

# PANDEMIC RESPONSE & RECOVERY PLAN

for the West Michigan Shoreline Economic Development District

June 2022



Regional Development Commission



The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC) is a regional council of governments representing 127 local governments in the West Michigan counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, and northern Ottawa.

The mission of WMSRDC is to promote and foster regional development in West Michigan... through cooperation amongst local governments and regional partners.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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  - Jodi Nichols, Lake County Economic Development Alliance/Oceana County Economic Alliance
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- \* 493 online survey participants

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## INTRODUCTION

In July 2020, the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC) received a \$400,000 planning grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) to help respond to the COVID-19 global pandemic within the region encompassing the counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana. The funds were made available by the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which was signed into law March 27, 2020. This grant enabled WMSRDC to accomplish many tasks during the pandemic, including workplace upgrades that allowed the agency to work remotely and efficiently; technical assistance to communities for accessing pandemic related assistance; coordination of efforts within the region to improve broadband internet access, adoption, and use; and hiring additional staff to aid in pandemic response efforts. In addition, the EDA grant allowed for the creation of this document, the WMSRDC Pandemic Response and Recovery Plan (PRRP). This plan set out to conduct short-term and long-term planning and coordination to develop an economic development disaster recovery and resiliency plan consistent with the region's approved Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The plan would highlight current needs and capacities, pandemic recovery and resiliency, regional strengths and opportunities, and economic recovery strategies.

**It is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic continued to persist and evolve at the time this document was developed and the full extent of the economic impacts of the pandemic were not yet realized. Therefore, this document should be viewed as a starting point in long-term response and recovery from the pandemic. The observations and proposed strategies of this document will be incorporated into the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) document, and will be monitored, revised, and updated as needed through the ongoing CEDS planning process.**

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this PRRP is to contribute to the region's response and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. This is not intended as a comprehensive economic resilience plan. (See Appendix A for a primer on economic resilience which provides a framework for such planning.) Rather, the plan addresses specific components of economic resilience that have been born out of recent events and ripple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lessons learned through this period may be applicable to various types of economic disruption in the future.

At the time this plan was conceptualized, there was optimism the pandemic would be under control by the time it would be completed in June 2022. Alas, the pandemic endured, and the overall narrative of the PRRP inherited a tone of adaptation in addition to the original themes of response and recovery. The plan has three objectives:

- ◆ Document impacts of the pandemic upon the local economy, including hardships and opportunities
- ◆ Provide recommendations for short term economic response and economic recovery
- ◆ Provide recommendations for future resilience to future economic disruptions

## PLANNING PROCESS

To begin, a team was assembled to oversee and contribute to the plan development. Economic development representatives from each county within the region were invited and all agreed to participate in development of the PRRP. The EDA planning grant enabled WMSRDC to award subgrants

to these organizations to help ensure participation and reimburse a portion of their contribution to the PRRP during the tumultuous circumstances of the pandemic.

The first major objective was to develop and administer an online survey to document local impacts of the pandemic. The planning team collaborated to create three surveys to specifically target households, businesses, and public/nonprofit organizations. WMSRDC utilized the SurveyMethods online platform to create the survey questionnaires and make them accessible online. Team members distributed survey links to their extensive community networks and the survey was displayed prominently on the WMSRDC website landing page. The effort culminated with nearly 500 survey responses gathered between September 2021 and November 2021. A survey summary report is included in Appendix B.

Building upon valuable insights of the survey results, the next objective was to conduct data research to identify economic impact data. This information may be useful for tracking metrics over time as the pandemic evolves, as well as for demonstrating hardships resulting from the pandemic. The final objective was to distill perspectives and strategies into a summary of challenges and opportunities presented by the pandemic, as well as a set of short-term and long-term strategies for economic resilience.

Throughout the various stages of the planning process, WMSRDC staff engaged with the PRRP planning team, the WMSRDC Board of Commissioners, and the CEDS Strategy Committee to review information, identify economic risks and opportunities presented by the pandemic, and review priorities and strategies.

## RELATIONSHIP TO THE CEDS

The PRRP should be considered a companion document to the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The process of reflecting upon the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and developing strategies for response and recovery during the PRRP planning process will contribute to the region's overall strategy for economic resilience contained within the CEDS. This document is an initial step toward enhancing economic resilience in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Information presented herein will serve as a foundation for long-term data tracking and planning for economic resilience.

## ABOUT THE CEDS

A CEDS is required by federal enabling legislation to maintain a region's eligibility for federal development assistance. WMSRDC maintains the document for the economic development district, including the counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana. The CEDS is a factbook and blueprint for the economic development of the West Michigan region, including economic development priorities, objectives, and strategies for the area.

As a part of the CEDS planning process, the WMSRDC organizes the CEDS Strategy Committee to oversee the development and implementation of the document. The committee is required to "represent the main economic interests of the region," and typically includes representatives from a variety of sectors, such as: economic development, public officials, community leaders, workforce development, higher education, minority/labor, private business, nonprofit, and education. The CEDS Strategy Committee was engaged to participate in the development of the PRRP.

## COVID-19 MILESTONES in MICHIGAN

**3/23/2020**

Governor Whitmer declares stay-at-home order

**4/02/2020**

K-12 schools closed through the end of the school year

**5/11/2020**

Manufacturing able to re-open again

**6/08/2020**

Restaurants able to reopen with COVID-19 safety rules

**6/15/2020**

Personal care business resume

**7/10/2020**

Mask mandate

**7/29/2020**

Remote work, if possible

**9/3/2020**

Gyms, pools, and organized sports resume

**12/15/2020**

Vaccination effort begins

**5/15/2021**

Gathering limits and masks required again

**6/7/2021**

Governor Whitmer rescinds emergency orders

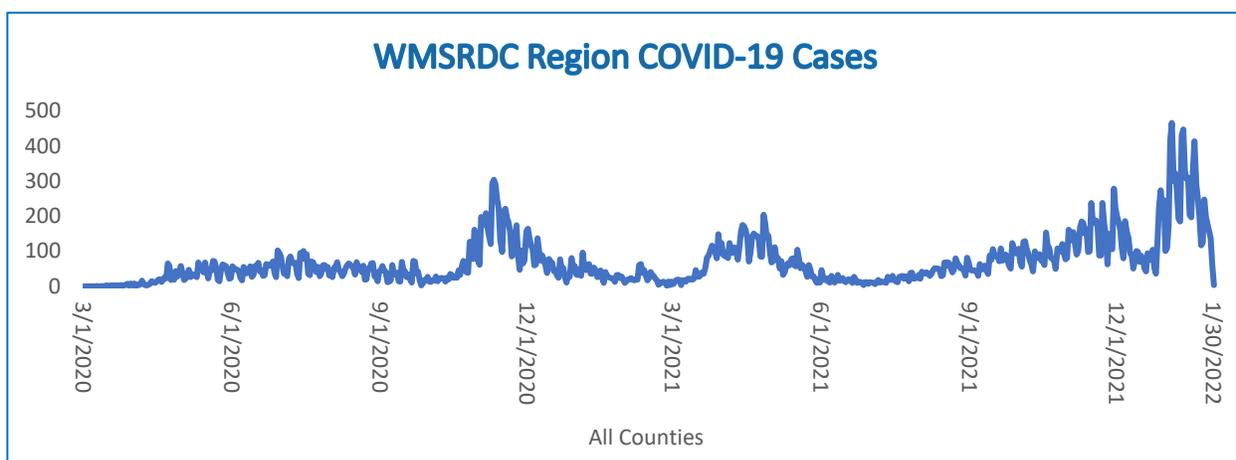
## ECONOMIC IMPACT DATA

This section outlines a selection of “best available” and baseline information, as well as resources for data and a list of pandemic indicators to be tracked going forward. This is presented to develop a fact-based awareness of economic impacts of the pandemic and serve as a foundation for tracking local impacts into the future. Doing so is intended to aid the economic recovery in the short term and foster resilient economic systems over the long term.

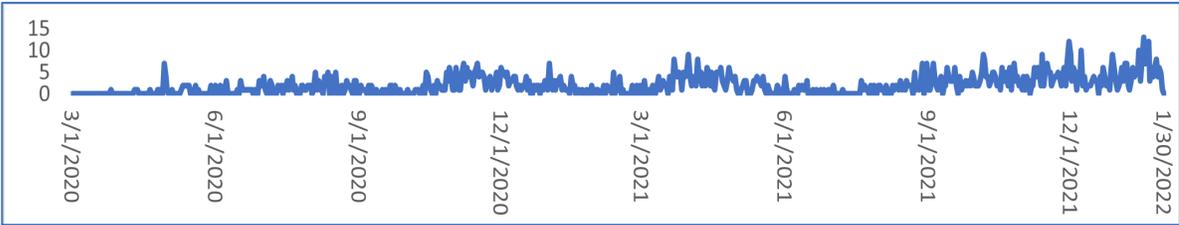
One goal of this PRRP was to document economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, so that economic development stakeholders can demonstrate hardships brought on by the pandemic and monitor the effectiveness of recovery efforts. This, however, was a challenging task for several reasons. First, the WMSRDC region, much like everywhere else, had been affected by the pandemic in many complex, interrelated, and overlapping ways, therefore making it difficult to prioritize and identify only economic impacts. Second, the pandemic was ongoing and long-term impacts will need to be monitored over time to be fully captured. Third, localized data linked to the pandemic for the period 2020-2022 was hard to come by so soon after/during the pandemic. In general, it takes time for data to be collected, processed, and released.

### COVID-19 CASES IN THE REGION

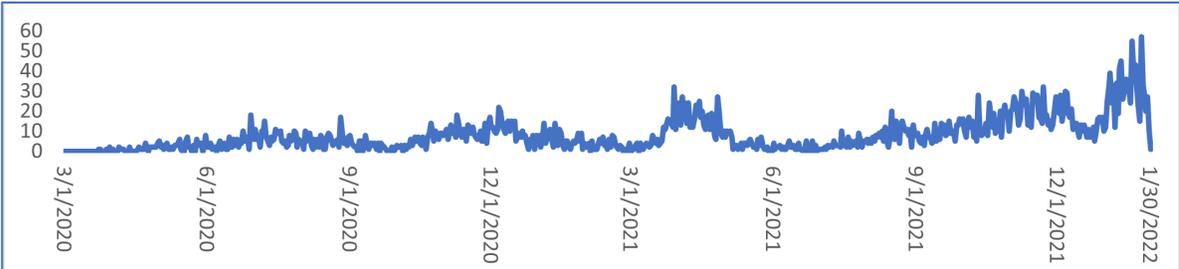
The following graphs represent the daily COVID-19 cases reported by the MDHHS from March 2020 through January 2021. The COVID-19 “waves” in each county generally coincided. Within the WMSRDC region, seasonal spikes in the number of COVID-19 cases were observed in the winter of 2020/2021 and the following spring. Overall, these COVID-19 waves have generally corresponded with national trends. One notable exception was observed in Oceana County in June-July 2020, when the county experienced a significant wave, while the other four counties did not. This is thought to have been related to migrant workers entering the area for agricultural work.



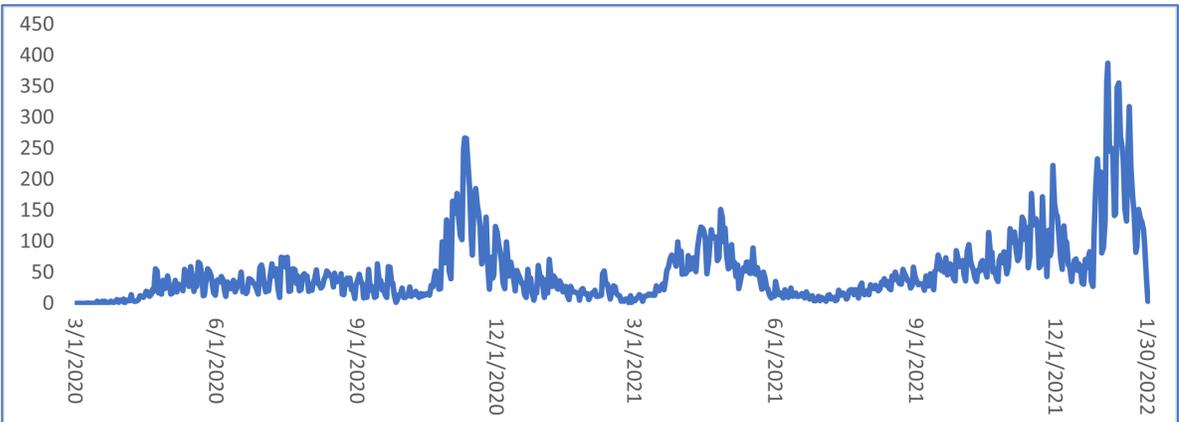
Lake  
County



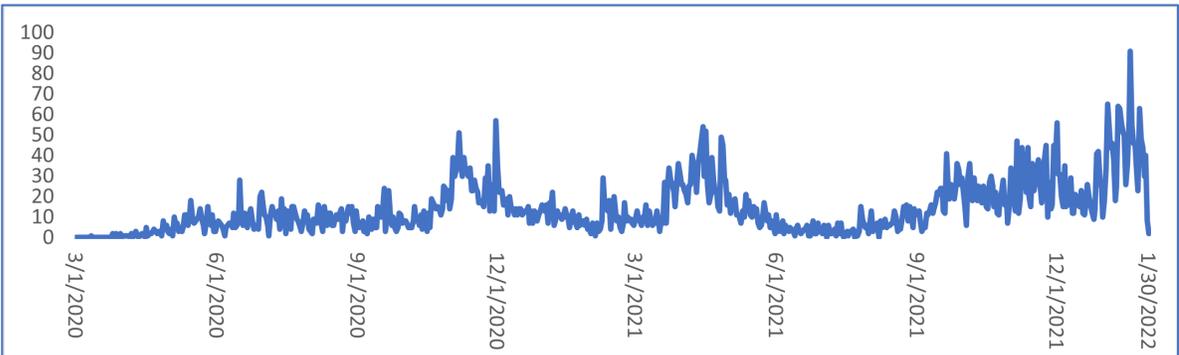
Mason  
County



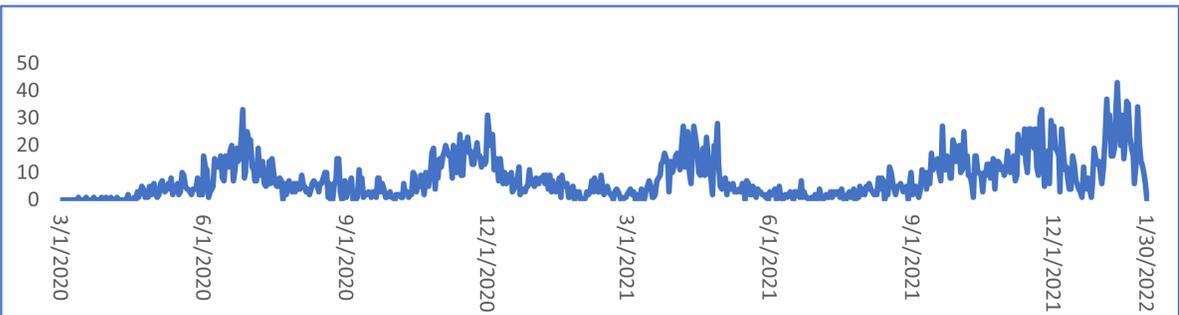
Muskegon  
County



Newaygo  
County



Oceana  
County



### AT-RISK POPULATIONS

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers a guide, “Planning for an Emergency: Strategies for Identifying and Engaging At-Risk Groups,” which describes six categories to consider when identifying at-risk groups that could be disproportionately affected by disasters. **This guide provides a framework for emergency planning and may be a useful reference for communities within the region.** It is available at, <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/disaster/atriskguidance.pdf>.

- Socioeconomic status
- Age
- Gender
- Race and ethnicity
- English language proficiency
- Medical issues and disability

### Community Health Needs Assessment

Mercy Health Muskegon serves a majority of the region’s population. Through the Mercy and Hackley campuses in Muskegon County and the Lakeshore campus in Oceana County, the Mercy Health Muskegon service area reaches into at least some parts of all five counties. Mercy conducts a Community Health

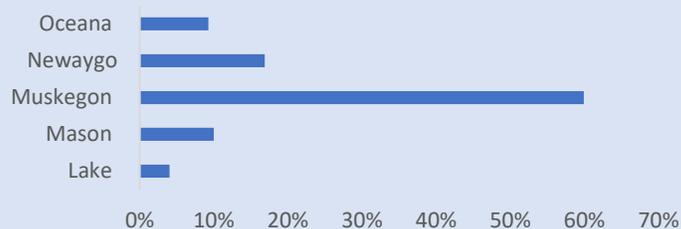
Needs Assessment (CHNA), which is intended to be a living document that provides a pathway to improving health and well-being for all people. This document contains a wealth of information pertinent to community health and at-risk populations. The latest CHNA report is available at: <https://mchp.org/community-health-needs-assessment/current-chna/>.

### Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE)

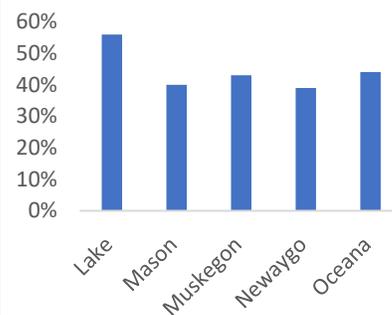
Another measure of economic hardship comes from the ALICE Report which is compiled by the United Way of Michigan. ALICE, which is a measure of the working poor population, stands for “asset limited, income constrained, employed.” This report provides important data and comprehensive narrative to explain connections between various aspects of economic hardship and overall economic prosperity in the state. The most recent ALICE Report was released in 2021 and focused on 2019 statistics. **This report will provide a valuable baseline for monitoring economic impacts of the pandemic as future editions are released.** The ALICE Report for Michigan is available at: <https://www.uwmich.org/alice-report>.

**Muskegon County accounts for about sixty percent of the region’s population of 289,778. The county has experienced the greatest total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the WMSRDC region.**

WMSRDC Region Population (2020)



% Below ALICE Threshold 2019



**According to the US Census ACS 5-year estimates, poverty in the WMSRDC region increased 2.7% from 2019 to 2020. However, the only county to experience the increase was Muskegon County, while poverty in Lake Mason, Newaygo, and Oceana counties decreased.**

## Selected Statistics for At-Risk Populations

	WMSRDC Region		Michigan		U.S.	
Population 2020	289,778		9,973,907		326,569,308	
Population Growth since 2010	0.10%		0.20%		7.40%	
Population Change 2010	224		21,220		22,604,036	
Growth in Working-Age Population	-1.90%		-2.00%		5.90%	
Single Parents w/Kids <18 in Poverty	4,225		127,640		3,772,357	
American Indian and Alaska Native	1,912	0.7%	42,931	0.4%	2,075,852	0.6%
Asian Alone	1,521	0.5%	314,736	3.2%	18,184,182	5.6%
Black or African-American alone	24,811	8.6%	1,342,592	13.5%	39,994,653	12.2%
Native Hawaiian...Other Pacific	27	0.0%	2,675	0.0%	550,080	0.2%
White alone	234,156	80.8%	7,428,622	74.5%	196,251,375	60.1%
Two or More Races	8,543	2.9%	293,901	2.9%	9,134,542	2.8%
Hispanic or Latino	18,595	6.4%	521,203	5.2%	59,361,020	18.2%
Mexican	15,980	5.5%	371,361	3.7%	36,537,028	11.2%
Puerto Rican	249	0.1%	13,791	0.1%	2,332,584	0.7%
Cuban	856	0.3%	48,389	0.5%	5,699,150	1.7%
Other Hispanic or Latino	1,510	0.5%	87,662	0.9%	14,792,258	4.5%
Not Hispanic or Latino	271,183	93.6%	9,452,704	94.8%	267,208,288	81.8%
<b>Veteran Status</b>						
Civilian population 18+	224,868		7,807,607		252,130,477	
Veterans	19,813	8.8%	532,394	6.8%	17,835,456	7.1%
<b>Health Coverage</b>						
Under 19	66,025	24.7%	2,222,672	23.8%	73,565,445	25.1%
19 to 64	147,894	55.4%	5,446,060	58.3%	169,230,054	57.7%
65 and older	53,145	19.9%	1,668,944	17.9%	50,670,639	17.3%
<b>Disability Status of Civilian Population</b>						
Under 18	2,751		104,197		3,166,556	
18 to 64	24,066		730,151		20,231,217	
65+	18,337		566,434		17,388,688	
<b>Educational Attainment</b>						
Ed Attainment base - pop 25+	202,099		6,853,674		222,836,834	
High School Graduate	71,911	35.6%	1,955,654	28.5%	59,421,419	26.7%
Some College	48,751	24.1%	1,587,649	23.2%	45,242,162	20.3%
Associate Degree	22,998	11.4%	658,927	9.6%	19,254,254	8.6%
Bachelor's Degree	26,528	13.1%	1,251,117	18.3%	45,034,610	20.2%
Graduate or Professional Degree	12,392	6.1%	804,014	11.7%	28,321,709	12.7%

Source: StatsAmerica. <https://www.statsamerica.org/regions/>. Retrieved 6/24/22.

