

UNITED | Missouri Town Halls
WE .



2021 REPORT

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*Missouri's economy
stands to grow 10-15%
by 2025 if women's
participation in the
workforce is increased.*

*—McKinsey Global
Institute*



LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT & CEO

United Women's Empowerment (United WE) works to advance all women's economic and civic leadership. The strength of our country's economy and democracy depends upon women's full participation in the workforce. The McKinsey Global Institute found that Missouri could grow its economy by 10-15% by 2025 if women's participation in the workforce increased.

That's why, in 2021, United WE set out to launch a first-of-its-kind Missouri Women's Economic Development Task Force to study issues related to women's participation and advancement in the workforce. We know that research and data are powerful tools to help unlock women's economic potential. Data and stories inform and inspire policy that address the everyday experiences of working women across the state, from the boardroom to the home offices of small business owners.

Building on past research, including United WE's recent update to the Status of Women in Missouri 2020 and The Coronavirus Impact on Missouri Women reports, the Missouri Women's Economic Development Task Force and United WE held a series of town halls throughout Missouri to hear from women firsthand, gather feedback, listen for new insights and compare findings to existing research.

Change will not come far enough or fast enough unless we are inclusive and continue an intentional focus on marginalized members of our community. We recognize that women of color, women in rural and senior communities, and those living in poverty face unique challenges and have unique needs. The Missouri town halls sought out these women's voices in order to amplify their concerns and provide additional opportunities to address the barriers they face.



Wendy Doyle,
President & CEO



Research.

Appoint.

Educate.

Empower.

Missouri Women's Economic Development Task Force

Alexis Bundy

Compensation Manager,
Cox Health

Alice Mangan

Veteran, Nurse & Small
Business Owner, AliceCBD

Ally Siegler

Health Policy Strategist,
Missouri Foundation for
Health

Senator Barbara Ann Washington

State Senator, District 9,
State of Missouri

Carolyn Chrisman

Executive Director, Kirksville
Regional Economic
Development, Inc.

Mayor Carrie Tergin

Mayor, Jefferson City,
Missouri

Cora Faith Walker

Chief Policy Officer,
Office of St. Louis County
Executive, Dr. Sam Page

Kara Corches

Director of Legislative
Affairs, Missouri Chamber of
Commerce and Industry

Kathy Wunderlich

Program Associate,
Hawthorn Foundation

Katie Steele Danner

Executive Director, Greater
Missouri Leadership
Foundation, Inc.

Kellie Ann Coats

Executive Director, Missouri
Women's Council

Kim Wallace Carlson

Director of Engagement &
Entrepreneurship in Public
Affairs, Ewing Marion
Kauffman Foundation

Dr. Lupita Fabregas

Director, Missouri
4-H Center for Youth
Development

Malorie Raulerson

Attorney, Poplar Bluff &
Cape Girardeau Region

Rosie Privitera Biondo

President, Mark One Electric

Sarah Hough

Senior Manager of Community
Affairs & Diversity Outreach,
Bass Pro Shops

Susan Coatar

Former Vice President,
Centene Corporation

Lt. Colonel Tara Bradley

Active-Duty Military &
Police Department Chair,
Department of Military
Science, University of
Missouri

Terri Barr-Moore

Director of Government
Relations, Kansas City Area
Transportation Authority

Zora Mulligan

Commissioner of Higher
Education, State of Missouri

Strategic Partner: Hawthorn Foundation

Hawthorn Foundation is a highly diverse group of Missouri leaders in business, education, economic development, healthcare and labor dedicated to making the state of Missouri stronger, thus developing a vibrant economy for the state of Missouri. Hawthorn was created as and remains a non-partisan, non-political organization of Missouri-based business, labor, academic and community leaders in statewide business recruitment, retention, and development efforts.

Funding Partners:



Community Partners:

City of Jefferson City
City of Kirksville
City of Florissant
Girl Scouts of NE Kansas & NW Missouri
Greater Missouri Leadership Challenge
Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Greater Kansas City
Missouri Southern State University
ROSIE/E-Factory, Missouri State University
Southeast Missouri State University
State Fair Community College
Truman State University



INTRODUCTION

United WE invited women across the state from diverse industries, areas, and backgrounds to study issues related to women's participation and advancement in the workforce and lead the effort to hear from them directly as members of the Missouri Women's Economic Development Task Force.

Launched in June 2021, the task force held a series of nine town hall discussions throughout the state of Missouri collecting both qualitative and quantitative data through discussion, surveys and polling.

AREAS OF FOCUS:

- Broadband Access
- Childcare
- Eldercare
- Education
- Entrepreneurship
- Healthcare
- Housing
- Mentorship
- Paid Family Leave
- Pay Equity
- Poverty
- Telehealth
- Sponsorship
- Running for Office

► **WE MET WITH WOMEN FROM ACROSS MISSOURI.**

▶ **MANY WOMEN** STEPPED UP TO SHARE THEIR STORY.



▶ **AND THEY SHARED WHAT MATTERS TO THEM.**

HOW IS BROADBAND ACCESS IN YOUR AREA?



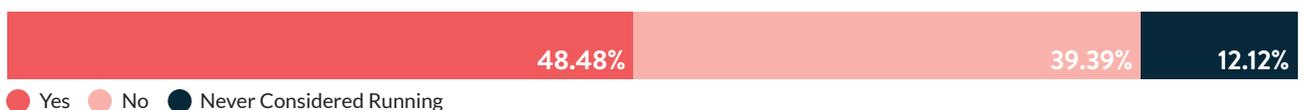
HOW IMPORTANT IS FAMILY LEAVE POLICY TO YOUR RETENTION?



**DO YOU HAVE A BARRIER TO ACCESSING HEALTHCARE?
IF SO, WHAT IS THAT BARRIER?**



WOULD YOU CONSIDER RUNNING FOR ELECTED OFFICE?



KEY FINDINGS

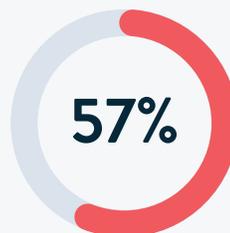


CHILDCARE

- Childcare costs are unaffordable. For many women the cost of care equals or surpasses their monthly income, making it hard to justify staying in the workforce.
- The supply of childcare providers does not meet demand.
- Staff shortages occur because of barriers for workers, who must have a certificate or specialized degree and are often paid low wages.
- Accredited childcare facilities in rural areas don't accommodate non-traditional work hours, some even close before the end of the typical workday (i.e., 4 pm).
- Social norms often dictate that women take on the responsibility for planning or providing childcare.
- State funding for childcare providers is unpredictable and can cause providers to close or reduce services unexpectedly.

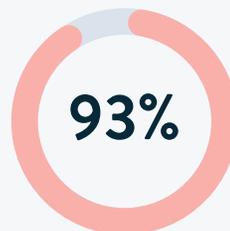
ELDERCARE

- Eldercare options are very limited, whether in-home/center care.
- The eldercare system is difficult to navigate, and women report challenges in understanding what services are available.
- Social norms often exacerbate the pressure that women feel to be the person in the family to take on responsibility for eldercare.
- Some women are forced to try to balance their careers while also caring for aging family members because of limited programs offering pay for caregivers.



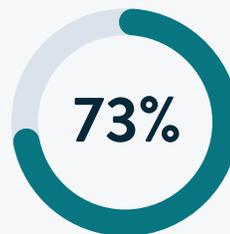
Families paying more than \$500/month on childcare

29% pay over \$1,000/month.



Experienced childcare disruption during COVID-19 Pandemic.

30% lost access to all childcare providers.



Of the 73% of women currently responsible for eldercare, more than 30% are driving 15+ miles each week, and spending multiple hours each week on eldercare.



BROADBAND

- Internet access is limited in rural areas and there is often a monopoly on the market with only one or two providers available.
- If internet is provided, residents are usually confronted with high installation costs. To combat this, many residents utilize cellular hot spots. However, cellular coverage can also be unreliable.
- While many rural residents are technically considered to have internet access because of their satellite internet, they find the service is intermittent and slow.
- The digital divide exists even in urban areas, despite the perception that broadband is more accessible in higher populated areas.

HEALTHCARE

- Women utilized telehealth technology, especially for mental health treatment, which they found to be especially helpful during the pandemic. Benefits of telehealth include eliminating the need for transportation or traveling with children.
- Despite its convenience, the use of telehealth is not an option for many women who have limited access to broadband and/or a strong internet connection. This barrier is more pronounced in rural areas of Missouri.
- Women often prioritize the health of family members over their own mental or physical needs.
- Health insurance plans offered through the federal marketplace are unaffordable. Many medical conditions and procedures are not covered in-network under these plans. This is especially troubling as most women do not qualify for Medicaid benefits.
- Some small business owners are unable to pay the employer premiums for healthcare for their employees, and have decided to close their businesses for that reason alone. Others take on an additional job to access personal health insurance.



