



UTAH FOUNDATION

RESEARCH • ANALYZE • INFORM

2023

ANNUAL REPORT

JANUARY 2024

# UTAH FOUNDATION ANNUAL REPORT

# 2023

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## Utah Foundation Staff

Shawn Teigen, *President*  
Christopher Collard, *Research Director*  
Ashley Marshall, *Research Analyst*  
John Salevurakis, *Research Analyst*

## 2023 Consultants

Megan Keating, *Outreach Coordinator*  
Trevor Eckhoff, *Research Analyst*  
Justine Dombrowski, *Research Analyst*

## 2023 Research Interns

Neveah Olmado  
Chandler Robinson  
Margaruite Spathling  
Joseph Wirthlin

## 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 501c3 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.**

Known for its signature products such as the Quality of Life Index, Utah Priorities Project, and Social Capital Index, the Utah Foundation has released more than 50 reports since 2020 on topics ranging from energy and education to taxation and transportation. Access all research, podcasts, videos, statistics, and more at [utahfoundation.org](http://utahfoundation.org).

## A WORD FROM THE UTAH FOUNDATION PRESIDENT

**Phew.** I spent my first 12 years at the Utah Foundation as a researcher. But in late 2022, our previous president decided to head back home to Louisiana. To ensure that the Utah Foundation stayed the course in creating independent, illuminating research, our leadership decided to have me fill that vacant position. It has been quite the first year as president. While it has been a learning experience for me, our organization has really thrived.

**First.** Our organization has reached its target level of fiscal stability. Leadership transitions can be financially rocky. The Utah Foundation knows that firsthand... I am proud to say that the whole team – our officers, Board of Trustees, and staff – worked hard to smooth the path into 2023 and beyond.

**Second.** We run a small, tight ship with three full-time researchers, myself, occasional consultants, and a handful of interns. Despite the small staff, as you will see in this report that we have a substantial amount of quality output. That really speaks to the strength of our team. Christopher Collard just marked a decade with the Utah Foundation. He is the Swiss Army knife of the organization, covering tech support, survey analysis, graphic design, tax research, and even some facilities management. Lucky for him, the Utah Foundation hired two great researchers in 2023. John Salevurakis brings years of economic research experience and deepens the foundation's level of expertise. Ashley Marshall, with a degree in social work from Columbia University, makes sure our work stays focused on the people that it is designed to benefit. She also provides a fantastic unifying force for our team.

**Third.** With our new team in place, we determined that it was a perfect opportunity to take a good look at our foundational principles. We clarified an organizational vision, streamlined our mission, and established guiding principles for our work. This will make us even more effective as we inform and engage Utahns with illuminating, independent, nonpartisan public-policy research.

**Fourth.** We have a fantastic group of volunteers, partners, and supporters. To my mind, this is what makes Utah one of the best places to do public policy research. A culture of collaboration among policy-oriented groups and individuals ensures that our work is backed by the best local experts. An environment that values independent and evidence-based research helps us find financial supporters from businesses, local and state officials, foundations, and other community groups. This same environment is eager to improve the state, often looking to the Utah Foundation to understand how to improve our quality of life.

**Like I said, phew!** It's been a busy year, and you are in the right place to learn all about it. In the following pages you will see us define our success "by the numbers" as well as in qualitative ways. Importantly, thank you for your support. Without you, our Board of Trustees, and other great Utahns, we would not be able to do what we do best:



**Research. Analyze. Inform.**

# BY THE NUMBERS



**8** in-depth  
research  
reports



**7** blog posts  
podcasts



**2** online tools analyzing  
social capital and inflation



**1** foundational renewal

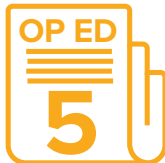
- clarified vision

- streamlined mission

**4** guiding  
principles



**12** community presentations



**5** op-eds in the **Deseret News**  
and the **Salt Lake Tribune**



**120**

social media posts



**1** very successful  
annual luncheon  
enlightening  
breakfast briefing

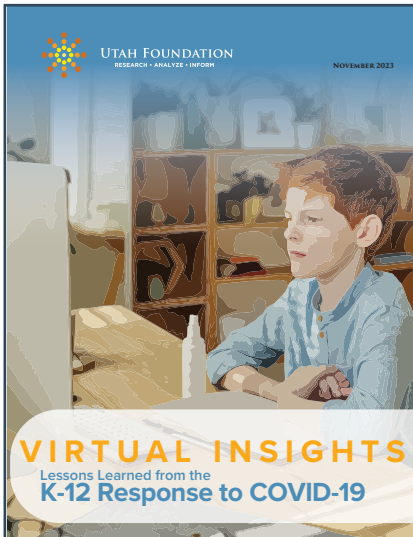


**21**  
newsletters



# in-depth research reports

## How Did the Pandemic Change Digital Learning?



[Virtual Insights: Lessons Learned from the K-12 Response to COVID-19](#) explores the pandemic era implementation of digital learning. The report highlights many of the problems identified during the process and identifies potential benefits of digital learning going forward. It presents a broad survey of issues to help those outside the educational system understand the effects of the pandemic. The report offers policy options that are informed by pandemic era insights.

*This report was made possible with support from the Brent and Bonnie Jean Beesley Foundation and the Lawrence T. & Janet T. Dee Foundation.*



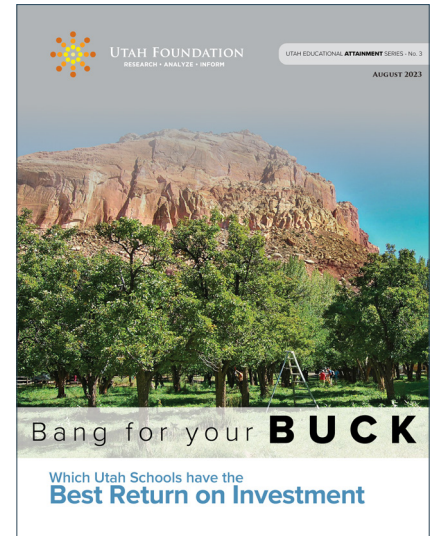
Online and Home-Based Learning, Credit: Flickr User 'ILO Asia-Pacific' under license (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

# Is Education After High School Worth It?

[Bang for Your Buck: Which Utah Schools Have the Best Return on Investment](#) evaluates the return on investment for education beyond high school. Research suggests that this education is generally worth the time and effort. However, that return varies depending upon numerous factors. The report examines three factors: the institution attended, the credential obtained, and the subject studied.

This report is part of Utah Foundation's Utah Educational Attainment Series which seeks to help broaden the educational horizons of young Utahns.

*This report was made possible with support from the Call to Action Foundation, the Brent and Bonnie Jean Beesley Foundation, the Lawrence T. & Janet T. Dee Foundation, and the Utah System of Higher Education.*

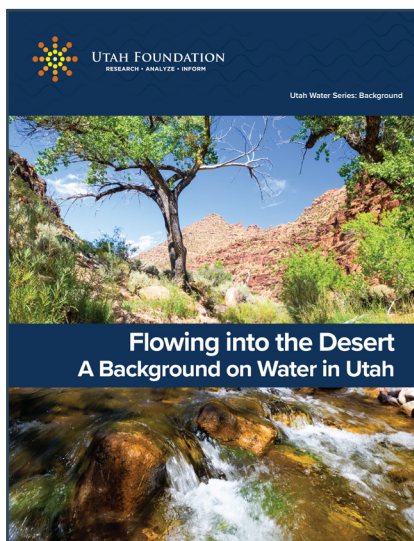


Weber State University spring commencement, April 26, 2019.



Big Springs of Zion, Credit: Flickr User [Sathish J](#) under license ([CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)).

## What's the Deal with Water in the Desert?



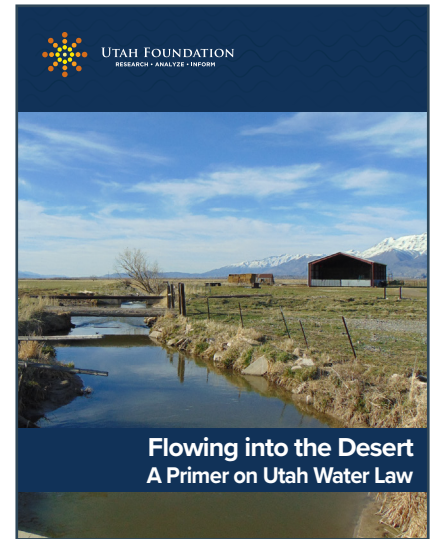
[Flowing into the Desert: A Background on Water in Utah](#) is a background brief providing a reference to explain some key ideas and definitions that are involved in discussions around water supply and use. This brief is a companion to a series of Utah Foundation reports exploring ongoing water concerns. This initial report offers a primer on water in Utah and provides background information to support the subsequent reports.