Calculations by WMSRDC and shown for comparison

## PANDEMIC INDICATORS

Meetings and interviews conducted for this document provided clues to what issues and data may be beneficial to monitor. WMSRDC will use the ongoing CEDS planning process to monitor these “pandemic indicators,” review them for relevancy, and communicate them to economic development stakeholders in the region. This will allow the region to be flexible and able to adjust as new issues arise and data points become available.

The following categories are not new concerns due to the pandemic. In one form or other, each could be considered a pre-existing topic of concern or priority. In fact, it may be trivial to attempt to assess the impact of the pandemic on these factors. Regardless, all are highlighted due to their importance within communities of the region.

- **Mental Health**

Mental health was cited many times throughout the planning process. This is something that the region could focus on to be better prepared for the next major pandemic/event. Mercy Health Muskegon patient surveys showed that about 8% of patients felt down or anxious during the pandemic.

- **Alcohol and Drug Use**

According to the Mercy Health Muskegon Community Health Needs Assessment, “when consumed in excess, alcohol is harmful to the health and well-being of those that drink as well as their families, friends, and communities. Prescription drug misuse and illicit drug use also have substantial health, economic, and social consequences.” It is uncertain how long-term patterns of this pre-existing topic of interest were, or will be, influenced by the pandemic.

- **Housing**

Housing has been a major issue for many people during these trying times due to the raising costs in the market making it difficult to have affordable housing. According to Zillow, one of the biggest impacts of the pandemic was the almost 71% increase in housing costs.

- **Education**

Schooling was commonly referenced as one of the most difficult issues for most families. This could come in the form of schools being closed or students having issues learning online. This is one of the hardest measures to get data on because there is not one specific point to measure.

- **Infrastructure & Energy Usage**

According to interviews for this plan, 2020 residential energy usage was believed to be up about 5%, while commercial & industrial energy usage was down about 15%. This significant shift is likely due to pandemic-related stay-at-home orders and business closures.

- **Inflation**

Rising inflation has greatly impacted everyday life for most people; this is due to many factors including the pandemic. This makes it very hard now for impoverished populations to afford basic necessities. According to the World Bank, inflation in the United States rose from 1.8% and

1.2% in 2019 and 2020, respectively, to 4.7% in 2021. Anecdotally, inflation increased further through the first half of 2022, with little relief expected in the short term.

- **Broadband Internet**

Broadband internet is a rare issue that nearly everyone agrees upon. It is essential to communications, commerce, education, and content consumption. Ensuring access to high quality broadband infrastructure is an ongoing priority which has been elevated to the forefront by the pandemic. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, approximately 70% of workers shifted to a remote working or hybrid schedule. One element that remains to be seen is whether, or to what extent, remote or hybrid working will continue to be utilized.

- **Tourism**

Impacts of the pandemic upon tourism was a reoccurring theme in public interactions for this plan. The region's tourism industry was heavily impacted early in the pandemic. However, a shift to outdoor recreation was a boon to some areas. Since summer of 2021, some tourism metrics appear to have bounced back better than before the pandemic.

In the spring of 2022, WMSRDC conducted a survey of local governments to better understand local funding intentions and opportunities associated with American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Fiscal Recovery Funds. 43 of the 120 local governments within the region responded to the survey, good for a response rate of nearly 36%.

Local ARPA funding priorities indicated by the survey included the following:

1. Building improvements
2. Roads
3. Water/wastewater
4. Local business help
5. Broadband
6. Health department improvements

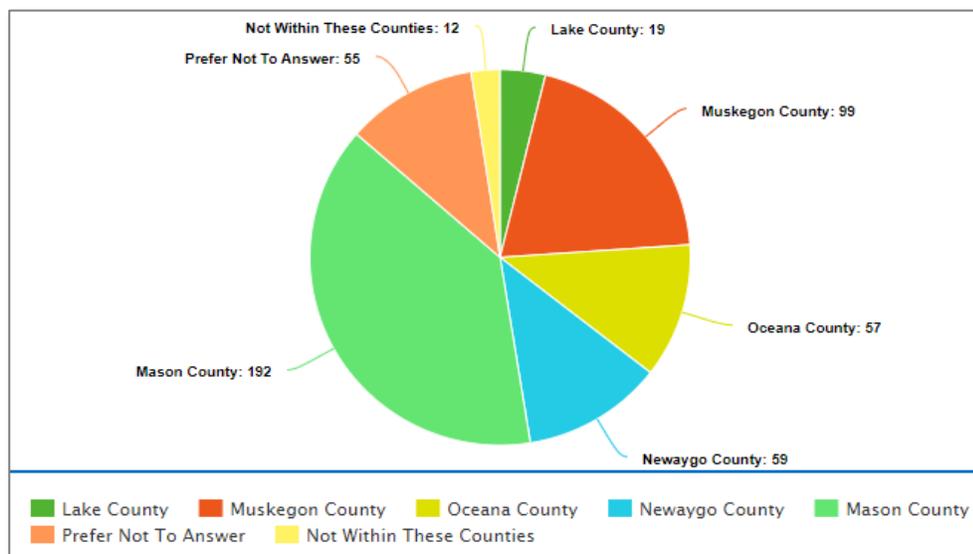
When asked what support was needed regarding the use of ARPA funds, local governments frequently cited the following:

- Documenting use of funds
- Understanding eligible expenses/final US Treasury rules
- Public engagement in decision-making/communicating funding priorities
- Accessing content experts

This survey was part of a larger effort through the Michigan Association of Regions and done in collaboration with other regional planning agencies across the state.

## PANDEMIC IMPACTS SURVEY

The pandemic impacts survey solicited 493 responses between the end of September 2021 and the beginning of November 2021. This included 106 business surveys, 298 household surveys, and 89 public/non-profit surveys. Most responses hailed from Muskegon (20.1%) and Mason (38.9%), two of the three most populated counties in the region. About 12 percent of the responses were received each from Newaygo and Oceana counties. The fewest number of responses was received from Lake County (3.9%). About 13.6 percent of the survey responses were either from outside the WMSRDC region, or respondents chose not to answer.



<- Geographic Distribution of Survey Responses

Overall, this survey provided a useful sample of the variety of feelings toward the pandemic, as well as tangible experiences from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring of 2020 through the fall of 2021. There was a satisfactory volume and geographic distribution of survey responses from across the WMSRDC region, lending credence to the validity of the survey results. The most noticeable exception is that Mason County responses made up nearly 40 percent of the total. Even this is not necessarily bad, given that Mason County has urbanized and rural characteristics, both which are found elsewhere within the region.

### Survey Takeaways

Common challenges of the pandemic noted by the survey revolved around technology (remote working and access to quality broadband internet); workforce (attracting and retaining employees); supply chain disruptions; and issues with public mandates and social distancing (misunderstandings and negative perceptions).

Positive effects of the pandemic have included improved relationships (both professional and personal); a greater awareness of needs (community, customer, personal, etc.); the increased use of the internet to generate revenue and conduct business; and increased personal free time and income.

### Survey Results

The survey results are included as Appendix B- Pandemic Impacts Survey Report.

## PANDEMIC SUCCESS PROFILES

Not all economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been negative. For example, the necessities of meeting virtually and working remotely have paved the way for cost-saving tools for future communication and conducting business. This section highlights local businesses that were able to survive, and at times thrive, amid the various stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Peacock Ltd. \* Baldwin, Lake County, MI

“Peacock Ltd. is a motor sports dealership founded in 1972 that sells motorcycles, side by sides, ATV’s, snowmobiles, personal watercraft, and all of the parts and accessories related to these products. We are an authorized dealer for Polaris, Can-Am, Sea Doo, Ski Doo, Honda, Yamaha, Kawasaki, Suzuki and Arctic Cat. Vehicle service is another major part of our business. Peacock is located six miles north of Baldwin on highway M-37 in Lake County in the middle of the Manistee National Forest. There are hundreds of miles of off-road trails and roads legal for snowmobiles and off-road vehicles nearby.”



#### **What have been the biggest challenges your business has faced during or as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?**

The biggest challenge of the pandemic has been with supply chain issues affecting our supply of major units, parts, and accessories from our manufacturers. We have operated several months with an empty showroom and had to rely on customers putting deposits on future orders that were scheduled for delivery with the challenges of the manufacturers not delivering products as scheduled.

#### **What business opportunities have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic?**

The pandemic created increased sales and revenue opportunities by bringing an influx of people to our area to enjoy its unique outdoor recreational activities. Many of these people were second homeowners who were able to work remotely and spend more time on their recreational vehicles. Others were first-time visitors wanting to experience the outdoors in new ways.

#### **Do you have any wisdom to share with other businesses dealing with major disruptions, such as a global pandemic?**

We currently employ 25 people, and our best advice would be to value and embrace your employees as well as your customers; and if the products that you offer have supply issues, be on the lookout for other streams of revenue.