PAID FAMILY LEAVE

- Most employers do not offer paid family leave.
- Women without access to paid family leave are forced to use personal time off (PTO), or sick leave to care for family members.
- Many women in hourly jobs or shift work are penalized for taking off work to care for family, children, and themselves, even to the point of being demoted or fired.
- Many women who have personal time off (PTO) prioritize caring for family members over their own medical care.

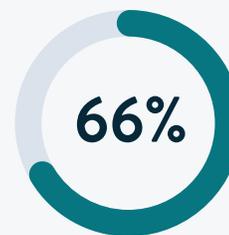
EMPLOYER BENEFITS

- Access to affordable, low-deductible health insurance is critical in women deciding whether to take a job.
- Employer-provided health insurance dictates many women’s career choices (i.e., women will stay in a job even with lower wages to ensure family coverage).
- Businesses negatively affect the financial stability of their employees by offering health benefits at differing levels (i.e, high-deductible, low-coverage plans) and/or by failing to provide a match for retirement contributions.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- Access to resources and local business groups is vital.
- Women often lack the network connections to gain access to seed funding.
- When women business owners do not have a relationship with their local banking institution they can miss important financial information and resources needed to get ahead.
- A local bank, legal advice, and accounting expertise were all determining factors for small business owners to apply for and receive the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans.

Barriers to Entrepreneurship



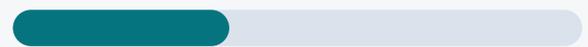
More than 60% of women surveyed were interested in starting a business

Of the 33% not interested, all listed “benefits” as the primary barrier

54% | Losing Employment Benefits



38% | Access to Capital



38% | Primary Breadwinner



Town hall attendees identified several barriers to entrepreneurship. 54% reported **losing employment benefits** as a barrier, 38% identified **access to capital** as a barrier, and 38% reported that **they’re the primary breadwinner**, meaning the often unpredictable nature of entrepreneurship is a barrier.



Through our Appointments Project™ program, we advocate for women and help them secure appointments on civic boards and commissions.

We know the importance of asking women to lead.

MENTORSHIP & SPONSORSHIP

- Many women lack mentors or sponsors to help guide them through their careers, including discussions on negotiating salary or paid family leave in their workplaces.
- A lack of women-focused networking and mentorship opportunities was cited as a critical need in rural communities which face unique challenges and opportunities, but is also a concern statewide.
- Networking opportunities to discuss issues such as preparing for retirement, childcare, and public policies affecting women's families are greatly needed.
- Some communities across the state have identified the need for women to have mentors in their areas and have started programs to meet demand.

RUNNING FOR ELECTED OFFICE

- A lack of interest in entering the “volatile political climate” prevents many women from running for office. Time, family responsibilities, and media scrutiny are other top concerns for women.
- Some women had never considered running for office and may be interested in becoming involved if they had more education around the process (i.e., United WE's Appointments Project).
- Women who did run for office mentioned they were asked multiple times before deciding to run.
- Women tend to undervalue their credentials when considering running for office.



POVERTY

- Women 65 and over are increasingly facing poverty.
- For many women, high medical costs deplete them of any leftover financial resources due to high insurance premiums and high prescription costs.
- Women face the compounding challenges of lower earnings and having to take time off to care for children/family members.
- Lack of access to retirement matching programs and not being able to save as aggressively overall as their male counterparts was cited as a risk factor affecting poverty among this age group.

HOUSING

- Affordable housing and quality rental options are limited, especially in rural areas.
- The housing market across Missouri mirrors that across the country: it is competitive and expensive to buy a house.
- Rental housing is unaffordable to most residents in both rural and urban areas.

Poverty in 65+ Communities

More than 90% of women surveyed included “affordable healthcare & housing” as the top solutions to end poverty for elderly women.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPACT

Drawing on the key findings from the town halls as well as data from the Status of Women in Missouri 2020 report, six key areas emerged as the top barriers for Missouri women to fully participate in the workforce.

These six areas must be addressed to recruit and retain Missouri women in the workforce and grow Missouri's economy to its full potential. There is no one-size-fits all policy solution to reduce these barriers, yet Missouri government, corporations, nonprofits and citizens must continue to research and emphasize a multi-solution approach for the strength of our economy.

CHILDCARE:

Access to affordable, quality childcare

- Review Missouri-specific data from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Childcare report
- Meet with the Missouri DESE Office of Childhood to identify childcare strategies
- Identify childcare best practices and continue to educate Missouri employers
- Corporations: Continue to survey and monitor employees' childcare needs
- Develop city, county and state policy recommendations to improve access to affordable, quality childcare.

ELDERCARE:

Access to affordable, quality eldercare

- Continue to monitor federal and state paid family leave discussions and policies
- Continue to educate Missouri businesses on the importance of paid family leave as a workforce development and retention strategy
- Corporations: Survey employees to understand the need for eldercare.

PAID FAMILY LEAVE:

Access to paid family leave

- Meet with Missouri Chamber of Commerce to discuss opportunities for small businesses
- Corporations: Identify best practices and work to implement a paid family leave policy
- Review and share the Missouri Foundation for Health's paid family leave policy brief in spring 2022.

BROADBAND:

Access to affordable, reliable broadband internet

- Educate Missouri policymakers on broadband challenges captured from women during town halls
- Share findings from town halls with nonprofit organizations that are working to address broadband accessibility, especially in rural communities.

HEALTHCARE:

Access to affordable, quality healthcare

- Share town hall findings with Missouri healthcare organizations
- Continue to educate Missouri women on the importance of wellness checks including telehealth options available to them in their area.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP:

Access to capital for women entrepreneurs

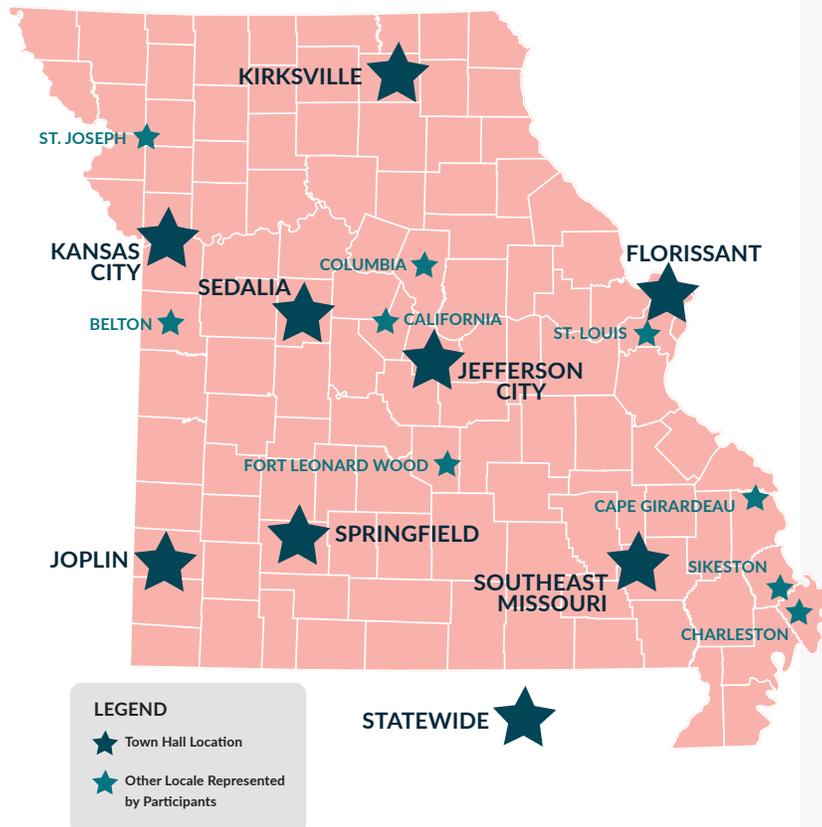
- Update Occupational Licensing Brief
- Share town hall findings with Missouri Bankers Association to encourage stronger relationships between women and their banking institutions
- Share town hall findings with nonprofit organizations providing resources to future women entrepreneurs on women's capital needs.

TOWN HALLS

OVERVIEW

The Missouri Women’s Economic Development Task Force launched mid-June with a virtual kick-off meeting, followed by 11 town halls, July to October 2021. After welcoming remarks from United WE and local partners, participants were invited to join discussion groups as part of a semi-structured interview led by facilitators. Participants and facilitators later convened for a large group discussion that included moderated questions and live polling, when possible.

UNITED WE | Missouri Town Halls



LOCATIONS

JOPLIN

Missouri Southern State University
July 20, 2021 | 11:30a-1p CST | Virtual

SEDALIA

State Fair Community College
August 9, 2021 | 11:30a-1p CST

FLORISSANT

Florissant Civic Center
September 14, 2021 | 11:30a-1p CST

GREATER MISSOURI LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION

DeBruce Foundation
September 15, 2021 | 9:30a-10:30a CST

JEFFERSON CITY & MID-MISSOURI

City of Jefferson City
September 21, 2021 | 11:30a-1p CST | Virtual

SPRINGFIELD

ROSIE /E-Factory & Appointments Project™
September 22, 2021 | 12p-1p CST | Virtual

KANSAS CITY

Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Greater KC
Greater KC Chamber of Commerce & Virtual
October 6, 2021 | 11:30a-1p CST

KIRKSVILLE

Truman State University
October 14, 2021 | 11:30a-1p CST

GIRL SCOUTS OF MISSOURI

Girl Scouts of NE Kansas & NW Missouri
October 25, 2021 | 6:30p-7:30p CST | Virtual

SOUTHEAST MISSOURI

Southeast Missouri State University
October 27, 2021 | 11:30a-12:30p CST | Virtual

STATEWIDE

October 28, 2021 | 5:30p-6:30p CST | Virtual

JOPLIN

Attendance: 18

Women from Joplin and the surrounding community highlighted the challenge of living in a more rural area, where access to many services and infrastructure is limited. For many women, internet access is often unavailable or unaffordable. In the digital age, lack of internet access creates challenges in almost every aspect of life, from their livelihoods to healthcare, and much more. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue has been exacerbated with many women requiring internet access for telehealth, virtual learning, remote work, and basic communication.

“I use a combination of things to try to get internet to make it work during these times. I asked [one internet provider] if there was a way to extend access to my house, and they said that it would cost me \$24,000 to do so.”

Lack of access to broadband often means that women in rural areas cannot take advantage of conveniences afforded by telehealth visits. One woman said that she had to drive more than 15 miles for doctors appointments and a trip to the specialist could take upwards of two hours.

“There is a connection between internet access and access to healthcare, especially during the pandemic. Telehealth visits were sometimes the only option to use to see a doctor.”

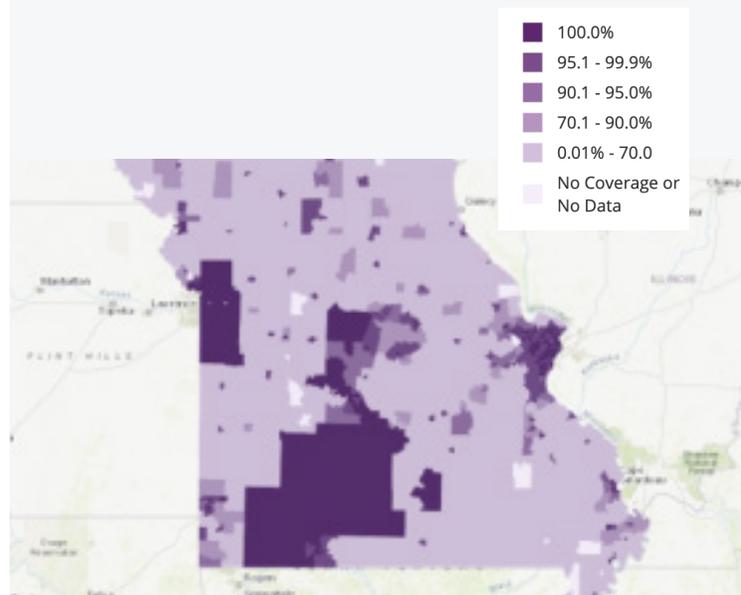
Another attendee who is a small business owner shared that she was quoted more than \$6,000/month to have internet for her small business.

“[My sister and I, [running a business together] took turns working one week on and one week off. My sister’s kids kept getting sent home from school. We had months and months where we had to navigate that. We didn’t have money set aside to do paid time off or benefits like that. We [changed our business model and] did curbside drop off, delivery in a basket outside on someone’s porch to keep as many customers as possible. I got COVID in March and again in November. Everyone had to pull together. We cannot offer the benefits that retain people like retirement or health insurance.”



Participants at the virtual Joplin town hall

If a community lacks broadband internet access, they may inevitably lack access to healthcare as well.



Missouri Broadband access map (mobroadband.org)
University of Missouri, Center for Applied Research and Systems

One attendee shared her experience of choosing to commute 45 minutes to a neighboring town in order to find an employer that could offer competitive benefits and income. She shared that she is also interested in continuing her education, but she's not sure she can afford it. Women consistently mentioned that employer benefits influence their decision on where to work.

"Working in social services we don't have the best benefits in that field. Commuting from Joplin to Pittsburg, KS is 45 min one way. I made the decision to seek employment outside of the Joplin area. I moved from Pittsburg to Joplin thinking I would find a better job but they couldn't match income."

One woman shared her concern about the lack of paid family leave offered by local employers:

"If I found a place that offered [paid family leave] I would probably switch. I'm planning on starting a family, so that policy would be beneficial. My organization represents families, and feels that it goes against their values to not offer it. [My] spouse gets one week paid family leave."

Reliable and affordable childcare was an issue for many women in the area, some were forced to leave the workforce during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

"If you don't have the resources, then school is not an option."

"I don't have kids, but my sister quit her job so she could stay home with her kids doing school remotely. She did start her own business but it was a lot on her plate between the business, managing virtual school for her kids during the pandemic, and taking care of the house."

"Getting a peek at some of the inner workings of our political system I just have zero interest. I am willing to help others use their voice in an effective way but I have absolutely no interest in running. I do have friends considering a run in the future."

SEDALIA

Attendance: 29

For the first in-person Missouri town hall, United WE and the task force sought to provide an inclusive setting for both English and Spanish speakers. Twenty-nine participants attended and task force member, Dr. Lupita Fabregas, hosted and translated a Spanish-speaking table, which allowed many native Spanish speakers to fully engage in the town hall experience and ensure their input was accurately recorded. The group's responses were similar to those in the English-speaking groups, but spoke to different and more pronounced barriers and challenges, such as language barriers while applying for a loan, knowledge of and access to statewide programs, and an utter lack of access to the resources needed to start a business.

"We would love to start our own businesses. We only need \$2,000-3,000. We can't get a loan because there is no one that can translate for us at the bank. We work the overnight shift in the factory. We slept for only two hours so that we could come here today. We will start our shifts again tonight."

Access to childcare was mentioned as a major barrier for a number of participants. Many women expressed difficulty in finding affordable, reliable childcare. Most providers are single-person, home-based operations and when they need to close (i.e. for vacation, sick days, etc.), women expressed that finding a back-up was close to impossible, forcing many to miss work.

"[There are a lot of jobs in the] manufacturing sector [in our community] and most of our centers close by 5 or 5:30 pm. When you're working the first shift they aren't open, if you're working the second or third shift, they are not open. Economic development has worked with employers about employer- sponsored daycare. We're hoping [more companies will do that]."



Task force member, Kathy Wunderlich, leads a discussion at the Sedalia town hall.

"We have the two nursing homes with 250 employees, we created a daycare in one of the nursing homes to address that need. Having you're people working and having daycare available. It's open 6 am—6 pm. If anyone is working a twelve hour shift they can work their shift and have childcare."

"I'd love to see something too for college students. I teach a lot of non-traditional students. They are single parents. [Getting a college education is] a great way for them to provide for their families but it's hard for them to get here with childcare. Once, I held a newborn while my student took her final."

"As a teacher who has 18 years experience, and a Master Degree, I bring home \$2700/month. I get health insurance for myself. If I wanted to add my daughter I would have had to pay \$750/month. The deductible would have gone from \$2500/year-\$5000/yr."

During COVID-19 related closures, families had to pay their providers to keep their child's spot, while also paying for substitute care. For some, the cost of childcare already amounted to the majority of their paycheck, making it difficult to justify working and causing some to leave the workforce altogether.

Most participants expressed difficulty caring for elderly family members and shared that eldercare facilities are limited in the area and many are at capacity and unaffordable, especially for those on Medicaid. Also, home care professionals are in limited supply in the area.

For all of the women, employer benefits were a driving factor when it came to career choices. Salary was important, as well as access to health insurance and retirement.

"We have amazing benefits where I'm at. There have been other people who have approached me about 'do you want to [come] work here'. That's always my first question [about benefits] which sounds sassy, but I'm spoiled and I'm not going to give that up for a couple more dollars an hour. I feel like what we have is very rare."

Entrepreneurs discussed that being covered by their partner's insurance was a determining factor in their ability to pursue opening their own business. They cited the unaffordability of health insurance for those that are self-employed.

For some of the Spanish-speaking participants, finding a job with benefits was close to impossible. They commented that many in their circles worked for employers who paid them (a higher rate than average), but only paid them for a fraction of the hours they worked. Other hourly employees commented that not only did they not have PTO, but their employers' tracked absences with a point system. They had eight points for the year, if employees reach eight points, they were penalized with a demotion and could lose their job. They did not have the option of rolling over points or earning more for excellent work.

"I have never been married and I have no kids. My mother got lung cancer—I'm the sole caretaker of her and I live with her now. Her boyfriend started getting Alzheimers and had no family. I ended up getting a power of attorney and [taking care] of him, too. I'm thankful that I have a job that has sick leave."



Eastern District Commissioner for the County of Pettis, Israel Baeza, and task force member, Dr. Lupita Fabregas pose with the Spanish-speaking town hall participants.

FLORISSANT

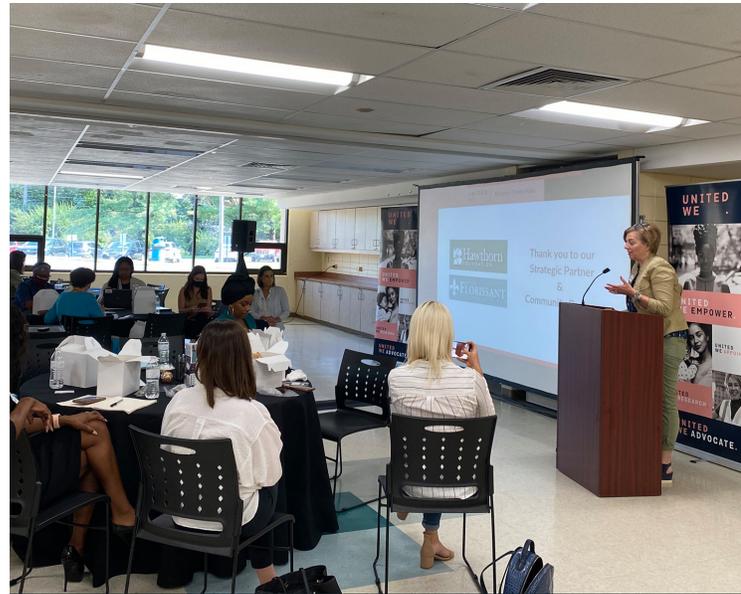
Attendance: 17

In Florissant, the town hall was attended by women from across the St. Louis metropolitan area. Additionally, the event was broadcast over Facebook Live for a virtual audience. Childcare, small business ownership, employer benefits and mentorship were themes discussed among participants.

Women in the St. Louis metropolitan area mentioned funding and staff shortages as obstacles for childcare providers. Even after facilities reopened following some of the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, many childcare staff did not return to their jobs because of low-wages, shift instability and safety concerns. According to the most recent data available from 2018, more than 70 percent of in-home childcare providers do not pay themselves a salary and if they do, the average reported hourly wage is \$13.57/hour.[1] One woman commented that most childcare staff are women of color who want to work, but accredited child care providers were often requiring an early childhood certification, adding another barrier to employment.

"[My kids were two and five-years old at the height of the pandemic.] They were home with us for a couple of months which was really challenging because a lot of us got a lot busier at work. It was a lot of screen time that we would have [otherwise] avoided. We delayed kindergarten [for our five-year-old] because it would have been entirely virtual. He doesn't have that attention span. It was really challenging for a lot of parents that I saw. [When our two-year-old returned], all of our favorite teachers at daycare were gone. We finally had some stability and it was gone. Now they have a massive shortage at the daycare because they're underpaid. We're thinking about looking for something else that's more expensive. We're lucky we can afford it."

"No one wants to go into a field and be a licensed early childcare provider because they go to school for four years, gain \$80K in debt and get out for a salary of \$22,500 as a high offer. How do we raise the value where salaries are commensurate with the work?"



Task force member, Kathy Wunderlich, thanking the partners and sponsors of United WE's Missouri town halls

A woman working in local government identified technical assistance as a barrier for local childcare providers to secure Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act money, which included a \$7 million allocation for a childcare relief program. Of 400 providers, only 126 applied to the program. Providers did not know how to complete the application or have the funds to hire an accountant to assist with bookkeeping. Participants described the unsustainable, cyclical nature of state funding for childcare which is a challenge for providers to deal with.

Employer benefits present a significant challenge for many of the women, who realize the precariousness of job-related healthcare.

“The kids are on my insurance. It’s more expensive to pay for the children. I don’t entertain moving and working up the ladder. Whereas [my husband] has the freedom to do what he wants and he has been able to increase his income significantly. Because I don’t want to have to find new doctors and a new insurance plan—for the stability, for [my family], I stay where I’m at.”

While only a handful of women in the group had a strong mentor in their lives, the others who did not felt that a lack of women in their industry or leadership positions motivated them to want to mentor and sponsor others, to give other women the support they never had. A lucky few had mentors in their lives that had helped them get to where they wanted to be, providing them with critical advice and support, opening doors to new opportunities, and much more. But simply seeing a woman in their industry or in the role they aspired to—especially women who shared their cultural backgrounds—provided many with the sense of hope and encouragement needed to move ahead in their careers.

“I’m a transplant. Without mentorship I wouldn’t have been able to navigate the St. Louis space. In my current role I do have a strong female boss who has invested in me.”

Women also expressed a social norm that they shouldered more of the housework and caretaking for children and other family members.

“[The pandemic] has really magnified how much of the lifting we are doing and how much of a mental toll it takes.”



Attendees engaging in a discussion at the Florissant town hall

“[While working from home during the pandemic] I had the opportunity to spend a lot of time at home with [my family]. About a month and a half ago I was cleaning the toilet when it dawned on me that I am the only one that does it. I wonder how they think the toilet gets cleaned. The amount of unpaid labor that goes into keeping a household together [is significant].”

GREATER MISSOURI LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION

Attendance: 22

The Greater Missouri Leadership Foundation's Leadership Challenge provides professional development experiences for participants and connects talented women across the state in addressing the critical issues facing Missouri. United WE's task force member Katie Steele Danner is the Executive Director of the Foundation and invited a group of women to take part in the Missouri town halls series to share their perspectives. Childcare, healthcare and paid family leave dominated the conversation.

Many women in the class spoke to the unaffordable nature of childcare combined with the lack of flexibility from many employers. Some women revealed that childcare costs equate to their annual salary, making it difficult to justify working outside the home.

"I have a friend who was an elementary education and physical education teacher. Other than tenure, she wasn't gaining anything. She told me, 'I can't afford to pay the sitter and buy the clothes I need to go to work.' She stayed home because economically that was better."

Women echoed the concern that trusted childcare options are hard to come by and many facilities have closed or do not have availability because of staffing shortages.

Among participants, most women had not received paid family leave benefits through their employer and had to take unpaid time or use their paid vacation or sick leave, if available. Others expressed frustration at the lack of understanding of the importance of paid family leave policies.

"I was the first person to have a baby in my office in 20 years. All of the partners are men whose wives stayed home after children or women who do not have children. Explaining maternity leave to women was interesting to do – it's not a vacation. There's a lot that goes into six weeks."



United WE heard from the 2021 Class of the Greater Missouri Leadership Foundation, a core program from the Missouri Leadership Foundation.

"I remember sitting down to look at our taxes and realizing we'd paid more in daycare than we had for our mortgage. As you're submitting your taxes, getting a \$200 [childcare] tax credit [considering] what I'd spent in daycare. You have the emotional burden, you feel like I'm paying into the system, contributing to the community but I'm getting only \$200 back. If we want women to work, that aspect needs to be reimbursed. [As it is now], it doesn't help."

"I have friends deciding not to have a baby because of the penalties at work."

"There is no one of childbearing age in my leadership. In these meetings, I keep asking 'Who's fighting for us in these discussions when you talk about these different policies?' I feel like, 'You don't care as much as I do about this because it's not your lived experience.' Someone told me, 'When we had kids, my wife stayed home.'"

JEFFERSON CITY & MID-MISSOURI

Attendance: 20

Women from the Jefferson City and Mid-Missouri area, including a few women with experience in an elected office, joined together for a virtual town hall. The discussion included interesting perspectives on women's political ambitions and highlighted the need for mentorship.

When asked if they would consider running for office, only 20 percent of attendees responded "yes," prompting a conversation about why many of the women would not or had not considered running for office at all. Many women expressed that while they respect women who do run for office, they had concerns about the "ugly" process of running and holding office.

The discussion turned to mentorship and sponsorship, especially as a factor for women pursuing their goals and developing as leaders. One woman shared the concern that mentorship and professional groups are needed to help inform mentor/mentee relationships. She noted that being mentored by women felt more competitive than with men. Other women agreed that many times, ambition is taken as a threat rather than a resource.

"In my community, southwest missouri, we found that that was something that was missing from the professional landscape for women. In our Chamber we are building a framework group, The Leading Ladies, building a structure for mentor and mentee relationships. We just work differently with each other than we do with men. Our women really wanted to talk to other women who had expereicne in their industry. It was a passion for me, if you look in the chamber of commerce, the vast majority of workers are women and the vast majority of presidents are men."

Another major topic of discussion for the women was their experience as small business owners navigating the Payment Protection Program (PPP) loans. As mentioned in previous town halls, women business owners felt that having a local bank was critical to their ability to apply for PPP loans. They also stressed the importance of legal guidance and accounting services in the process.



Virtual participants from the Jefferson City & Mid-Missouri town hall

"In my career lifetime, I worked at a warehouse distribution center. Two men were mentors. In my next job it was men as well. It has been men my whole career life that have been mentors. I think with women sometimes it feels more competitive."

