COVID-19 BUSINESS IMPACT SURVEY RESULTS

MAY 2021

Greater Sudbury

District of Manitoulin

District of Sudbury

Prepared by:

Workforce Planning for
Sudbury & Manitoulin
Planification en main d'oeuvre

www.planningourworkforce.ca

sudbury

Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce
Chambre de commerce du Grand Sudbury

Sudbury & Manitoulin Workforce Planning
Planification en main-d'oeuvre

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements: *Project partners would like to acknowledge all employers who responded to this year's survey as well as community partners who assisted with dissemination. It is, however, also important to acknowledge and thank all employers who have made tremendous efforts to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on their business operations and their employees.*

COVID-19 BUSINESS IMPACT SURVEY - May 2021

WHY DO ANOTHER SURVEY?

Without a doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in enormous upheaval in every aspect of our lives. Many of us wrongly thought it would be over in a matter of months. None of us ever imagined or expected it to go on as long as it has and the ongoing impact that this pandemic continues to leave in its wake.

Provincially-mandated closures, strict public health guidelines and other measures were implemented to stem the tide of the pandemic and like all communities and actually all countries around the world, local businesses have been significantly impacted. Many have been required to lay-off their workforce, change their business operations and in some cases temporarily close. Undoubtedly, some will permanently close but there is no way to assess this until further research is done.

Although Statistics Canada and others were developing a national and in some cases, a provincial picture of the impact that the pandemic has had on businesses across the country, Workforce Planning for Sudbury & Manitoulin (WPSM) collaborated with the City of Greater Sudbury (Economic Development and the Regional Business Centre) and Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce to assess the impact on local businesses in Greater Sudbury, the Sudbury District and the District of Manitoulin.

In 2020, shortly after the pandemic hit, project partners conducted surveys in April, May and June 2020 to assess the more immediate impacts on local businesses. Reports for each of these survey periods can be found on the WPSM website at: www.planningourworkforce.ca.

As we all know too well, the pandemic has continued and the province has implemented various additional measures such as a regional framework to curb further spread in high risk areas, has completely closed down the province several times (with the exception of essential services) and has embarked on a slow-to-start but now robust vaccination rollout and reopening strategy. Since the pandemic began, various sources of funding have also been made available to businesses through both the provincial and federal governments in the form of wage subsidies, tax deferrals, grants and loans.

But how are local businesses coping with all of these ongoing and shifting measures? This is precisely why project partners collaborated to conduct another COVID-19 Business Impact survey one year out from the onset of the pandemic. Project partners felt it was and is critically important to hear what local businesses are saying and give them an opportunity to voice their ideas, opinions and concerns as we move forward with more local and targeted economic recovery strategy approaches.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is based on the results of the COVID-19 Business Impact survey conducted at the end of April and early May of this year (2021). While we cannot accurately compare the results to the responses from the three surveys conducted in 2020 as the same businesses may or may not have completed the survey, some common themes have emerged. Additionally, although completely anecdotal, it appears that many businesses that responded to this survey have experienced what is now known as a "new normal." Some also appear to be a bit more optimistic about viability and many have adapted their business to continue their operations…but more on that later.

LIMITATIONS

It is acknowledged that there are significant limitations to this survey and the results should be viewed as a snapshot in time by those businesses that chose or were able to respond. It is unclear how many local businesses have closed temporarily or permanently, and again, as noted, we may not know this for a period of time until further research is conducted or when business closures are identified and analyzed by Statistics Canada through their Canadian Business Counts data.

It is also important to say that in no way can this survey capture the enormous sacrifices that local businesses have made and the hardships that have been endured. The same needs to be said for the workforce that they have had to lay-off and the jobs (and lives) that have been impacted every step along the way. Some may never recover and for others it may take a long time aided by various supports that are needed.

Additionally, disseminating a survey of this nature to local businesses is challenging and project partners do not have access to a full database of ALL businesses that exist in Greater Sudbury, and the Districts of Sudbury & Manitoulin. While various strategies were used to inform local businesses about the survey, including the use of media, social media and email blasts, survey responses are not statistically representative of all businesses or industries that do exist.

