

# Benefit Cliff Mitigation in UTAH

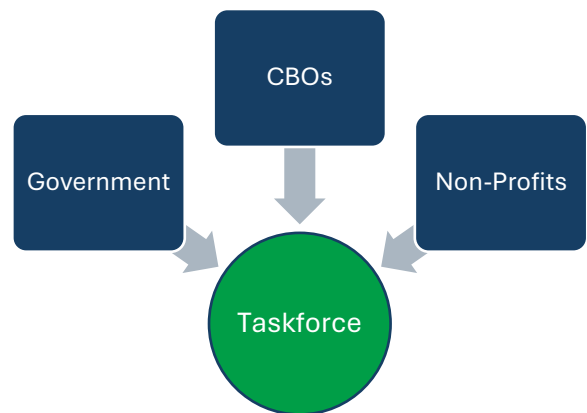
## THE SPARK

Initiatives to address benefit cliffs in Utah were sparked by a combination of factors. The state has a history of leveraging data to drive policy decisions, particularly through the University of Utah's Social Research Institute. Conversations about upward mobility and the impact of benefit cliffs on families receiving social safety net programs highlighted the need for action. Furthermore, the Sutherland Institute's research on the topic included a statewide survey conducted by Lighthouse Research, which revealed that 43% of respondents had turned down job opportunities due to fear of losing benefits. This data underscored the real-world impact of benefit cliffs on economic behavior and decision-making among families. The Governor's Office and the Department of Workforce Services (DWS) played pivotal roles in recognizing and championing the need for change.

## INITIATIVES

### Intergenerational Poverty Task Force

One of the key initiatives in Utah was the focus on intergenerational poverty. As a result, Salt Lake County established an Intergenerational Poverty Task Force. This task force brought together various stakeholders, including government departments on the state, county, city, and school district level, nonprofits, and community-based organizations (CBOs), to address the systemic issues contributing to intergenerational poverty. The task force focused on creating pathways for families to achieve economic self-sufficiency and reduce reliance on government assistance.



### Transitional Cash Assistance Bridge

Utah implemented a transitional cash assistance bridge for TANF recipients. This program provides a full month's worth of cash assistance upon closure due to employment, followed by two months of partial grants. Additionally, recipients receive 12 months of case management to help navigate the transition to employment. This initiative aims to ease the financial burden during the transition period and support long-term self-sufficiency.

#### Utah's Transitional Cash Assistance Bridge



### Child Care Step-Down Policies

Recognizing the importance of childcare in supporting working families, Utah introduced step-down policies for childcare assistance. These policies gradually reduce the level of assistance as families' incomes increase, preventing a sudden loss of benefits that could deter families from pursuing higher-paying jobs. The state also increased the income limit for childcare assistance to 300% of the federal poverty level and ensured that providers are paid 75% of the market rate. 300% of the federal poverty level and ensured that providers are paid 75% of the market rate.

#### UT Lesson Learned

Utah's approach to benefit cliff mitigation has been heavily influenced by data. The Sutherland Institute's research, which included a statewide survey, provided critical insights into how benefit cliffs impact families' economic behavior. This data-driven approach ensures that policies are grounded in real-world evidence and can effectively address the issues at hand.



## FINER DETAILS

### Funding

The initiatives were funded through a combination of state and federal dollars. TANF funds played a significant role, particularly in the transitional cash assistance bridge program. The state also leveraged existing authority and flexibility within the TANF block grant to pilot new programs. Additionally, the Intergenerational Poverty Task Force received support from various sources, including state appropriations and partnerships with local organizations.

### Key Collaborators

Utah's success in advancing benefit cliff mitigation initiatives was due in large part to strong collaboration among key stakeholders. The Department of Workforce Services worked closely with the Governor's office and the state legislature to secure funding and support for the initiatives. Nonprofits such as Circle Salt Lake and United Way of Salt Lake were instrumental in providing advocacy and direct support to families. The Sutherland Institute's research and partnership with the Georgia Center for Opportunity also provided valuable insights and tools, such as the benefit cliff calculator, to inform policy decisions.

## TIMELINE

Utah leveraged data to advance benefit cliff mitigation strategies:

