



Department of Development and Land Services  
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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Outagamie County Finance Committee  
FROM: Kara Homan, AICP, DLS Director  
Bob Jakel, AICP, Special Projects Planner  
DATE: September 2, 2021  
RE: **Outagamie Rescue Plan – Stakeholder Engagement Summary & Major Issues Areas**

### Background & Overview

Outagamie County initiated a stakeholder & community engagement effort to better assess the impacts of COVID-19 within the community. Outagamie County staff conducted interviews with representatives from organizations directly impacted by COVID 19 and held outdoor workshops in June and July at various parks throughout the County. UW-Oshkosh conducted, on behalf of Outagamie County, two surveys targeted at County households and businesses. The above engagement tools were designed to assist the County in implementing the American Rescue Plan in accordance with the vision, guiding principles and goals established within the Outagamie Rescue Plan framework.

The County strove to be inclusive with the workshops by inviting as many organizations as could be reasonably accommodated in an outdoor setting while ensuring COVID protocol was maintained. The workshops were well attended and had excellent participation from those present.

The agenda for each workshop was as follows:

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Overview of Outagamie Rescue Plan Effort
3. Stakeholder Workshop Purpose and Approach
4. Individual and Small Group Session
5. Report Out and Priority Exercise
6. Next Steps

At the beginning of each workshop, participants were encouraged to freely share and discuss matters from their perspective, and informed that there was no bad, right or wrong idea and all input would be respected and heard. Participants were challenged to discuss and inform, within small groups, how COVID-19 impacted their organization, community and/or those they serve during the pandemic and for a year or more into the future and what “magic wand/bright ideas” they would use to mitigate those impacts. Each small group then reported out and ranked the needs on a priority basis.

The following eight workshops were conducted:

- Non-Profit and Basic Needs
- Rural Municipalities
- Urban Municipalities
- Tourism & Hospitality
- Small Business & Main Street

- Health Care and Mental Health
- Economic & Workforce Development
- Childcare & Education

Attached to this memo are summary reports analyzing the results of the eight workshops, two surveys, and one on one interviews to provide guidance to elected officials in implementing Outagamie County's American Rescue Plan. The workshop summaries attached to this report were summarized into four sections: participants, noted issues, bright ideas and workshop priorities; information gleaned from one-on-one interviews were integrated with pertinent workshop topics. The UW-Oshkosh Center for Customized Research & Services Surveys Summaries provided a county-specific overview of the impact of COVID-19 on an individual household/business as opposed to workshops that assessed organizational/community-wide impacts. An overview of impacts on Women & Minority-owned businesses is also attached.

### **Assessment & Next Steps**

Based on evaluation of the county's stakeholder & community engagement, and UW-O survey results, we have identified the following major issues/focus areas as it relates to Outagamie County's COVID-19 response & recovery:

- County-wide access to high speed, high capacity, and affordable internet.
- Workforce Development: recruitment/retention; training/education
- Economic Development: Business Assistance, Tourism Recovery
- Childcare & Early Childhood Development
- Mental Health
- Affordable Housing
- Food Access & Security
- Consistent Messaging & Communication
- Fiscal Impacts: Inflation and lost sales tax/other revenues
- Access to COVID-19 rapid testing

In terms of next steps, additional research, evaluation, and discussion will be required within county administration, amongst community partners, Finance Committee, County Board to determine if and how Outagamie County's ARPA funding could best be used to address the issues above. Staff will continue to report back on efforts to the Finance Committee as these efforts begin to take shape.

It is recommended that any future use of funds related to the above areas align with the OC Rescue Plan Vision, Guiding Principles and Goals. In addition, we recommend that emphasis be placed on: not duplicating effort of existing or future state/federal COVID-19 relief efforts or that have other dedicated/adequate Covid-related funding sources; targeting investments to where funding or programmatic gaps exist; and leveraging/partnering county ARPA funding investments with other municipal, state, federal, and/or non-profit resources.

Cc: Brian Massey, Finance Director  
Craig Moser, Deputy Director of Dept. & Board Relations

Att: Workshop Summary Reports, Women/Minority Owned Biz Impacts; UW-O Survey HH & Biz Results

# **Outagamie County Rescue Plan**

## **Workshop Synopsis - Non-profit and Basic Needs**



### **Participants**

Conducted a workshop with participation from the following groups:

- CAP Services (Community Action Program)
- Outagamie County Dept. of Health and Human Services
- CASA (advocate for childcare services)
- Outagamie Public Health
- Community Clothes Closet
- Valley Packaging
- Fox Valley Technical College Foundation
- League of Women Voters-Appleton
- ESTHER Faith based social justice
- Lutheran Social Services
- St. Paul Elder Services
- SOAR Fox Cities World Relief Fox Valley
- Goodwill
- Harbor House
- Rebuilding Together Fox Valley
- St. Vincent de Paul

### **Noted Issues**

Access to services, on-line options did not work due to:

- Service provider capability and training
- Mental health of client
- Client's inability to access on-line services

Court system is backlogged particularly for families

Children social skills are stunted as virtual is age temperament

Loss of family transportation for essential services

Hard to get and keep staff

Social isolation and fear impacting mental health

Services to get seniors to a new normal

Isolation has led to addiction and the need for more future services

Communication that is consistent and compassionate

Access to childcare particularly the rural areas

Undocumented workers needing services such as housing

To keep workers non-profits need to pay competitive wages particularly in shelters

Keeping staff safe and need for personal protection equipment

Affordable healthcare and dental

Options for rural transportation

Accommodations for support groups in a safe environment

### **Bright Ideas**

More programs to address loneliness and isolation especially among seniors

Increase transportation to seniors and rural areas

Provide reliable internet, access and training  
Increase court capacity and social workers  
Need competitive wage package and worker incentive  
Promote volunteers  
Provide more and perhaps specialized addiction and mental health programming  
Increase personal protection in group settings  
Relieve debt incurred by non-profits during pandemic to allow future dollars for services  
Incentive packages for affordable housing and housing options  
Update Social Programming:  
    Are current programs meeting needs  
    Coordination among providers  
    Are new programs needed  
    Properly train staff and volunteers  
Increase childcare providers  
Educate towards self-sufficiency and financial independence  
Vaccinations myths, education, access, and transportation

### **Workshop Priorities**

Participants in the workshop session engaged in a group discussion to provide greater insight on the long term impact of COVID-19 along with potential remediation. Each issue was then prioritized individually by the participants. The following is the result and prioritization of the group discussion:

The number one issue was the ability of non-profit providers of basic need services to offer a competitive wage and benefit package.

The number two issue was to provide services to combat isolation, abuse, and addiction, and increase childcare/schooling, elderly programs, and transportation.

The third ranked issue was providing broadband and internet access.

There were two actions that ranked as the number fourth issue.

- A) Mental health of non-profit workers and volunteers. Combat feeling of isolation.
- B) Help build skills for financial and life services.

The fifth ranked issue was to address rural needs to access jobs and quality, affordable childcare.

Two actions ranked as the sixth highest issue.

- A) Slow eviction/foreclosure of housing through emergency grants.
- B) Legal ID for undocumented workers and educate providers

The number seventh issue was to provide non-profits the financial means to rebuild, retool, finance operations, and hire adequate staff.

The number eight issue was affordable public transportation.

The number ninth issue was to help people navigate social programs. Help coordinate needs and remove language barriers.

There were three actions that ranked as the number tenth issue.

- A) Attract volunteers and create volunteer programs
- B) Extension of hospital care for persons of need.
- C) Vaccinate folks.

# Outagamie County Rescue Plan

## Workshop Synopsis - Rural Communities



### **Participants**

Conducted a workshop with participation from the following groups:

- Town of Center
- Town of Kaukauna
- Village of Seymour
- East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
- Village of Shiocton
- UW Extension
- Town of Black Creek
- Town of Ellington
- Town of Cicero
- League of Women Voters
- Village of Black Creek

### **Noted Issues**

- Lack of internet access for work and school
- Loss of farm income
- Emotional and mental stress to pay bills or lose a generation farm
- Care for rural seniors
- COVID slowed farm transfers, modernization and affordable building construction
- Question if vaccination works-future effectiveness and if booster needed
- Closed municipal buildings
- Rural businesses struggled and had a lack of access to services
- Loss of employees
- Ability to attract new businesses
- Loss of municipal rental space
- Added paperwork and personal protection
- Lack of volunteers for fire and EMS
- County services shut down
- County sales tax revenue reduced
- Election security and time consumption
- More people outside created safety concerns for walking along roads
- Long term financial security
- Decrease in services such as the library

### **Bright Ideas**

- Improve internet technology and cell phone/broadband coverage
- Provide support for transportation, communication, and mental health to isolated folks
- Offer stipends to volunteers in fire/EMS and poll workers
- For tourism the County should maintain and promote the Newton Blackmour Trail
- Increase personal protection items
- Provide better and consistent communication
- Increase shared revenue to compensate for sales tax loss

**Workshop Priorities**

Participants in the workshop session engaged in a group discussion to provide greater insight on the long term impact of COVID-19 along with potential remediation. Each issue was then prioritized individually by the participants. The following is the result and prioritization of the group discussion:

The number one issue is to gain affordable and quality broadband and internet access.

The number two issue is seeking compensation for road repairs due to lost income from the County sales tax.

The number three issue was planning for elections during a pandemic

The number four issue was Farm Planning and succession.

The fifth ranked issue was safe and affordable transportation.

There were three issues that ranked as the sixth highest priority.

- A) Access to virtual meetings
- B) Increase personal protection items
- C) Uniformed Emergency Preparedness Plan addressing EMS and seniors

The seventh ranked issue was to address mental stress due to fear of income loss, farm transition, and communication issues.

# Outagamie County Rescue Plan

## Program Synopsis - Urban Municipalities



### Participants

Conducted a workshop with participation from the following groups:

- City of Appleton
- City of Kaukauna
- Village of Little Chute
- League of Women Voters
- Town of Grand Chute
- Oneida Nation
- Village of Kimberly

### Noted Issues

- Urban workers who live in rural areas lack access to internet and remote work
- Job loss reduced family incomes
- Access and safety in schools
- Senior support to gain internet access and training
- Housing support and cost of living increases on marginal population
- Access to services, library, recreation and support groups
- Providing readily accessible personal protection equipment
- Lag in revenue from room tax, user fees and County sales tax
- Supply chain demands on new construction, roadway and IT infrastructure
- Concerns on gathering indoors this winter
- Slow recruitment of new businesses and recuperation of existing businesses
- Uncovering best practices for preparation of future pandemic
- Financial stability for households and businesses
- Access to health care needs
- Mental health issues
- Family shelters hard to open for those who need it
- Rent and utility bills fell behind
- Daycare needs
- Inflation, specifically groceries

### Workshop Priorities

Participants in the workshop session engaged in a group discussion to provide greater insight on the long term impact of COVID-19 along with potential remediation. Each issue was then prioritized individually by the participants. The following is the result and prioritization of the group discussion:

The highest priorities identified was to increase the ability to serve at risk individuals, improve the ability to respond to mental health issues and improve the health care system during a pandemic.

The number two issue was to increase intergovernmental cooperation; resources for staff and to add staff where needed.

There were three items listed as the third highest priority.



- A) Access to high speed and high capacity internet.
- B) Increase awareness and messaging for social services.
- C) Small business assistance and daycare for workforce.

The fourth ranked action was to provide regional coordination and communication for emergency response on housing and public health.

The fifth ranked issue was to create an emergency management tool kit that addresses all forms of need.

There were two issues ranked as the sixth highest priority.

- A) Daycare assistance for working families
- B) Access to affordable housing. Price, location and transportation needs

The seventh ranked item was to promote better access to food.

# **Outagamie County Rescue Plan**

## **Workshop Synopsis - Hospitality, Tourism, Arts, Travel and Entertainment**



### **Participants**

Conducted a workshop with participation from the following groups:

- Grignon Mansion, Kaukauna
- Outagamie County Fair, Seymour
- Whistler's Knoll Vineyard, Hortonville
- Weis Earth Sciences, Fox Cities
- League of Women Voters, Fox Cities
- 1000 Islands Environmental Center, Kaukauna
- Paper Discovery Center, Appleton

One on one conversation with representatives of the Fox Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau

One on one conversation with start-up entrepreneur (Hospitality)

### **Noted Issues**

- Cancelled events/school tours resulted in lost revenue but still incurred expenses
- Lacked technology to serve the community virtually
- Lost volunteers
- Workforce shifted to higher paying industry jobs
- Adjusting to a new normal
- Outdoor facilities overwhelmed-tough on infrastructure
- Added cost of cleaning supplies
- Lack of tourism (business/pleasure) reduced restaurant and hotel use
- For business travel if virtual meetings are a new norm travel will be impacted into the future
- No clear location to receive information adding to confusion
- Reservations cancelled and deposits refunded
- Decreased public travel
- Uncertain future (start ups are hesitant)

### **Bright Ideas**

- Create a uniformed and enforceable policy for COVID
- Increase outreach through technology
  - Broadband access for everyone
  - Hardware and training
- Create a pool of volunteers
- Formal outdoor space and funding to maintain the facilities
- Develop large endowment to secure future funding
- Focus on kids safety
- Invest in infrastructure
- Create a Tourism Master Plan
- One stop shop for policy and issues
- Address the need for foreign workers in the hospitality industry
- Promote jobs and business start ups in the tourism industry in a positive light

### **Workshop Priorities**

Participants in the workshop session engaged in a group discussion to provide greater insight on the long term impact of COVID-19 along with potential remediation. Each issue was then prioritized individually by the participants. The following is the result and prioritization of the group discussion:

The number one issue was making up for lost revenue due to closed facilities. Provide gap financing.

There were three issues that ranked as the second highest priority.

- A) Outreach/communication tools and training-provide affordable marketing
- B) Universal safety protocol, state/local collaboration, universal marketing and safety signage
- C) Provide funding for deferred maintenance

The number three issue was to develop ways to increase trust in safety protocols.

There were three issues that ranked as the fourth highest priority.

- A) Establish endowments and fund raising assistance
- B) Re-engage workforce particularly the youth by vaccination and sustainable wage assistance
- C) Help transition youth and students to a post COVID life in mental health and education

The fifth ranked issue was to provide formal improved outdoor space and a funded maintenance program.

The number six issue was to create programs that engage new volunteers as present participant's age out. A succession plan for recruitment and placement.

### **One on One Priorities**

The following un-ranked comments had been discussed above and beyond the workshop comments:

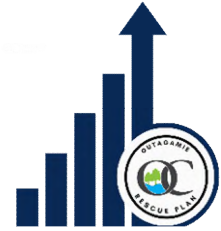
Establish marketing and incentives for foreign labor to return.

Create a tourism study with a goal to maintain and attract new clients and business travelers.

Create a business network of "best practices" that helped the tourism industry adopt to the pandemic and accommodate the new norm going forward.

# Outagamie County Rescue Plan

## Workshop Synopsis - Small Business and Main Street



### **Participants**

Conducted a workshop with participation from the following groups:

- ADI
- Lamers Dairy
- UW Extension
- Mid-day Women's Alliance
- Color Bold Business Association

In addition there were a number of one-on-one conversations with small business owners

### **Noted Issues**

- Lack of in person meetings with clients and staff
- Lost clients and/or could not build new client list resulting in failed growth projections
- Business shutdown and lost revenue
- Health and safety issues
- COVID impact on an already tight labor market
- Child care facilities needing staff
- Cost of accommodating customers to meet COVID protocol
- Struggle to find new employees
- Landlords lost tenants slowing the demand for new commercial construction
- Need to accommodate more work from home situations
- Slowed entrepreneurial growth hurting women and minority owned business development
- Future inflation concerns
- Fear of lost business under a new normal (will folks return)

### **Bright Ideas**

- Ensure broadband for all to connect with workforce and customers
- Funds for marketing and sales
- Funding for innovations that attract customers
- Education for a digital economy (on line sales)
- Align skills needed to labor supply and education
- Provide greater childcare support
- Stop unemployment boost pay to encourage worker return
- Encourage teen employment

### **Workshop Priority**

Participants in the workshop session engaged in a group discussion to provide greater insight on the long term impact of COVID-19 along with potential remediation. Each issue was then prioritized individually by the participants. The following is the result and prioritization of the group discussion:

The number one issue was to create a small business hub interlinking with support organizations and tech services. This would create a unified message.