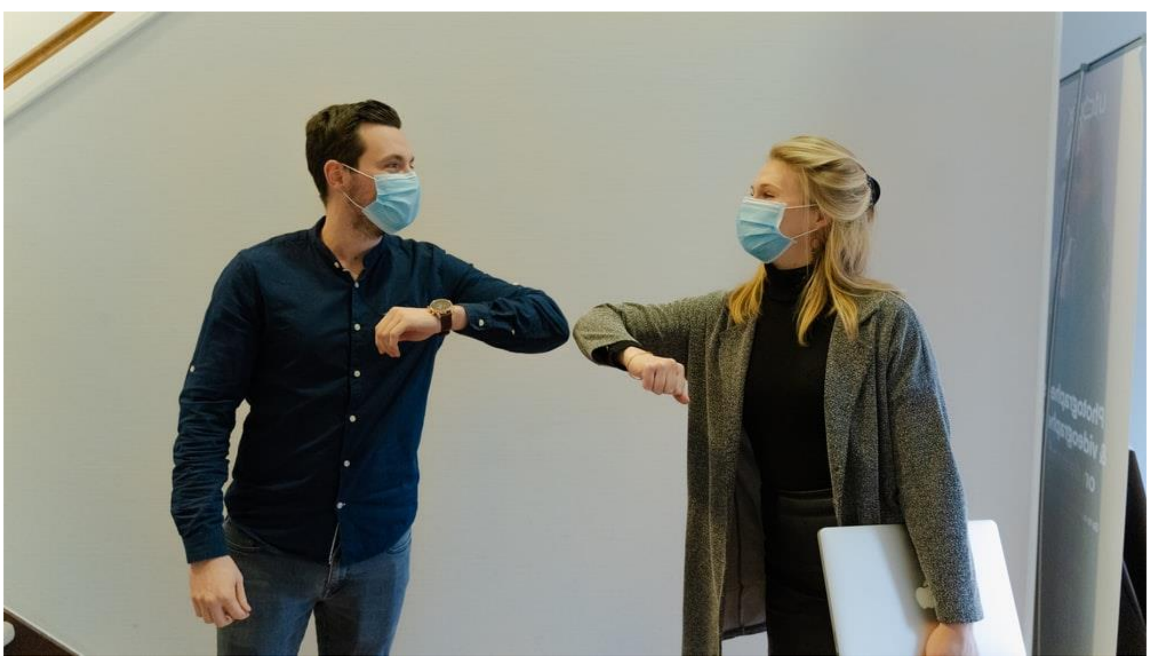
Nevertheless, the results and comments provided by respondents in this survey are vitally important; they are a snapshot of local businesses that did respond. Responses help us in our understanding of the financial burden that some have experienced; efforts to support employees despite the inevitable impact on our workforce (laid-off and hired/rehired workers); how local businesses have shifted operations in order to adapt; the immense value of technology (online sales, new websites, virtual meetings); measures that have been taken to comply with new rules; and how others have continued and sometimes expanded their operations as an essential service due to demand.

RESULTS

The results of the COVID-19 Business Impact survey 2021 are broken down in this report as follows:

1. responses from businesses in Greater Sudbury
2. responses from businesses in Manitoulin District
3. responses from bushiness in the Sudbury District
4. summary of comments by questions and themes that collectively emerged for all three areas

NOTE: not all responses add up to 100% due to multiple choice options for some questions.



GREATER SUDBURY – business responses

BUSINESS PROFILE

TYPE OF BUSINESS	% OF RESPONDENTS
Private Business – Sole Proprietor/Partnership	31%
Private Business – Corporation	45%
Public Sector/Government Agency	8%
Not-for-Profit	17%

Number of respondents to this question: 211

SECTORS BUSINESS OPERATES IN (PRIMARY AND OTHER)	PRIMARY	OTHER
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	4	9
Mining, Quarrying or Oil & Gas Extraction	17	11
Utilities	7	9
Construction	22	11
Manufacturing	19	12
Wholesale Trade	6	9
Retail Trade	34	12
Transportation and Warehousing	9	10
Information and Cultural Industries	6	10
Finance and Insurance	8	7
Real Estate and Rental & Leasing	2	11
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	24	11
Management of Companies and Enterprises	2	7
Administration & Support, Waste Management and Remediation Services	4	9
Educational Services	14	12
Healthcare and Social Assistance	22	12
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	10	11
Accommodation and Food Services	15	5
Public Administration	6	7
Other	20	12

Number of respondents to this question: 203

BUSINESS PROSPECTS

STRATEGIC RISK PANDEMIC POSES TO LONG-TERM BUSINESS PROSPECTS	% OF RESPONDENTS
High – could put us out of business	16%
Medium –going to significantly impact financials	34%
Low – may impact financially, but confident can weather the storm	38%
None (see comments section for additional responses)	12%

Number of respondents to this question: 185

PANDEMIC IMPACT ON BUSINESS	% OF RESPONDENTS
No impact	10%
Reduced hours, staff and business operations	40%
Working remotely but continuing operations	41%
Closed business temporarily	16%
Experienced an increase in business	16%
Closed business	2%

Number of respondents to this question: 183

IF BUSINESS CLOSED - PLAN TO:	% OF RESPONDENTS
Reopen	63%
Reopen but change the way you run your business	32%
Remain closed	5%

Number of respondents to this question: 94

REMAINED OPEN - ADJUSTMENTS TO BUSINESS OPERATIONS	% OF RESPONDENTS
Storefront is operating with reduced hours	15%
Storefront is closed but taking telephone orders	17%
Storefront is closed but operating online	20%
Expanded operations	7%
Extended business hours	2%
Created a new website (order taking, e-commerce, online services)	9%
New client/customer services (curbside pick-up, take-out, delivery)	26%
N/A	48%