"I was fortunate that I was already a remote worker—however, it made it very difficult in the height of this when we did virtual school for three months. The stress level that that brought onto parents and children—I don't know what we're going to see from these really young ones five to ten years from now and what the longterm affects are on that."

"I received the PPP for my small business, I was lucky, I had a banker that I had a good relationship with. They called me and they helped me navigate it. If I did not have that relationship, it would have been extremely difficult, and I may have not even known. Even with the second round, it was hard to find."

SPRINGFIELD

Attendance: 54

Women in Springfield, members of ROSIE, a local nonprofit partnering with United WE, joined virtually for a discussion on the barriers to women’s advancement and navigating elected leadership positions. Three elected officials shared their experiences and encouragement to run for office.

“I really want to encourage young people and people with diverse backgrounds to get involved with your community. Sometimes you may not think your voice is the most important. There are certain circumstances where your voice is one of the only ones that can lend to a conversation or move an initiative or move a community forward.”

“I don’t have children and it gets used against me on the campaign trail. No matter what our life experiences are, there are going to be people who are critical of you. It was a really hard pill to swallow but it was 100% worth it. I would do it [again] 100 of 100 times”

“We had a team of six women across both sides of the aisle on a child welfare bill. We were able to pass a bill that had a lot of bi-partisanship thrown into it and it did a lot of great things for the children in Missouri.”

Attendees discussed challenges related to childcare during the pandemic, healthcare benefits through their employer, elder care and their interest in running for elected office. More than sixty percent of women experienced disruption in their childcare during COVID, one-third of the women surveyed experienced a completed lack of childcare options.

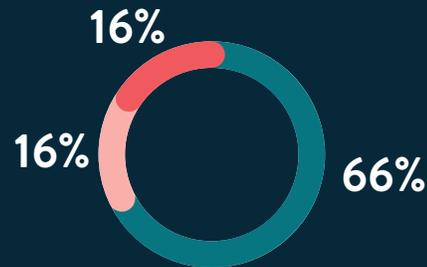
All of the women surveyed were caretaking for elderly family members, many driving more than 15 miles each week to medical appointments and errands. When asked what should be done to address poverty among women 65+, more than ninety percent of women surveyed said affordable housing and access to healthcare were top priorities to ease the burden on this population.



Families who experienced a disruption in childcare during COVID-19 pandemic



Families who completely lost childcare during COVID-19 pandemic



66% | Stay at workplace for benefits

16% | Need better benefits

16% | Benefits do not matter

Barriers to Entrepreneurship

50% | Don't want to lose benefits

41% | Are the Primary Breadwinner

38% | Need access to capital

KANSAS CITY

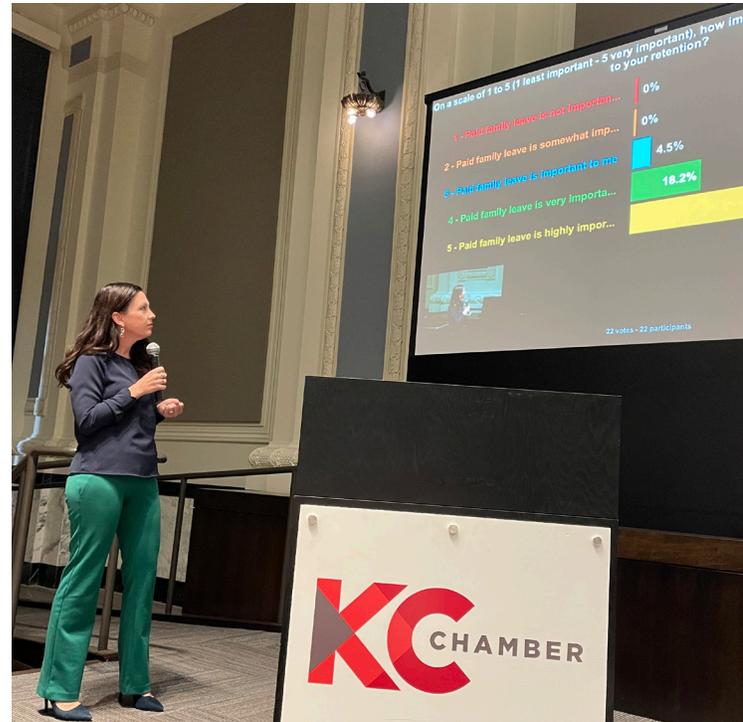
Attendance: 40

While Kansas City, one of the largest cities in the state, tends to have more resources, women at the town hall still felt the same challenges as women in the rural areas, with childcare, eldercare, pay equity, and continuing education being the leading topics of discussion.

Childcare was a problem shared by women from all backgrounds at the town hall. Women face many challenges, including finding childcare that fits their work schedules, whether they work traditional or non-traditional hours. Consequently, women have had to leave the workforce or cut back work hours to accommodate their childcare needs. Many of the women emphasized how childcare largely falls on a woman's shoulders if their partner is male and leads them to feel extra pressure and guilt when spending time away from their children.

"I was a single mom for years. I ended up working at the elementary school where my kids went to school because I had to find a job where I could be on their schedule. I couldn't have kids in before- school care, after school care and one in daycare. Had I not had family support—we would not have had food on the table or a roof over our heads. I would not have been able to afford childcare and work."

For many women, eldercare mirrored the challenges of childcare. Women felt the responsibility to be the ones coordinating and making care decisions for their parents and older family members. Those responsibilities, in addition to other barriers, create challenges for women eager to continue their education or professional development.



Joni Wickham explaining the results of a poll at the Kansas City town hall

"I have been adamant with my [daughters] about this: no one is going to take care of you. It's up to you. You need to [be prepared to take care of yourself] and you need to watch [out for yourself]."

"I think a lot of us [women] have to side-step our own aspirations because I'm not going to put [my family] second."

"For 15 years I was never offered to go to a conference or have [additional] training. Never once was I offered an opportunity on the company dime or [did they give me] paid time off from work [for professional development]. They were like, 'Sure go ahead, but on your own time and dime.'"



United WE's President and CEO, Wendy Doyle, presenting to attendees of the Kansas City town hall at the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce

“From a gender role perspective, I have three brothers. They all live in Arkansas [where our mom is, too] and I’m the only one who lives in Kansas City. I’m the youngest and only girl. I have a lot of resentment about [having to coordinate care for our mother from another state]. It’s a lot of emotional labor. When the COVID vaccines were coming out – my mom is a type II diabetic. Guess who was coordinating [her getting a vaccine] from three hours away...coordinating getting her on the list, getting the appointments, getting the transportation set up? Things like that. It tends to fall on the women. I spend at least a couple hours a day thinking about this.”

Exacerbating women’s situations even more is the continued wage gap between women and men, which has long-term effects for older women who consequently lack savings and financial resources.

“Women don’t have a ton of economical conversations about how we fund our 401K. A small group of us came together and decided to put groups together and have women come together and talk about [retirement and building wealth]. It was fascinating to get a group of women together and start firing questions away at the professionals [we brought in to advise us]. [We need the knowledge to] trickle down to all socio-economic of the populations.”

“Some of [the other] parents [I know] didn’t take a job, chose not to work because of the childcare issue. They had little ones and they had to delay taking a job. For me, childcare is like health insurance because it is as crucial. If you want to be a healthy worker, you need to have high-quality childcare and health insurance. Women are often the ones that take on the biggest burden finding childcare.”

KIRKSVILLE

Attendance: 45

United WE and members of the Missouri Women's Economic Development Task Force heard from 45 women in the Kirksville area who discussed the intersection of obstacles related to childcare, employer benefits and healthcare.

Childcare was described as a major need in the area, as many women had to leave the workforce to care for children, either because of the COVID-19 pandemic, a child's special needs, or a shortage of available spots or childcare providers.

In the area, it's difficult to find a provider with openings, and some of the women's childcare providers had shut down or were planning to shut down in the future. A few women emphasized the lack of providers for their children with disabilities. As a result, women had to cut back on their hours.

"My daughter was in a Zoom class with a girl who she'd [known] since preschool. Neither of her parents had the luxury to do what we were doing. Neither one of them could stay home. Her mom's a nurse. The girl was having trouble with technology and her teacher asked her to go get her parents. She said, 'I can't because my mom is sleeping and my dad is at work'."

The town hall discussion made clear that, for many in the area, access to employee benefits is often the only factor for women in their career choices.

"I know a ton of people and they have coverage otherwise they wouldn't be [working at their jobs]. They're worried they can't get healthcare and they're just doing their job for [health benefits]."

"That's literally all I'm working for. My husband is self-employed, and I need benefits."



United WE's President and CEO, Wendy Doyle, presenting to attendees of the Kirksville town hall

"My daughter is epileptic so basically after 3 pm I have nothing that I can do for her besides be with her. Obviously, we don't know when seizures occur. She must be watched at all times. She doesn't need to be babysat but it's hard for me as a working mom. I can't expect my job to say well ok, we're going to let Michelle off at 3:30 and not let other people off at that time. So, I have to make do."

"At the height of the pandemic my son was 10. Daycare was not an option [because of his age]. My husband and I are essential workers and bringing our son to work is not an option. We ended up having to hire a college student [to watch our son]. You can't rely on a family member because of the risk there."



United WE's Director of Operations, Rachael Holloway, leading a small group discussion at the Kirksville town hall

Small business owners and those considering opening their own businesses have been strongly affected by a lack of capital, as well as childcare and health insurance. A few women talked about the strain of owning a business, while still having the majority of childcare and homemaking responsibilities, especially when they lack access to childcare, which sometimes creates tensions with their partners.

Healthcare options in the area, especially for mental health, are limited, affecting not only the women, but also their children and spouses.

"In the past my husband had issues with self-medicating. He wasn't seeing a counselor and I think that [his problems] got out of hand. He's fine now, but there are still mental health issues going on. It's really hard to find a counseling appointment anytime. I don't go [to counseling] myself but I had someone break into my house, [so I wanted to see a counselor]. I had to wait long enough to get an appointment that I felt fine, and I didn't care anymore. There's people that could have experienced what I did who would not be OK and they couldn't have gotten into a counselor. I think there's a lot of people like that."

"The last time I was in rehab I had to wait three months to get in. That's a matter of life or death."



GIRL SCOUTS OF MISSOURI

Attendance: 9

United WE was fortunate enough to hear from a number of young leaders from the Girl Scouts, who shared their insights on leadership and gender equity, and identified barriers and opportunities for girls.

A theme of the discussion was gender inequality, from observing the lack of representation in leadership in many fields, access to education, and their own experiences in not receiving the same recognition or opportunities as their male counterparts.

"I feel like a woman leading, it's a great thing, but I feel like it should be a norm. Where when you see a woman leading something like leading a big topic or being on the news you don't think 'oh wow there's a woman on the news.' It should be normal to see both women and men, or anyone on the news and having it be a part of normal life and not have anything special about it because it's just become a norm."

The young women we spoke with were encouraged by progress that has been made in gender equity, but also recognized how much work still needs to be done. Several highlighted the barriers they face in developing a space to develop their skills and be empowered.

"I see my professors befriending my male counterparts [instead of female students]. The [teachers] will engage with men during office hours or supplementary education sessions. They will speak to them in terms that don't include, 'basically, essentially, if you understand,' [which is how they talk to the women]. So those are things that I have seen firsthand are gut wrenching."



girl scouts
of ne kansas
and nw missouri

"I broke my arm and had to have surgery and they gave me a pamphlet [describing the procedure]. Every time they referred to the doctor in the pamphlet, it said, "he." So I kept it because I was shocked by it.

They probably give this pamphlet out to multiple people every day and the fact that no one has noticed was interesting to me."

I don't think [opportunities for boys and girls] are quite equal yet and it could be because people don't want to be the first to do it, but I think people do want to do it but it's just harder. It's the same with salaries too, everything is just a little undercut without people realizing it."

The girls shared some of their leadership icons, including women politicians and activists. A Latina participant shared how meaningful it was to hear about women of color who have succeeded in politics and are now fighting for the rights of people like her. Another participant, who is a student athlete, already admired Megan Rapinoe for her abilities on the soccer field but grew to love to appreciate her even more because of her activism and leadership for pay equality.

“[When the first woman Vice President was elected] I was thinking why did it take 200 years for this to happen? It shouldn’t have. [In school] we’re learning about the women’s suffrage movement. And I’m thinking about how that was only 100 years ago, and it wasn’t that long ago. Thinking about how far we’ve come, it shouldn’t have taken this long. It shouldn’t have taken 200 years to have a woman in the office.”

“Barrier-wise, I feel like looking at history, it’s been male dominated. Writing the future and what’s to come can be a daunting task. Things like [the Girl Scouts town hall] help empower women and girls, to raise the bar to match those of everyone else is really important.”



Attendees of the virtual Girl Scouts of Missouri town hall

“At my school I’m in AP Calculus. My entire class is all girls with a male teacher. Everytime there is an administrator who walks by the classroom they say, ‘Oh you got all these girls in here, I hope they’re not causing you too much trouble.’

Why does that matter? I don’t care about your opinion about me being a female. I literally just want to sit here and learn about math. I’m going to sit here and learn about math just like a male will learn about math.”

“Telling girls at a young age [about microaggressions] really helped me. We were doing a push up contest. All the adults who were guys were telling me i should do it on my knees (girl push ups). I remembered my conversation with my parents and I said, ‘No I can do it’ and I ended up beating the guys.”

SOUTHEAST MISSOURI

Attendance: 16

In Southeast Missouri the topics of childcare, employer benefits, and mentorship drove the conversation for the night. Underlying many of these issues is the lack of resources and support in the area felt by many of the women.

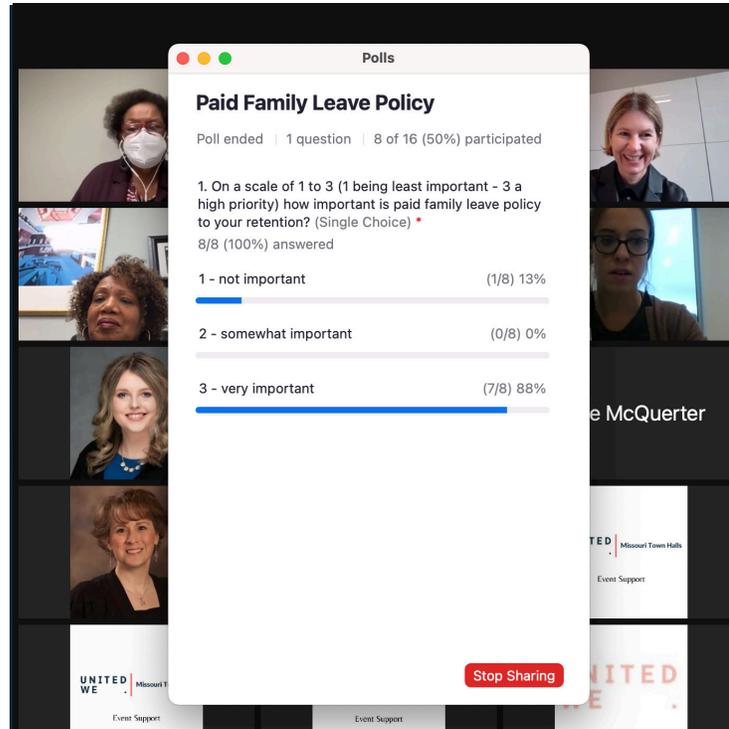
According to participants at the town hall, childcare in Southeast Missouri is hard to come by, expensive, and doesn't accommodate non-traditional work schedules. Business leaders in the area shared that they have lost out on many top candidates and employees due to the lack of childcare options.

"We used to have 24 hour childcare and they closed. Expense is an issue. Business leaders said they had top level employees that they [wanted to have] move to our community. They passed on the job opportunity because they could not find childcare in our area."

One woman shared that she was 151 on the waiting list for childcare. She and her husband ended up driving two hours round trip to take their child to a neighboring rural community. She shared that this experience has caused her concern about adding more children to their family even though she originally wanted more than one child.

Employer benefits for many of the women are limited at their places of work. According to a few participants, many of the local employers are small nonprofits with 50 or fewer employees. Those smaller nonprofits and companies many times do not have the resources to provide health insurance, retirement benefits or paid leave.

"I do private pay. It is hard to go to the doctor. I had several major things happen all within nine weeks and it was a lot with no insurance. [I had] around \$5k in medical bills. [The hospital] had a program where I only had to pay for 90%. [This is an especially big concern because] I'm diabetic. In the Charleston County area, there are a lot of people who [have to] decide whether to pay their electric bill or buy medication, buy groceries or buy medication. My mother... it's terrible that they have to decide—what they can afford or what they can't."



Polling in progress at the virtual Southeast Missouri town hall

"We moved for my job. Childcare was definitely on the con list. We don't have kids yet, but we hope to sooner rather than later. Hoping a grandparent is retired by then is not a good strategy, but really that is where we're at right now. We are taking the chance. I talked with a new friend who spends two hours on the road who takes her toddler and baby two separate places because that's the best-case scenario for her right now."

"We are heavily industrial here, [yet] second shift childcare is nonexistent. There are unfortunate choices being made. There are several organizations that have tried [to address the problem] with grants and task forces. It continues to be an issue."

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, many participants utilized telehealth for their healthcare appointments. For specific visits, participants felt telehealth was a great option. Others expressed the limitations of telehealth for those without solid internet access, especially those in rural and low-income areas.

“It’s probably the only way I would have chosen to get mental health counseling. It doesn’t seem like I can take off work [for those appointments or] for seeing specialists like endocrinologists. I was able to keep on top of [those appointments using telehealth]. For me, it was great and I’m glad we had it. [Other people in our community though struggle because they] don’t have access to the internet. I work with a group, Cape Cares, and people were having to use the public library for their telehealth appointments.”

In developing in their careers, the women were split in their experience with mentorship and sponsorship. A couple women participated in leadership programs locally or nationally to connect with others in their industry. However, the vast majority of women at the town hall had limited experience with mentors, but they recognized the need in the region to create organizations or networks.

“The closest I’ve ever had to a mentor is someone I met through a leadership program, but she lives in Alabama. So, I’m translating her experience to something I’m experiencing here [in Southeast Missouri]. Sometimes the regional network doesn’t touch our experience here.”

“My mom had been my only mentor and leader. She was heavily involved in her career and worked for a great company. She was a part of a Women in Communications [group]. We don’t have anything like that here in Southeast Missouri. I feel like oftentimes, it’s always the same people [at networking events]. I’ve never met any of these local women. [I’m not interested in] how can you defend yourself and [other] things. [I want to] get into the nuts and bolts about how you get specific movement in your career.”



Dr. Leigh Anne Taylor Knight, Executive Director and Chief Operating officer at The DeBruce Foundation welcoming attendees to the virtual Southeast Missouri town hall

“Telehealth is geared towards specific demographics. It forgets others.”



STATEWIDE

Attendance: 16

The statewide virtual town hall drew women from all over the state of Missouri, and in its own way, summarized many of the common themes identified in earlier town halls, emphasizing challenges with childcare, eldercare, healthcare, paid family leave, and how the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges.

Childcare was a major challenge for women, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most women bore the responsibility for childcare, taking off work or staying home.

“There were some workplaces that made it almost toxic for men to be the ones to leave. Basically, if kids had to stay home, there was an assumption that the female partner would be the one to stay home regardless of their role in the workforce. When these policies are talked about, they are talked about being a benefit for women. We need to talk about how they are a benefit for families and not just for women. For it to be acceptable for women to be the ones who stay at work and not always be the one who needs to take care of children in emergencies.”

Women spoke to the challenges of caring for their elderly family members. Finding time to transport aging parents and loved ones to various appointments interferes with work, which had to be made up later.

“[My co-worker] has entire afternoons blocked to take care of [her aging parents’] doctor appointments. We’ll be working at night to make up for it. To and from doctor appointments is one of the biggest things. Based on her calendar it’s 4-6 hours a week she spends shuffling them back and forth.”

Healthcare presents a number of obstacles for women. Ensuring access to health insurance is a difficult task for many and has proven to be a limiting factor in women’s careers. Even with insurance, some shared that their medical bills are still unaffordable, have gone into debt to cover them, and found it difficult to find a primary care physician.



Participants of the virtual Statewide town hall share their thoughts

“I think one thing that we noticed was when kids had to be quarantined and students had to be home for a week or two weeks, there was definitely a lot more pressure for women in the workplace.”

“Some parents [in the program I run] didn’t take a job or chose not to work because of the childcare issue. They had little ones and they had to delay taking a job. For me childcare is like health insurance because it is as crucial. If you want to be a healthy worker, you need to have high-quality childcare and health insurance. Women are often the ones that take on the biggest burden finding childcare.”

However, when it came to telehealth, a handful of women expressed how great and affordable the experience was for them and their family members, others acknowledged the expense of reliable internet access and the visits themselves.

“I was pregnant during the beginning of COVID. We had some follow up appointments and monitoring during telehealth [visits]. They were ok. What I found though was that insurance –when it came to insurance, they were more expensive than my in-person [visits].”

Concern about elderly women facing poverty after a lifetime of putting others first was something many women expressed. Many women shared a history of sacrificing their own career ambitions, earning potential, healthcare, mental health, and personal goals to care for their families.

“A lot of times women are the ones who work part-time while children are growing up and are the [ones] who have those gaps [in their job history]. That would cause an employer to offer a lesser wage because [women] haven’t had that [same] continuous growth. I think of my grandmother who was living off my grandfather’s pension in her mid- 90s when he had retired in 1970. Things like pensions just aren’t available to most people anymore.”

Participants were surveyed at the end of the town hall discussion with six polling questions:

1. How is your broadband access in your area?
2. Would you consider running for elected office?
3. On a scale of 1 to 3 (1 not important – 3 a high priority) how important is a paid family leave policy to your employment retention?
4. Do you have a barrier to accessing healthcare, i.e., transportation, health clinic is geographically inaccessible, no health insurance?
5. Do you have an interest in starting your own business?
6. Do you have a relationship with your banker?



United WE’s President and CEO, Wendy Doyle, presenting to attendees of the virtual Statewide town hall

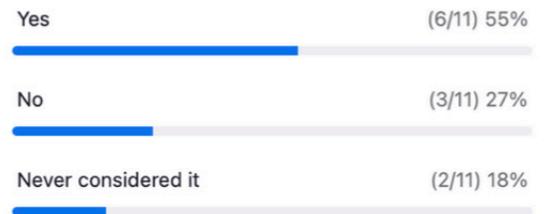
“My problem is I tend to put everyone else first as you tend to hear, I have postponed those checkups through COVID. Getting ready to get those scheduled. My husband’s older so I was very worried that I would bring home COVID. Now we’re vaccinated and getting ready to get the boosters – it is a big question though. I’m at that point where I could retire but I wouldn’t really have good health insurance. There would be a gap for a few years. I’ve been trying to figure it out.”

Election

Poll ended | 1 question | 11 of 18 (61%) participated

1. Would you consider running for elected office?
(Single Choice) *

11/11 (100%) answered





Alexis Bundy

Compensation Manager, CoxHealth

Alexis Bundy is a driven and committed human resources professional. She is currently the compensation manager for CoxHealth in Springfield, Missouri. Bundy is honored to be able to serve our healthcare heroes and the Springfield community. After earning her bachelor's degree in Health Communications from Missouri State University, she entered the human resources world to explore her passion for working with the community and building others up.



Alice Mangan

Veteran, Nurse and Small Business Owner, AliceCBD

Alice Mangan is the founder and owner of AliceCBD, which has two locations in Missouri. She is a Webb City resident, veteran and registered nurse. Mangan opened AliceCBD, to create a place where she could help educate and inform others on the effects of CBD and how to obtain a medical marijuana card, especially for those with serious medical conditions, such as multiple sclerosis and veterans dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Mangan holds clinics at her store where doctors from Kansas City and Cassville come to assess patients and provide recommendations. Patients are pre-screened and must provide all documentation they have from their doctors, as well as the cost of the doctor that is at the clinic. Given her experience, Mangan is able to share her expertise and insights as a small-business owner.



Ally Siegler

Health Policy Strategist, Missouri Foundation for Health

Ally Siegler is a health policy and public health professional trained in policy analysis, program evaluation, research, and coalition building as a means toward achieving health equity across the state of Missouri. Siegler has a Master of Public Health from Saint Louis University and a Bachelor of Science degree in Interdisciplinary Studies from the University of Alabama. Siegler previously worked on policy and program evaluation efforts for non-profit organizations in the St. Louis region. At the Missouri Foundation for Health, Siegler works to guide strategic investments to improve health and social safety net systems and programs in Missouri.



Senator Barbara Anne Washington

State Senator, District 9, State of Missouri

Senator Barbara Anne Washington, a Democrat, represents the 9th Senatorial District in the Missouri Senate. She was sworn into office on Jan. 6, 2021. Prior to being elected to the Senate, she served the residents of Jackson County in the House of Representatives for three years. Senator Washington proudly supports increased economic development in her district — including preserving the notable “18th & Vine” district, increased funding for educational opportunities and universal health care for all. In her district, she regularly presents programs designed to bring attention to the importance of small business development, juvenile justice reform, minority mental health awareness, crime reduction and environmental preservation. In addition to her legislative duties, Sen. Washington is a practicing attorney who also possesses an MBA. She is a proud graduate of the University of Missouri-Columbia’s famed School of Journalism. She obtained her Master of Business Administration from Avila University and her Juris Doctorate from the University of Missouri-Kansas City.



Carolyn Chrisman

Executive Director, Kirksville Regional Economic

Carolyn Chrisman serves as the executive director for Kirksville Regional Economic Development, Inc., a 501c3 public/private partnership. Her primary responsibilities include working on business retention and expansion and business attraction. Chrisman works with major industries in town and is a leader for workforce development, which includes training, housing, childcare, and all facets affecting the workforce. Additionally, she serves as the executive director of the Missouri Rural Enterprise and Innovation Center and is the center director for the Small Business Development Center. Her work includes small businesses, stage 2, start-ups, and tech-related companies.



Mayor Carrie Tergin

Mayor, Jefferson City, Missouri

Carrie Tergin is the owner of Carrie’s Hallmark Shop in Jefferson City, and is also an artist and a photographer. Elected as the mayor of Jefferson City, she is a graduate of Missouri State University with a degree in business management. Tergin has served on the Jefferson City Council and boards of numerous civic and charitable organizations.



