

UMC Meeting Summary Date: Thursday, September 18, 2025

1. Welcome and Acknowledgements The meeting began with a welcome to all attendees, including new and returning members. Bruce Hough thanked Melissa Ballard for her outstanding leadership as former Chair and Alan Hawkins for his tremendous work as manager (executive director role), announcing his return to board member status. Rian Gordon was introduced as the interim manager of the Commission, and the search for a permanent manager is underway. New participants, including Jennifer Campbell from the Utah Domestic Violence Coalition, Carly Palmer Webb (an influencer in marketing), Aaron Larson from the Dibble Institute, and Natalie Goddard (marketing expert, absent due to convention), were welcomed. Aimee Winder Newton from the Governor's office was also acknowledged for her continued support and partnership.

2. Financial Report and Resource Development Brian Higginbotham, Vice President of USU Extension Services, provided a financial overview. The UMC's bedrock funding comes from dedicated credits from marriage license fees, statutorily capped at \$400,000 annually. However, the Commission received an overpayment of approximately \$75,000 above this cap for FY25, which is being held and will likely need to be returned. Projections indicate the \$400,000 cap will be met earlier in FY26, around March or April.

Despite the funding cap, the UMC has been super productive in creating a comprehensive library of relationship resources. The strongermarriage.org website now hosts multi-hour courses covering pre-marital, marriage, and "rekindle ready" for long-term relationships. There is also a growing library of over 100 short mini-courses, including "disagree better" modules. The partnership with Utah State University is crucial, as the \$400,000 from marriage license fees does not cover the full cost of content development. Additional funds come from TANF grants (typically kept below \$300,000) and federal grants, though the future of federal grants is uncertain.

3. Strategic Direction on Funding and Content Promotion With the robust content library, the UMC plans to shift focus from intensive new content creation to more advertising and promotion. A key initiative is to monetize content for individuals outside of Utah through a paywall under the brand "RelationshipREADY," separate from the Utah Marriage Commission branding. Early indications show demand, with six out-of-state individuals already paying for courses without any advertising. Other revenue streams include donations, podcast sponsorships, and YouTube monetization (currently small but growing). The UMC is also seeking a proposal from USU Extension's marketing department to enhance promotion.

4. Legislative Initiatives and Key Accomplishments The meeting highlighted several significant legislative initiatives and achievements:

- **Success Sequence Curriculum:** In response to a legislative mandate to teach the "success sequence" in schools by fall, the UMC, in partnership with the Dibble Institute and the State Office of Education, developed curriculum for high school health and financial literacy classes. The curriculum is an adaptation of the evidence-based "Love Notes" program, condensed into one-to-two class periods. The "success sequence" involves graduating high school, securing full-time employment, getting married, and

then having children, and is proven to significantly reduce poverty regardless of demographic background. The financial literacy lessons are currently available to instructors, with health curriculum awaiting formal approval. The UMC aims to secure broader adoption by school districts.

- **Eliminating Marriage Penalties:** The UMC commissioned the Gardner report, which identified federal and state policies that disincentivize marriage, such as those related to federal assistance programs (Medicaid, SNAP, TANF, WIC) and tax codes (e.g., the federal earned income tax credit, EITC, and head of household status). Melissa Ballard is actively working on a bill for the 2026 Utah legislative session to eliminate the EITC penalty in Utah's tax code, focusing on the lowest economic group of taxpayers. This initiative aims to align state policy with supporting families and the success sequence, potentially influencing federal changes.
- **Modernizing Marriage License Reporting:** There is a recognized issue with the manual and backlogged system for tracking marriage licenses in Utah. Melissa Ballard reported on efforts to integrate marriage licenses into a new state-wide digital portal called "My Utah.gov," which will provide citizens with access to vital records like birth certificates and driver's licenses. This modernization would greatly improve data accuracy and accessibility.

5. Future Strategic Focus: Corporate Partnerships, the UMC plans a major push to create partnerships with corporations and organizations, working with their Human Resources departments. The goal is to integrate UMC's relationship resources into employee wellness programs, highlighting the economic value of strong employee marriages in reducing absenteeism and improving productivity. The Commission intends to offer these programs to companies for a flat fee, while still providing direct access to Utah citizens at no cost.

6. Engagement and Call to Action Board members are encouraged to make introductions to HR departments or top executives in organizations that could benefit from or support the UMC's mission. Donations are also welcomed. The Commission will be a sponsor at the Steve Young Foundation's wellness symposium next spring. Board members are asked to promote the UMC podcast and website by sharing links and recommendations to help spread positive, uplifting content and increase engagement.

Bruce Hough emphasized the commitment to making the content affordable and accessible, noting that monetization efforts are primarily for sustainability and to enlarge the UMC's footprint to reach more people. He encouraged board members to reach out with any ideas, thoughts, or concerns.