Number of respondents to this question: 179

ADDITIONAL IMPACTS/MEASURES EXPERIENCED	% OF RESPONDENTS
Interruptions to supply chain	52%
Have had to cancel/delay contracts	34%
Had contracts cancelled/delayed	40%
Cancelled/postponed fundraising events (non-profits)	20%
Decreased sales (or donations if non-profit)	47%
Restricted spending	50%
Increased consumer demand for certain items	19%
Increased cleaning and sanitation in office/facility	71%
Increased operational costs (IT services, security, screening, PPEs)	60%
Increased infrastructure costs (barriers/partitions, support social distancing)	45%
(see comments section for additional responses)	

Number of respondents to this question: 176

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

SIZE OF WORKFORCE PRIOR TO MANDATED CLOSURES (MARCH 2020)	% OF RESPONDENTS
No employees	6%
1 – 9	42%
10 – 19	15%
20 - 49	15%
50 – 99	8%
100 or more	13%

Number of respondents to this question: 170

# OF EMPLOYEES LAID OFF SINCE MARCH 2020 DUE TO COVID-19	
Full-time	586
Part-time	398
Seasonal	197
Contract	227
TOTAL REPORTED BY REPONDENTS	1,408

Number of respondents to this question: 125

# OF EMPLOYEES REHIRED/HIRED SINCE MARCH 2020	
Full-time	282
Part-time	125
Seasonal	119
Contract	96
TOTAL REPORTED BY RESPONDENTS	622

Number of respondents to this question: 117

OTHER EFFORTS TO MINIMIZE IMPACT ON WORKFORCE	% OF RESPONDENTS
Educated employees (virus symptoms, risks, prevention)	76%
Staggered employee work hours	30%
Required employees to work from home	43%
Asked employees to use vacation, sick or personal days; deferred layoffs	15%
Continued to pay wages to employees that were off work for quarantine or illness	27%
Closed our business temporarily; not paying employees during closure	12%
Informed employees of government assistance programs	38%
Implemented new COVID-19 policies for employees (signage, screening, sanitization)	73%
N/A (0 employees or self-employed)	12%
(see comments section for additional responses)	

Number of respondents to this question: 165

WHEN RESTRICTIONS LIFT, WHERE WILL YOUR EMPLOYEES WORK?	% OF RESPONDENTS
Ask everyone to return to working in the office/store/business location	26%
Ask only a percentage of workers to return	10%
Be flexible and continue to allow staff to work from home	28%
Stagger days in/out to reduce number of staff in at any one time	17%
N/A	40%

Number of respondents to this question: 156

GOVERNMENT FUNDING PROGRAMS

WILL CURRENT FEDERAL OR PROVINCIAL COVID-19 RELATED FUNDING BENEFIT YOUR BUSINESS?	% OF RESPONDENTS
Yes	57%
No, unable to take on more debt	8%
No, do not qualify	24%
Unsure	17%

Number of respondents to this question: 160

BUSINESSES THAT HAVE ACCESSED/PLAN TO ACCESS THESE FUNDS	% OF RESPONDENTS
Northern Ontario Recovery Program	17%
Ontario Small Business Support Grant	32%
Ontario Main Street Relief Grant	5%
Property Tax and Energy Cost Rebate Grants	13%
COVID-19 Energy Assistance Program Small Business (CEAP-SB)	8%
Regional Relief and Recovery Fund (RRRF)	9%
Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS)	54%
Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy (CERS)	22%
Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA)	35%
Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA)	8%
Highly Affected Sectors Credit Availability Program (HASCAP)	3%
Business Credit Availability Program (BCAP)	3%
Canada Recovery Benefit	7%
(see comments section for additional responses)	14%

Number of respondents to this question: 125

SATISFACTION WITH PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT'S PANDEMIC RESPONSE	% OF RESPONDENTS
Yes	26%
No	51%
Unsure	23%
(see comments section for additional responses)	

Number of respondents to this question: 157

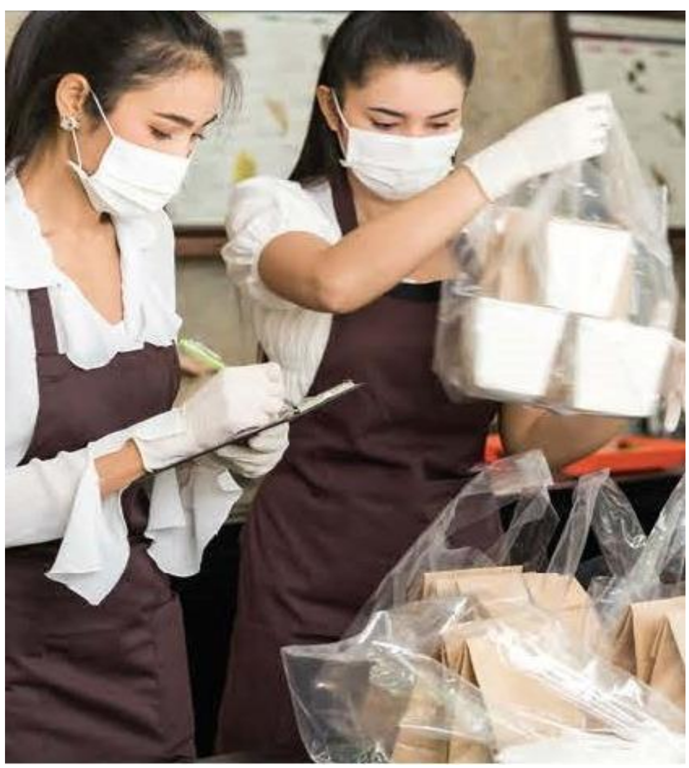
FINANCIAL IMPACT TO BUSINESS AND PROJECTED VIABILITY

REVENUE DECLINE SINCE BEGINNING OF PANDEMIC (MARCH 2020)	% OF RESPONDENTS
Less than 10 percent	9%
10 to 20 percent	12%
21 to 30 percent	16%
31 to 40 percent	12%
41 to 50 percent	7%
51 to 60 percent	5%
61 to 70 percent	3%
71 to 80 percent	7%
81 to 90 percent	3%
91 to 100 percent	5%
N/A (not lost money during the pandemic)	21%

Number of respondents to this question: 146

PROJECTED VIABILITY	% OF RESPONDENTS
Remain viable and in business	58%
Continue to operate with additional adjustments due to lower revenues	24%
Can manage for another 3 months	5%
Can manage for another 6 months	5%
Can manage for another 12 months	3%
Not be able to remain in business if this goes on much longer	5%

Number of respondents to this question: 150



MANITOULIN DISTRICT - business responses

BUSINESS PROFILE

TYPE OF BUSINESS	% OF RESPONDENTS
Private Business – Sole Proprietor/Partnership	38%
Private Business – Corporation	39%
Public Sector/Government Agency	16%
Not-for-Profit	7%

Number of respondents to this question: 74

SECTORS BUSINESS OPERATES IN (PRIMARY AND OTHER)	PRIMARY	OTHER
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	3	3
Mining, Quarrying or Oil & Gas Extraction	0	1
Utilities	0	2
Construction	2	1
Manufacturing	1	1
Wholesale Trade	0	1
Retail Trade	16	4
Transportation and Warehousing	4	1
Information and Cultural Industries	0	2
Finance and Insurance	2	0
Real Estate and Rental & Leasing	4	0
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	2	0
Management of Companies and Enterprises	0	0
Administration & Support, Waste Management and Remediation Services	0	4
Educational Services	2	2
Healthcare and Social Assistance	2	2
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	5	3
Accommodation and Food Services	23	2
Public Administration	5	1
Other	6	2

Number of respondents to this question: 73

BUSINESS PROSPECTS

STRATEGIC RISK PANDEMIC POSES TO LONG-TERM BUSINESS PROSPECTS	% OF RESPONDENTS
High – could put us out of business	21%
Medium –going to significantly impact financials	39%
Low – may impact financially, but confident can weather the storm	30%
None (see comments section for additional responses)	10%

Number of respondents to this question: 70

PANDEMIC IMPACT ON BUSINESS	% OF RESPONDENTS
No impact	6%
Reduced hours, staff and business operations	47%
Working remotely but continuing operations	25%
Closed business temporarily	34%
Experienced an increase in business	18%
Closed business	6%

Number of respondents to this question: 68

IF BUSINESS CLOSED - PLAN TO:	% OF RESPONDENTS
Reopen	55%
Reopen but change the way you run your business	38%
Remain closed	7%

Number of respondents to this question: 42

REMAINED OPEN - ADJUSTMENTS TO BUSINESS OPERATIONS	% OF RESPONDENTS
Storefront is operating with reduced hours	20%
Storefront is closed but taking telephone orders	17%
Storefront is closed but operating online	14%
Expanded operations	7%
Extended business hours	3%
Created a new website (order taking, e-commerce, online services)	13%
New client/customer services (curbside pick-up, take-out, delivery)	26%
N/A	54%

Number of respondents to this question: 69

ADDITIONAL IMPACTS/MEASURES EXPERIENCED	% OF RESPONDENTS
Interruptions to supply chain	57%
Have had to cancel/delay contracts	39%
Had contracts cancelled/delayed	33%
Cancelled/postponed fundraising events (non-profits)	21%
Decreased sales (or donations if non-profit)	43%
Restricted spending	55%
Increased consumer demand for certain items	21%
Increased cleaning and sanitation in office/facility	79%
Increased operational costs (IT services, security, screening, PPEs)	66%
Increased infrastructure costs (barriers/partitions, support social distancing)	55%
(see comments section for additional responses)	

Number of respondents to this question: 67

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

SIZE OF WORKFORCE PRIOR TO MANDATED CLOSURES (MARCH 2020)	% OF RESPONDENTS
No employees	15%
1 – 9	59%
10 – 19	6%
20 - 49	15%
50 – 99	3%
100 or more	2%

Number of respondents to this question: 66

# OF EMPLOYEES LAID OFF SINCE MARCH 2020 DUE TO COVID-19	
Full-time	66
Part-time	45
Seasonal	85
Contract	1
TOTAL REPORTED BY REPONDENTS	197

Number of respondents to this question: 45

# OF EMPLOYEES REHIRED/HIRED SINCE MARCH 2020	
Full-time	17
Part-time	7
Seasonal	23
Contract	10
TOTAL REPORTED BY RESPONDENTS	57

Number of respondents to this question: 39

OTHER EFFORTS TO MINIMIZE IMPACT ON WORKFORCE	% OF RESPONDENTS
Educated employees (virus symptoms, risks, prevention)	68%
Staggered employee work hours	24%
Required employees to work from home	27%
Asked employees to use vacation, sick or personal days; deferred layoffs	8%
Continued to pay wages to employees that were off work for quarantine or illness	15%
Closed our business temporarily; not paying employees during closure	13%
Informed employees of government assistance programs	29%
Implemented new COVID-19 policies for employees (signage, screening, sanitization)	65%
N/A (0 employees or self-employed)	18%
(see comments section for additional responses)	

Number of respondents to this question: 62

WHEN RESTRICTIONS LIFT, WHERE WILL YOUR EMPLOYEES WORK?	% OF RESPONDENTS
Ask everyone to return to working in the office/store/business location	20%
Ask only a percentage of workers to return	7%
Be flexible and continue to allow staff to work from home	18%
Stagger days in/out to reduce number of staff in at any one time	10%
N/A	61%

Number of respondents to this question: 61

GOVERNMENT FUNDING PROGRAMS

WILL CURRENT FEDERAL OR PROVINCIAL COVID-19 RELATED FUNDING BENEFIT YOUR BUSINESS?	% OF RESPONDENTS
Yes	46%
No, unable to take on more debt	10%
No, do not qualify	27%
Unsure	22%

Number of respondents to this question: 63

BUSINESSES THAT HAVE ACCESSED/PLAN TO ACCESS THESE FUNDS	% OF RESPONDENTS
Northern Ontario Recovery Program	32%
Ontario Small Business Support Grant	44%
Ontario Main Street Relief Grant	17%
Property Tax and Energy Cost Rebate Grants	32%
COVID-19 Energy Assistance Program Small Business (CEAP-SB)	5%
Regional Relief and Recovery Fund (RRRF)	12%
Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS)	39%
Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy (CERS)	10%
Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA)	42%
Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA)	7%
Highly Affected Sectors Credit Availability Program (HASCAP)	0%
Business Credit Availability Program (BCAP)	0%
Canada Recovery Benefit	7%
(see comments section for additional responses)	17%

Number of respondents to this question: 41

SATISFACTION WITH PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT'S PANDEMIC RESPONSE	% OF RESPONDENTS
Yes	24%
No	43%
Unsure	33%
(see comments section for additional responses)	

Number of respondents to this question: 63

FINANCIAL IMPACT TO BUSINESS AND PROJECTED VIABILITY

REVENUE DECLINE SINCE BEGINNING OF PANDEMIC (MARCH 2020)	% OF RESPONDENTS
Less than 10 percent	5%
10 to 20 percent	16%
21 to 30 percent	16%
31 to 40 percent	4%
41 to 50 percent	9%
51 to 60 percent	7%
61 to 70 percent	0%
71 to 80 percent	2%
81 to 90 percent	4%
91 to 100 percent	9%
N/A (not lost money during the pandemic)	27%

Number of respondents to this question: 55

PROJECTED VIABILITY	% OF RESPONDENTS
Remain viable and in business	42%
Continue to operate with additional adjustments due to lower revenues	30%
Can manage for another 3 months	9%
Can manage for another 6 months	5%
Can manage for another 12 months	5%
Not be able to remain in business if this goes on much longer	9%

Number of respondents to this question: 57

SUDBURY DISTRICT- business responses

BUSINESS PROFILE

TYPE OF BUSINESS	% OF RESPONDENTS
Private Business – Sole Proprietor/Partnership	30%
Private Business – Corporation	45%
Public Sector/Government Agency	19%
Not-for-Profit	6%

Number of respondents to this question: 64

SECTORS BUSINESS OPERATES IN (PRIMARY AND OTHER)	PRIMARY	OTHER
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	2	7
Mining, Quarrying or Oil & Gas Extraction	2	3
Utilities	0	1
Construction	9	4
Manufacturing	1	2
Wholesale Trade	1	2
Retail Trade	9	2
Transportation and Warehousing	1	2
Information and Cultural Industries	1	2
Finance and Insurance	1	2
Real Estate and Rental & Leasing	2	3
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	6	1
Management of Companies and Enterprises	0	1
Administration & Support, Waste Management and Remediation Services	3	3
Educational Services	4	3
Healthcare and Social Assistance	7	3
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	1	5
Accommodation and Food Services	9	3
Public Administration	5	2
Other	17	

Number of respondents to this question: 57

BUSINESS PROSPECTS

STRATEGIC RISK PANDEMIC POSES TO LONG-TERM BUSINESS PROSPECTS	% OF RESPONDENTS
High – could put us out of business	18%
Medium –going to significantly impact financials	25%
Low – may impact financially, but confident can weather the storm	48%
None (see comments section for additional responses)	9%

Number of respondents to this question: 56

PANDEMIC IMPACT ON BUSINESS	% OF RESPONDENTS
No impact	9%
Reduced hours, staff and business operations	47%
Working remotely but continuing operations	35%
Closed business temporarily	16%
Experienced an increase in business	22%
Closed business	4%

