

# MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Navigating Headwinds, Seizing Opportunity: Small Business Growth in America's Top Economy

Over the past year, the national conversation has been shaped by terms like economic headwinds, DOGE, tariffs, persistent inflation, labor shortages, and AI disruption. Global instability and domestic uncertainty have weighed heavily on business confidence. For many small businesses across the U.S., 2024 was another chapter in an ongoing challenge: navigating a climate marked by volatility, uneven recovery, and accelerating transformation.

Amid this backdrop, Utah stands apart.



## The Good, The Bad, and The Uncertain

The Mill Entrepreneurship Center plays a vital role in this ecosystem. As a hub for technical assistance, coaching, training, and resource connection, we are proud to support Utah's entrepreneurs in turning ideas into sustainable businesses.

As Utah's longest running resource center and co-working space, celebrating 25 years, The Mill and our programs deliver unprecedented service through our dedicated team of professionals and subject matter experts.

In the past year alone, our center has served close to 15,000 clients through workshops, classes, meetups, advising, speaker programs, and various educational training opportunities offered through The Mill. The conference center served approximately 76,000 visitors during the past 12 months, and hosted a record number of events.

We hosted business matchmaking events, our veteran business conference, and our Mill community spring open house. We graduated our 1,000th small business from Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses during our spring 2025 cohort, marking a significant milestone in our 13th year in operation.

Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses will also expand its footprint and delivery model to include small business owners statewide. We look forward to recruiting rural businesses from across the state.

The Year of The Veteran Entrepreneur was declared at our state legislature on the floor of the house, to recognize the importance of our Veteran Business Resource Center in assisting veterans with small business creation and growth.

Sadly, through federal executive order, the Utah MBDA Minority Business Center contract was abruptly terminated. Despite having our most successful year,

impacting dozens of businesses and executing on numerous educational workshops and seminars, our work and team ceased operation in June 2025. While the dissolution of this division is disheartening, The Mill, through our numerous resources, will continue serving and supporting the clients and partner relationships we formed these past 4 years. I congratulate the Utah MBDA team and the heroic work and impact they've made for disadvantaged business owners and the SLCC community at large.

Whether helping business owners adopt digital tools, navigate permitting processes, or access capital, we operate with a core belief: that with the right support, small businesses can not only survive economic uncertainty—they can lead in spite of possible setbacks or obstacles.

And indeed, they are. Across sectors—from construction to food services, clean energy to creative industries—Utah entrepreneurs are adapting to change, embracing technology, and building for the future. The convergence of a supportive policy environment, community collaboration, and high-quality technical assistance makes Utah a national model for inclusive small business growth.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to fostering innovation, expanding equity, and reinforcing the entrepreneurial culture that defines our state. As we face another year of complex dynamics—AI disruption, evolving workforce needs, and global economic shifts—we see not just risk, but remarkable opportu-

In a world still seeking stability, Utah offers a playbook for resilience. And in that playbook, small businesses are not just a chapter—they're the authors of what comes next.

## **Personal Note**

I've had the privilege of leading The Mill, our multiple divisions, and grant programs for 10 years. This 25-year established entrepreneurship center has never been stronger and staffed with more talented individuals than we have right now. As executive director, I sincerely thank the team of dedicated professionals I've had the pleasure of working with every day. As I look forward to writing new chapters in my professional journey, I'm eternally grateful for the support and trust placed in me by my staff and the leadership at Salt Lake Community College.

The Mill at Salt Lake Community College has experienced an exceptional year marked by momentum, growth, and community impact. More than just a coworking space or business incubator, The Mill continues to serve as a dynamic hub where entrepreneurs, creatives, and changemakers connect, collaborate, and thrive.

Over the past year, The Mill has seen new membership, and established businesses graduate to other workspaces, though it continues to be a networking hub for members, returning business owners, and visitors.

Programs like MOKR Mondays have become a cornerstone of strategic accountability, helping participants remain focused on their goals while benefiting from peer feedback. These sessions have led to breakthroughs in product development, customer engagement, and business clarity.

The popular 'Lunch and Learn' series has continued to deliver strong value, with expert-led sessions covering essential topics ranging from financial literacy to branding and leadership. These workshops not only spark new ideas but also equip entrepreneurs with the tools and knowledge they need to move their businesses forward.