*The brief was made possible with support from the George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation.*

## Want to Better Understand Water Law?

[Flowing in the Desert: A Primer on Utah Water Law](#) focuses on providing a background to better understand Utah's water law. Of course, a basic understanding of water law is essential for any policy discussion about water. There are concerns that Utah's water law a) provides incentives for water-right holders to waste water, b) distributes water in a way that might have been a better fit for historic needs rather than modern Utah needs, and c) inefficiently limits how water can be used. After outlining Utah's water law, this report briefly outlines these concerns and offers possible avenues for addressing these concerns.

*This primer was made possible with support from the George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation.*







Murray City Park, Murray, Utah. Credit: Flickr User [Jere Keys](#) under license [\(CC BY 2.0\)](#).

## Are Our Parks and Open Space Accessible?

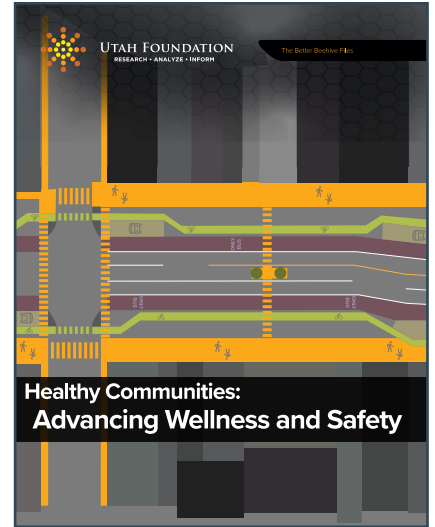


[Healthy Communities: Enhancing Open Space](#) provides an understanding of why open space is important, considers the population growth that is complicating access to open space, and describes the present and future availability of open space. The report then offers a menu of options for local governments and communities to improve the use and allocation of open space. These include improved and additional parks, trails, recreational access points, transportation systems, and other infrastructure necessary to encourage public space utilization. The report also includes spotlights on large-scale neighborhood projects.

*This report was made possible with the support of Union Pacific and the Wasatch Front Regional Council.*

## Are Our Streets Safe for All Users?

[Healthy Communities: Advancing Wellness and Safety](#) is designed as a guide for community leaders. The study examines two broad categories of policy solutions for this report. The first includes solutions that advance the physical, social, and mental health of individuals. The second set of solutions help protect individuals from dangers in their built environment. These solutions and the challenges that they seek to overcome are substantial, interconnected, and multifaceted. Hopefully, after reading this report, community leaders will feel more empowered to advance wellness and safety in their own communities.



*This study was made possible with the support of Get Healthy Utah and the Wasatch Front Regional Council.*



Separated dedicated bike lanes running along 900 South in Salt Lake City.

## How Accessible is Our Food?



[Healthy Communities: Cultivating Food Access](#) details the essential role food plays in building healthy communities. Food is enmeshed with nearly every social aspect of life. Romantic connections are made over meals, family connections are strengthened by daily dinners, celebrations are defined by the unique dishes served, and business deals are built over lunch. More broadly, national and regional identities can be defined by foods distinct to the area, and the sharing of food is a universal gesture of hospitality. Food not only plays an essential role in building the social fabric of communities, but it is essential in maintaining healthy lives in those communities. This report explores the level of food security in Utah and lists policies and programs that community partners are embracing to ensure enhanced food security for all.