Number of respondents to this question: 55

IF BUSINESS CLOSED - PLAN TO:	% OF RESPONDENTS
Reopen	59%
Reopen but change the way you run your business	41%
Remain closed	0%

Number of respondents to this question: 27

REMAINED OPEN - ADJUSTMENTS TO BUSINESS OPERATIONS	% OF RESPONDENTS
Storefront is operating with reduced hours	13%
Storefront is closed but taking telephone orders	13%
Storefront is closed but operating online	15%
Expanded operations	2%
Extended business hours	0%
Created a new website (order taking, e-commerce, online services)	6%
New client/customer services (curbside pick-up, take-out, delivery)	17%
N/A	56%

Number of respondents to this question: 54

ADDITIONAL IMPACTS/MEASURES EXPERIENCED	% OF RESPONDENTS
Interruptions to supply chain	58%
Have had to cancel/delay contracts	40%
Had contracts cancelled/delayed	49%
Cancelled/postponed fundraising events (non-profits)	16%
Decreased sales (or donations if non-profit)	33%
Restricted spending	47%
Increased consumer demand for certain items	22%
Increased cleaning and sanitation in office/facility	75%
Increased operational costs (IT services, security, screening, PPEs)	69%
Increased infrastructure costs (barriers/partitions, support social distancing)	56%
(see comments section for additional responses)	

Number of respondents to this question: 55

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

SIZE OF WORKFORCE PRIOR TO MANDATED CLOSURES (MARCH 2020)	% OF RESPONDENTS
No employees	15%
1 – 9	27%
10 – 19	21%
20 - 49	23%
50 – 99	4%
100 or more	10%

Number of respondents to this question: 52

# OF EMPLOYEES LAID OFF SINCE MARCH 2020 DUE TO COVID-19	
Full-time	95
Part-time	33
Seasonal	57
Contract	7
TOTAL REPORTED BY REPONDENTS	192

Number of respondents to this question: 38

# OF EMPLOYEES REHIRED/HIRED SINCE MARCH 2020	
Full-time	76
Part-time	29
Seasonal	27
Contract	4
TOTAL REPORTED BY RESPONDENTS	136

Number of respondents to this question: 33

OTHER EFFORTS TO MINIMIZE IMPACT ON WORKFORCE	% OF RESPONDENTS
Educated employees (virus symptoms, risks, prevention)	82%
Staggered employee work hours	24%
Required employees to work from home	38%
Asked employees to use vacation, sick or personal days; deferred layoffs	16%
Continued to pay wages to employees that were off work for quarantine or illness	18%
Closed our business temporarily; not paying employees during closure	8%
Informed employees of government assistance programs	36%
Implemented new COVID-19 policies for employees (signage, screening, sanitization)	78%
N/A (0 employees or self-employed)	12%
(see comments section for additional responses)	

Number of respondents to this question: 50

WHEN RESTRICTIONS LIFT, WHERE WILL YOUR EMPLOYEES WORK?	% OF RESPONDENTS
Ask everyone to return to working in the office/store/business location	37%
Ask only a percentage of workers to return	4%
Be flexible and continue to allow staff to work from home	20%
Stagger days in/out to reduce number of staff in at any one time	17%
N/A	48%

Number of respondents to this question: 46

GOVERNMENT FUNDING PROGRAMS

WILL CURRENT FEDERAL OR PROVINCIAL COVID-19 RELATED FUNDING BENEFIT YOUR BUSINESS?	% OF RESPONDENTS
Yes	45%
No, unable to take on more debt	16%
No, do not qualify	20%
Unsure	24%

Number of respondents to this question: 49

BUSINESSES THAT HAVE ACCESSED/PLAN TO ACCESS THESE FUNDS	% OF RESPONDENTS
Northern Ontario Recovery Program	22%
Ontario Small Business Support Grant	41%
Ontario Main Street Relief Grant	8%
Property Tax and Energy Cost Rebate Grants	22%
COVID-19 Energy Assistance Program Small Business (CEAP-SB)	14%
Regional Relief and Recovery Fund (RRRF)	0%
Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS)	49%
Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy (CERS)	14%
Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA)	43%
Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA)	5%
Highly Affected Sectors Credit Availability Program (HASCAP)	0%
Business Credit Availability Program (BCAP)	0%
Canada Recovery Benefit	3%
(see comments section for additional responses)	27%

Number of respondents to this question: 37

SATISFACTION WITH PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT'S PANDEMIC RESPONSE	% OF RESPONDENTS
Yes	23%
No	51%
Unsure	26%
(see comments section for additional responses)	

Number of respondents to this question: 47

FINANCIAL IMPACT TO BUSINESS AND PROJECTED VIABILITY

REVENUE DECLINE SINCE BEGINNING OF PANDEMIC (MARCH 2020)	% OF RESPONDENTS
Less than 10 percent	0%
10 to 20 percent	17%
21 to 30 percent	22%
31 to 40 percent	12%
41 to 50 percent	7%
51 to 60 percent	7%
61 to 70 percent	2%
71 to 80 percent	5%
81 to 90 percent	0%
91 to 100 percent	2%
N/A (not lost money during the pandemic)	24%