Cora Faith Walker

Chief Policy Officer, Office of St. Louis County Executive, Dr. Sam Page

Cora Faith Walker is chief policy officer for St. Louis County Executive Dr. Sam Page. As chief policy officer, Walker leads the advancement of the county executive's policy priorities by delivering an integrated approach to policy development and external engagement, through strategic oversight of government relations, regulatory affairs, and public policy operations. She is responsible for helping to develop and implement the county executive's policy agenda, liaise with experts in the issue areas of importance to the office, and use evidence and research to inform the direction of the county executive's actions and advocacy. Previously, Walker served in the Missouri House of Representatives. Walker is a licensed attorney who has extensive experience working on crucial issues such as Medicaid expansion and health reform, and came to the Legislature recognized as an expert in the field of health law and public policy.



Kara Corches

Director of Legislative Affairs, Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry

As the director of Legislative Affairs, Kara Corches advocates for issues that support the business community, including agriculture, education, energy, healthcare, technology, and workforce development. Before joining the Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry, she served as the chief lobbyist for the California Optometric Association in Sacramento and worked in political affairs at the California Farm Bureau Federation. Prior to her entry into state-level politics and advocacy, Corches worked at the federal level in Washington, DC for the American Medical Association and as a member of Congress. In her various roles over the years, she has developed expertise in political action committee fundraising and management, as well as mobilizing networks of grassroots advocates.



Kathy Wunderlich

Program Associate, Hawthorn Foundation

Kathy Wunderlich has been a resident of St. Louis since 1998, having been born and raised in Hinsdale Illinois. Wunderlich has 15+ years of experience in event planning, project management, marketing and nonprofit development. Kathy spent more than 12 years in roles at Northern Trust Bank in Chicago and Dallas, then helped to open their office in St. Louis. Along with being an extremely active community volunteer, Wunderlich served two area nonprofits as their interim Development Director and has sat on 11 different boards. After running her own business for four years, Kathy decided to pursue an opportunity at the Hawthorn Foundation. Kathy received a Bachelor of Arts from DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana. She was recently named to the Board of Trustees of Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Indiana.



Katie Steele Danner

Executive Director, Greater Missouri Leadership Foundation, Inc.

Katie Steele Danner is a multi-faceted senior executive and small business owner with four decades of public and private sector experience. The current Executive Director of the Greater Missouri Leadership Foundation, Inc., she has dedicated her life to encouraging women leaders who can flex across a variety of sectors and leadership styles, and who can create unique solutions in partnership with others. She received her degree in Business Administration and Public Administration from Truman State University and has held senior executive roles in the health, social services, commerce, community development, and hospitality industries. A former member of the Missouri House of Representatives and a previous Senior Executive Service federal employee as well as the Director of various Administrative Offices for the State of Missouri, she has a unique appreciation for the dynamics of strategic, non-partisan, and bi-partisan partnerships.



Kellie Ann Coats

Executive Director, Missouri Women's Council

Kellie Ann Coats serves as the executive director of the Missouri Women's Council. In this role, Coats leads the Missouri Women's Council in its efforts to support and advocate for women-owned businesses throughout the state of Missouri. Currently, her duties are focused on workforce development programming that serves justice-involved women in state correctional facilities. Coats' previous experience includes fundraising leadership positions at the University of Missouri, such as her most recent leadership role at MU Health Care, promoting their mission and vision through fundraising and advocacy. Coats earned a bachelor's degree in animal science from the University of Missouri.



Kim Wallace Carlson

Director of Engagement & Entrepreneurship in Public Affairs, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation

As the director of engagement and entrepreneurship in public affairs for the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, Kim Wallace Carlson develops and executes strategic communications plans, engages entrepreneurship ecosystem partners and stakeholders, and protects and grows the Foundation's national entrepreneurship brand. Prior to joining the Kauffman Foundation, Carlson was a senior website and content strategist for DEG, web and social media manager at the Kauffman Foundation, and a content strategist and copywriter for VML. She also was an assistant editor and web editor for Natural Home magazine. Carlson earned a Bachelor of Science in journalism from the University of Kansas with a minor in sociology.



Dr. Lupita Fabregas

Director, Missouri 4-H Center for Youth Development

Lupita Fabregas is originally from Mexico, and she immigrated to the United States in 2002. She received her undergraduate degree at Monterrey Tech in agriculture engineering and animal sciences, a master's degree in education from UPAEP and doctoral degree in agricultural education, at Oklahoma State University. Fabregas began her career in higher education, working for a Mexican university as well as Oklahoma State University College of Human Sciences. More recently, she has worked to improve inclusion and diversity in 4-H, leading the largest 4-H inclusion and diversity initiative in the United States. She now works as director of the Missouri 4-H Center for Youth Development.



Malorie Raulerosn

Attorney, Poplar Bluff & Cape Girardeau Region

Malorie Raulerosn is a native of Pemiscot County, Missouri and her family has farmed in Pemiscot County for five generations. She attended elementary and high school at South Pemiscot and attended college at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, Arkansas, where she graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Science in journalism — emphasis in public relations. Raulerosn attended the University of Arkansas at Little Rock William H. Bowen School of Law, where she graduated with her Juris Doctor. After graduating law school, she returned home to Pemiscot County to begin serving her neighbors and friends. Raulerosn is a licensed attorney in both Missouri and Arkansas; her goal is to provide the community and surrounding areas with much-needed estate planning services and legal advice.



Rosana Privitera Biondo

President, Mark One Electric

Rosana Privitera Biondo serves as president of Mark One Electric, headquartered in Kansas City, Missouri. The company is full-service and provides regional electrical contracting and subcontracting work, as well as design/build construction, estimating, engineering, pre-construction coordination, project management and architectural design. Biondo has built the company to employ more than 200 employees and earn more than \$25 million in annual revenue. Biondo has also served as the national president of the Women Construction Owners & Executives (WCOE), USA organization, which is an association of women business owners committed to making a positive difference for women in the construction industry. Additionally, she has served as both a member and chair of the Kansas City Corporation.



Sarah Hough

Senior Manager of Community Affairs & Diversity Outreach, Bass Pro Shops

Sarah Hough is the senior manager of Community Affairs and Diversity Outreach for Bass Pro Shops, North America's premier outdoor retailer and conservation company based in Springfield, Missouri. She is responsible for developing the company's philanthropic giving and community outreach programs, including managing grant programs and national partnerships with organizations such as National Wildlife Federation and YMCA. She also oversees the Bass Pro Cares Fund, the company's employee relief program that has granted more than \$1 million since 2016, to outfitters experiencing a personal hardship. Prior to joining Bass Pro Shops, Hough worked for the Downtown Springfield Association, a non-profit focused on the economic development and revitalization of Downtown Springfield.



Susan Coatar

Susan Coatar is a former vice president at Centene Corporation. Prior to joining Centene, Coatar worked at the St. Louis Regional Health Commission and served as a Coro fellow in Public Affairs. She holds a Juris Doctorate from St. Louis University School of Law and bachelor's degrees in political science and Spanish from University of California, Los Angeles.



Lt. Colonel Tara Bradley

Active-Duty Military & Police Department Chair, Department of Military Science, University of Missouri

Lt. Col. Tara K. Bradley is a career military police officer in the active-duty component of the U.S. Army. She graduated from Auburn University in 2003, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in criminal psychology, and received a Master of Arts degree in business and organizational security management from Webster University in 2007. Lt. Col. Bradley's military assignments include all aspects of the Military Police Corps, from combat support to law enforcement. She has served in multiple assignments geared toward the education, progression, and training of soldiers and officers. Lt. Col. Bradley deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom for two terms, from 2005-2007 and 2007-2009. She has received multiple military awards and decorations, including the Bronze Star and the Military Police Corps Order of the Marechausee.



Terri Barr-Moore

Director of Government Relations at Kansas City Area Transportation Authority (KCATA)

Terri Barr-Moore has more than 25 years of experience in government relations and legal and community affairs. In her current role, she supports the CEO, as well as the entire executive team, by serving as the liaison to members of congress, elected and appointed officials and their staffs and key community stakeholders. Barr-Moore also keeps the KCATA's federal, state and locally elected officials informed about capital projects, RideKC brand and services. Prior to her time with the KCATA, Barr-Moore served as the political director, field representative and office manager for U.S. Senator Claire McCaskill, and was a paralegal for 15 years. Barr-Moore graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Missouri-Kansas City.



Zora Mulligan

Commissioner of Higher Education, State of Missouri

Zora Mulligan was appointed commissioner of Higher Education by the Coordinating Board for Higher Education in 2016. She had previously worked as chief of staff for the University of Missouri System, executive director of the Missouri Community College Association, assistant commissioner and general counsel for the Missouri Department of Higher Education, and assistant attorney general for the Missouri Attorney General's Office. A native of West Plains, Missouri, Mulligan received her Juris Doctor and master's degrees from the University of Kansas, and her bachelor's degree from Drury College.