The Mill's structured programs—especially the Everyday Entrepreneur Program—have also made a significant impact, guiding entrepreneurs toward achieving product-market fit. As a result, many businesses that started the year in the early stages of development are now confidently scaling, supported by clearer strategies and stronger business models.

The physical workspace remains a key asset. From impromptu pitch practices in the boardroom to high-quality recordings in the podcast studio, the facility provides entrepreneurs with the professional environment and resources they need to succeed.

As The Mill reflects on the past year, the sense of pride is palpable—not just in the accomplishments of its members, but in the environment it continues to foster: one that champions innovation, support, and growth. With this momentum, The Mill is poised for another incredible year of impact.

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14%

**INCREASE IN JOBS** 

58%

OF CLIENTS INCREASED **REVENUE** 

## **Business Breakthrough: Campus Pitch Event**

In Spring 2025, The Mill launched its inaugural Business Breakthrough: Campus Pitch event—a fast-paced, high-impact experience designed to help SLCC students refine business ideas and bring them to life. The two-day workshop culminated in a friendly pitch competition where students presented their newly polished ventures to a panel of judges.

The event was a resounding success, drawing 18 student participants who formed 7 teams and developed viable, well-supported business solutions. With guidance from experienced mentors, students quickly absorbed entrepreneurial frameworks, tested their ideas, and gained the confidence to share them publicly. Their enthusiasm didn't end with the final pitch—many participants have continued their journey with one-on-one business advising from The Mill's staff.

"This Business Breakthrough event was incredibly high value to time," said Trish Gorman, Dean of the Gail Miller School of Business. "In less than two days, 18 students brought ideas to life in the form of 7 well-supported, viable solutions. I was impressed by the students' creativity and ability to rapidly grasp and apply entrepreneurial concepts. The mentors gave generously of their broad expertise and will continue to support projects informally and through programs at The Mill."





## UTAH VETERAN BUSINESS RESOURCE CENTER

The Utah Veteran Business Resource Center (VBRC) is dedicated to supporting military-connected entrepreneurs. In 2025, the VBRC and Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) declared the Year of the Veteran Entrepreneur, highlighting their efforts. Representatives Ashlee Matthews and Anthony Loubet recognized the VBRC with a citation for their work supporting veteran-owned businesses in Utah.

The VBRC hosts the Utah Veteran Entrepreneur Networking (UVEN) events, allowing military-connected businesses to present and connect. With locations in Sandy and Davis County, these events attract 30-70 attendees. The VBRC partners with the Veteran Business Outreach Center (VBOC) and Small Business Administration (SBA) to offer Boots to Business courses, providing basic entrepreneurship instruction to around 450 veterans and military spouses. They also offer the Startup Training Resources to Inspire Veteran Entrepreneurship (STRIVE) courses, which have trained over 290 military-connected entrepreneurs.

The VBRC partnered with Syracuse University's D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) to bring the Veteran Women Igniting the Spirit of Entrepreneurship (V-WISE) program to Utah. They also hosted the Minnow Tank Pitch Competition, where six VBRC graduates competed for \$29,500 in seed funding. The VBRC supported the 9th Annual Veteran Owned Business Conference and the UNITE Confer-

ence, recognizing veteran entrepreneurs with the Utah Veteran Entrepreneur Pillar Award.

Katie Fry of Warrior Revival and Todd Vowell of Modern Warriors received the Pillar Award for their contributions to the Utah veteran community. The VBRC is expanding its efforts to support veterans in rural areas, including the Navajo and Ute Nation areas in southeastern Utah. They are working with seven Native American veteran entrepreneurs and, in partnership with the Utah Department of Veterans and Military Affairs (UDVMA), have helped connect more veterans to their benefits than ever before. The VBRC remains committed to supporting veterans throughout Utah.

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**591** 

**VETERAN APPOINTMENTS** 

2,548

**CONTACT AND RESEARCH HOURS** 

## SPOTLIGHT **SARA LAMBRINOS**

When Sara Lambrinos launched Sites by Sara in 2007, she didn't have a business degree, a team, or a financial safety net. What she did have was a vision—to take control of her time, her talents, and her future.

After college, Sara cycled through several jobs, each one teaching her more about what she didn't want. "I realized that I wanted to have more say in how I was spending my time and the type of work I was doing," she says. That desire intensified when she became pregnant with her first child. The demands of a full-time job and freelance side gigs were mounting. "My spouse and I decided it was a risk worth taking," she recalls. "It's never easy to walk away from the security of full-time employment, but my desire to birth this business was stronger than my desire for stability."

The early days were anything but easy. With no formal business education and only a few projects under her belt, Sara started from scratch. "What wasn't difficult about it?" she laughs. Finding clients was the hardest part. Most of her first projects came through word of mouth—friends of friends, acquaintances, anyone who needed a website. She leaned into perseverance, refusing to give up when things got tough.

There were some hard lessons along the way, too. "Learning about self-employment taxes was a rude awakening," she admits. "What little profit I did manage to make was handed over to Uncle Sam." Over time, Sara restructured her business to be more sustainable. She also learned how to navigate the balancing act of entrepreneurship—hiring the right people, building a solid portfolio,

Today, nearly two decades later, Sites by Sara has a thoroughly vetted and committed team. Many of her team members work three-quarters to full-time, and the business has grown far beyond the one-woman operation that started it all. "We've come a long way in 18 years," she says with quiet pride.

and staying adaptable in

an ever-evolving industry.

A turning point in her journey came with her involvement in Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses (10KSB). "It showed up at exactly the right time," she says. "I finally got some formal education around business concepts and best practices that I could put into practice in my business right away." Beyond the curriculum, it was the camaraderie that left a lasting impression. Meeting weekly with other entrepreneurs in her cohort gave her renewed energy and fresh perspective. "Getting to meet and talk with other business owners and help each other through our respective business challenges was one of the most rewarding aspects."

Another meaningful source of support in recent years has been The Mill at Salt Lake Community College. Sara speaks highly of the space and the people who keep it running. "The Mill is a fantastic facility. There's a real sense of community here," she says. "The staff care about the entrepreneurs who come through. They go out of their way to offer programming that is supportive and helps business owners stay accountable." Among her favorites is MOKR Mondays, where members meet in small groups to share goals and get peer feedback—something she finds both motivating and grounding.

> For aspiring entrepreneurs, Sara offers advice rooted in real-world experience. "If this is what you are on the planet to do—do it," she says. "If you need help, ask for it. Don't try to go it alone. Be willing to be visible. And try to learn from every mistake so you don't have to make it again."

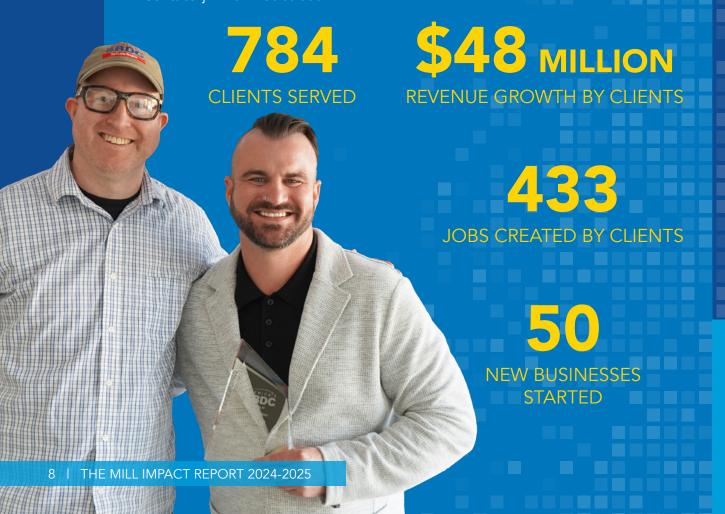
> > Sara's story is a testament to what's possible when passion, persistence, and community come together. Through every challenge and every milestone, she's carved out a path that's all her own and she's still moving forward.



## SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER

At the Salt Lake Region Small Business Development Center (SBDC), our dedicated team is committed to propelling local small businesses by facilitating the growth of new and existing entrepreneurs. As leading champions of Utah's small business community, our advisors bring decades of firsthand experience as business owners and executives. Each of our dedicated team members has been with the SBDC for over a decade. This extensive experience, combined with their wealth of business knowledge and skills and the valuable resources of the SBDC, enables them to provide exceptional guidance, support, and mentorship throughout the complex journey of entrepreneurship. This significantly boosts the success potential of the local businesses they work with. The Salt Lake SBDC team boasts a stellar track record of helping small businesses achieve positive economic impact for their business, their employees, their community, the state of Utah, and the nation. We take immense pride in delivering impactful, customized solutions tailored to the unique needs of each client.

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## SUCCESS STORY

## REVOLUTIONIZING SNOWBOARDING WITH INNOVATION AND PASSION

ShredHook, founded by Kyle Dreifus, aims to improve the snowboarding experience for riders of all skill levels. The company provides a unique solution to the long-standing snowboarding challenge of maintaining control while riding with one foot strapped in. This situation often leads to injuries and lift stoppages, and is especially challenging for beginners. It accounts for roughly 30% of a snowboarder's day.

Dreifus worked to create a product that helps snowboarders navigate snowboarding confidently and easily. The ShredHook is a snowboard accessory designed to improve snowboarders' control and stability when riding one-footed, particularly while exiting lifts or traversing flat terrain. Installed between the board and bindings, it enhances safety and comfort.

"The opportunity to make a lasting impact on an industry I am so passionate about drives me every day," he said. "I hope to bring my customers a unique, quality product that helps them enjoy the mountains as much as I do."

Building his business from the ground up has caused Dreifus to wear every hat possible through the process.

"This has provided me with a wealth of knowledge, and the challenges and hurdles along the way have been valuable lessons that I can bring to future ventures," he said.

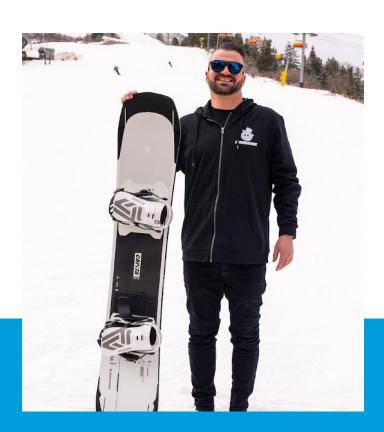
Dreifus attributes much of ShredHook's success to the guidance of Bryce Hansen, his SBDC counselor.

"Bryce provided invaluable advice, connected me to local manufacturers, and introduced me to resources that were instrumental in my growth," said Dreifus. "From drafting operating agreements to finding investors, the SBDC's support has been huge for me."

Early on in the startup process, securing intellectual property for ShredHook was one of the biggest hurdles Dreifus faced.

While living in California at the time, and with limited resources, he turned to a patent pro bono program, which connected him with Womble, Bond, and Dickinson, a law firm staffed with snowboard enthusiasts—an added bonus for Dreifus.. After three years of effort, ShredHook's patent was secured, and Dreifus moved to Utah to be closer to the growing Utah startup ecosystem and also to the best snow on earth! After arriving in Utah, he was connected to the Salt Lake SBDC, paving the way for production and distribution.

Regarding advice for aspiring entrepreneurs, Kyle said, "Be a sponge. Absorb all the advice you can, use it wisely, and be ready for your business to consume your life. It's a challenging journey, but the rewards are huge!"





## GOLDMAN SACHS 10,000 SMALL BUSINESSES

Utah is home to more than 324,800 small businesses that employ over 625,500 workers. They are 99.3% of all Utah employers, employ 45.5% of Utah's workforce, and deliver over \$27.1 billion in Utah payrolls. Small businesses are engines of economic growth and job creation, yet many struggle to grow, find and retain talent, or access capital.

For over 13 years, SLCC and the Goldman Sachs Foundation have partnered to deliver the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses (GS10KSB) Program. As Utah's premier small business program, GS10KSB delivers a best-in-class business curriculum, access to capital, and support services that enable entrepreneurs to grow their small businesses.

Participants of the GS10KSB Program represent all aspects of Utah's community and its impressive variety of industries. They form a tight-knit community of entrepreneurs who support each other professionally, commercially, and personally. Amid historic market conditions, many businesses struggled to keep up with rising prices and remain competitive. Local GS10KSB

graduates not only thrived during this difficult time, but they succeeded in creating 700+ new jobs and increased their cumulative annual revenues by over \$100 million.