Number of respondents to this question: 41

PROJECTED VIABILITY	% OF RESPONDENTS
Remain viable and in business	49%
Continue to operate with additional adjustments due to lower revenues	31%
Can manage for another 3 months	4%
Can manage for another 6 months	4%
Can manage for another 12 months	2%
Not be able to remain in business if this goes on much longer	9%

Number of respondents to this question: 45

SUMMARY OF RESPONDENT COMMENTS

Various questions in this survey were open-ended, allowing respondents to provide additional comments regarding activities and impact on their business as well as their thoughts about provincially mandated pandemic measures and economic recovery. Where possible, comments for each question were also grouped into themes. Last, for this section only, responses from Greater Sudbury, the Manitoulin District and the Sudbury District were combined as they were, for the most part, relatively consistent across all three areas.

QUESTION: What additional measures/costs have you experienced?

In addition to the categories provided, just over 40 respondents commented on various other measures and costs that have been experienced such as:

- decreased revenue (loss of sales; fees; spoilage of product) reported by various industry sectors
- increased costs (materials; technology; infrastructure; PPEs; extra supplies to work from home; training staff to use new technology; delays in shipments)
- revenue loss due to cancelled events, workshops, labs, exams, travel bookings
- closure of municipal facilities and recreational programs
- increased mental health strain
- increased stress related to childcare (for employees; availability/work hours; staff scheduling)
- positive/negative impact of home offices (some want to remain in home office, while others don't for various reasons)
- financing delays – impact on start-ups
- harm to physical health (suspended medical appointments; unable to see all patients with other health problems at height of pandemic; overdose deaths in homeless population; rippling impact of PTSD; elderly delaying essential treatments and supports)
- loss of volunteers, placements and stewardship opportunities
- screen time overload (home and school) – reduced interest in online lessons
- specific industries identified (travel, tourism, personal care services)
- hospitality industry reported shorter stays and lack of respect by domestic travellers
- pandemic quarantine requirements – employee not allowed to go to work for 14 days
- finding/attracting employees (pandemic-related negative image of Long Term Care homes)
- ongoing frustration, uncertainty and fear of being able to attract business/clients back due to on again/off again mandatory closures
- challenges working with international clients and those living abroad

QUESTION: Has your business pursued any new or innovative products/services in response to the COVID-19 crisis?

Just over 100 respondents provided comments to this question even though some of the prompts listed in this question had already been identified. Responses included the following themes:

CHANGES IN TECHNOLOGY:

- new or strengthened web presence
- phone-based applications
- improved technology
- virtual tours

ONLINE SERVICES:

- online shopping, stores and sales
- online promotions
- e-commerce, e-signatures, electronic consent forms
- use of social media
- reduced handling of cash
- online program delivery, training, “help” services, and mental health supports

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE:

- installation of barriers/partitions
- increased cleaning/sanitization
- implementation of physical distancing requirements
- signage

NEW BUSINESS MODEL:

- outreach to increase business presence and sales
- curbside pickup and delivery
- meal contracts with local businesses
- special menu pricing
- diversification of specialty products being offered
- delivering essential supports to those in need (food bank donations/bags; groceries; clothing; toiletries; etc.)

QUESTION: What else have you tried to do to minimize the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on your workforce?

A handful of respondents commented on other things they are doing to minimize the impact on their workforce. The majority focussed on providing flexibility to their employees as follows:

- accommodate staff who have children or grandchildren at home (especially single mothers)
- allow staff to be laid off if they so choose
- provide options to work at home and limit the number of staff in the office
- flexible scheduling
- restructured roles, job descriptions, streamlined operations
- time off for required COVID-19 testing, vaccinations and isolation; some paid sick days; implementation of COVID-19 leave
- increased supports as needed (i.e. transportation)
- increased PPEs and staff education
- transitioned from using part-time seasonal employees to offer more full time jobs
- use of government assistance (wage and rent subsidies)

QUESTION: What would you like your local community to do to assist at this time in managing the COVID-19 crisis?

This question generated comments from almost 130 respondents. Although responses cannot be compared to the three Business Impact surveys conducted in 2020, the themes that emerged for this survey for this question are quite similar as follows:

- more respondents asked that people follow the public health guidelines (masks, social distancing, stay at home), be patient and get vaccinated

- a handful of respondents clearly expressed their anger and frustration; they wanted the government to stop the restrictions and allow businesses to stay open yet others felt that current capacity restrictions need to be enforced better
- “support local” emerged as a theme and many respondents asked that government embark on a free “shop local” marketing campaign to support local businesses
- communication continues to be a key factor and once again, centralized and open communication by government officials was deemed as crucial
- questions were raised in Greater Sudbury as to why the city is increasing taxes when there is such a strong need to support small local businesses, address financial hardships, increase mental health and addiction services and address the needs of the homeless population downtown. Some felt municipal fees and taxes should be reduced at this time to help support economic recovery and help the community
- some felt travel restrictions should be lifted yet others want government to enforce regional restrictions to prevent those with COVID-19 coming north for needed medical treatment (i.e. those being transported to ICUs in northern hospitals) or simply to shop/travel/visit
- small businesses said they have been overwhelmed by lengthy government funding applications (which they feel should be shortened) along with slow turnaround times. They are also frustrated that they do not hear about funding supports in a timely fashion, nor do they qualify for some of the current financial supports being offered by government to other businesses

QUESTION: Are you satisfied with how the provincial government has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic over the past few months?