## Jamesport Brewing Company \* Ludington, Mason County, MI

Jamesport Brewing Company (JBC) was established in downtown Ludington in 2000. As the community's first brew pub, Jamesport offers locally made brews and a casual restaurant atmosphere. It was the town's first brewing operation; opening in a late-Victorian, six-storefront complex formerly occupied by a hotel and saloon. In the 1800s, the saloon largely served sailors of the Great Lakes during the west Michigan logging boom. The business prides itself on providing great service to locals and visitors alike. This was no different during the Coronavirus pandemic.



### **What were the biggest challenges your business has faced during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

According to Thom Hawley, Vice President of SJS Ventures & Jamesport Brewing Company, the COVID-19 pandemic represented the most difficult and challenging period of the Jamesport 22-year history. To stay afloat through pandemic safety restrictions, JBC's greatest challenge was to transition from a full-service brewpub/restaurant to an exclusively take-out, curbside, and delivery business. With the employment of over 80 individuals at stake, owners and management were intent on remaining open to serve loyal customers and retain employees. In addition, fear and uncertainty loomed over daily operations as there were many unknowns about the virus and a vaccine was not yet available.

### **What opportunities have resulted in success and what did it take to make it happen?**

The business needed to be nimble, adaptable, and creative in response to state and federal directives as the pandemic unfolded. The management team proactively initiated transition meetings and developed safety protocols in the days before the March 2020 shutdown. Hours were shortened, the menu was pared down, and food items were adapted to travel well in take-out containers. New promotions were developed, and door-to-door delivery was offered. In order to continue providing food and service to the community, the entire kitchen staff participated in an online ServSafe food safety/kitchen training program to mitigate the spread of the disease and ensure the highest quality products.

One of the greatest opportunities resulting from the pandemic was time to critically examine and streamline current business practices, develop efficiencies, and adopt changes where needed. Many maintenance projects were addressed and have resulted in new capital expenditures, especially in its brewing operations, which will allow the business to continue to grow and adapt to new operating paradigms. New technologies, including migration to a new enterprise/point of sale/inventory system, were introduced to provide better data on inventory, streamline ordering practices, and enhance profitability. There will be a greater reliance on technology into the future.

JBC also developed an active and transparent dialog with its customer base through social media. As a result, outdoor dining options have been expanded with the addition of the Portside Beer Garden. The establishment of the City of Ludington's social district and Chamber of Commerce and DDA's marketing promotions provided successful sales opportunities for JBC and other downtown businesses.

**What wisdom can you share with other businesses coping with disruption, such as a global pandemic?**

Flexibility is crucial for any business and maintaining a sharp attention to the detail and care for the customer's experience is crucial to success. In a tumultuous period, JBC learned to be as consistent as possible with hours, food, and service. JBC also focused on employees' mental, physical, and financial health, and they responded with their dedication and support during a stressful period.

"It's really important to stay true to your brand's integrity," Hawley said. "Whenever there is a major business disruption or a change in current business practices, be adaptable and keep listening to your customers and peers. Always be open to learning and having critical conversations, even when it might be uncomfortable. Make it part of your business practice to get feedback and listen to employees. They will help to make you and your business better. The long game is to continue to build a strong relationship with current and future guests and to be an active participant in the life and growth of our community, whatever comes our way."

**Have circumstances of the pandemic changed the way you will conduct business into the future?**

Considering unprecedented challenges triggered by the pandemic, such as supply chain issues, labor shortages, and inflation, many restaurants are expected to continue with shortened hours, limited menu offerings and services, and have closed days of operations.

Still, there is room for optimism as restaurants adapt and find new efficiencies. Take-out will continue to be a big part of JBC's future, and recent challenges have showcased how JBC employees could collaborate, innovate, create, and tap into their ingenuity. The word "team" found its true meaning throughout the pandemic and will impact how JBC conducts its business well into the future.



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Swanson Pickle Co. \* Ravenna, Muskegon County, MI

Swanson Pickle Company grows pickling cucumbers and ferments them with salt brine. Its customers are manufacturers who use the fermented pickles to create a finished product in final packaging for the end consumer. The company also grows corn, soybeans, wheat, and hay. Swanson is a fourth generation family business, founded in 1949, employing 25 year-round and another 40 seasonally.



**What have been the biggest challenges your business has faced during or as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Keeping employees safe, especially in the early days, when we didn't know best practices to contain COVID. Also, there was a significant decrease in pickle demand due to lack of restaurant and stadium sales.

**What business opportunities have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic?**

We started relationships with new customers (retail), trying to find more outlets for our products. We also started some new ways of working; simple things, like how we handle timecards and packing slips, to avoid contact with people. We will probably keep those processes in place. We also created new break/lunchroom and bathroom areas for employees which will still be used going forward.

**What opportunities have resulted in success and what did it take to make it happen?**

Because our industry is considered "essential," we never had to stop coming into work. We were thankful for that because the alternative would have destroyed our agricultural business. We know many businesses were not so fortunate. Our attitude from the beginning was to be flexible, keep improving/learning as we go, and do right or the best we can by our employees. We were not perfect, but I think we navigated the storm well. I'm proud of our entire workforce in making that happen.

**Have circumstances of the pandemic changed the way you will conduct business into the future?**

It took a while, but it seems like the food service market has come back around now, demand is back up. Although we are not currently using the new customer relationships we made during the pandemic, you never know when those connections might come in handy in the future or what further opportunities could present from those connections.

**Do you have any wisdom to share with other businesses dealing with major disruptions, such as a global pandemic?**

Be flexible. Don't be afraid to reach out and ask for help. The business and food/agrucultural community really came together to help each other navigate COVID-19, especially in the beginning. I found other companies (large and small) to be extremely generous in sharing their knowledge and even supplies in helping to navigate a crisis.

## MPH Logistics \* Fremont, Newaygo County, MI

Raymond Gilliland founded Michigan Produce Haulers more than 75 years ago in the early 1940's. He then passed the business to his son Robert Gilliland. The company is now run by the third generation of Gilliland's, with the fourth generation working their way up the ranks. What started out as a small trucking company on main street in Fremont, MI, MPH has now grown to three locations with two buildings in Fremont, MI and one in Kentwood, MI. Although still a trucking company, MPH has strived to offer diverse services which now include: packaging, logistics, and distribution. MPH would not be where they are today if it wasn't for the 100+ employees that work hard every day.



### **What have been the biggest challenges your business has faced during or as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Hiring employees. Like many other companies, MPH is currently hiring every day and could use up to 30 more workers due to the daily demand of product increases.

### **What business opportunities have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic?**

An opportunity to open another warehouse in Kentwood, MI, now known as MPH South, happened in late 2021. Most warehouses are filling up quickly due to lack of transportation in the United States. As a result, MPH took the chance on starting a distribution center to help with the flow of product and to distribute to other centers and customers.

### **What opportunities have resulted in success and what did it take to take to make it happen?**

MPH South is the best opportunity we have faced. It is currently shipping product within the 52 states. It took a team of excellent employees and managers working numerous hours to start a successful business quickly and efficiently.

### **Have circumstances of the pandemic changed the way you will conduct business into the future?**

It hasn't necessarily changed the way we do business, but it has made us more aware that right now more than ever, we need each other to succeed. There are many days our management team and owners are out on a packaging line working right along with our employees. We are very aware that our company's success starts with our hard-working employees.

### **Do you have any wisdom to share with other businesses dealing with major disruptions, such as a global pandemic?**

In our case, we put our faith in ourselves as a family business and our faith in our employees. It is important in this pandemic to remember to have compassion and understanding. Every business right now is just doing the best that they can.

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## Arctic Foods \* Hart, Oceana County, MI

Arctic Foods, Inc. was started less than 10 years ago by Alex Hardy, a twenty-something entrepreneur with one wholesome jam recipe straight from his grandma's cookbook, and has since turned into a full all-natural product line that also includes ice cream toppings and recipe inclusions for products like ice cream and salsas. The company's customer base is mainly West Michigan food processors.



### **What have been the biggest challenges your business has faced during or as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Our business growth has been slowed by supply chain issues during, and since, the pandemic. Unfortunately, we have had to drop some suppliers because of lack of product availability. As a result, we keep more product on hand, at least 3 months' supply for customers. Serious price increases have also been a challenge to deal with, with some materials increasing more than 100%.

### **What business opportunities have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic?**

We have remained optimistic and worked through all of the challenges thrown at us and are currently looking at even more new product lines and customer opportunities with the increasing interest in all-natural ingredients and home cooking.

### **Do you have any wisdom to share with other businesses dealing with major disruptions, such as a global pandemic?**

Stay resilient and upbeat. Continue to work and cooperate with those you work with - colleagues, customers, and vendors. There are a lot of people out there that can and are willing to help and who can connect you with the right people. And always remember, family and health come first.

\* \*\* \*

## PANDEMIC OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

In June 2022, the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing as communities and countries around the world continue to cope and learn to coexist with the virus. While some impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were immediately evident, others may take months or years to measure or even manifest. This section summarizes the variety of local impacts that were revealed during the development of this document, sorted into positive (opportunities) and negative (challenges) experiences. This is intended to provide a snapshot, taken in the midst of evolving and complex challenges.

### - Opportunities

- Improved work-life balance for many workers
- Flexible and more-resilient business models
  - ◆ Organizations and businesses needed to be flexible to survive, or even thrive through the stresses of the pandemic
- Increased focus and investment in broadband infrastructure (both public and private)
- Renewed focus on building close personal and professional relationships
- New and unique partnerships
- Relief funding and assistance

### - Challenges

- Broadband internet
  - ◆ Availability, quality, and affordability
- Disparities of COVID-19 relief funding
  - ◆ Not all organizations/governments were able to access funding equally
- Mental health
- Workforce
  - ◆ Hiring or retaining workers
  - ◆ Childcare
- Supply chain disruptions
- Inflation
- Misinformation and frustrations with government mandates
  - ◆ In some cases, the evolving scientific understanding of the virus outlasted public patience and appetite for changing public safety recommendations. This also served to undermine public trust in public safety regulations.