The number two issue was to provide safe and affordable childcare, including a need to increase capacity and provide a competitive wage and benefit package.

The number three issue was to provide support for business marketing and new business development.

The fourth issue was to provide high capacity and affordable internet.

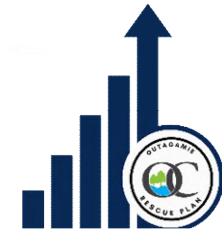
The fifth ranked issue was to align employer's workforce needs with training and a competitive wage package.

There were two additional issues noted

- A) Create affordable housing with access to public transit
- B) Reimagine downtown real estate

# Outagamie County Rescue Plan

## Workshop Synopsis - Health Care & Mental Health



### **Participants**

Conducted a workshop with participation from the following groups:

- NEW Mental Health Connection
- Catalpa health
- Sexual Assault Crisis Center
- Theda Care
- Be Well Fox Valley-United way Fox Cities
- YMCA
- Hope Clinic and Care center
- Outagamie County Public Health
- Outagamie County Mental Health
- Samaritan Counseling

### **Noted Issues**

- Staff fatigue from higher demands
- Clients stress and mental health worse
- Lack of adequate funding
- Client isolation especially older adults
- Lack of physical exercise impacting mental health
- PPE Expenses
- Vaccine confusion
- Vaccine for child protection and return to normal schooling
- Family tension and domestic abuse
- Addiction increases
- Risk factors up while protective factors are down
- Capacity and access issues for clients in need
- Call to have 1<sup>st</sup> responder alternative for mental health crisis
- Telehealth not available to all
- Clients who lost jobs lost health insurance
- Broadband access became an issue particularly in the rural areas
- Stress from having to meet child's school needs
- Students at home who could not reach out to teachers or trusted adults
- Consistent education for children
- Depression, anxiety and risk of suicide
- Food insecurity

### **Bright Ideas**

- Strong fee assistance fund for clients
- Fund infrastructure for reliable, high capacity internet for all
- Provide more relief for those with chronic health issues who are at greater risk
- Additional support for trainees
- Additional case management for complex cases
- Engage "Family Wrap Around" approach
- Additional school-based and child care-based services

Mobile crisis units

Community case management to help navigate the system of care

Provide vaccines or PPE so folks can move about without fear or health risk

Provide additional advocacy services

Subsidize childcare for low income access

Access to healthy affordable food and lifestyle habits (like trails)

### **Workshop Priorities**

Participants in the workshop session engaged in group discussion to provide greater insight on the long term impact of COVID-19 along with potential remediation. Each issue was then prioritized individually by the participants. The following is the result and prioritization of the group discussion:

The number one issue was providing urgent care for mental health issues by sustained funding

The number two issue was to provide higher wages for mental health, childcare and long term care workers.

The number three issue was to create a sense of belonging for all to promote social health and diversity.

The number fourth issue was to provide internet access to all parts of the county.

The fifth ranked issue was an alternative to mental health by training first responders.

The sixth ranked issue was providing affordable, flexible and quality childcare.

The seventh ranked issue was providing lifestyle education through a mentorship program.

Three additional issues arose.

- A) Incentive for those with a chronic condition to reassume care.
- B) Provide safe affordable housing for at risk individuals with access to public transit.
- C) Create a workforce succession plan for health care workers

# Outagamie County Rescue Plan

## Workshop Synopsis - Economic & Workforce Development



### **Participants**

Conducted a workshop with participation from the following groups:

- Voith & NEW Manufacturing Alliance
- Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce
- Fox Cities Economic Development Professionals
- East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
- Realtors Association of Northeast Wisconsin
- Fox Cities Regional Partnership
- Fox Valley Technical College – Business & Industry Services
- NEW North

### **Noted Issues**

- Worker talent shortage in both skilled and un-skilled positions
- Lack of affordable childcare
- Conflicting information on working through the pandemic
- Health care reduced general services to deal with the pandemic
- Low skilled positions hit the hardest
- The supply chain was hurt particularly from China (supply chain shock)
- Establish how to work remotely
- Employee turnover
- Broadband access
- Pent up housing demand
- Cost of material for construction rose significantly
- Eviction moratorium hurting the rental market
- Future inflation to impact industry
- Technical colleges need to teach in person for the type of skill sets needed in the future
- Fear of new COVID strains again impacting the workforce
- PPE supply and cost

### **Bright Ideas**

- Start initiatives to upskill/reskill the workforce including increased capacity at FVTC
- Target metro areas in the US hard hit by COVID to attract their workforce to the Fox Cities Region
- Work to meet the needs of persons presently not in the Fox Cities labor market
  - Promote advanced training in regional industries
  - Stabilize the housing market
  - Maintain stable cost of living
- Provide resource and assistance to businesses in maintaining a regional supply chain
- Invest in long term initiatives
- Direct loans and tax credits to landlords impacted by the eviction moratorium
- Increase government cooperation to stimulate an affordable housing market
- Improve broadband



### **Workshop Priorities**

Participants in the workshop session engaged in group discussion to provide greater insight on the long term impact of COVID-19 along with potential remediation. Each issue was then prioritized individually by the participants. The following is the result and prioritization of the group discussion:

The number one issue is to attract talent to the Fox Cities and improve workforce skills and quantity.

The number two issue is land use reform and end nimby-ism. This would include converting or repurposing existing structures, upgrade zoning, and provide financial incentives.

Three issues ranked as the third priority.

- A) Supply chain shock, I.D. complexity and re-orientate efforts.
- B) Improve workforce through automation and workable immigration.
- C) Broadband service to all County residents.

Three issues also ranked as the fourth highest priority.

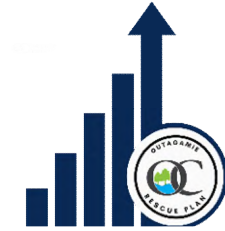
- A) Encourage workforce re-entry through subsidized childcare.
- B) Repurpose closed commercial space.
- C) Customize training programs to serve the manufacturing sector.

Two additional issues were considered.

- A) Create on demand public transit
- B) Ensure safe affordable housing for the workforce

# Outagamie County Rescue Plan

## Workshop Synopsis - Childcare and Education



### Participants

Conducted a workshop with participation from the following groups:

- Life Tools Foundation
- Outagamie County Public Health
- Kimberly Area School Dist.
- Valley Packaging Early Intervention
- Valley Packaging Industries
- UW Oshkosh
- Fox Valley Technical College
- Child Care Resources and Referral
- YMCA
- OWLS (Library)
- Boys and Girls Club of the Fox Valley
- Big Brothers and Big Sisters
- Family Services of Northeast Wisconsin
- League of Women Voters
- Appleton Area School District
- First 5 Fox Valley
- Fox Valley Technical College

### Noted Issues

- Health risk for worker
- Equal education opportunity for all
- Need child approved vaccine
- Fear of new variants
- Workforce challenges due to higher risk
- Balancing in person and on line services
- Nutrition for healthy childhood development
- Access to technology and how to use it some students fell behind
- COVID distracted from other non-pandemic services
- Social impact on developing children
- Mental health concerns
- Lack of childcare services
- Lost revenues
- Broadband service not equal throughout the County
- Inconsistent rules
- Increased homelessness
- Getting kids caught up on studies
- School bus shortage
- Adjusting to a new normal
- Language barriers
- No field trips or hands on projects

### **Bright Ideas**

Promote vaccination/boosters where needed  
Add staff (tutors) to assist with children who fell behind  
Provide equal access to broadband  
Increase healthy food options for children  
Programs for affordable childcare  
Expansion of developmental screening and monitoring  
Revenue recovery for child support groups  
Early childhood intervention program to catch issues early on  
Libraries to serve a segment of the population not perceived as “clients”  
Take services to the families as opposed to families coming to the service  
Stronger community networks  
Parental programs to help adults help the children  
Provide for honest workplace pandemic information  
Access to mental health programs  
Create flexibility for employment  
Match education to the future skill set needed in employment  
Promote existing programs, a clearinghouse type of program

### **Workshop Priorities**

Participants in the workshop session engaged in a group discussion to provide greater insight on the long term impact of COVID-19 along with potential remediation. Each issue was then prioritized individually by the participants. The following is the result and prioritization of the group discussion:

The number one issue was to create a Family Resource Center. A navigator that connects people with a particular resource. The resource would be widely distributed, easy (in relative terms) to follow, heavily promoted, and in multiple languages.

The number two issue was providing and or connecting children and workers with mental and social health needs.

The third highest priority was to bridge education to new standards. Create more flexibility and responsiveness to meet students in their terms and comfort level.

The fourth ranked priority was to provide access to broadband for all residents.

The fifth ranked priority was to create an endowment for early childhood development.

There were two issues that ranked as the number sixth priority.

- A) Provide assistance to children who have fallen behind in education who do not qualify for other programs.
- B) Provide affordable “hot spots” for internet access. Perhaps in conjunction with library services.

The seventh ranked issue was to provide incentives for families with children under the age of five to return to the workforce.

There were two issues that ranked as the number eight priority.

- A) Provide consistent and honest information on the pandemic
- B) Provide flexible workspace to educate children.

The ninth ranked issue was to create a network that connected families with resources in a bi-lingual manner.

The tenth ranked issue was to upgrade buildings for proper venting and air circulation.

Two other issues were considered.

- A) Properly train the trainers who are instructing teachers to teach under the new norm
- B) Ensure affordable booster shots



## **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Business and Citizen Surveys**

Prepared for Outagamie County Planning Department

July 30, 2021

Primary Contact: Jeffrey Sachse, Interim Director  
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## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a myriad of profound effects on businesses and communities. One in six businesses have closed nationally since March 2020 as a direct result of the pandemic and four of every five businesses has experienced a loss of more than twenty percent of revenue at some point in the past year. Communities have been equally impacted as funds have been diverted to meet public health and programming needs. Similarly, the absence of a summer tourism season has depressed room and sales tax receipts in many communities, leading to tough decisions in the FY2021 budget process.

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, signed by President Biden on March 11 seeks to remedy many of these ills while providing state and local governments an unexpected injection of aid. The legislation includes more than \$350 billion in formula grants as part of the \$1.9 trillion fiscal package. As the first of two payments is distributed from the Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Fund to most recipients beginning this week, leaders are prioritizing plans and projects as jurisdictions have been afforded generally wide latitude to spend their allocations.

Outagamie County recently contacted the UW Oshkosh Center for Customized Research and Services (CCRS) for assistance in engaging discussions across the county regarding prioritizing investments from their \$36.8 million allocation. County leaders have been actively discussing this since mid-March and have established several guiding principles. The County Board of Supervisors' intent is to make investments to promote business and community resilience in a sustainable and data-driven manner. Central to this is the engagement of key stakeholders from across the County to identify challenges and prioritize investments.

CCRS has more than thirty years of experience connecting faculty, students, and other university resources to businesses and organizations across Northeast Wisconsin. It specializes in consulting, customized training, and market research services. The Center has broad experience managing large-scale customer response surveys, including the Northeast Wisconsin Manufacturing Alliance Vitality Index and large surveys for several corporate clients and the EAA. It has employed many of the techniques cultivated in these prior experiences to the current project.

The report proceeds in four parts. First, it will detail the survey methodology employed as well as the steps taken to recruit residents and business respondents to provide feedback. Second, the report will review the results of a survey directed at Outagamie County residents. Next, it will discuss the findings of a parallel business survey. Finally, the report will briefly discuss implications and findings of each as well as possible implications for the County.

## Methodology

It is important for any organization to consider the perspectives of their clients and stakeholders when considering a new program or initiative. In this case, the Outagamie County Board of Supervisors seeks the input of business owners and residents to identify the ways that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their lives and livelihood as well as preferences for the County's investment of ARPA funding. The opportunity presented by the funding represents both the possibility for new and one-time investments as well as the addition of new capacity. Utilization of related programs and services is critical to the policy's success.

A survey instrument is especially apt when seeking feedback from a diverse audience over a long time. Similarly, surveys are best suited for capturing large volumes of input. The COVID-19 pandemic added another wrinkle to the process in that the public health measures employed during the study period made other forms of market research, such as encounter surveying, focus groups, or structured interviews far less practical and timely.

The project and client teams developed two discrete surveys – one for residents and the second for business owners (see Appendix A and B). The survey design clearly stratifies audiences across multiple dimensions, such as age, gender, income, and industry. The survey instruments further identify key challenges and needs. Finally, the surveys provide several opportunities for respondents to express clear preference through ranking activities.

The surveys and related collateral were further translated into Hmong (Laotian) and Spanish in recognition of the significant populations of both groups in the county. The project team further worked with several community partners to distribute both surveys to these populations.

Both the resident and business surveys were programmed in the University's Qualtrics platform and administered anonymously. This provided the project team with the opportunity to both track respondents over time as well as to identify areas or audiences needing further response.

### Survey Audience and Engagement

The surveys were designed to solicit response from a sampling of Outagamie County business owners and residents. Samples of both audiences were collected from physical address lists provided by the County's Geographic Information Systems office and email addresses supplied by a private, third-party provider. Randomized samples of both audiences (2,000 residential addresses and 1,500 businesses) were produced to meet a five percent sampling threshold.

Residential respondents were mailed a postcard directing them to a county website containing the survey links (see Appendix C). These residents also received follow-up emails reminding them to complete. Business owners were both directly and indirectly recruited as the project team sent a series of targeted email reminders and partner organizations such as the Heart of the Valley Chamber, New North, Fox West Chamber, Fox Cities Chamber and Casa Hispanic Inc. sent invitations to a broader audience.

Finally, UWO Honors Program students performed two in-person postcard distributions to apartment complexes across Outagamie County. This was designed to both increase the general response rate and to specifically improve responses among multi-family residents.



The distribution methods generated mixed results, as we will see in the survey findings. Similarly, the extensive engagement practice does impact the statistical reliability of the results, as we will see.

### Survey Period

The initial survey period ran from June 24 to July 16. This is a rather short time frame for two surveys of this type, though the engagement strategy was designed to compensate for this. The two surveys were designed to run simultaneously given the short project period. This poses little challenge to the surveys or their reliability as the questions in each differ as do their audience. This posed some challenge to the project team as they were managing two distributions simultaneously. Similarly, the project team was somewhat dependent on the participation of partner organizations to generate responses among business owners and underrepresented populations. As such, the project team and client agreed to extend the survey period for both surveys to July 23. Responses reported here were collected across this period.

### Survey Reliability

Both surveys presented their own challenges, both in their initial design and because of the market environment. Generalized response surveys typically require longer and more intensive engagement strategies to build familiarity with the project and solicit response. The engagement on the residential survey did generate some traction in this regard. This is further complicated by a general pattern of survey fatigue and non-response that has plagued the customer response industry for the past several months.

Similarly, each of the survey links were published on a county website. Therefore, we can assume that some margin of respondents may have come to the survey from outside of either selected sample.

It is difficult to assign a statistical significance to either dataset, since both surveys are considered voluntary, despite the sampling methodology imposed on both survey audiences. However, it is possible to estimate confidence intervals of voluntary data based on expected and synthetic response. The resident survey is reported within a margin of error of +/- three percent and the business survey is reported within a margin of error of +/- five percent due to the relatively smaller number of responses.