In April 2025, SLCC's GS10KSB Program celebrated the graduation of its 1,000th small business owner. The National GS10KSB Program announced Utah's GS10KSB alumni community had exceeded \$2 Billion in annual revenues. Asahi Pompey, president of the Goldman Sachs Foundation, announced that as part of the GS10KSB Program Rural Initiative the SLCC GS10KSB site will expand to assist all of Utah.

The GS10KSB Program will continue to meet the needs of Utah's small business owners by implementing a new delivery method for its curriculum. In October 2025, GS10KSB program participants will receive their education via an online format with periodic face-to-face meetings.

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## VERIZON INNOVATIVE LEARNING

## STEM ACHIEVERS PROGRAM

Following its successful launch in 2024, the Verizon Innovative Learning STEM Achievers Program returned to SLCC in 2025, and this time, it returned for two, week-long sessions. The program features immersive, tech-focused summer programming, hosted at SLCC's Taylorsville campus. The growth in participation and reach confirmed what we learned last year: middle school students are eager for hands-on STEM learning, and this program delivers.

Led once again by Program Director Brian Acord and a team of trained educators, the 2025 program attracted students from across the Salt Lake Valley and beyond. With registration quickly filling both sessions, the Verizon STEM program has become one of the most sought-after youth experiences offered at The Mill.

True to Verizon's mission of increasing technology access and opportunity, the program continued to focus on inclusivity and outreach to underrepresented communities, including students from Title I schools. Participants engaged in high-tech, hands-on courses like Immersive Media, Robotics & Artificial Intelligence, Coding, and Design Thinking. Students built smart tech prototypes, coded robots, and explored virtual planets—all while gaining exposure

to real-world problem-solving and the college experience.

All program costs—including equipment, instruction, and materials—were fully covered by Verizon, allowing students to interact with advanced tools such as VR headsets, 3D printers, iPads, Merge Cubes, Sphero robots, and Micro:Bits at no cost. For many students, this was their first time using such technology in a structured learning environment.

Hosting the program at SLCC's Taylorsville campus provided students with access to college-level facilities and mentorship, helping bridge the gap between middle school and higher education. This connection fosters long-term interest in STEM and introduces pathways to future careers.

With enthusiastic feedback from students, parents, and instructors, the program has solidified its place as a core part of SLCC's summer outreach. The decision to expand programming was driven by both demand and impact, and SLCC remains committed to deepening this partnership and reaching even more young learners in the years ahead.

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## MINORITY BUSINESS **DEVELOPMENT CENTER**

Over the past year, the Utah MBDA Business Center has made significant strides in expanding our reach, deepening our impact, and empowering minority business enterprises (MBEs) across the state. We successfully launched and completed two procurement training cohorts, equipping dozens of businesses with the skills and strategies necessary to compete for and secure government and corporate contracts. In addition to our training programs, we hosted a series of webinars designed to share timely information on access to capital, certifications, and business development.

Our team actively participated in key community and economic development events including the Utah Black Chamber's Black Wealth Conference, the Utah Asian Business Summit, and the Utah Pacific Islander Chamber's Pacific Islander Business Summit. These engagements not only strengthened our partnerships but also expanded visibility and outreach to MBEs statewide.

In our effort to increase accessibility and brand awareness, we updated our website, launched a new newsletter, and created a dedicated LinkedIn page to keep our community informed and connected. These tools enabled us to share more contract opportunities, resources, and success stories, ultimately serving more businesses than ever before.

Despite these successes and the clear need for our services, we received the unfortunate news that the Utah MBDA Business Center will cease operations at the end of April 2025 due to the termination of our federal grant. While this chapter is closing, we are proud of the progress made and the relationships built, and we remain committed to finding new pathways to support Utah's diverse business community.

## **Success Stories**

Miss Essie's Southern BBQ has focused on rebranding and expanding its operations to support growth. With guidance from the Utah MBDA Business Center, the company launched a workforce development program with Bonneville Correction Center, resulting in over 50 hires and successful transitions into full-time employment. The Center also helped secure financing for a delivery vehicle, contributing to a 200% revenue increase in Q1 FY2024.