## RECOVERY & RESILIENCE STRATEGY

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected virtually every aspect of society in West Michigan either directly, or indirectly. It will take months, if not years to fully identify and respond to the cascading impacts of the pandemic. This proposed strategy, based upon input and observations gathered during the study period, is modestly intended to contribute to the overall economic recovery and resilience of the WMSRDC region. To be clear, there is much more to be done across the spectrum of governments, organizations, and private sector interests to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and become more resilient to future economic disruptions. The following priorities and strategies will be incorporated into the region's CEDS document and revisited regularly as aspects of the CEDS economic resilience section.

### - **Priorities**

- Increase workforce participation
- Develop public-private partnerships and networks
- Improve access to broadband internet service
- Equitable access to disaster relief and assistance
- Constant and open lines of communication with underserved and vulnerable populations

### - **Short Term Strategies**

- Engage a regional network of economic development stakeholders
- Leverage current wave of broadband funding opportunities
- Identify current and future workforce training needs

### - **Long Term Strategies**

- Compete for workers
  - ◆ Support remote working
  - ◆ Flexible workplace cultures
  - ◆ Develop attractive places and experiences
- Maintain lines of cross-sector communication across public, private, and nonprofit sectors.
  - ◆ Utilize industry associations and organizations
- Data tracking: Through the region's CEDS document and planning process, monitor and communicate data indicators over time.
  - ◆ Workforce participation
  - ◆ Tracking of public relief assistance/funding secured within the region
  - ◆ Broadband availability
  - ◆ ALICE
  - ◆ Housing
  - ◆ County work patterns

## Appendix – ECONOMIC RESILIENCE PRIMER

*The information in this appendix is presented to provide a broad framework for economic resilience planning. This content was retrieved in February 2022 from the EDA website:*

<https://www.eda.gov/ceds/content/economic-resilience.htm>

### ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

It is becoming increasingly apparent that regional economic prosperity is linked to an area's ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from major disruptions (i.e., 'shocks') to its economic base. Many definitions of economic resilience limit its focus on the ability to quickly recover from a disruption. However, in the context of economic development, economic resilience becomes inclusive of three primary attributes: the ability to recover quickly from a shock, the ability to withstand a shock, and the ability to avoid the shock altogether. Establishing economic resilience in a local or regional economy requires the ability to anticipate risk, evaluate how that risk can impact key economic assets, and build a responsive capacity. Often, the shocks/disruptions to the economic base of an area or region are manifested in three ways:

- Downturns or other significant events in the national or international economy which impact demand for locally produced goods and consumer spending.
- Downturns in particular industries that constitute a critical component of the region's economic activity; and/or
- Other external shocks (a natural or man-made disaster, closure of a military base, exit of a major employer, the impacts of climate change, etc.).

At the regional or community level, economic development practitioners are instrumental in building the capacity for economic resilience. Economic development professionals and organizations often become the focal point for post-incident coordination, information dissemination, responding to external inquiries, and the lead grant administrator for federally-funded recovery initiatives.

In building economic resilience, it is critical that economic development organizations consider their role in the pre- and post-incident environment to include **steady-state** and **responsive** initiatives.

Steady-state initiatives tend to be long-term efforts that seek to bolster the community or region's ability to withstand or avoid a shock. Responsive initiatives can include establishing capabilities for the economic development organization to be responsive to the region's recovery needs following an incident.

Examples of **steady-state** economic resilience initiatives include:

- Engaging in comprehensive planning efforts that involve extensive involvement from the community to define and implement a collective vision for resilience that includes the integration and/or alignment of other planning efforts (e.g., hazard mitigation plans) and funding sources;
- Undertaking efforts to broaden the industrial base with diversification initiatives, such as targeting the development of emerging clusters or industries that (a) build on the region's unique assets and competitive strengths; and (b) provide stability during downturns that disproportionately impact any single cluster or industry;
- Adapting business retention and expansion programs (e.g., economic gardening or other enterprise supports) to assist firms with economic recovery post-disruption;

- Building a resilient workforce that can better shift between jobs or industries when their core employment is threatened through job-driven skills strategies and support organizations;
- Maintaining geographic information systems (GIS) that link with municipal business licenses, tax information, and other business establishment data bases to track local and regional “churn” and available development sites. GIS can also be integrated with hazard information to make rapid post-incident impact assessments;
- Ensuring redundancy in telecommunications and broadband networks to protect commerce and public safety in the event of natural or manmade disasters;
- Promoting business continuity and preparedness (i.e., ensuring businesses understand their vulnerabilities—including supply chains—in the face of disruptions and are prepared to take actions to resume operations after an event); and
- Employing safe development practices in business districts and surrounding communities. Strategies may include locating structures outside of floodplains, preserving natural lands that act as buffers from storms, and protecting downtowns and other existing development from the impacts of extreme weather.

Some examples of *responsive* economic resilience initiatives include:

- Conducting pre-disaster recovery planning to define key stakeholders, roles, responsibilities, and key actions;
- Establishing a process for regular communication, monitoring, and updating of business community needs and issues (which can then be used after an incident) ;
- Establishing/using a capability to rapidly contact key local, regional, state, and federal officials to communicate business sector needs and coordinate impact assessment efforts; and
- Establishing/using coordination mechanisms and leadership succession plans for short, intermediate, and long-term recovery needs.

The CEDS provides a critical mechanism to help identify regional vulnerabilities and prevent and/or respond to economic disruptions. Therefore, embracing economic resilience must be a key component of the CEDS document.

Integrating resilience into the CEDS should be undertaken as part of a two-pronged approach:

- 1) Planning for and implementing resilience through specific goals or actions to bolster the long-term economic durability of the region (steady-state), and
- 2) Establishing information networks among the various stakeholders in the region to encourage active and regular communications between the public, private, education, and non-profit sectors to collaborate on existing and potential future challenges (responsive).

## **PLANNING FOR AND IMPLEMENTING RESILIENCE**

All communities, whether those in locations likely to experience significant natural disasters or those dealing with immediate or pending economic shifts, must be able to recognize their vulnerabilities. They should then develop goals, strategies, and actions that can mitigate the effects of an economic incident and support long-term recovery efforts. While there is no universal blueprint for building regional economic resilience, the following items may help in establishing a general framework or identifying specific activities/projects:

- *Identify persistent economic challenges or deficiencies:* What are the region’s economic “weak spots” (i.e., vulnerabilities)? Is there a specific asset deficiency (e.g., poorly educated workforce,

excessive dependency on a single employer or industry, lack of transportation access/options, low levels of broadband availability and/or adoption, impediments hindering a firm's ability to gain access to the financial resources required to advance its business, major employers located in vulnerable areas)? Has a “planning horizon” been established (e.g., 10 to 15 years) for assessing economic vulnerabilities?

- *Prepare for disruptions by identifying “early-warning” tools:* Does the region have an “anticipatory focus” that will help it react quickly when confronted with potential disruptions and challenges? Do community economic development professionals work with their local/regional emergency managers to address the risks identified through hazard mitigation planning? Do community leaders employ mechanisms (e.g., scorecards, state of the region reports, economic dashboards) that offer a regularly updated assessment of the regional economy?
- *Build mechanisms that create flexibility:* Do the local governments have detailed and tested disaster response and recovery plans? Do the local governments and major employers have access to “surge” capital/credit resources? Does the region have a good handle on its assets to help identify emerging economic sectors that may lead to a diversified economic base? Has the region established mechanisms to realign and retrain its workforce post-disruption?
- *Promote a positive vision for the region:* Is the messaging about the region’s assets and opportunities positive (to encourage investments in both times of tranquility and disruption)? Do stakeholders understand that actions that build resilience are good for the regional economy whether or not an economic shock occurs, and have they reached consensus on a set of actions they can take proactively? Are economic shocks used as an opportunity to “re-vision” (i.e., reassess) the region’s economy?

Regardless of the specific steady-state approaches considered or undertaken, the CEDS, *at a minimum*, should include an identification of the region’s key vulnerabilities and resilience-building goals, measurable objectives, and/or projects in the action plan.

### **ESTABLISHING INFORMATION NETWORKS**

In addition to identifying regional vulnerabilities and specific actions to address them, the region should establish mechanisms to facilitate active and regular communication between the relevant sectors to collaborate on common challenges. The economic development organization should be prepared to serve as a responsive participant in economic recovery efforts. The region should also be prepared to serve as an information hub by collecting data and convening the appropriate players to facilitate recovery post-disruption. The effectiveness of a region’s response to a major economic disruption is often enhanced if the public, private, education, and nonprofit sectors are aware of each other’s roles and responsibilities – particularly as they pertain to recovering from economic shocks. Established communication networks and information collection protocols coupled with broadly understood knowledge of key elements (such as supply-chain relationships) can help speed a region’s response. Once the networks are established, participants can be called upon in times of crisis to provide services and support in the case of a disruption.

More experienced economic development organizations will find opportunities to enhance and expand their business retention and expansion programs as a vehicle to mobilize action and facilitate information sharing. Other networking examples include the establishment of Business Emergency Operation Centers (BEOC) or Business Recovery One-Stop Centers. Among other actions, BEOCs serve as a hub of business-to-business collaboration and communication to connect private sector organizations with each other and with emergency response and recovery efforts while interfacing with

local and federal emergency operations centers to ensure assistance and resources are being directed to businesses in need.

Regardless of the specific responsive approaches considered or undertaken, the CEDS, *at a minimum*, should demonstrate how the region serves as both a source for information to deal with an economic challenge and as a convener of regional stakeholders to gather data and encourage collaboration post-disruption.

*A note on structure:* The two-pronged approach to resilience noted above can be included in the CEDS as a separate section. However, resilience could also be addressed by weaving the concept throughout the document (e.g., identifying a region's vulnerabilities in the SWOT section, then developing specific goals or action items to counter those vulnerabilities in the strategic direction/action plan, followed by an exploration of ways to measure success in the evaluation framework). Regardless of how resilience is included in the CEDS, it is critical for regions to identify vulnerabilities and, where possible, bolster the capacities that may lead to economic resilience as part of regional planning efforts.

