to evaluate areas of concern for each unique community throughout Utah.

Overall, policymakers and civic leaders can improve Utahns' quality of life by focusing on the most important factor in the Index: how much people support each other.

APPENDIX A: COMPLETE FACTOR LANGUAGE

Respondents rated their community on 20 factors

Figure A: Factor Survey Language and Short Reference

Complete factor language	Short reference
The availability of quality healthcare services	Health care
Opportunities for good jobs	Good jobs
The availability of good housing that is affordable	Housing affordability
The affordability of living costs other than housing, such as food, utilities, and services	The cost of living
The level of safety in your area and security from crime	Safety
The quality of the environment such as air and water quality	Air and water quality
How accepting and respectful people are of individual and group differences	Community acceptance
The extent to which people have family nearby	Family proximity
How much people share similar values or views of the world	Shared values
The quality of the public schools	Public schools
The availability of quality education beyond high school such as good trade schools, colleges, and universities	Higher education
The availability of spiritual or religious activities or groups	Religious activities
The availability of quality public transportation such as buses or trains	Public transit
Traffic conditions on the roads and highways	Traffic
The attractiveness of the streets, homes, and other buildings	Community attractiveness
The attractiveness of the natural surroundings	Natural surroundings
The availability of good parks, green spaces, or places for recreation	Parks and recreation
The availability of recreational, social, or cultural events and programs	Social or cultural events
The availability of good stores or other places to get the food and other things people want and need	Stores
How much people support and help each other	Community support

APPENDIX B: POPULATION DIFFERENCES

Significant differences based on population characteristics are shown in Figure B. Arrows indicate how demographic groups differ from their counterparts. Blanks represent no significant difference.

Different demographics report different community experiences.

Figure B: Quality of Life Factor by Demographic Difference

	Actively religious	Bachelor's degree or higher	Older Utahns	Female	Earning \$79,000 or more	Hispanic and/or non-white	Rural
Health care	↑		↑		↑		↓
Good jobs	↑			↓	↑		↓
Housing affordability	↑				↑		
The cost of living	↑			↓	↑		
Safety	↑			↓	↑	↓	
Air and water quality	↑	↓	↑	↓			↑
Community acceptance	↑		↑	↓	↑		
Family proximity	↑						
Shared values	↑						↑
Public schools	↑						
Higher education	↑	↑					↓
Religious activities	↑						
Public transit			↑			↑	↓
Traffic	↑						↑
Community attractiveness			↑				
Natural surroundings			↑				↑
Parks and recreation							
Social or cultural events			↑				
Stores	↑						↓
Community support	↑		↑		↑		

Source: Utah Foundation Survey

Differences are categorized as follows:

Religion – Actively religious Utahns are compared with Utahns who are not actively religious, spiritual but not religious, and neither spiritual nor religious. Although this represents four categories, the actively religious comprise the single largest group and differ most from the other three.

Education – In terms of education, those with a bachelor's degree or higher are compared to those without a bachelor's degree.

Age – Utahns' age was based on five age categories: 18-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-64, 65+. The differences on the graph show the factors that were significant when age categories were treated as an ordinal variable.

Gender – Those identifying as women were compared against those identifying as men.

Income – Those earning less than \$79,000 were compared against those earning that amount or more.

Race/ethnicity – White non-Hispanic Utahns were compared against Hispanic and non-white Utahns.

Location – Residents along the Wasatch Front (those in Weber, Davis, Salt Lake, and Utah counties) were compared to those in more rural counties.

APPENDIX C: OPEN-ENDED QUESTION RESPONSES

To understand concerns about one's community quality of life, the survey team asked directly through an open-ended survey question. The survey asked respondents what could most improve their areas as places to live. From these responses, numerous themes emerged. The research team then categorized these responses into 13 themes and dozens of subthemes.

Grouping Responses

These responses can be grouped beyond their themes and subthemes. For instance, many people suggested just one way to improve their quality of life. However, nearly half suggested several possible improvements.

Themes

The research team categorized comments into 13 broad themes. "Housing & growth" and "transportation & infrastructure" were far and away the most common themes. That said, about one in five people also commented on the "economy & cost of living" and the "environment & natural resources."

Respondents focus on housing, growth, transportation, and infrastructure as top needs to improve quality of life.

Figure C1: What could most improve respondents' areas as places to live?

Theme	Respondents	Percent of respondents
Housing & growth	239	47%
Transportation & infrastructure	193	38%
Economy & cost of living	110	21%
Environment & natural resources	102	20%
Recreation, arts & culture	48	9%
Government & governance	43	8%
Community & social cohesion	42	8%
Shopping & services	31	6%
Safety & public services	30	6%
Other	28	6%
Education	23	5%
Religion & spiritual life	11	2%
Health & healthcare	10	2%

Note: Percentages add to well over 100% because many respondents offered more than one suggestion; the denominator is 513 respondents which have been weighted on age, sex and income.

Source: Utah Foundation.

Subthemes

The research team categorized each of the 13 broad themes into subthemes. As Housing & Growth was at the top of the themes, housing affordability as a subtheme was far and away the top issue, cited by 23% of respondents. Relatedly, 9% of respondents expressed opposition to new developments and growth.

One in 10 respondents cited traffic as their top issue, while 7% suggested the need for better public transit.

In terms of affordability, 10% said that lower prices of goods and services overall would be their largest community benefit.

Better air quality was important to 8% of respondents. Other subthemes were cited by fewer than 5% of respondents.

Respondents focus on housing affordability as a top need to improve quality of life.

Figure C2: What could most improve respondents' areas as places to live?

Subtheme	Respondents	Percent of respondents
Housing affordability	116	23%
Cost of living*	53	10%
Traffic	53	10%
Development and growth	45	9%
Air quality	43	8%
Public transit	38	7%

Note: Please note that many respondents offered more than one suggestion; the denominator is 513 respondents which have been weighted on age, sex and income.

* This does not include "food costs" and "utility costs."

Source: Utah Foundation.

APPENDIX D: ADDITIONAL FIGURES

Community factors range in quality.

Figure D1: Factor Quality Rating, 1-to-5 scale

Factor	2026 Quality
Religious activities	4.2
Natural surroundings	4.2
Parks and recreation	4.1
Stores	4.0
Safety	4.0
Higher education	3.9
Family proximity	3.9
Social or cultural events	3.8
Health care	3.8
Community support	3.7
Community attractiveness	3.7
Public schools	3.5
Shared values	3.5
Community acceptance	3.4
Good jobs	3.1
Air and water quality	3.1
Public transit	2.9
Traffic	2.8
The cost of living	2.7
Housing affordability	2.1

Source Utah Foundation.

Community factors range in importance.

Figure D2: Aspect Importance, 0-to-1 scale

Factor	2026 Importance
Community support	0.61
Community attractiveness	0.54
The cost of living	0.51
Health care	0.51
Shared values	0.50
Community acceptance	0.50
Safety	0.50
Natural surroundings	0.49
Religious activities	0.48
Good jobs	0.48
Stores	0.48
Social or cultural events	0.47
Parks and recreation	0.45
Public schools	0.44
Air and water quality	0.42
Housing affordability	0.38
Higher education	0.37
Family proximity	0.37
Traffic	0.36
Public transit	0.19

Source Utah Foundation.

Quality of Life Matrix

The Community Quality of Life Index matrix (Figure D3) categorizes factors into four quadrants based on their individual quality ratings and importance. Matrix quadrants are as follows:

Successes – High-quality, high-importance factors located in the upper-right quadrant. These factors received high-quality ratings and correlate more strongly with an individual’s overall quality-of-life rating.

Improvements in community support, cost of living and housing affordability would most improve Utahns’ quality of life.

Figure D3: Community Quality of Life Matrix, 2026



Source: Utah Foundation.

Secondary Strengths – High-quality, low-importance factors located in the upper-left quadrant. These factors received high-quality ratings but correlate less with an individual's overall quality-of-life rating.

Ongoing Efforts – Low-quality, low-importance factors located in the bottom-left quadrant. These factors received low-quality ratings and correlate less with an individual's overall quality-of-life rating.

Action Items – Low-quality, high-importance factors located in the bottom-right quadrant. These factors received low-quality ratings but correlate more strongly with an individual's overall quality-of-life rating.

Action Items stand to improve Utah's Community Quality of Life Index more than others. These Action Items are:

- Shared values
- Good jobs
- The cost of living
- Community acceptance

Additional analysis identifies High-Potential Factors by plotting a line between the lowest-performing factor and the most important factor, helping identify those factors where even minimal improvements could increase the Utah Community Quality of Life Index. Positive improvements in high-potential factors could produce large changes because these factors are either low-performing and could improve community quality of life, or highly important and could benefit from even small gains. These High-Potential Factors are:

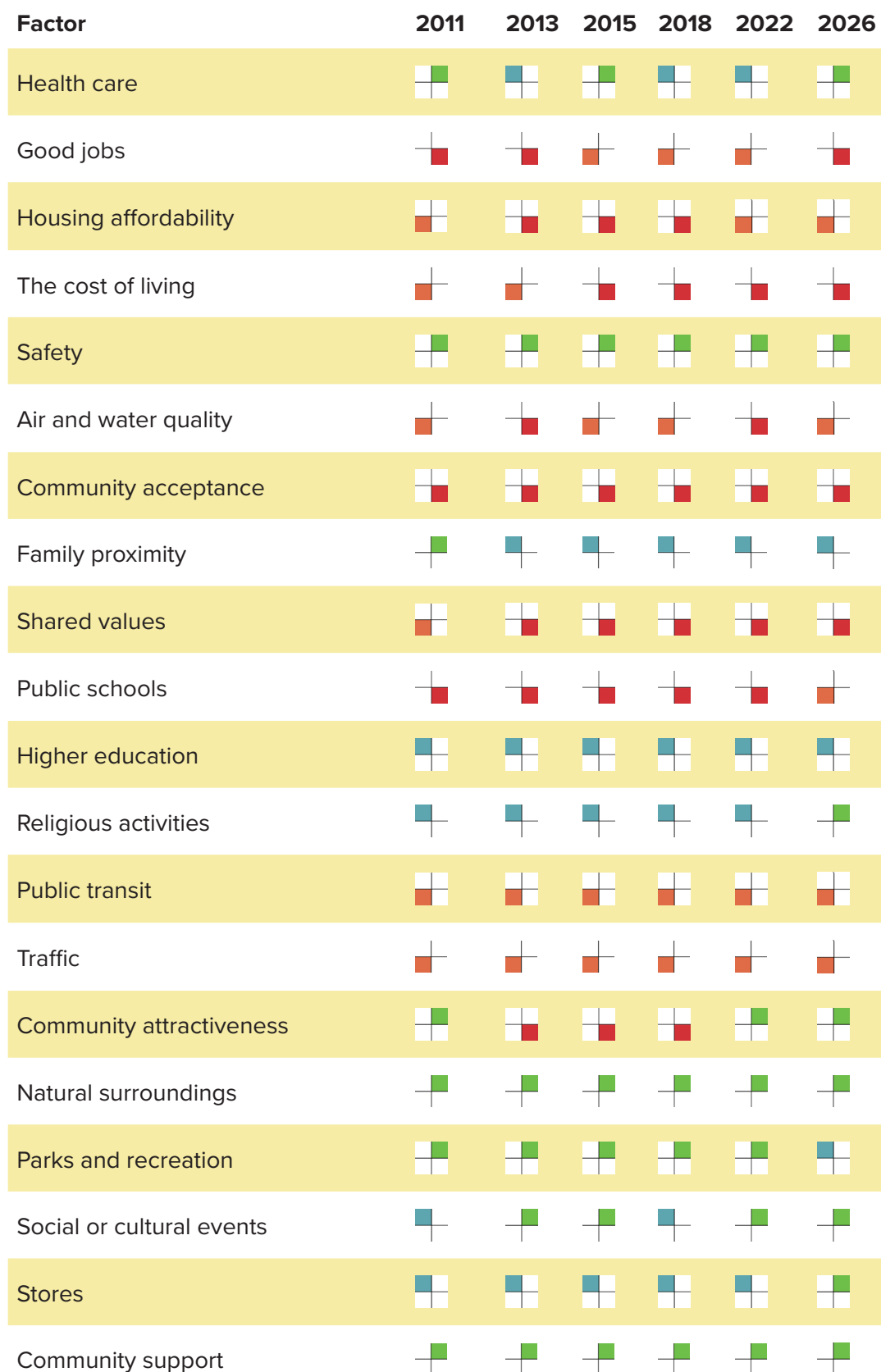
- Housing affordability
- The cost of living
- Community support

The listed action items and high-potential factors reflect a growing consensus across analyses of the 2026 survey data. Survey findings continue to reaffirm the need to improve housing affordability, the cost of living, and opportunities for good jobs, as well as the need to maintain or build community support and resilience. Improvements in these factors could significantly enhance Utahns' quality of life and potentially reverse the current trend of the declining Index.

To learn more about the Community Quality of Life Matrix and High-Potential Factor Methodology, see Appendix E.

Most factors change in relative importance but not relative quality.

Figure D4: Factor quadrant over time



Source: Utah Foundation.

APPENDIX E: 2026 METHODOLOGY

Survey Methodology

Lighthouse Research administered the survey. They generated a random sample from their database of a large majority of Utah households. Lighthouse Research reached out via telephone and email concurrently. The contact mode was reversed partway through the collection period to obtain additional responses. The survey collected 513 responses. The margin of error was 4.3%. The household response rate was 7.7%. The survey was administered from June 23 through July 15, 2026. The survey reached respondents from 27 of the state's 29 counties. Researchers weighted responses using survey demographic data and U.S. Census Bureau data by income, sex, and age to better reflect Utah's overall demographic profile.¹⁰ Over the past six iterations, the survey tallied information from 3,774 respondents – 513 residents in 2026, 508 residents in 2022, 915 residents in 2018, 609 in 2015, 608 in 2013, and 621 in 2011. Before 2018, the survey was administered only by telephone.