## Resident Survey Findings

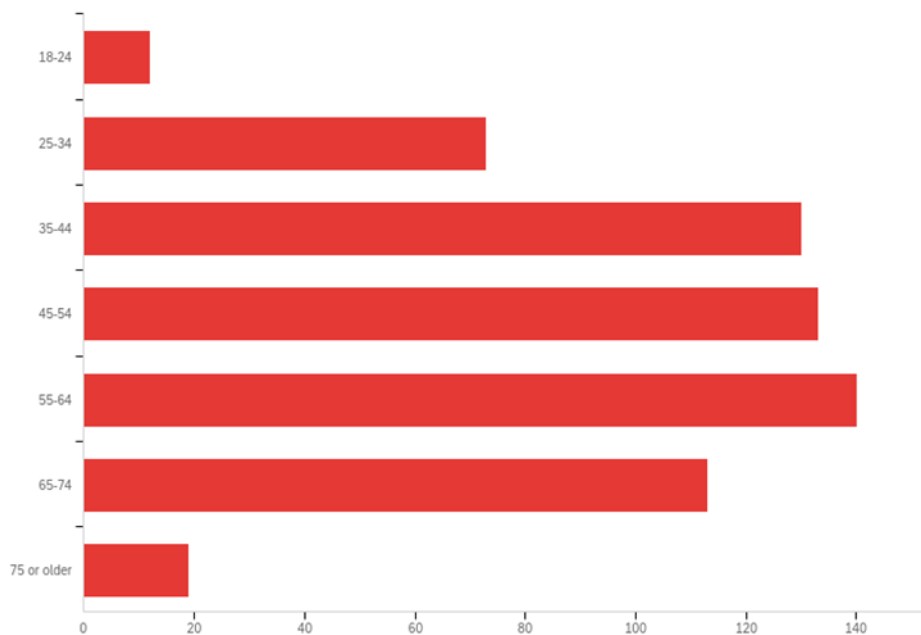
The first audience surveyed in this project are Outagamie County residents. This survey was sent to a randomized sample of 2,000 county residents. Similarly, UWO Honors College students distributed an additional 1,000 survey postcards across a two-week period. These engagement efforts generated 789 discrete responses, or a response rate of 26.3 percent. Additionally, all 10,254 residents whose email addresses were secured were invited to complete the survey on multiple occasions. It is difficult to conclude where respondents ultimately responded to the survey invitation. Conversely, extensive engagement into the county's Hispanic and Hmong populations yielded two responses to each translated survey. Finally, several blank or partial responses were collected. The full and combined responses are reported here.

### Respondent Demographics

Respondents were first asked to identify their residence status. Ninety-five percent of respondents are Outagamie County residents (non-residents were not allowed to complete the survey). The respondent sample is further significantly female, with 66.7 percent of respondents. Thirty-one percent of respondents are male, and the remaining 2.4 percent are non-binary or preferred not to answer.

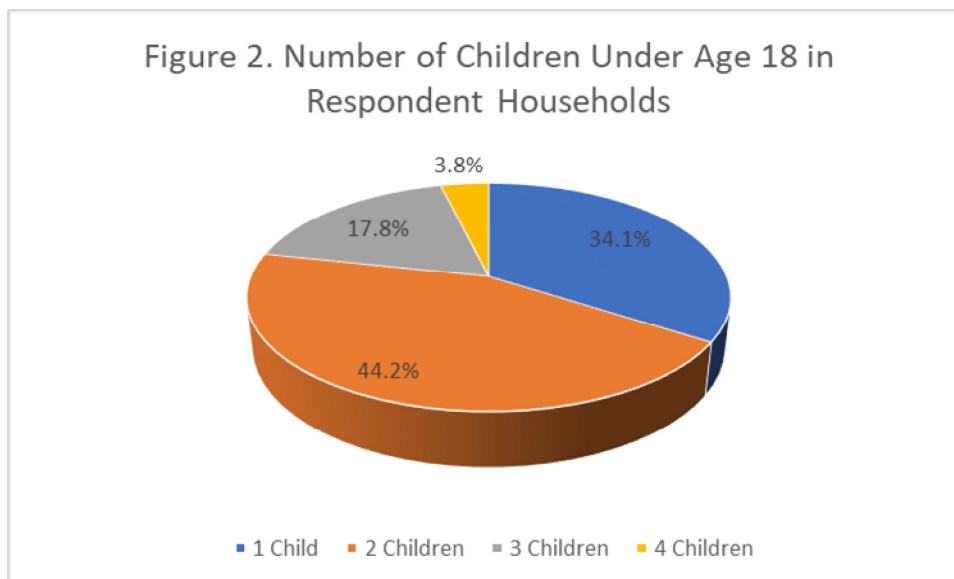
The respondent sample is also strongly centered among prime working age residents as suggested in the age distribution below.

*Figure 1. Respondent Age Distribution*



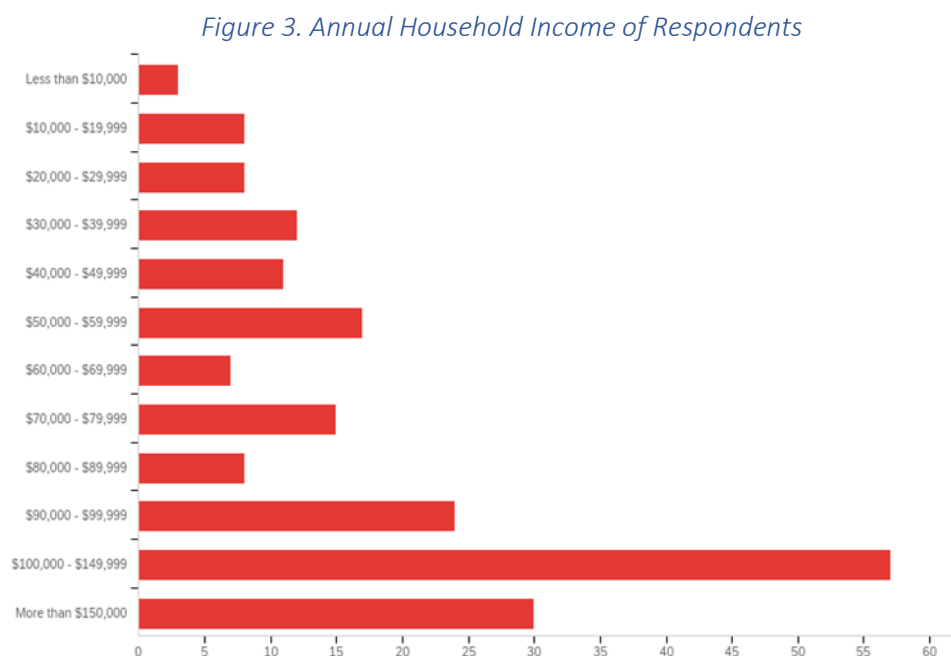
The median age of respondents in the sample is 47 years old, which is slightly higher than the county median but is generally representative of the homeowner population. It is further important to note that the survey did not ask respondents to identify their homeownership status. Similarly, the survey platform does not allow us to distinguish which responses came from single-family or multi-family residents.

Respondents were next asked to identify their family status. Respondents were not asked about marital or relationship status but were asked about parental status. One-third of residents reported having at least one child over the age of eighteen living at home. The median number of children per respondent household is 2.3 among parental households and 1.1 across the entire sample.



Of those families reporting children living at home, one quarter of those children are under the age of 5. This distinction is important as the survey includes several questions regarding childcare availability and expense. This is a greater concern among families with young children.

Respondents were finally asked to disclose their annual household income. This is presented in the distribution below.

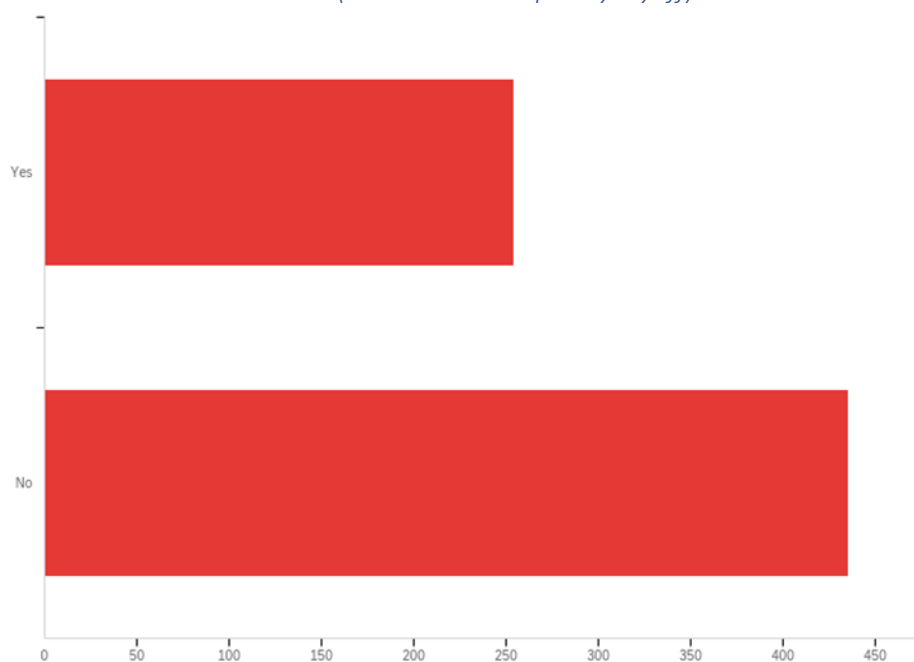


We see that the survey sample is significantly biased towards higher income residents, with more than half (55 percent) of respondents reporting annual household incomes over \$90,000. This places this segment of the respondent pool as upper middle income. As such, this income bias does strongly influence both the impact assessments and value statements that follow. Further note that no specific correlations have been calculated between income and any other response as the general correlation across responses is positive, but statistically weak (r-value of 0.31).

### COVID-19 Financial Impacts

Respondents were next asked to identify the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their households. The survey first asked about the employment and income effects and next discussed the health effects.

*Figure 4. Have you or a member of your family experienced a loss of employment or income due to the COVID-19 virus (even due to temporary layoff)?*



Respondents were first asked whether their household was impacted by a loss of employment or income. 41.7 percent of respondents have experienced some impact. This is consistent, though slightly higher than labor market indicators for the county and likely includes workers that have experienced loss of income without a loss of employment, such as through furloughs or base reductions.

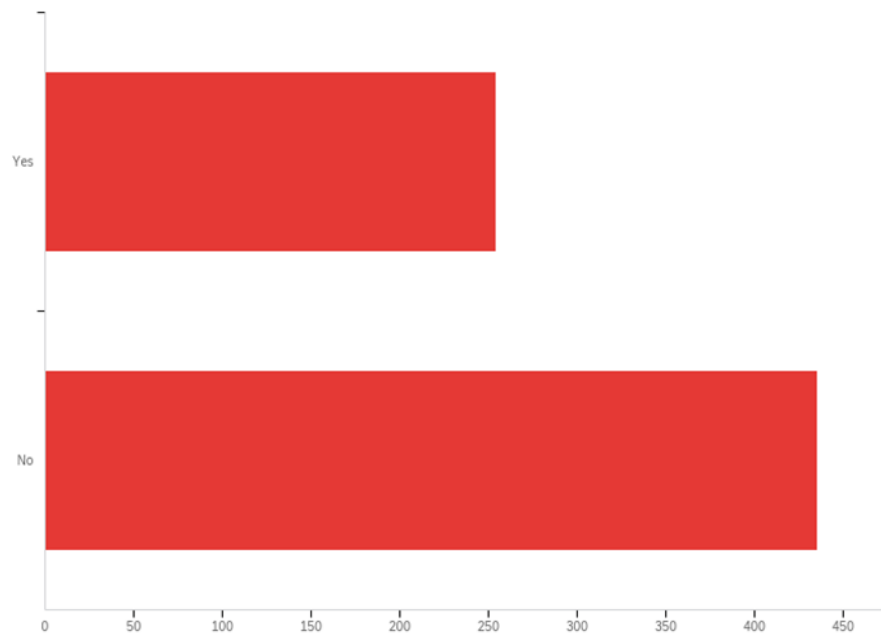
It is difficult to assess the financial impact of these losses, as ninety-two percent of respondents are current with their rent or mortgage payments as of June 1. This will obviously be an area of focus as the federal eviction moratorium is set to expire as of the publication of this report.

Further, fifteen percent of respondents report some food insecurity and eleven percent are not current with their utilities. These questions surface a population of between 75 and 100 household respondents with some acute need because of the pandemic. These results are also easy to reconcile with the previous finding as more individuals, including those with children prioritize shelter over other financial needs. Similarly, the community has seen expanded need and resources to address some of these needs, such as federal expansion of supplemental nutrition programs.

## COVID-19 Health Effects

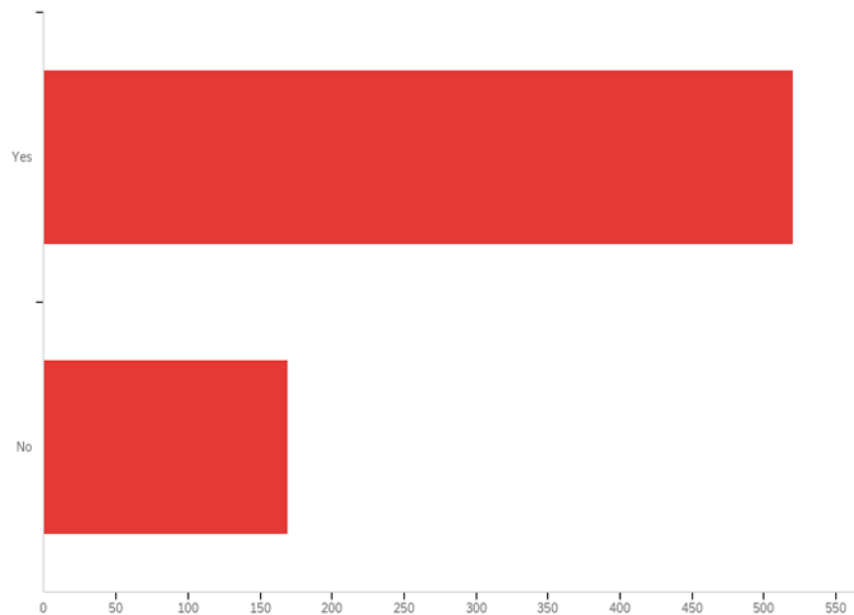
Respondents were next asked to identify the physical and mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. We see here that the resident population was significantly impacted in several ways and that some effects persist.

*Figure 5. Consider lifestyle changes that have occurred during the pandemic. Have you or a member of your family experienced any type of adverse physical health because of the pandemic? This includes contracting COVID-19 and its effects*



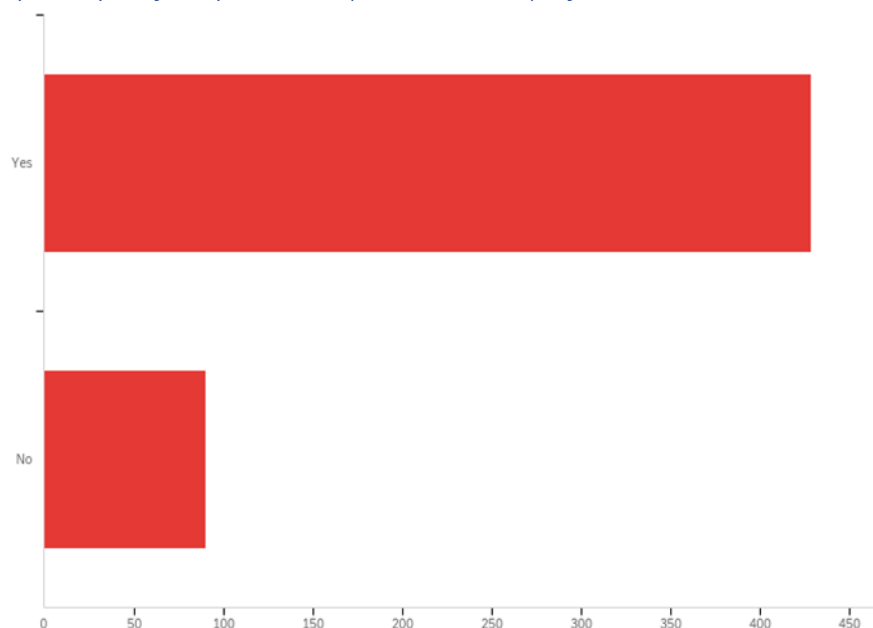
We first see that 37 percent of households experienced some physical health effects from the pandemic. This does not necessarily mean that this share of respondents only includes those directly contracting COVID-19. Rather, there have been several other physical impacts, including increased obesity, changes in sleep habits, and hypertension related to the pandemic and remote work, for example.

*Figure 6. Has COVID-19 caused added mental stress on you or any member of your family?*



Next, we see that more than three-quarters of respondent households have experienced some form of mental stress through the pandemic. The past year and a half have introduced several uncertainties that have added strain to families, including employment and educational impacts. The pandemic has further highlighted gaps and disparities in the nation's mental health infrastructure, as suggested in the response below.

*Figure 7. Do you or your family have adequate access to professional mental health services?*



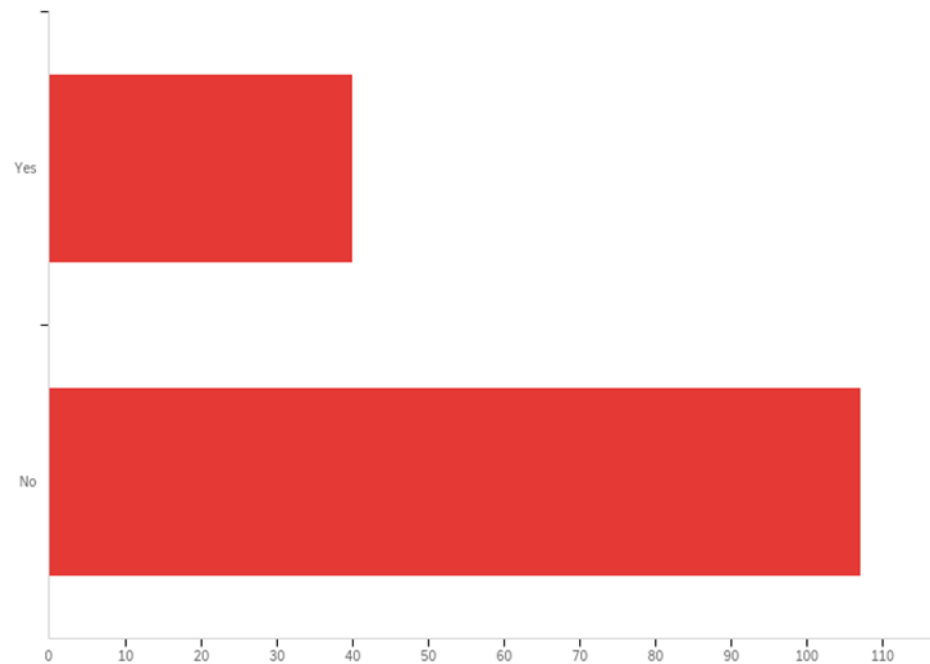
While a significant share of respondents (82 percent) suggest that they have adequate access to mental health services, while seventeen percent do not. Further, the respondent population lacking access are more likely to have experienced other impacts including, most notably, difficulties securing childcare,

which we will explore next. This suggests an opportunity to provide additional services to an acutely vulnerable population, which may produce healthier long-term habits.

### Resident Child Care Challenges

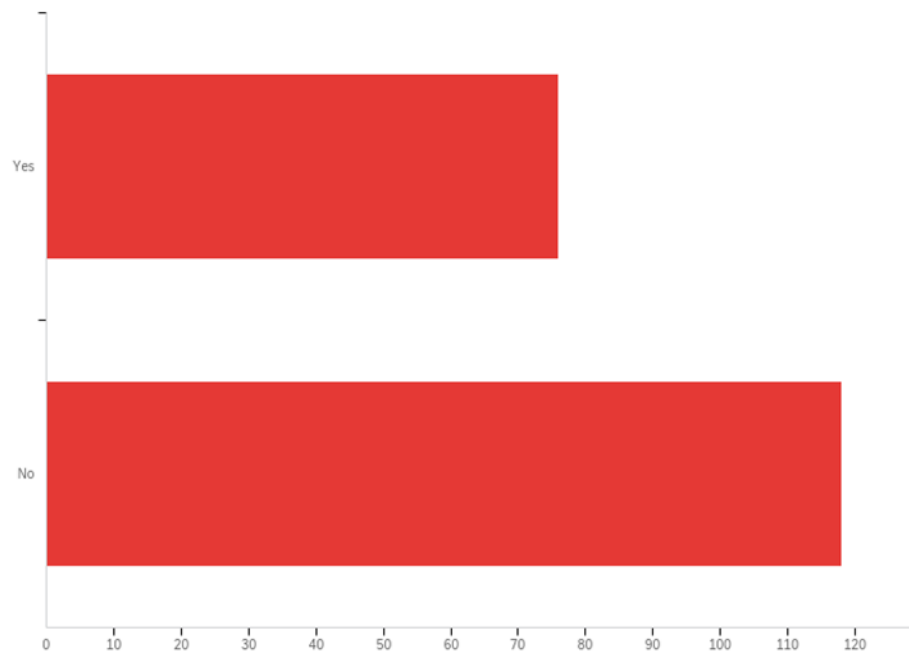
Respondents were asked several questions regarding childcare and broadband access. These issues have been closely linked through the pandemic as changing school schedules and the rise of virtual schooling made each a more acute need for most families, further highlighting disparities across communities.

*Figure 8. Have you had difficulty finding childcare for children 5 or under during the pandemic?*



We first see that 27 percent of the 147 respondent families with children under the age of five experienced some childcare difficulty in the past year. This may have been caused by increased demand due to changing education schedules and decreased demand as many childcare facilities either adjusted or limited capacity through public health measures.

Figure 9. If you had difficulty finding childcare, have you found a workable solution going forward?



Looking further at this population, we see that sixty percent of respondents continue to have trouble securing reliable childcare. Similarly, sixty percent of respondents also report either a loss of income or added expense due to childcare constraints. It is difficult to accurately predict how these trends will continue or resolve as the county emerges from the pandemic as we know that most school districts are resuming regular in-person instruction and many workers forced out of the labor market due to childcare responsibilities are beginning to reenter. This therefore seems to point to added demand for childcare capacity throughout the county, though it is difficult to say how much.

Finally, we see that 94 percent of respondents report having sufficient broadband access. The county has generally excellent broadband access, though this remains a concern for business owners, as we will see later in the report.

### Changes in Dining and Travel Habits

Next, the resident survey asked a series of questions regarding dining and travel behavior. We know that each of these was significantly impacted by the pandemic and that the restaurant and hospitality industry still struggle to recover.

In general, respondents reported dining far less during the pandemic, with two-thirds reporting some change. Conversely, sixty-four percent of respondents report some interest in returning to pre-pandemic habits, suggesting that a small, but significant population have experienced a long-term change in habit.

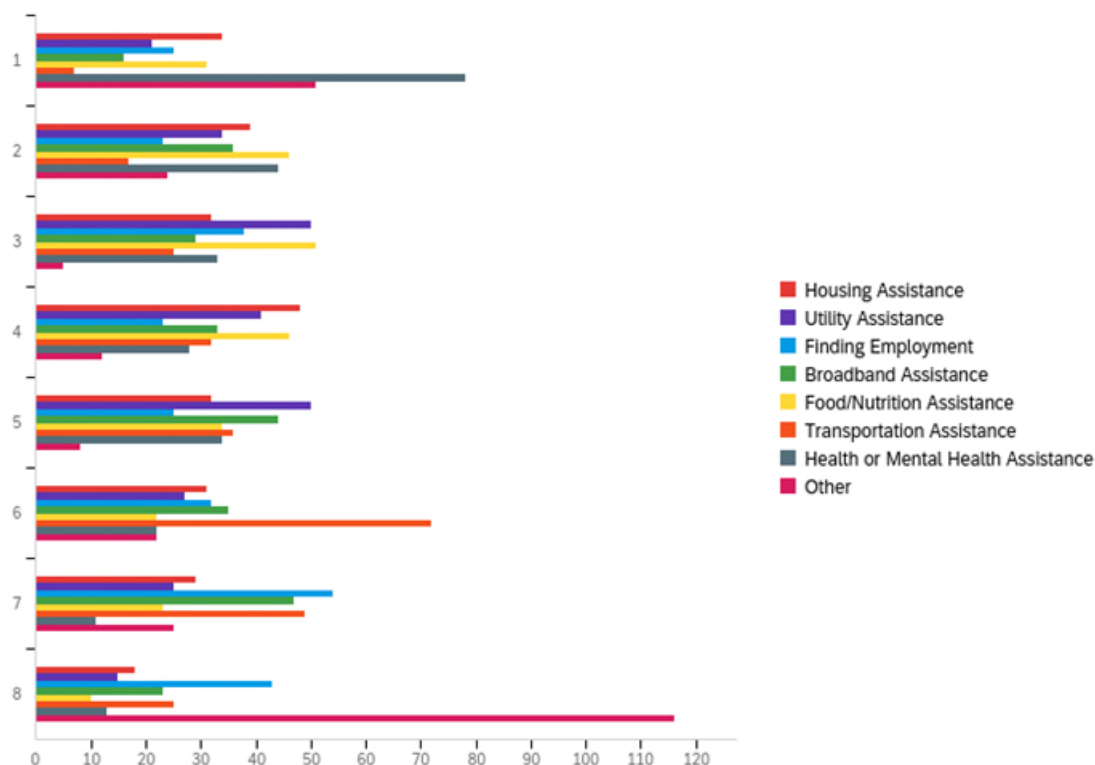
A similarly large share of respondents (90 percent) reported some disruption in travel plans in the past year, either because of concerns of public health or the cancellation of events. Eighty-two percent of respondents suggest that travel will resume in the next year, again suggesting that a small, but significant share of the population continues to express concerns regarding the safety of travel.



## Program Investment Priority Rankings

Resident respondents were finally asked to rank their preferences for investments across several program areas. The chart below presents the total distribution of preferences ranked 1-8. This chart is admittedly busy but does highlight important trends.

Figure 10. Program Investment Priority Rankings



The chart above suggests that there was no clear priority that reached the top of the ranking. Similarly, the respondents were more likely to identify a named priority than offer suggestions of their own. There is also a substantial grouping of options in the middle levels of the ranking, suggesting some ambivalence among respondents. This may be a true preference or reflect a lack of knowledge or awareness of specific detail.

It is also useful to consider a rough ranking of priorities. We can do so by calculating the mean ranking of each option. These are presented in the table below.

Figure 11. Mean Ranking Scores of Program Investment Priorities

#	FIELD	MEAN
7	Health or Mental Health Assistance	3.27
5	Food/Nutrition Assistance	3.81
1	Housing Assistance	4.16
2	Utility Assistance	4.22
4	Broadband Assistance	4.75
3	Finding Employment	5
6	Transportation Assistance	5.32
8	Other	5.46

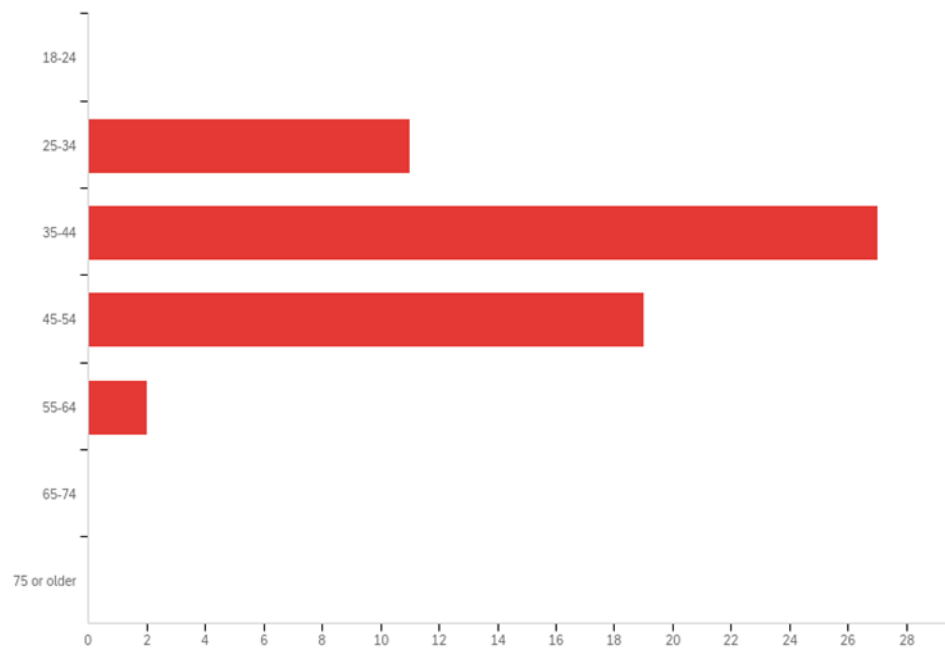
We again see some ambivalence among respondents as each of the investment priorities are grouped between 3 and 5. Health or mental health assistance and food/nutrition assistance seem to have slightly greater support, where finding employment transportation assistance have the weakest relative support. This may be a matter of association as many of the more highly ranked priorities are associated with existing county programs where others are the responsibility of local or regional agencies, such as Fox Valley Transit and the Bay Lakes Workforce Development Board, for example. As such, the County may consider expanding existing capacity to be a path of lesser resistance than the creation of new programming.

#### Sub-Analysis for LMI Residents

The client also requested a secondary analysis of results for those residents with low-to-moderate household incomes. The project team defines this subgroup as those with HHI under \$60,000. This subgroup is notable as many of the programs and funds considered for additional investment have income eligibility requirements targeted at this population.

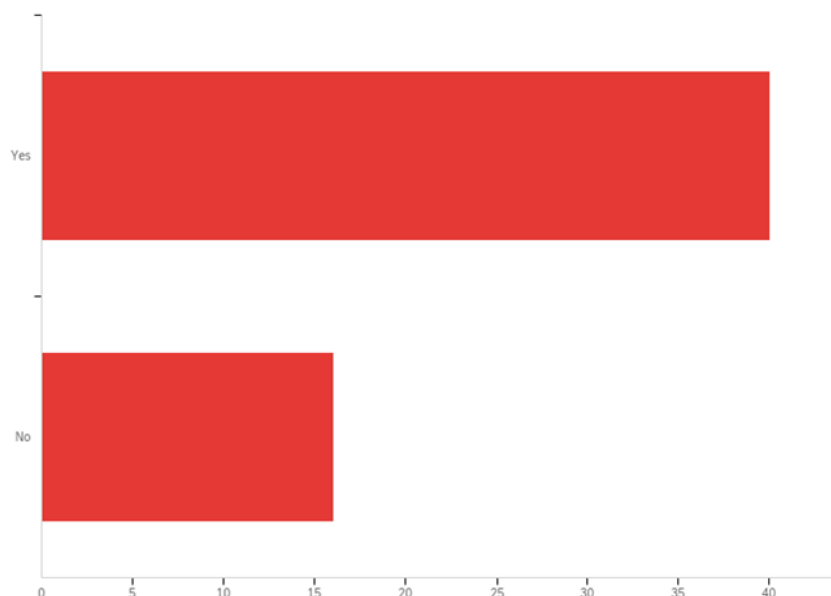
Fifty-nine of the survey respondents met this classification. All are Outagamie County residents. The sample was even more overwhelmingly female (86.11 percent) than the respondent population, and each of the respondents reported having children at home. The average number of children under 5 (2.3) is also higher than the total population.