### **PRE-DISASTER RECOVERY PLANNING**

It should be noted that a number of regions, particularly those that are prone to natural disasters, have engaged in resilience planning by focusing on the development of disaster recovery strategies. Developing and implementing a strategy for disaster recovery is often a good first step in establishing resilient regions. Specifically, certain regions have integrated economic development strategies, sustainability principles and hazard mitigation planning to ensure such activities are undertaken in a complimentary fashion. Examples of the benefits from this "cross-pollination" planning include promoting local procurement and hiring, the pre-prioritization of the resumption of major employers, and the siting of new commercial and industrial development in locations that are out of harm's way.

In addition to providing a vehicle to approach resilience in a comprehensive fashion, a CEDS can often fill an important role in ensuring that disaster mitigation efforts are well-coordinated across municipal and county-lines to shape stronger, more resilient regions. Regardless of focus (i.e., broader economic resilience or a more directed look at disaster recovery planning), the CEDS should still include the two primary elements: 1) "steady-state" initiatives that seek to bolster the community or region's long-term ability to withstand or avoid a shock and, 2) "responsive" initiatives that establish and utilize capabilities for an economic development organization to be responsive to the region's recovery needs post-disruption.

### **MEASURING RESILIENCE**

Measuring the economic resilience of a community or region, including the actions taken to foster resilience, will vary depending on the assets and vulnerabilities of each region. Two common measures are the degree of regional income equality (i.e., how evenly income is distributed across a regional population) and the degree of regional economic diversification (i.e., degree to which economic activity is spread across sectors). Regardless of the specific types of data collected and measures used, it may be helpful to benchmark data collected against national averages to help identify trends and better inform the development of key strategies.

# Pandemic Impacts Survey Report

January 2022



## Regional Development Commission

*The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission is a federal and state designated regional planning and development agency serving 120 local governments in Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana counties. It is also the planning agency for the metropolitan transportation planning (MPO) program for Muskegon and Northern Ottawa counties.*

## **BACKGROUND**

The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC), in partnership with local economic development offices (LEDOs) from the counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo and Oceana, conducted three short online surveys to document impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic upon local **businesses, households, and public & nonprofit organizations**. The surveys were conducted during the fall of 2021 as part of a pandemic response and recovery plan (PRRP) for the WMSRDC region. The survey and PRRP efforts were made possible with a planning grant from the US Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA).

## **GOALS OF THE SURVEY**

- Engage a wide variety of perspectives in each of the five counties in the WMSRDC region
- Document impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic within the local region which may be used for accessing various types of state and federal assistance for pandemic recovery
- Solicit perspectives to help identify gaps in service and opportunities that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic
- Collect information to help planners anticipate additional impacts of the ongoing pandemic and identify potential strategies for coping with future economic disruptions
- Leverage information gathered to help target regional response, recovery, and economic resilience efforts

## **SURVEY DESIGN**

The survey effort was targeted to three community segments **businesses, households, and public & nonprofit organizations**. A unique survey was developed for each segment by WMSRDC with input of representatives from the counties of Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, and Oceana. Designed to be quick and accessible, the average time taken to complete the surveys was between five and ten minutes. All survey responses were collected and tabulated anonymously.

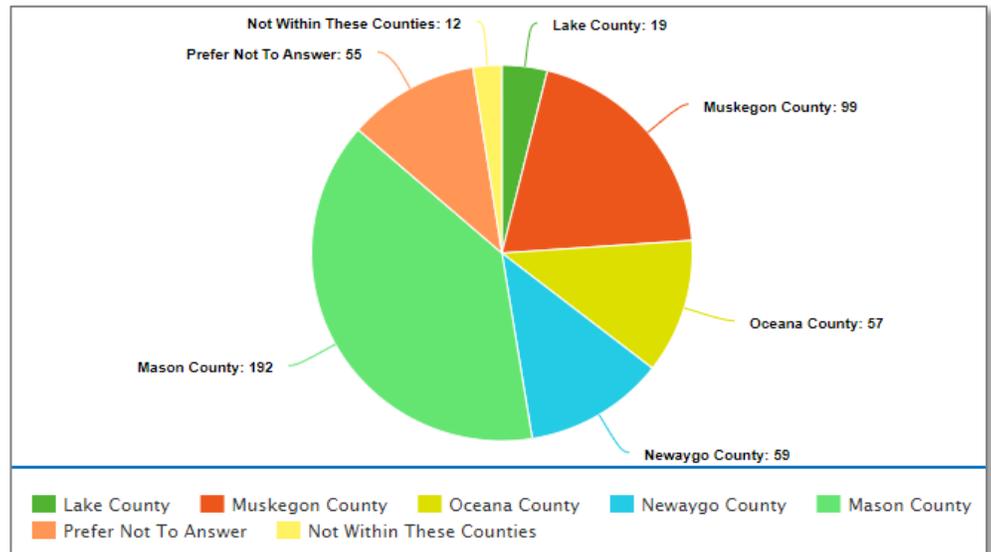
The SurveyMethods online platform was used to craft the survey questionnaires and make them accessible online. Team members distributed survey links to their extensive community networks, and the survey was also displayed prominently on the WMSRDC website landing page.



## **SURVEY RESULTS**

The pandemic impacts survey successfully culminated with nearly 500 survey responses submitted between the end of September 2021 and the beginning of November 2021. Responses included 106 business surveys, 298 household surveys, and 89 public & nonprofit surveys. Most responses hailed from Mason (38.9%) and Muskegon (20.1%), two of

the three most populated counties in the region. About 12 percent of the responses were received each from Newaygo and Oceana counties. The fewest number of responses were received from Lake County (3.9%). About 13.6 percent of the survey responses were either from outside the WMSRDC region, or respondents chose not to answer<sup>1</sup>.



**GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY RESPONSES**

Overall, this survey provided a useful sample of the variety of feelings toward the pandemic, as well as tangible experiences from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020 through the fall of 2021. There was a satisfactory volume and geographic distribution of survey responses from across the WMSRDC region, lending credence to the validity of the survey results. The most glaring exception is that Mason County responses made up nearly 40 percent of the total. Even this is not necessarily bad, given that Mason County has both urbanized and rural characteristics, both of which are found elsewhere within the region.

### **TAKEAWAYS**

The most common challenges of the pandemic noted across all surveys revolved around technology (remote working and access to quality broadband internet); workforce (attracting and retaining employees); supply chain disruptions; and issues with public mandates and social distancing (misunderstandings and negative perceptions).

Some of the most-noted positive effects of the pandemic include improved relationships (both professional and personal); a greater awareness of needs (community, customer, personal, etc.); the increased use of the internet to generate revenue and conduct business; and increased personal free time and income.

The remainder of this report outlines results of the three survey components: business, household, and public & nonprofit. Each section concludes with a county-specific synopsis of written survey responses<sup>2</sup>.

1. A number of surveys were completed and submitted before the geographic question was added to the survey. Rather than omit these submissions, they were manually classified as “prefer not to answer.” These instances account for a majority of the 55 responses in this category, or about 10% of the overall survey responses.
2. Each survey component included two open-ended questions which allowed participants to provide responses in their own words. However, these questions generated an overwhelming amount of text responses; many of which were not appropriate or necessarily relevant to the intent of the survey. Therefore, in lieu of reporting unfiltered responses, a brief synopsis is provided at the end of each survey section.

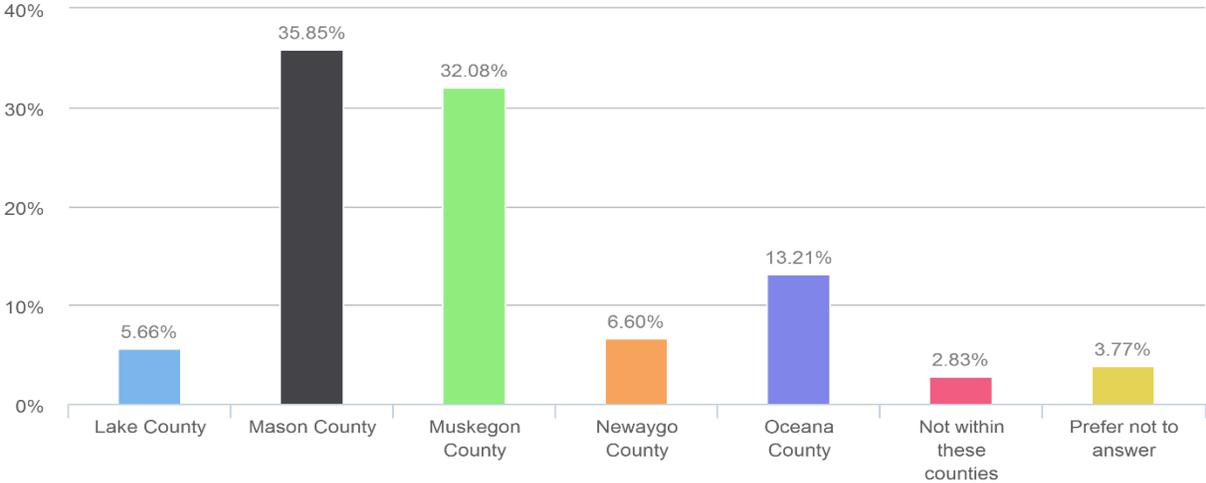
## SURVEY INDEX

- ❖ **BUSINESS** Survey Results ..... Page 4
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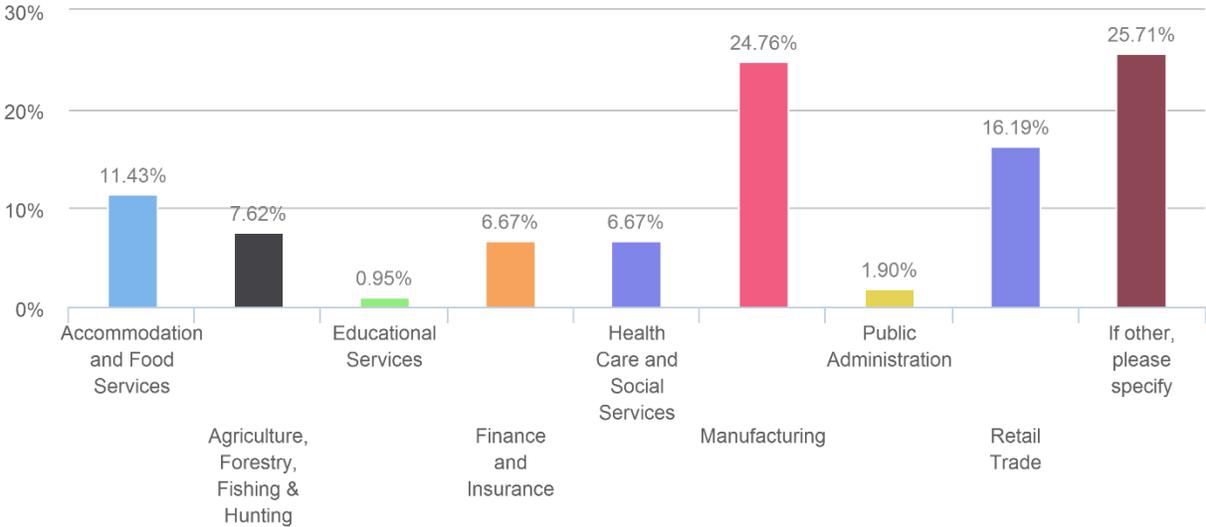
# Pandemic Impacts Survey: BUSINESSES