**153** 

MBE'S SERVED

**\$2 MILLION** 

VALUE OF FINANCING, **CAPITAL & BONDING** 

9,962 **CUSTOMERS REACHED** 

**MILLION** 

**GROSS REVENUE GENERATED** 

## **GLOBAL BUSINESS**

The Global Business Center at The Mill at Salt Lake Community College offers training for business owners, professionals, and students looking to expand their knowledge of the global trade industry. Navigating the international landscape requires shared experiences, collaborative efforts, and accessible resources—and that's exactly what the Center provides.

Over the past year, we've seen more businesses embrace these global opportunities. The Mill has partnered with both international and local organizations to create synergies that strengthen our economy and open doors for expansion.

Key events this year included the "Open for Business" Resource Panel, which explored opportunities in the South Korean market; an Imports Workshop, where local organizations shared strategies and resources; and collaborative stakeholder sessions that connected visiting groups with Utah experts to exchange insights and build partnerships.

Our global trade training is open to the public and led by a dedicated team of industry experts and mentors. The curriculum continues to expand, reflecting the needs of a diverse range of industries across Utah. Each session includes best practices, networking opportunities, and actionable insights for companies looking to compete on an international scale.

As with any program, our greatest success comes from our students. Their feedback helps us shape the program to better support their goals and career paths.

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## MICHAEL JESSOP

## **Executive Certificate of Global Business Management** 2024 graduate

"I completed the Global Business Professional course while opening a new copper mine in Mexico—a project that required navigating complex local systems and securing Mexican residency. With my background in mining, exploration, farming, and construction, the course gave me practical tools to refine my global approach.

I really appreciated Venita, Franz, and the other instructors for making the course interactive, relevant, and grounded in real-world experience. Since

then, I've applied those insights to cross-border projects, from mineral exports to sustainable exploration, and launched new ventures in the U.S.

In Mexico, I've worked to streamline operations—managing VAT taxes, export controls, and compliance—to meet trade standards while optimizing costs. In Colombia, I'm leading water exploration efforts that combine technology with local partnerships to deliver sustainable results. And in Utah, I'm developing a new copper mine to support infrastructure, AI, and electric vehicles.

The course helped me connect local expertise with global opportunity. Whether in Mexico, Colombia, or the U.S., I'm using what I learned to manage risk, capitalize on trends, and build ventures that balance growth with responsibility.'

## GLOBAL ENTREPRENEU **WOMEN'S FORUM**



The Global Business Center partnered with Utah Global Diplomacy and the U.S. State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program to host several global delegations, including a Chinese business group, Latin American higher education professionals, and participants in the Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative (YLAI).

A standout event was the Women in Business Leadership Program, which brought 25 female entrepreneurs from 25 countries to SLCC's Taylorsville campus.

They received marketing training from SLCC instructor Jen Klenk and heard from Utah business leaders Kristin Andrus, Marlene Gonzalez, Paula Fellingham, and Jessica Elwell. The event coincided with United Nations Day and featured a surprise visit from UN Ambassador Dr. April Ripley.

These visits foster global connections and showcase SLCC's role in supporting international collaboration and leadership.

## CONFERENCE CENTER

The Karen Gail Miller Conference Center, located on the Miller Campus of Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) in Sandy, Utah, is a premier venue designed to host a wide range of events, from conferences and workshops to trade shows and seminars. With modern amenities, flexible room setups, and advanced audiovisual capabilities, the center provides an ideal space for professional gatherings, educational programs, and community events.

One of the key aspects of the Karen Gail Miller Conference Center is its ability to bring together diverse groups, fostering collaboration and innovation. It serves as a hub for business leaders, educators, policymakers, and students, offering a space where ideas can be exchanged and meaningful discussions can take place. Events such as the Utah AI Summit, which gathers experts and leaders to shape the future

of artificial intelligence, highlight the center's role in advancing technology and education in the region.

Beyond professional and academic events, the center also hosts community-focused gatherings, including conferences that address social issues and provide resources for personal and professional development. Its accessibility, state-of-the-art facilities, and commitment to supporting local initiatives make it a valuable asset to the community.

By providing a space for learning, networking, and collaboration, the Karen Gail Miller Conference Center plays a significant role in enriching the Salt Lake City area, empowering individuals and organizations to drive positive change.

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