10 The Utah Foundation and Intermountain Healthcare made the determination not to weight all of the demographic factors. While some races and ethnicities were not well represented, the samples were too small to weight appropriately. While the survey sample was somewhat more educated than the population as a whole, other metrics were weighted in lieu of these.

Index Methodology

The Utah Community Quality of Life Index measures Utahns' quality of life by asking survey respondents a series of questions on 20 factors of their local communities (the area within a 30-minute drive). Respondents rated each aspect on a five-point scale, from "poor to excellent." The Utah Foundation creates the Index by averaging the responses about each aspect and adjusting them to a 100-point scale. (For a deeper understanding of how these 20 factors were chosen, see the first Utah Quality of Life Index report, released in 2011.¹¹)

11 Utah Foundation, The 2011 Utah Foundation Quality of Life Index First Biennial Survey Reveals Strengths, Weaknesses, 2011, www.utahfoundation.org/uploads/rr703.pdf.

Importance Methodology

The importance of each factor is measured by the correlation between each of the 20 factors and respondents' overall communities' quality-of-life rating. The correlation (naturally bounded between 0 and 1) makes up the Index's "importance" measure. For more information on the validity of using this measure to estimate importance, please see the appendix of the 2018 Quality of Life Index report.¹²

12 Utah Foundation, Utah Foundation Quality of Life Index: Measuring Utahns' Perceptions of their Communities, Personal Lives, 2018, www.utahfoundation.org/uploads/rr756.pdf.

Matrix Methodology

The matrix is generated by plotting each aspect on a graph where the y-axis represents the quality rating of each aspect and the x-axis represents the importance of each aspect. The quality rating of each aspect is calculated by averaging the respondents' ratings of that aspect for their community. The research team then uses the average quality and average importance to divide the matrix into four quadrants.

High-Potential Methodology

The research highlights the factors where improvement would have the highest potential to improve the Utah Community Quality of Life Index. These items would be either the lowest-performing items – where there is a lot of room to improve – or the most important items – where even small improvements could drive up the Index. These items were selected by first calculating the line between the lowest performing aspect and the most important aspect. High-potential factors were those that fell within a specified margin of that line. The margin was specified based on the slope of the line. The margin was made dynamic to account for how lower-slope lines tended to include more factors than higher-slope lines over the past five iterations of the survey. The margin varied between 5% and 15% where the margin would be 5% if the slope were 0 and 15% if the slope were 12. The average slope over the past six iterations of this line was approximately six.

Open-Ended Survey Methodology

The research team categorized each comment into one of 13 themes. If a comment addressed multiple factors, the first three factors would be categorized into a theme. The main themes were:

- Housing & Growth
- Transportation & Infrastructure
- Environment & Natural Resources
- Economy & Cost of Living
- Education
- Health & Healthcare
- Safety & Public Services
- Community & Social Cohesion
- Recreation, Arts & Culture
- Shopping & Services
- Government & Governance
- Religion & Spiritual Life
- Other

The research team subdivided each theme into numerous subthemes. For example, “housing & growth” had 10 subthemes:

- General Housing
- Housing Affordability
- Housing Availability
- Housing Quality
- Rental Costs
- Home Ownership
- Development/Growth
- Density/Overdevelopment
- Land Use/Zoning
- Neighborhood Appearance

Two members of the research team went through the 513 survey responses, coding each open-ended response into one, two, or three themes and their respective subthemes. Another staff member then examined these coded responses for differences and reconciled them.



UTAH FOUNDATION

RESEARCH • ANALYZE • INFORM

STRATEGIC LEADER

The **Brent and Bonnie Jean Beesley** Foundation

giv COMMUNITIES

GEORGE S. AND DOLORES DORÉ ECCLES
FOUNDATION

ENBRIDGE
Life Takes Energy®



CLYDE
COMPANIES

THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
FOUNDATION

COMMUNITY CHAMPION



Enterprise Mobility™

HEALTH
UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

LAWRENCE T. & JANET T.
DEE FOUNDATION

IPA
Intermountain Power Agency
Energy for Today & Tomorrow



RESEARCH ALLY

American-Pacific Corp.
Deloitte
Fidelity Investments
Garbett Family Foundation
Intermountain Health

The Kanter Family Foundation
Molina Healthcare
Mountainland Association
of Governments

Northrop Grumman
Staker Parson Companies
US Bank
WCF Insurance
Wells Fargo

CIVIC SUPPORTER

BBG Real Estate Services
Brigham Young University
Community Foundation of Utah
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
United Way of Salt Lake

University of Utah
Utah State University
Utah System of Higher Education
Utah Tech University
Utah Valley University
Wasatch Front Regional Council
Weber State University
West Jordan
Y² Analytics