*This study was made possible with the support of Get Healthy Utah.*





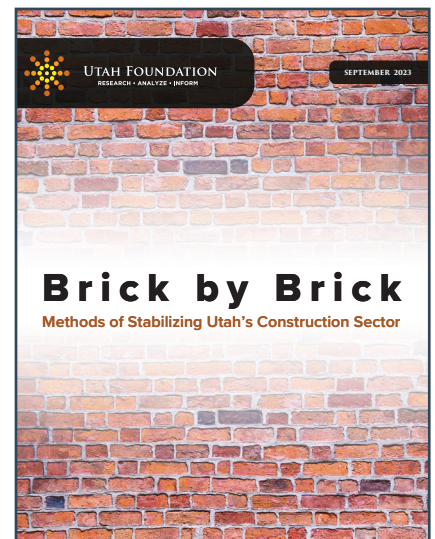
## How Can We Foster Needed Construction?

### [Brick by Brick: Methods of Stabilizing Utah's Construction Sector](#)

explores the interdependency between building suppliers and the construction sector. It does this while highlighting the significance of short-term credit, lien rights, and lien recovery to the future of the Utah housing market in an environment of ongoing shortage.

The construction materials supply industry is important, constituting 1% of Utah's GDP while being composed of 345 firms and employing roughly 4,569 people in the state. This group of firms directly supports the overall construction industry which makes up 7% of the state's economy. The Utah Foundation undertook a study to examine the industry in the face of an expiring program used to stabilize it. The Residence Lien Recovery fund is set to be depleted of funds over the next one to two years.

*Special thanks to the Utah Construction Suppliers Association for providing support to make this project possible, with added support from Sunpro, Geneva Rock, Burton Lumber, LKL Associates, Plastic Specialties, Inc., Staker Parson Companies, Builders FirstSource, and the Utah Plumbing & Heating Contractors Association.*



# 5 key findings and highlights

Each year, the Utah Foundation Board of Trustees chooses our top findings. Here are the top five from 2023.

1

## [Flowing in the Desert: A Primer on Utah Water Law](#)

Water can only be used in specific ways, and if not used, it can be forfeited. Historically, this has created little incentive for conservation. This may be changing with recent legislation.

2

## [Flowing into the Desert: A Background on Water in Utah](#)

Of the 5.2 million acre-feet of water Utah diverts, 82% goes to agriculture use.

3

## [Virtual Insights: Lessons Learned from the K-12 Response to COVID-19](#)

The pandemic forced the implementation of digital learning in K-12 education far beyond what people thought possible in such a short time. This initial thrust provides a solid foundation for further efforts to embed digital education in traditional educational environments.

4

## [Healthy Communities: Enhancing Open Space](#)

Under multiple measures, Utahns have a dearth of open space access and availability. With Utah's population growth, this will become more of an issue.

5

## [Healthy Communities: Advancing Wellness and Safety](#)

Community leaders should consider implementing Complete Streets policies given the potential benefits, such as increased active transportation, reduced obesity rates, an improved sense of community, improved neighborhood safety, reduced stress, and reduced car usage.

# 4 full-time staffers

There were some big changes in 2023 to Utah Foundation's community: 1) we re-established a physical office after three years of being a remote-first organization, and 2) we built up our staff to four full-time employees, the largest since 2019.

Shawn Teigen and Christopher Collard have both been around for a decade. Their research capacity and lively spirits are well-established. Early in the year, Utah Foundation brought on John Salevurakis – a Utah native who spent most of the previous two



decades teaching economics at the American University in Cairo. We are glad he is back in Utah with his economic expertise infusing our reports. In mid-2023, Utah Foundation extended a position to long-time intern Ashley Marshall. She first started interning at Utah Foundation while obtaining a Master's degree in social work. She did some excellent research as an intern and also helped shape our staff into a team. With this excellent crew, you can count on 2024 being a productive year full of quality research.

# 60 board members

We are grateful for our 60 Board members and innumerable other supporters. In December, we said goodbye to our Board Chair, Art Turner, with much appreciation for his work. At that time, we welcomed:

- Annalisa Holcombe, senior vice president of advancement at Western Governors University, as our new Board Chair.
- Kelly Mendenhall, director of regulatory and pricing at Dominion Energy, as our vice chair.
- Benjamin Brown, manager of public affairs at Fidelity Investments, as our treasurer.
- Carlton Christensen, board chair of the Utah Transit Authority, as our fundraising chair and secretary.

Our board members provide leadership, topical expertise, and unique insights as they direct and support our research products.