This question generated answers from 110 respondents but included more than 150 comments. While 25% felt satisfied with the provincial government’s response, another 25% were unsure and the remaining 50% were not. Most of the comments in this section focussed on what should have been done better from their perspective.

The main theme that stood out (reported by just under half of respondents) targeted the provincial government. Respondents expressed concerns about the following sub-themes:

- some wanted more vigilance by the government and said that they acted too slow re: infection control, stay at home orders, PPEs, vaccination rollout
- others felt there should be less political “opinion” and to stop half measures
- a number of respondents said there was not enough enforcement of public health guidelines
- various respondents said that there should be increased supports for small businesses and some felt that sick pay should be mandated along with hazard pay
- it was also mentioned that the province/country should invest in self-sufficiency (i.e. research and development for vaccines) and not be reliant on others

Other comments:

- some respondents said there should have been travel restrictions (international, domestic, hot zones) and regional considerations (leave north open and do not send those who are ill to “clean” areas)
- others expressed frustration and in some cases anger that businesses were mandated to close and a small number felt there should be no more lockdowns
- the vaccination roll-out was noted a number of times as follows: poor roll-out; too slow; poor communication; need for a more focussed vaccine strategy; and the importance of working better with the federal government

- addressing the impact on mental health came up a number of times
- it was noted that small businesses require additional supports to address financial hardships as some do not qualify for current supports and those that do are finding the process lengthy and cumbersome as noted earlier
- several industry sectors (aviation, environment, non-profit, education, seasonal businesses such as tourism, personal care services, etc.) that have been hit hard with closures self-identified as needing extra supports
- as with the previous surveys, a number of respondents want everyone, including government to follow the science and the medical community though not all agreed

OBSERVATIONS

Although the intent of this survey was to capture the responses of local businesses one year out from the onset of the pandemic, overall, responses were similar to the surveys conducted in 2020 and many of the same themes emerged. More respondents did provide comments but again these themes were fairly consistent with previous surveys. Themes included: following the science/public health guidelines; supporting shop local campaigns; and improving communications and business supports. On the opposite end of the scale, as expected, a much smaller number of respondents voiced their concerns about mandated closures and rejected the need to follow a public health strategy.

While no one knows how long this pandemic will continue and/or how new variants will impact us in the near future, most respondents felt the vaccination roll-out was an important strategy albeit they commented that initial implementation was far too slow. Again however, it is important to say that not everyone agrees that vaccinations are the answer – and a very small number of respondents voiced their opinion in this regard.

Respondents to this survey were also marginally more optimistic about business viability, but part of this might simply be indicative of their adjustment to a new norm. While the speed, implementation and use of technology, and changing operational models to do business point to this adjustment, some would argue that some of this was already happening; COVID-19 simply ramped everything up for faster implementation. A good example of this would be online shopping and ordering which was already being thrust into our daily lives and most notably, our shopping habits.

Additionally, although stated earlier, it will be years before we can fully understand and assess the impact that COVID-19 has and will continue to have on every aspect of our lives, including the world of work. Already we are seeing employers and employees rethink their physical work environment in ways that were unimaginable in 2019. Even in this small survey, some employers are considering whether or not they will have all of their employees return to work in the office or offer flexible options such as a hybrid version between home and office once the pandemic is over. To carry this a step further, if employers allow staff to work from home, how will this impact on local businesses that rely on commercial rentals and space for these businesses as well as all of the subsidiary businesses that rely on people, vehicular traffic and use of public transportation? This includes restaurants, event centres, gas stations, car rentals, hotels, clothing stores for business apparel...the list is endless! Although some workplaces are not able to offer these kinds of options given the nature of their business, this was unthinkable in the past and again the pandemic has changed all of this.

While this survey did not focus on the employee, other surveys and anecdotal reports are showing that many employees are now rethinking their home-life-work balance. Some are even quitting their job to embark on a new career that will allow them the option to work from home, eliminate long commutes, live in less dense and expensive cities, reduce mental health stress and refocus on balance in their life and with their families.

At WPSM, although we have constantly reminded colleagues, stakeholders, job-seekers, industry leaders, employers, government and others that no one has a crystal ball when it comes to the world of work - COVID-19 has certainly confirmed and shown us this to be true. No one could have predicted or envisioned the impact of this pandemic. It is a wake-up call to all of us across the globe, across every industry sector and across every business to examine and re-examine how we work, where we work, how we choose to live and what jobs will exist. What impact this will have on us personally and professionally and on the future or work is still unknown and remains to be seen.

This project is funded in part by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario

Ontario