The subgroup's age distribution also differs from the total population, as we see below.



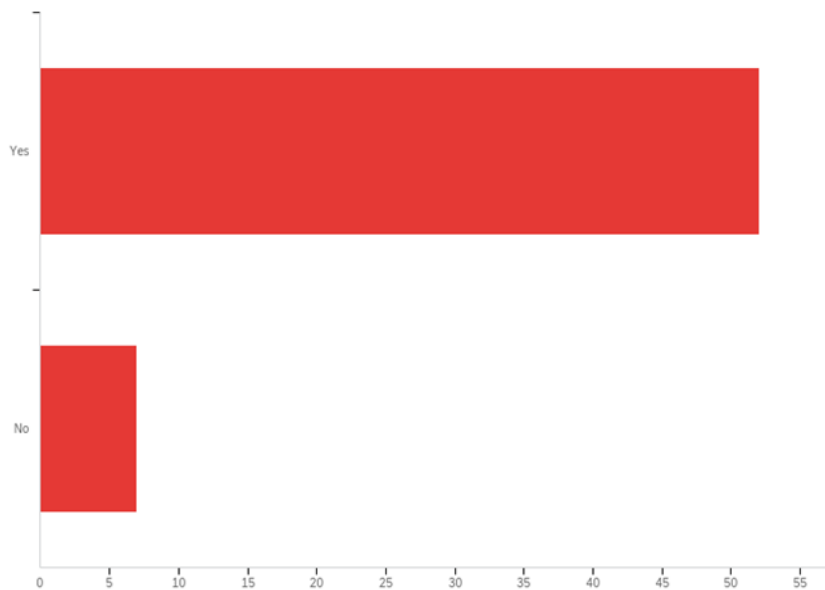
The subgroup sample is centered on the prime working age population. This population was profoundly impacted by the recession of 2007-2009 and other later economic shocks.

*Have you or a member of your family experienced a loss of employment or income due to the COVID-19 virus (even due to temporary layoff)?*



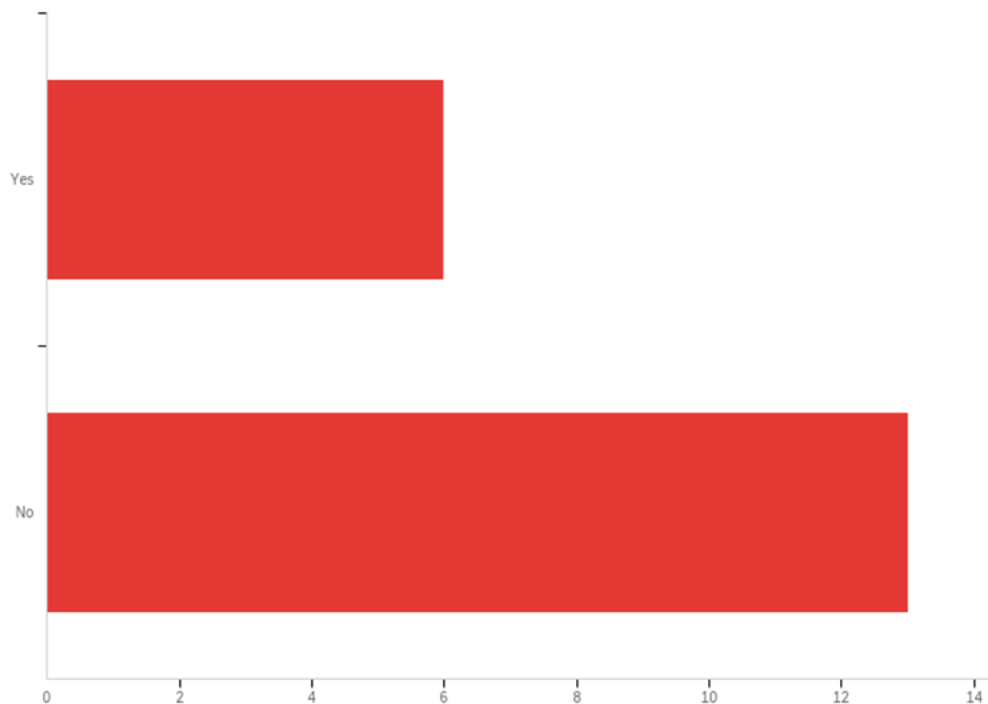
Seventy-two percent of subgroup respondents experienced some loss of income due to COVID-19. While only 45 percent of respondents experienced a physical malady over the past year, 88 percent report experiencing some stress or strain because of the pandemic.

*Has COVID-19 caused added mental stress on you or any member of your family?*



Seventy-eight percent are current in their rent or mortgage payments. Only a slight majority (54.54 percent) consider themselves food secure, with the balance regularly struggle to buy food. Forty-one percent are also in arrears on their utilities' payments.

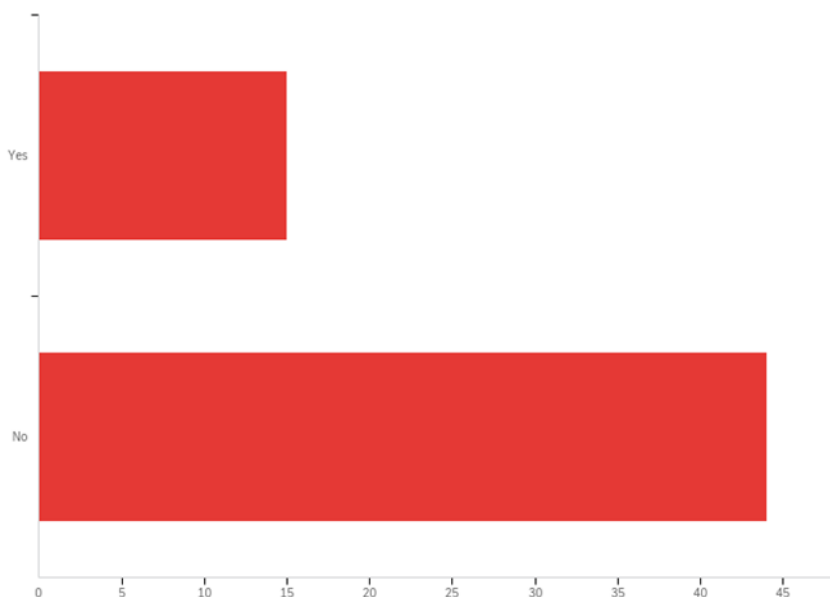
*Have you had difficulty finding childcare for children 5 or under during the pandemic?*



Nearly one-third of LMI respondents reported facing childcare difficulties, and 53 percent continue to struggle to find childcare. Seventy-one percent of respondents report bearing additional expenses related to childcare and school schedules. Internet access and quality is only a mild concern.

Three-quarters of respondents ate out less than before the pandemic, and 52 percent do not anticipate returning to pre-pandemic levels of dining. Similarly, while 90 percent of respondents experienced some travel disruption, only 70 percent plan to reschedule those trips.

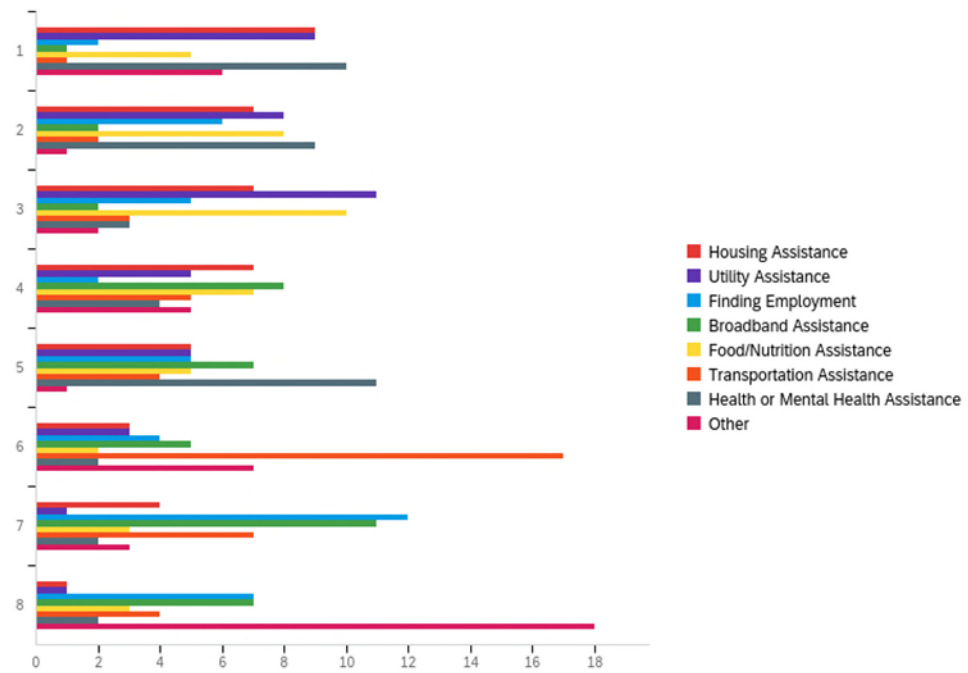
*Have you or your family gone out to eat or ordered takeout as often as before the pandemic?*



Forty-one percent of LMI residents do not feel that they have adequate mental health services and three-quarters are still dealing with the impacts of COVID-19.

The mean rankings of priorities do not vary much from the general population, with Utility Assistance, Housing Assistance, and Food/Nutrition Assistance all rated highly. This correlates strongly with the difficulties previously identified.

### Program Investment Priority Rankings



## Business Survey Findings

The survey project also includes a comprehensive survey of business owners across Outagamie County. The response rate for this survey is significantly lower than the resident survey, despite a more extensive period of engagement. A total of 145 responses were received, including two Spanish-language responses. It is difficult to measure an accurate response rate as it is unclear how many businesses may have indirectly received the survey links through project partners. We know that the response rate is less than ten percent based solely on those email invitations sent directly by the project team. This is somewhat expected both given the survey period as well as the survey fatigue that many businesses have experienced in the past year. There are several reliable instruments measuring business sentiment, including the Census Bureau's Business Pulse Survey and CCRS's own COVID-19 Business and Economic Impact Survey that can be tapped to glean additional insight.

### Business Characteristics

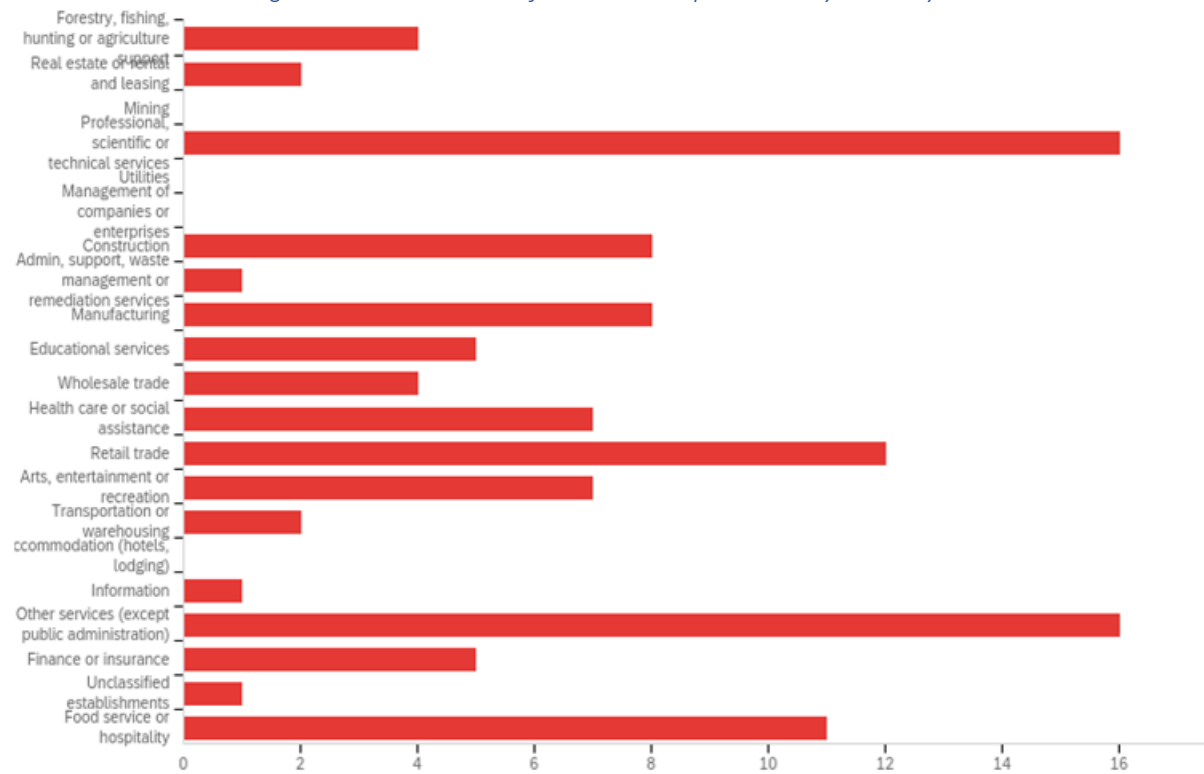
Ninety-three percent of respondents operate businesses in Outagamie County (out-of-county owners were prohibited from completing the survey).

Most respondent businesses are in the City of Appleton (56.1 percent), with other concentrations existing in the Village of Grand Chute (10 percent), Village of Greenville (5 percent), City of Kaukauna (5 percent), and Village of Hortonville (5 percent). The latter distribution can be attributed to the engagement work of the Fox West Chamber, and Heart of the Valley Chamber.

Twenty-three percent of respondents also operate facilities outside of Outagamie County. Respondents were reminded to respond to the survey in the context of their Outagamie County location.

Respondents were next asked to identify their industry sector.

*Figure 12. Distribution of Business Respondents by Industry Sector*



The chart above yields few trends other than to suggest that most industry sectors are represented in the survey panel. The industry distribution here is not representative of the county's industry composition. This distinction is important as the survey sample was neither stratified by industry nor was representation imposed as a constraint on the survey.

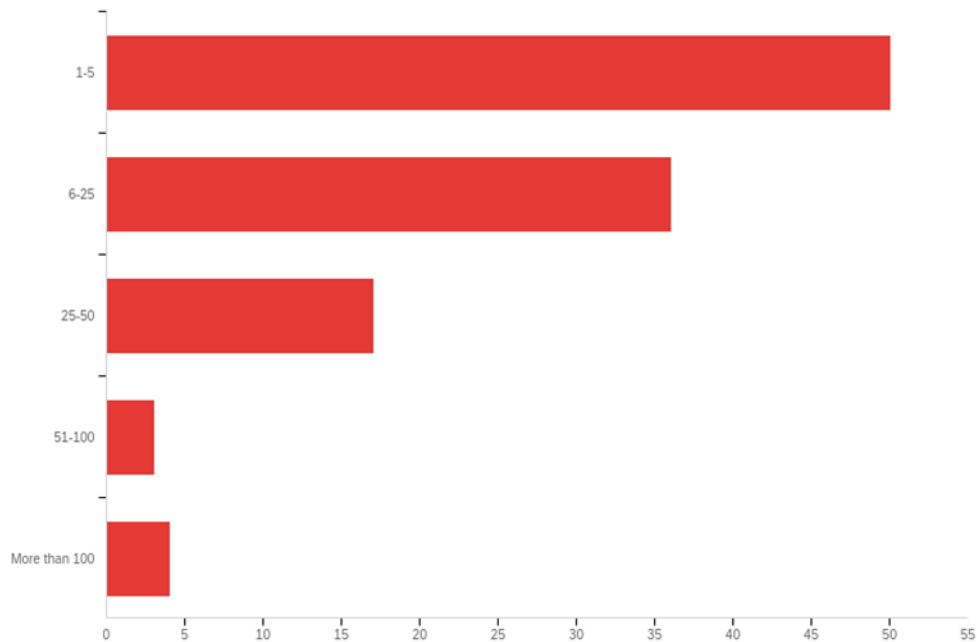
It should be noted that the survey does include strong representation by food service or hospitality and retail trade businesses, two industries acutely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. We will refer to the specific impacts on the 22 respondents in these hardest-hit sectors throughout the narrative.

Conversely, the survey panel includes relatively fewer information and manufacturing sector firms than their representation in the regional economy.



Businesses were finally stratified by employment range, as presented below.

*Figure 13. Distribution of Business Respondents by Employee Range*

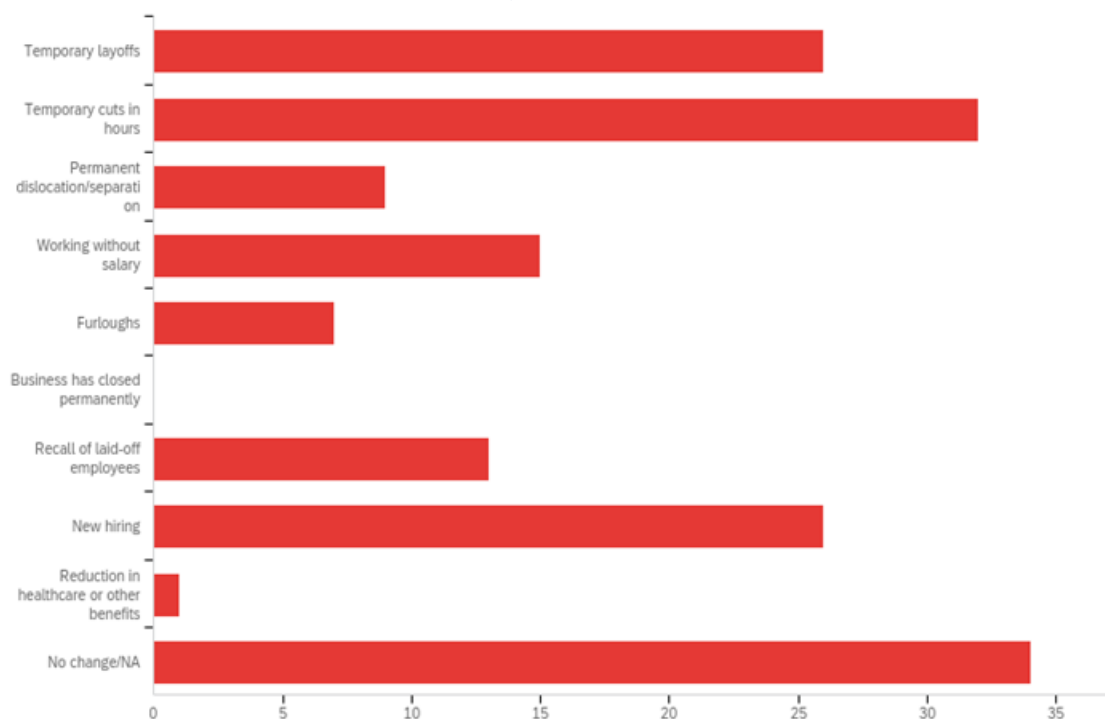


We see here that most respondents are considered small businesses, or those with fewer than fifty employees. We again know that the nation's small businesses have been most acutely impacted by the pandemic, so the responses should be more representative of businesses that have been impacted than the impact on the economy. Businesses in the food and hospitality and retail sectors are generally small, with only two respondents employing more than 50 employees.

## Workforce Effects

Respondents were next asked a series of questions regarding staffing and workforce effects. We know that the pandemic had an acute, but fleeting effect on the region's labor market, as employment and hiring levels dipped sharply in the early months of the pandemic but have largely recovered in the subsequent year.

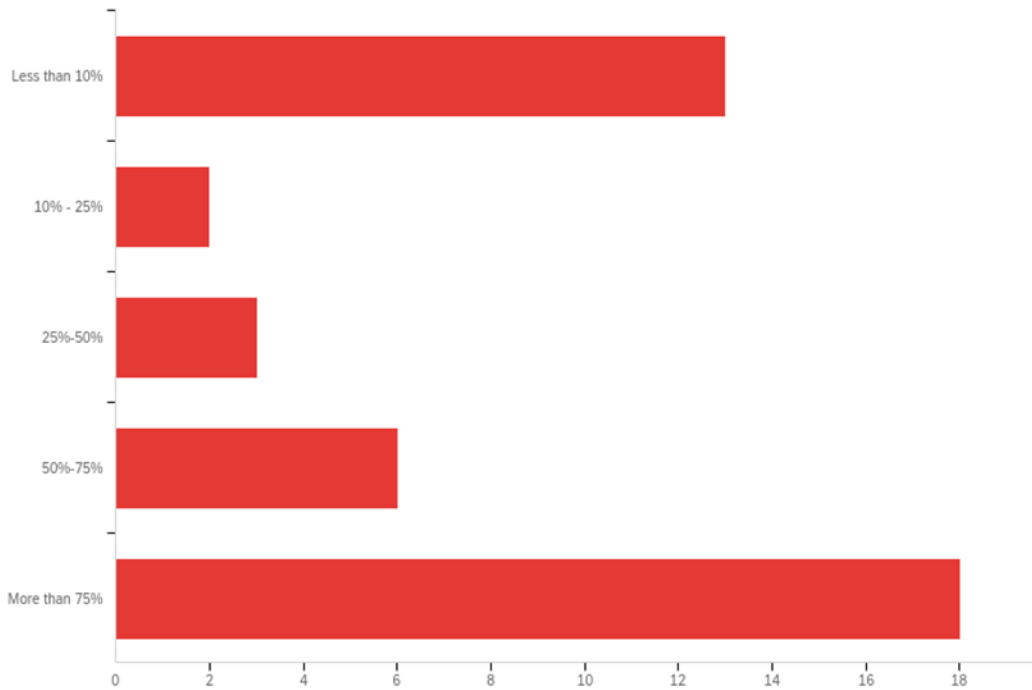
*Figure 14. How have you handled your payroll and/or workforce adjustments related to the COVID-19 pandemic?*



We first see that respondents utilized a variety of strategies over the past year to respond to public health restrictions, reduction in customers, and other market changes. Most strategies are temporary, with businesses choosing to maintain staffing levels to the greatest extent possible while reducing utilization. This includes temporary layoffs, reduction in hours, or work without pay. These strategies are the result of two key learnings about the pandemic. First, we know that most business owners have had to continuously adapt to the pandemic because of the uncertainty of its degree and duration. Second, businesses experienced acute labor shortages before the pandemic. As such, most businesses decided to keep staff both as a moral imperative as well as to ensure that staff would remain after the pandemic had passed.

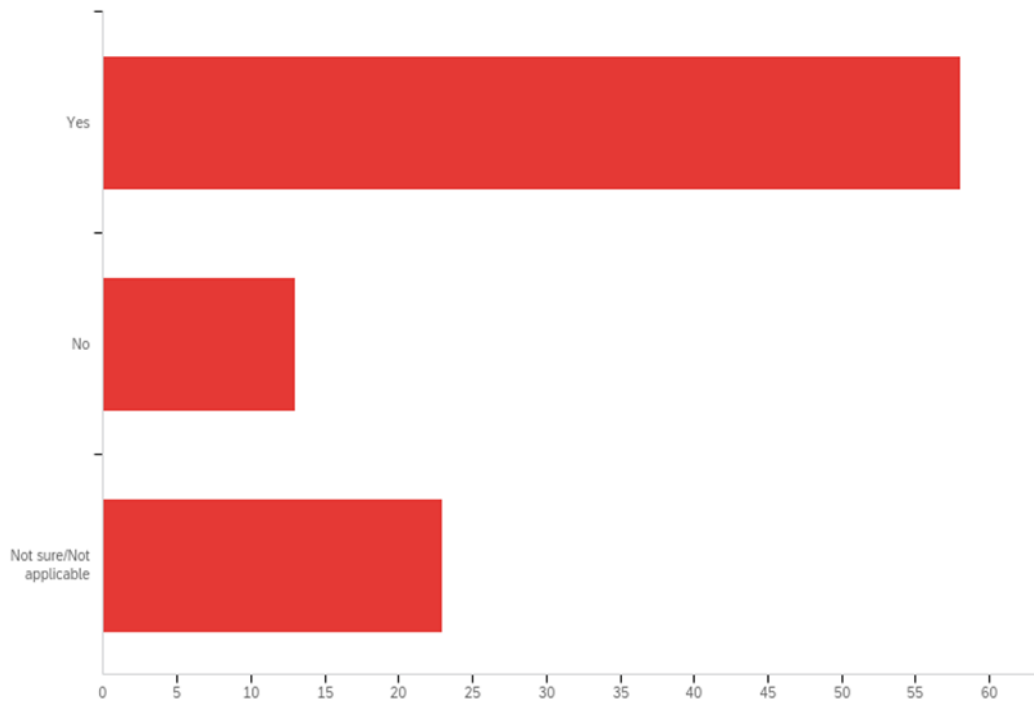
Strategies used in the most vulnerable industries are equally diverse, though retail employers were slightly more likely to reduce their operating hours than to layoff staff where food and hospitality businesses tried to keep operating hours as close to normal given the nature of their business.

*Figure 15. If you needed to lay off any workers because of the COVID-19 pandemic, what percent of employees have been recalled as of June 1, 2021?*



The chart above tells a more complex and nuanced story. First, we see that most businesses that laid off workers during the pandemic have recalled at least half of that staff. What is equally interesting is those businesses that have recalled fewer than a quarter of those employees. It is unclear as to who many of those staff have been permanently let go by their employer and how many found other jobs during their layoffs. This disparity has come to light in recent months as national surveys have identified at least a quarter of all employees that have expressed some interest in changing jobs because of the pandemic.

Figure 16. Have you had trouble finding qualified applicants in the past six months?



The chart above provides some additional nuance to this story. Sixty-two percent of respondents report having trouble finding applicants. This rate is likely higher across all employers given the large number of openings currently in the market and recent media coverage of labor shortages. This is again expected to ease somewhat in the next several months as schools return to in-person instruction. Still, we should expect a competitive labor market to exist for the next several years as the economy recovers.

We know that hiring needs are especially acute in the food and hospitality and retail trade sectors. Sixty-three percent of these firms report hiring difficulty where a slightly lower share (14 percent) are not actively hiring.

### Company Financial Health

Respondents were next asked to provide context regarding the current state of their balance sheet. Several monthly surveys have documented significant inventory and income losses among businesses throughout the pandemic. Other businesses have thrived due to increasing demands for their products and services. In general, the immediate recovery has been punctuated by supply shortages, increasing prices and wage pressures.

Figure 17. Comparing 2021 to 2020, are your company's revenues?

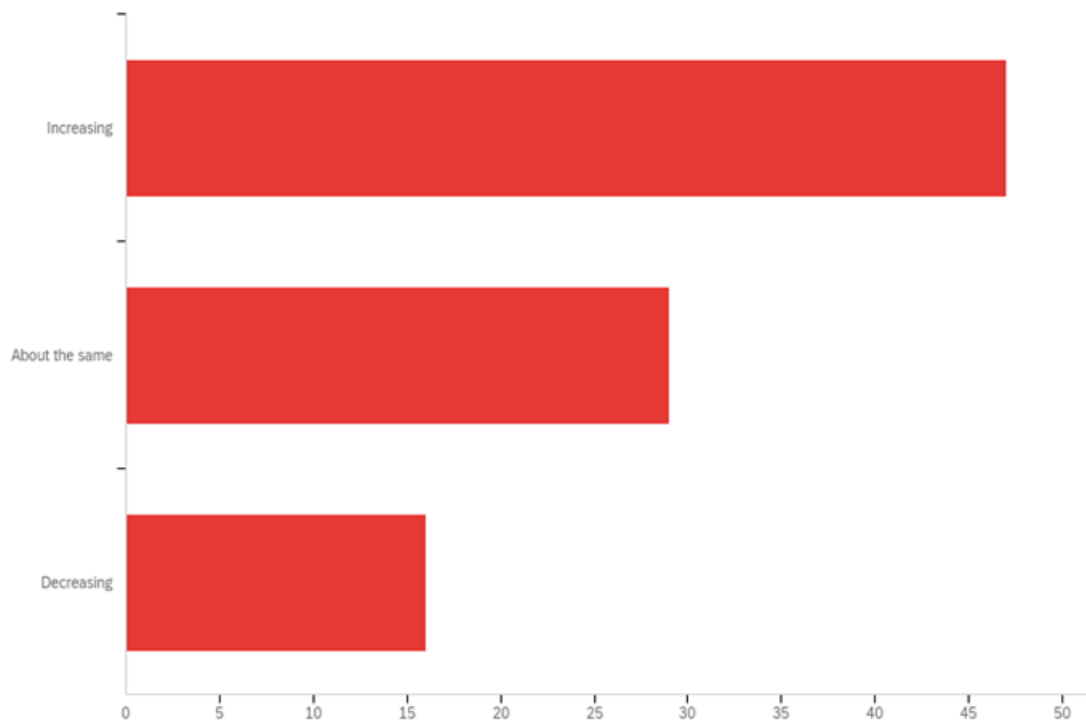
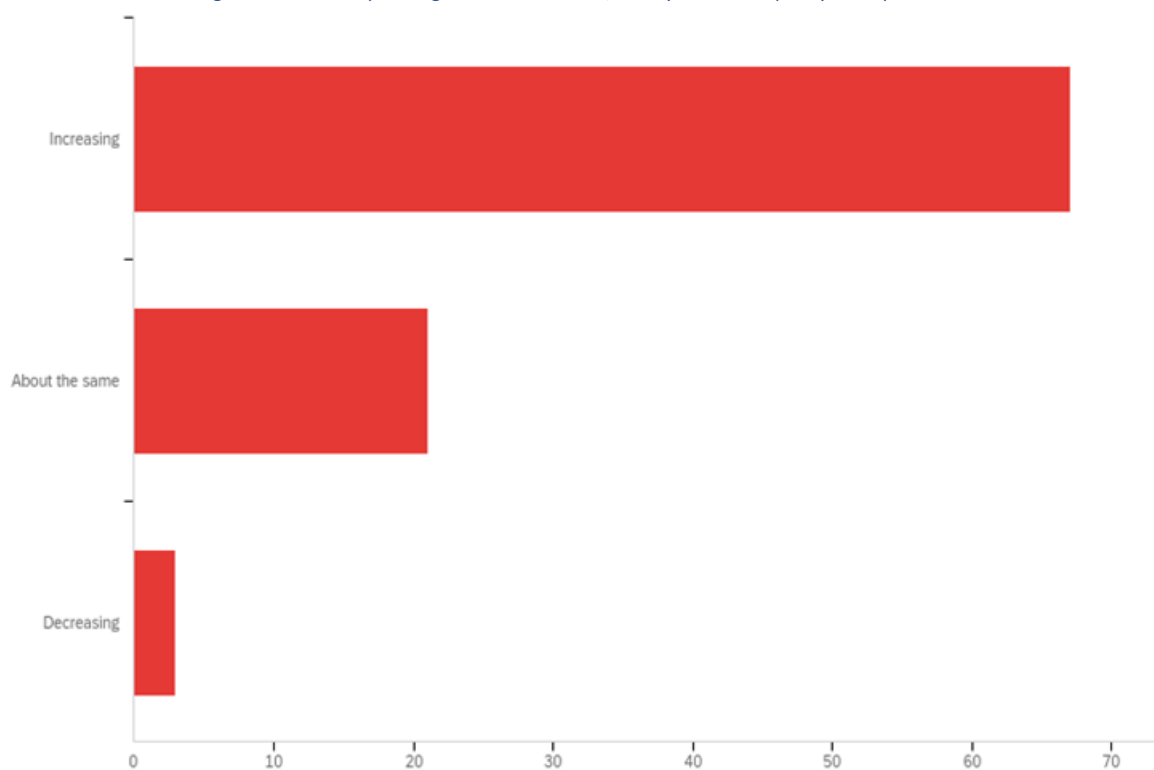


Figure 18. Comparing 2021 to 2020, are your company's expenses?

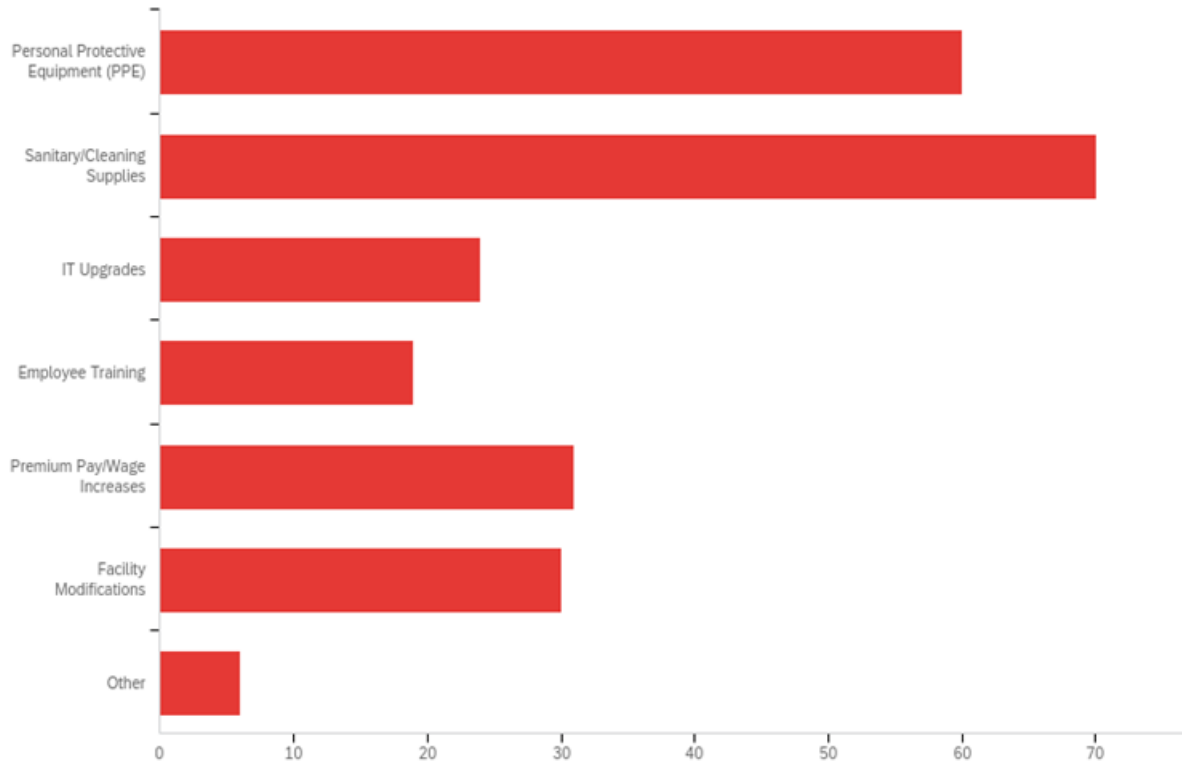


The two charts show a consistent story. Most businesses expect their incomes to increase over last year. A larger majority have noticed increasing expenses through material costs or constrained supplies. This

disparity means that some businesses are experiencing net losses despite increasing income where others are experience losses due to increasing costs and stable income.

Food and hospitality and retail trade firms are more likely to experience both increasing incomes due to expanded hours and increased customer contact and increasing expenses, including labor and supplies costs.

*Figure 19. Did your company have to invest in any of the following because of the COVID 19 virus?*



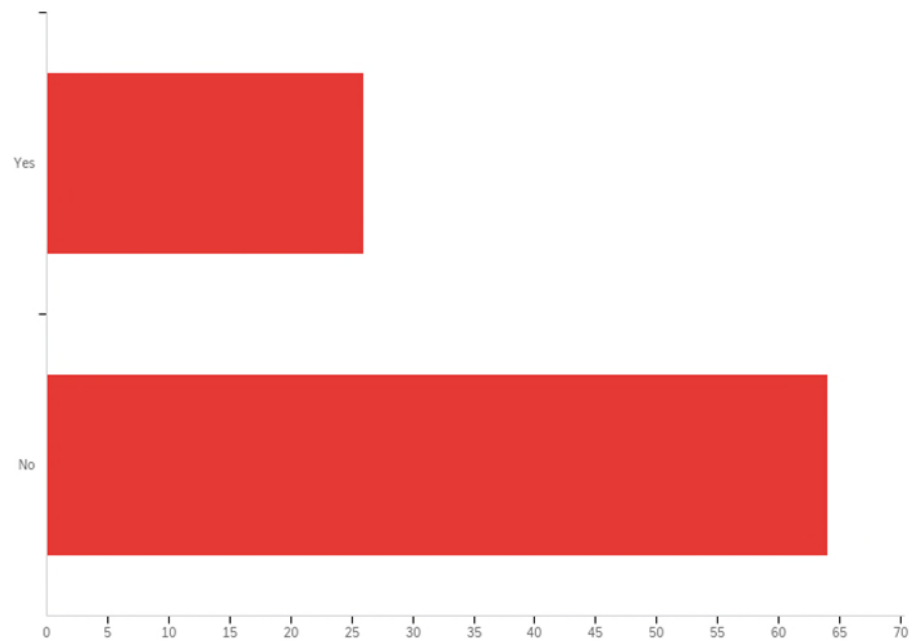
The chart above further contextualizes this story. We see that most (85 percent) of respondents invested in at least one modification because of the pandemic, with 57 percent investing in three or more of these categories. Many of these, including PPE and facility modifications may be considered temporary where others, such as IT upgrades may have long-lasting benefits. As such, not all expenses are equal, and businesses do not consider many of these among the economic losses of the pandemic.

Expenses borne by Food and Hospitality and Retail Trade businesses do not differ significantly, though fewer (10 percent) firms invested in IT upgrades. This includes e-commerce and delivery services. We know that adoption of these services locally lagged national trends both because of the long-term nature of these investments. Firms in these sectors also reported concerns regarding their ability to maintain staffing to support these operations after the pandemic.

## Broadband Access, Quality, and Remote Work

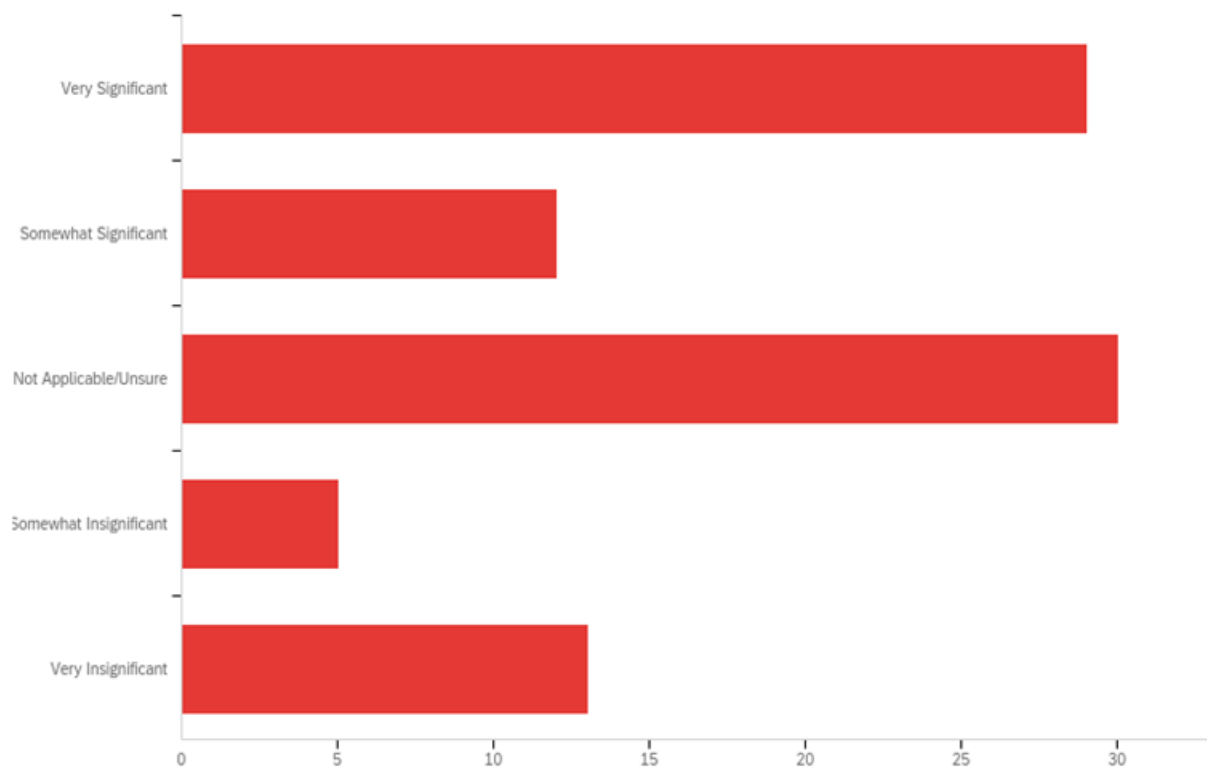
Respondent businesses were next asked to provide feedback on the availability and importance of broadband internet to their business and employees. Broadband expansion has emerged as a policy priority both in the state and nationally over the last several years and the pandemic has illustrated several disparities.

*Figure 20. Have any limitations in your broadband service (i.e. speed, access, pricing, etc.) limited your ability to adapt to the challenges of the past year?*



We first see that 29 percent of respondent businesses cite limitations in broadband as a barrier to adapting to the past year. This finding is interesting given the relatively low rate of adoption of online services, such as e-commerce or delivery services among small businesses in the region compared to national trends. Part of this disparity can be explained by a relatively more conservative business posture among most small businesses. The other can be attributed to the broadband challenges highlighted here.

*Figure 21. Looking at the prospect of working from home in the past year and in the future, how significant do you believe that access to broadband services is to your employees' ability to successfully work from home?*

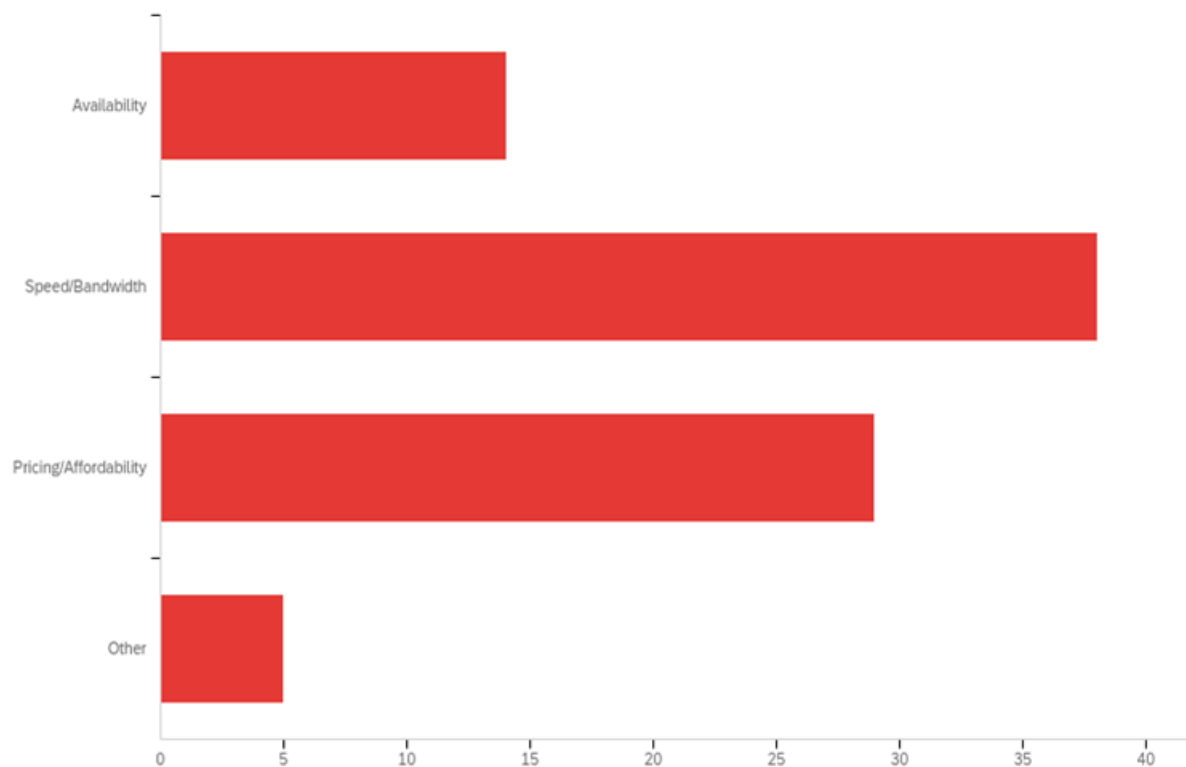


We next see that there is some difference of agreement among businesses as to the importance of broadband to their employees with most suggesting that it is a significant factor in remote working. One possible explanation for this disparity is ambivalence about the value or importance of remote working. Most businesses in the region are either fully back to work or never implemented remote working throughout the pandemic.

Firms in the Food and Hospitality and Retail Trade sectors were more likely to regard remote work as having no impact or little to no significance due to the nature of their work. Few of these firms worked remotely over the past year with management generally among the few that could.



Figure 22. If broadband access is a barrier for your company or employees, what are the most common issues?



This discussion furthers in considering what issues may exist for firms and their employees. Speed is the most significant issue, though pricing and availability are also important concerns. Several studies are currently underway to assess broadband quality and identify gaps throughout the region. This response confirms the need for further research.

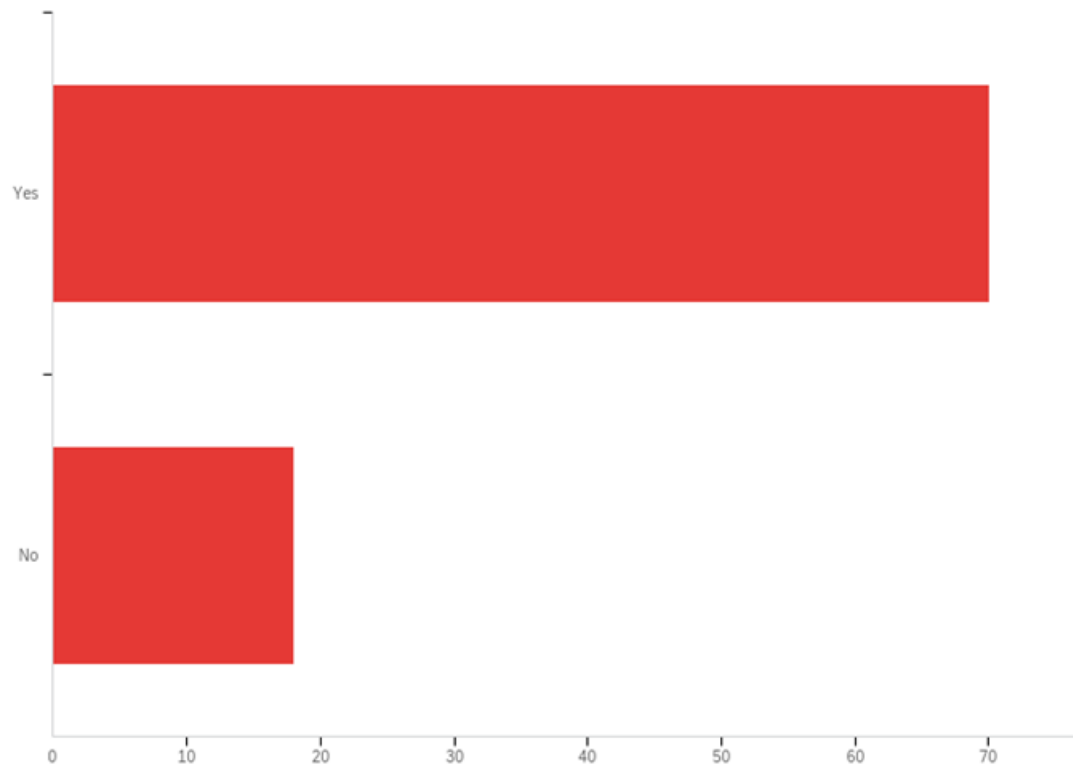
Similarly, the results of this set of questions runs somewhat contradictory to the findings in the residential survey, where a wide majority of respondents reported having adequate broadband access.

## Financial Assistance

Business respondents were next asked about their experience accessing any of the pandemic-related financial assistance programs, such as the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL), We're All In grants, and several others.

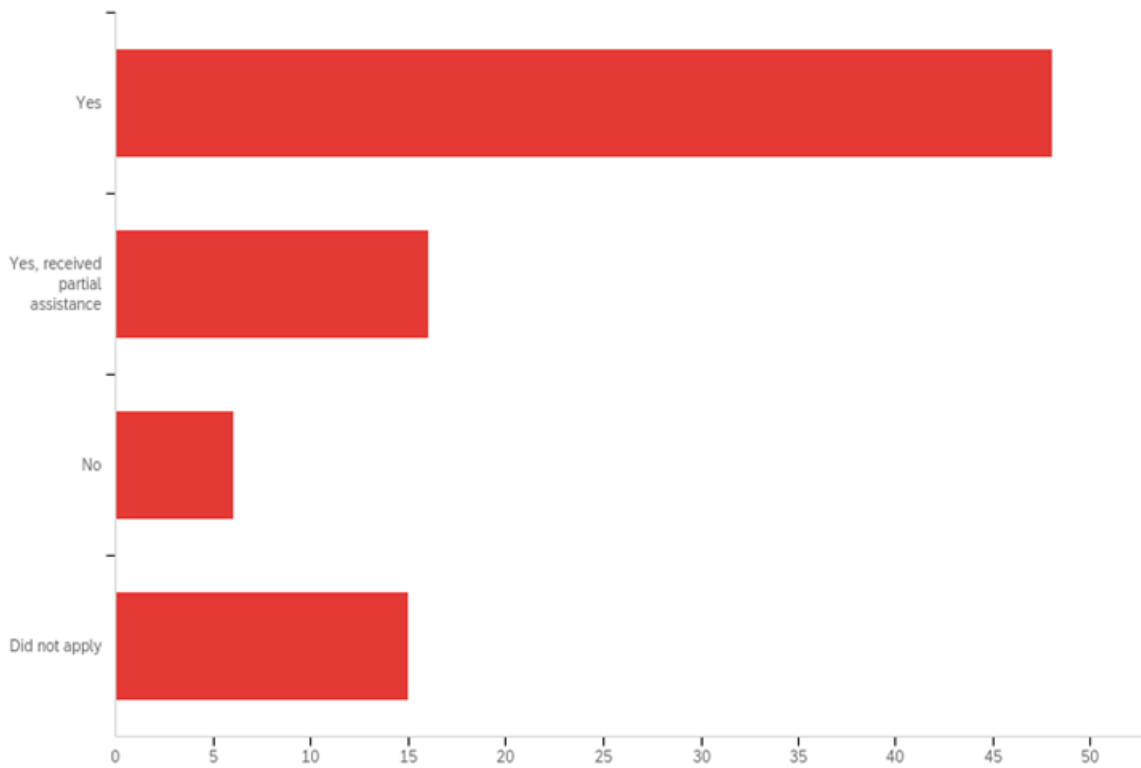
Respondents were first asked whether they applied for assistance in the past year. They were also asked to assess their success in securing funding.

*Figure 23. Did you seek any financial assistance for your pandemic-related business needs (PPP, SBA loans, etc.) over the past year?*



We see first that nearly eighty percent of respondent businesses pursued some type of assistance. The survey did not ask respondents to identify which type of assistance they pursued. This distinction is important as some awards were competitive where others, such as several WEDC grants were awarded on basic eligibility.

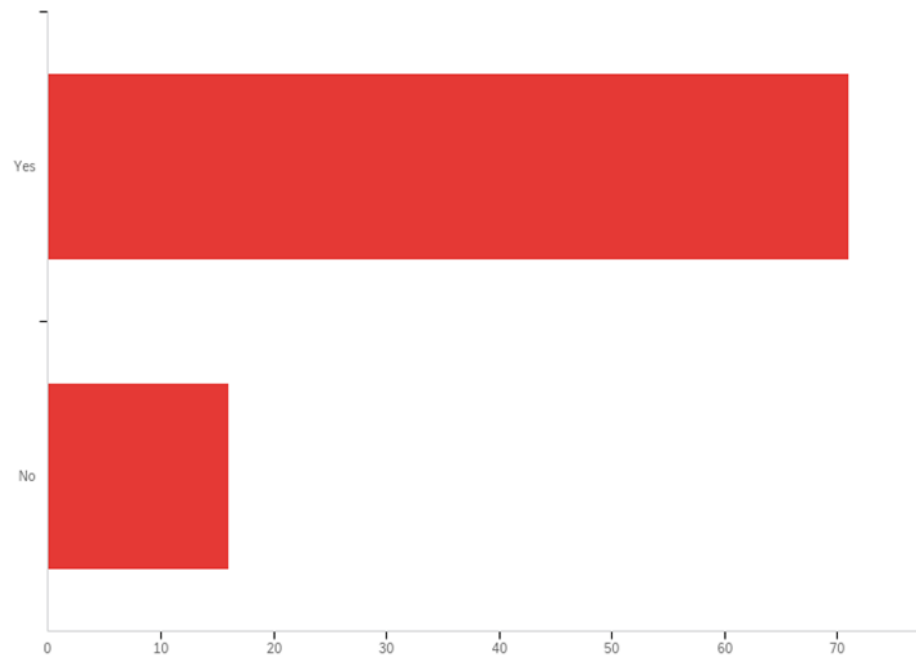
Figure 24. Were you able to receive that assistance?



Next, we see that most respondents that applied for assistance received it. What is especially interesting is the fifteen businesses that received partial assistance. We know that most of the federal loan programs authorized by CARES, APRA, and other legislation allow for partial awards though few surveys distinguish between full and partial awardees. It would be interesting to explore this group further to understand why they received partial assistance.

Similar application rates are found in the Food and Hospitality and Retail Trade sectors with 80 percent seeking assistance, but only 45 percent receiving assistance. An additional quarter of applicants received partial assistance, though firms in these sectors may have been eligible for different types of assistance than other industry sectors, increasing the likelihood of partial awards.

*Figure 25. Do you feel that you had access to adequate information about available assistance, eligibility, and how to apply for pandemic-related business recovery programs?*

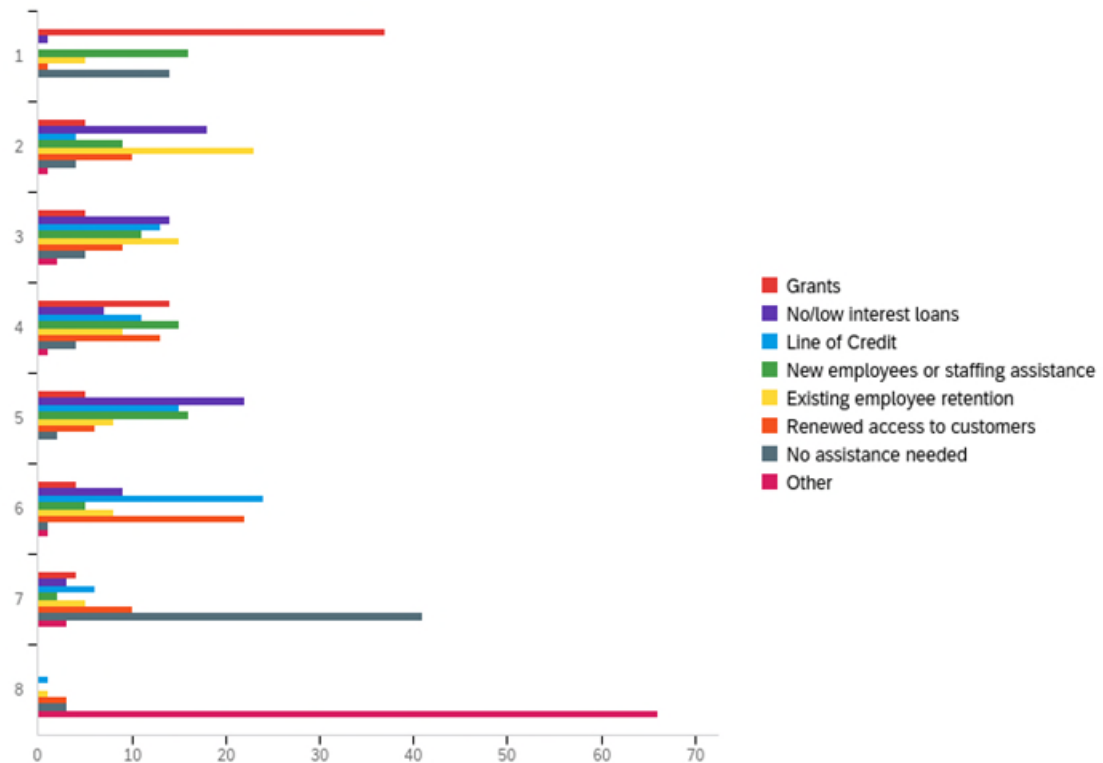


Respondents were finally asked whether they received adequate information about available assistance and eligibility. Most respondents felt they had adequate information. However, it is important to note that only around 65 percent of respondents answered this question, suggesting that others either did not seek assistance or were not aware that any was available. Information gaps have been cited as significant barriers to capital access among underrepresented businesses, for example.

## Program Investment Priority Rankings

Finally, respondents were also asked to rank a variety of programs and investment presented by the client for consideration.

Figure 26. Program Investment Priority Rankings



We again see that each of the proposed programs received at least some support. Further, we see that most businesses need some support since the “no assistance needed” option was lowly rated. Similarly, few businesses offered other suggestions.

We see that both grants, and no/low interest loans are highly rated. This strongly correlates with the monthly findings of our own survey.

In addition to requesting grants and no/low interest loans, respondents in the Food and Hospitality and Retail Trade sectors also rated staffing assistance and access to customers as high priorities.

*Figure 27. Program Investment Priority Mean Rankings*

#	FIELD	MEAN
1	Grants	2.64
4	New employees or staffing assistance	3.39
5	Existing employee retention	3.55
2	No/low interest loans	3.95
6	Renewed access to customers	4.81
3	Line of Credit	4.86
7	No assistance needed	5.14
8	Other	7.66

The sorted mean scores presented in the table above further clarifies the ranking. Staffing assistance for new and existing employees is also highly rated along with direct financial assistance. This correlates with the staffing issues that surfaced earlier in the survey. This ranking again raises questions of attribution since several organizations within the region operate programs in these areas. Similarly, several federal and state programs also exist. As such, the county should consider whether to invest in existing capacity or develop new programs.

## Conclusion and Findings

The surveys, when considered as a whole present a county that has experienced profound effects from the COVID-19 pandemic. Residents and businesses have proven to be tremendously resilient in adapting to these challenges, but the pandemic has highlighted several core inequities in areas such as broadband access and childcare. As the region emerges from the pandemic, it is important for the County and other leaders to consider investments that will provide lasting value beyond the immediate impacts of the pandemic.

Similarly, the pandemic amplified the labor shortages that businesses experienced before the pandemic. This is unlikely to change soon and is again critical to the region's economic recovery. Residents and businesses crave some sense of certainty as they emerge from the pandemic. Leadership will be vital in directing resources to strengthen core areas and spur new investment.

## Women & Minority-Owned Businesses Trends & COVID-19 Impacts



According to the Metropolitan Policy Program approximately 50% of all small businesses, 4 million +/- establishments, face immediate or near term risk due the pandemic. While in the last decade women and minority businesses have increased in numbers, size and economic structure a disproportionate number are at higher risk due to the COVID pandemic. For a recent comparison the recession of 2002 indicated that 60% of non-minority businesses stayed in operation from 2002 to 2011. In the same timeframe only 49% of minority businesses survived. A similar gap existed during the recession for women owned businesses. COVID-19 has had a similar impact on businesses as the recession of 2002-2011 and therefore an equally pronounced impact on women and minority owned business.

Research conducted by various groups indicated businesses owned by low to moderate income individuals (in general) and women and minorities are at greater risk from the COVID pandemic due to, in part, the following scenarios:

- Businesses are more likely to use home equity loans to support business operations.
- There is a greater use of credit cards resulting in higher interest rates and lower credit scores.
- Businesses are more apt to be located in low rent areas lacking traffic or exposure, deteriorated facilities in need of repair, or higher crime/code enforcement districts.
- Business may be locked into an un-favorable or inflexible lease agreement.
- The recession of 2002-2011 hit manufacturing and construction the hardest while COVID-19 is impacting the food, retail, and hospitality industry the hardest. The latter businesses favor minority and female owned businesses.
- At risk businesses have fewer long term banking relationships.
- According to the Federal Reserve Bank prior to COVID at risk businesses, largely women and minority owned, had lower profit margins, lower credit scores, and more likely to use retained earnings.
- Some businesses require translation services to access local and federal programs and in some cases to counter long standing customs carried over from the old Country.
- Businesses lack access to training, entrepreneurial programs, or legal assistance.
- Inflation will impact certain businesses more than others.

Specific and accurate pandemic-related business data for Outagamie County is not available as there is a lag in reporting with the State & Federal agencies on the number of women and minority owned business closures. However looking forward, efforts such as those listed below, could be targeted for low income, women, and minority owned businesses.

- Short term liquidity in the form of grants, 0% loans, or forgivable loans. It should be noted Outagamie County has already implemented/partnered in two grant programs open to all eligible businesses – one for PPE reimbursement; another in partnership with Calumet County, administered by WWBIC (Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation), which targeted Veterans, women and minority-owned businesses but was available to all businesses.

- Access to legal advice and professional assistance to work with financial institutions and landlords.
- Work with financial institutions to restructure at risk loans by providing a guaranteed loan program. This could be further targeted to reduce credit card debt.
- Create unique marketing tools to promote women and minority owned businesses.
- Where applicable, provide translation services and/or cultural education.
- Support childcare, health care and mental health needs through financial assistance, support groups or promoting existing programs.
- Finance the participation in entrepreneurial training programs, such as the Fox Valley Technical College's E-seed Express: Entrepreneurship training. The cost per attendee is approximately \$300.00 (2021) plus childcare cost. This could be required as part of other incentive programs.