# very successful annual luncheon

Utah Foundation brought together community partners interested in building a successful higher education system for its Annual Luncheon. We discussed policies that can improve student and institutional success. Particular focus was given to how to make different levels of degrees and credentials available to more Utahns. Speakers included:

- Dean Michelle Camacho from the College of Social and Behavioral Science at the University of Utah.
- Governor Spencer Cox.
- Utah System of Higher Education Senior Advisor Jared Haines.
- Weber State University President Brad Mortenson.
- Superintendent Rich Nye from Granite School District.
- Nevaeh Olmedo, a current University of Utah student.

Utah Foundation also recognized two individuals for their contributions to Utah policy. The 2023 Insight Award recognized former Senator and Representative Patrice Arent and former Governor Gary Herbert who both worked to rely on evidence-based research while serving in public office.





## enlightening breakfast briefing

Our second event of the year was a Breakfast Briefing titled Making Space for Both Wheels and Feet. As you might have guessed, it focused on developing complete streets – streets that are accessible for multiple modes of transportation. Panelists included:

- Dina Blaes, Director, Office of Regional Development at Salt Lake County.
- Michelle Carroll, Executive Director of Mountainland Association of Governments.
- Andrew Gruber, Utah Foundation Trustee and Executive Director of the Wasatch Front Regional Council.
- Charles Small, West Region Government Affairs Officer and Vice President at HNTB, and former U.S. Department of Transportation Deputy Assistant Secretary – Intergovernmental Affairs.
- Dominic Spaethling, Utah Foundation Trustee and Vice President at HNTB.
- Josh Van Jura, Director, Trails and Transit Group at the Utah Department of Transportation.

The takeaways from the discussion were published in a [Salt Lake Tribune op-ed](#).





# foundational renewal

- clarified vision
- streamlined mission

# 4 guiding principles

As Shawn Teigen was acclimating to his new role as president of the organization, he wanted to make sure Utah Foundation was focused on what mattered most. During 2023, Board member Susan McLeod from HDR led staff and the rest of our Board of Trustees on a journey to help craft the vision and mission of Utah Foundation. This envisioning process led to Utah Foundation's first vision statement – capturing what we hope the world looks like when we have successfully completed our goals.

**Vision:** Empowered civic engagement as the foundation for enhanced quality of life in Utah.

We also streamlined our mission statement, tightening our scope of work from a description of 74 words to 10 words.

**Mission:** Inform and engage Utahns with illuminating, independent, nonpartisan public-policy research.

This focused mission describes the core work of Utah Foundation and the primary method to achieve our vision. A more focused scope will help ensure we prioritize our core research projects and avoid potential distractions.

We also set aside some time to define the values of Utah Foundation. This describes the way we approach our work

**Values:**

- Integrity: We embrace facts, transparency, and objectivity in our research.
- Spirit: We approach our work with passion and dedication.
- Engagement: We provide compelling and accessible research that educates and energizes.
- Empathy: We consider varied points of view, different communities' needs, and policies' effects.

# 1 busy year ahead

Looking ahead through 2024, the calendar is filled with new reports in the works and plenty of outreach events. The year will focus heavily on the 20th Anniversary of the Utah Priorities Project – with related reports, an Annual Luncheon, and a priorities roadshow. In addition, we will continue with our Flowing in the Desert series of water reports, at least two reports on affordable housing, one on health care, and the fourth part in our Utah Educational Attainment Series, which seeks to help broaden the educational horizons of young Utahns. We will also be releasing a series of reports on post-secondary education governance. In addition, we are initiating a new outreach campaign. In short, we are looking forward to another extraordinary year. Thanks to our friends and supporters who make all of this hard work possible.



## MANY ways to support

The Utah Foundation relies upon the support of business and civic leaders as well as Utahns to produce the high-quality and independent research for which we are known. To become a member or to sponsor one of our projects or programs, please contact us at 801-355-1400.

You can also visit our website at [utahfoundation.org](http://utahfoundation.org) to sign up for our newsletters and keep apprised of newly released reports and upcoming events. Follow us on [Linked-In](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#) to keep up to date with our newest work and even get sneak peeks of what we are working on.



# UTAH FOUNDATION

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