Number of completed surveys: 106

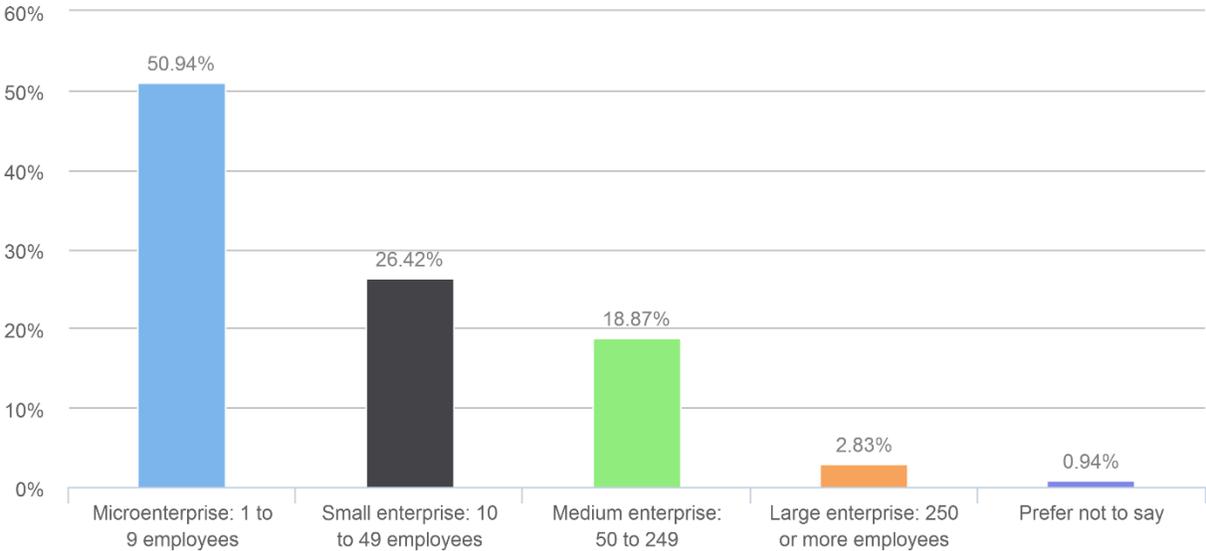
## 1. Please select the county where your business is based.



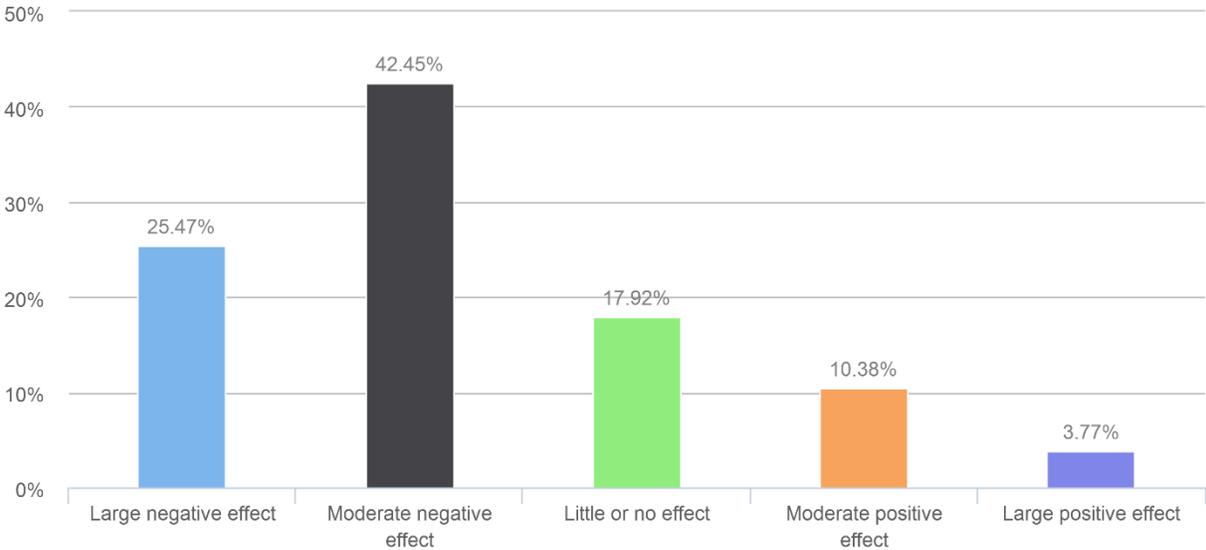
## 2. To which general economic sector(s) does your business belong?



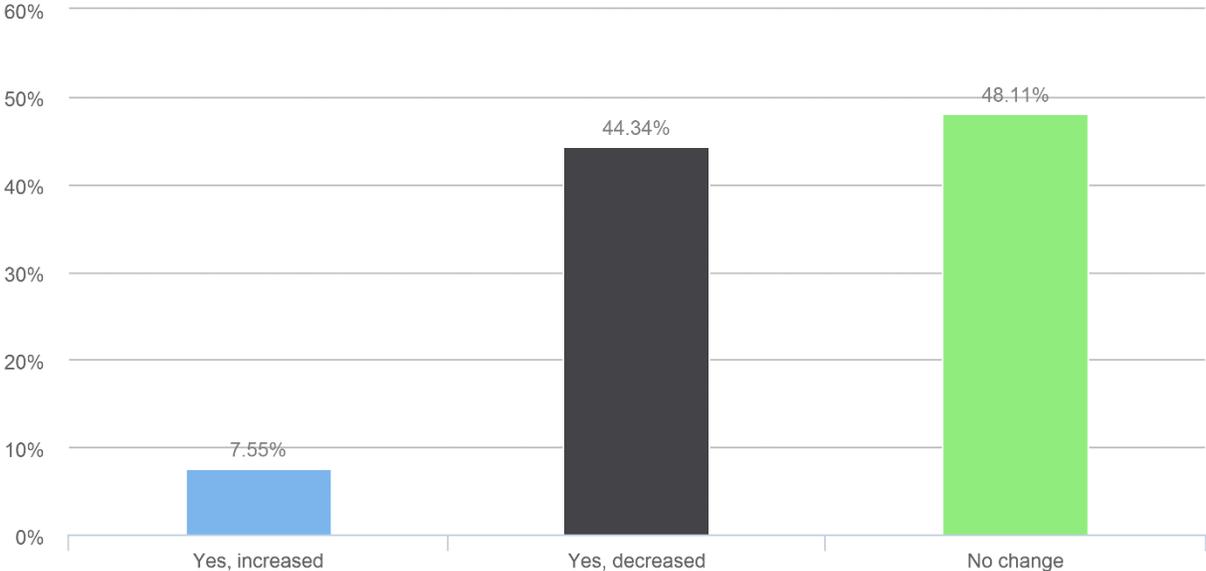
3. Approximately how many employees does your business have (full-time and part-time)?



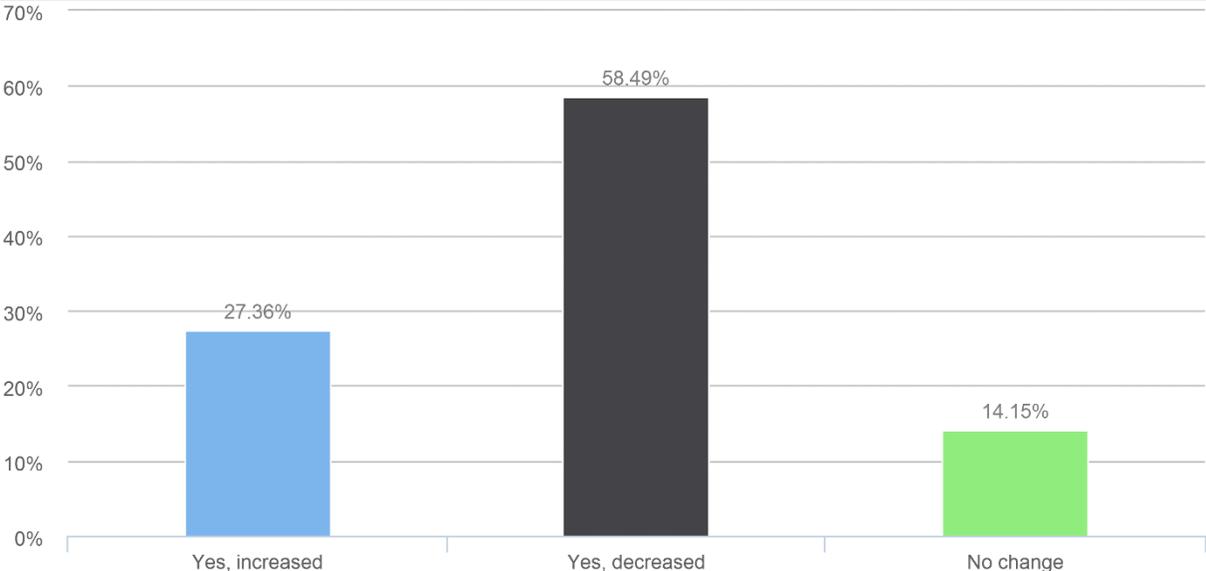
4. In your opinion, how has your business been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?



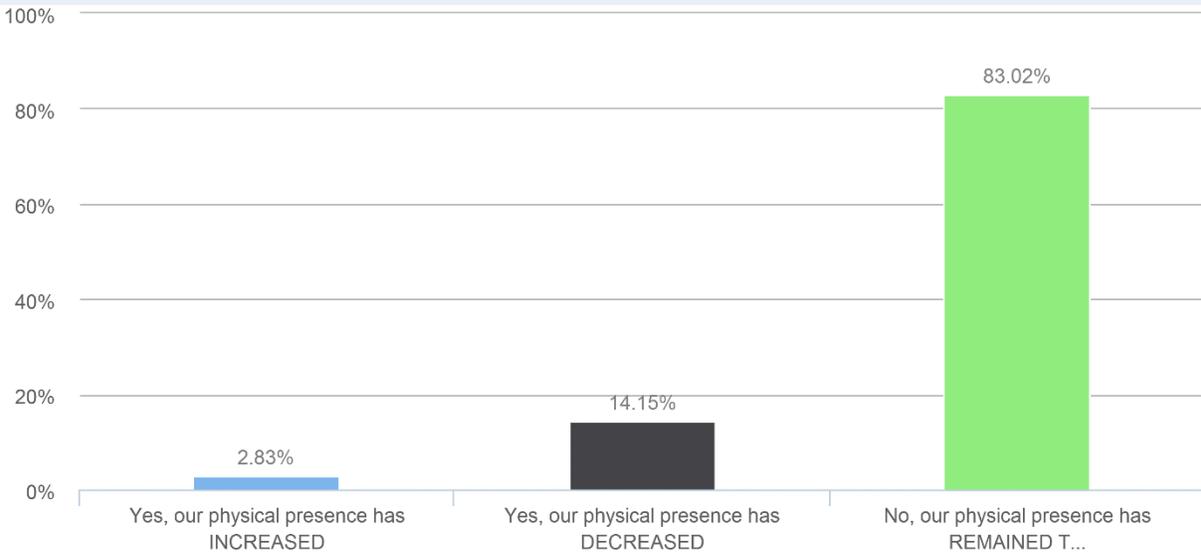
**5. Has your business experienced a change in the number of employees due to the COVID-19 pandemic?**



**6. Since April 2020, has your business had a change in operating revenues/sales/receipts, not including financial assistance or loans?**



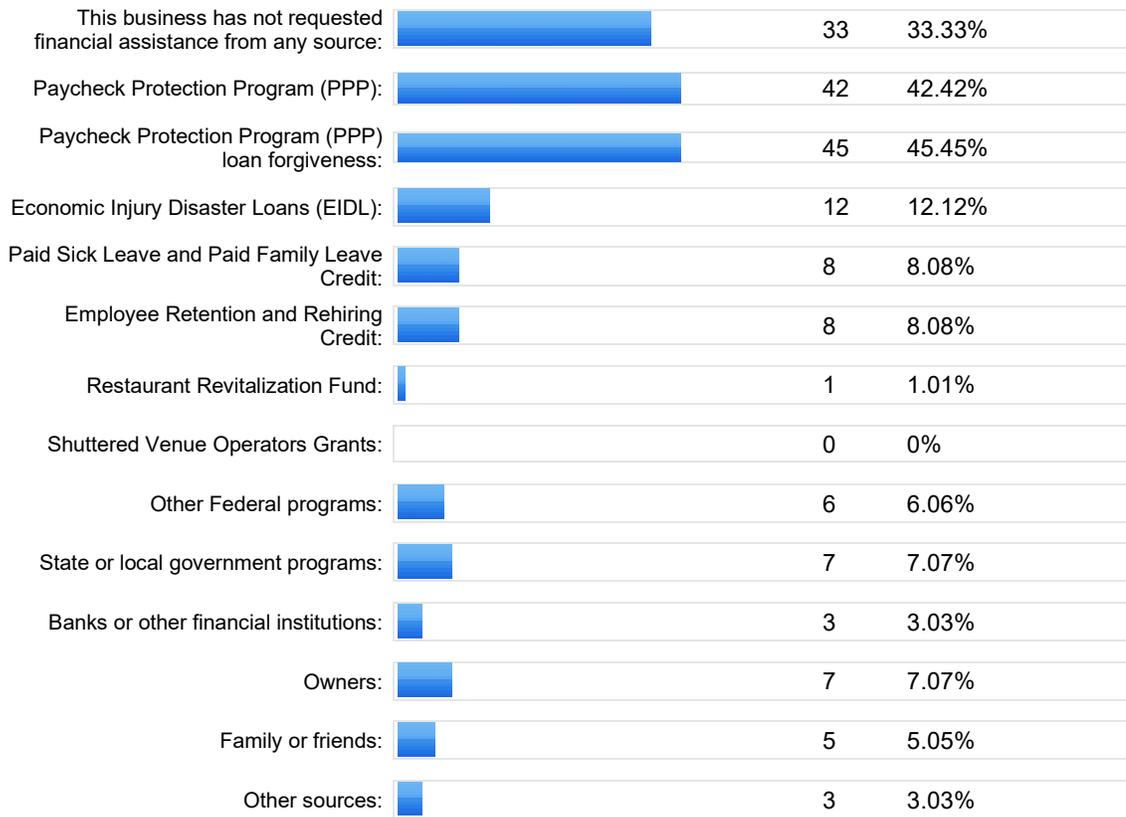
**7. Has the pandemic led your business to adjust its physical presence, such as office space downsizing or consolidation of locations?**



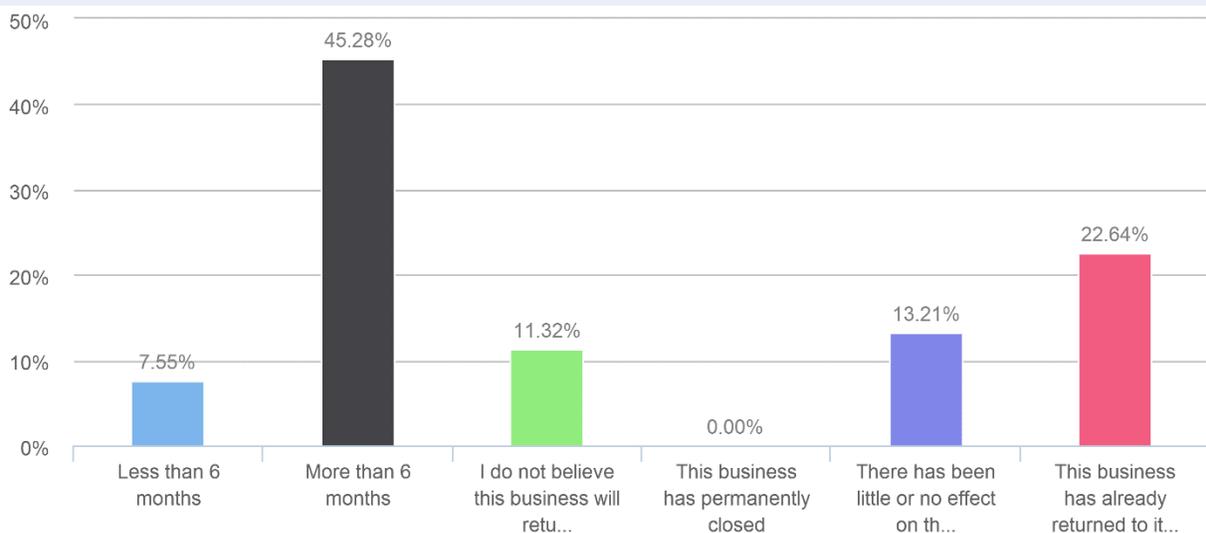
**8. In 2021, has your business REQUESTED financial assistance from any of the following sources? (check all that apply)**

This business has not requested financial assistance from any source:		28	28.28%
Paycheck Protection Program (PPP):		50	50.51%
Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan forgiveness:		47	47.47%
Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL):		18	18.18%
Paid Sick Leave and Paid Family Leave Credit:		11	11.11%
Employee Retention and Rehiring Credit:		12	12.12%
Restaurant Revitalization Fund:		3	3.03%
Shuttered Venue Operators Grants:		1	1.01%
Other Federal programs:		4	4.04%
State or local government programs:		9	9.09%
Banks or other financial institutions:		5	5.05%
Owners:		7	7.07%
Family or friends:		3	3.03%
Other sources:		3	3.03%

**9. In 2021, has your business RECEIVED financial assistance from any of the following sources? (check all that apply)**



**10. In your opinion, how much time will pass before your business returns to a normal level of operations?**



**11. In the next 6 months, do you think your business will need to do any of the following? (check all that apply)**

Obtain financial assistance:		10	9.52%
Identify new supply chain options:		35	33.33%
Develop online sales or websites:		18	17.14%
Increase marketing or sales:		38	36.19%
Learn how to better provide for the safety of customers and employees:		12	11.43%
Identify and hire new employees:		56	53.33%
Invest in a capital project:		24	22.86%
Cancel or postpone a planned capital project:		9	8.57%
Permanently close the business:		3	2.86%
None of the above:		18	17.14%

**12. IN YOUR WORDS: What has been your business's biggest challenge since April 2020?**

*(See Synopsis of Written Comments below)*

**13. IN YOUR WORDS: Please share something positive or a growth opportunity for your business since April 2020.**

*(See Synopsis of Written Comments below)*

**Synopsis of Written Comments**

**Lake County**

Six Lake County businesses responded to the survey. All reported an overall negative experience and little growth though the pandemic. The **food industry** initially experienced issues related to government-imposed restrictions but experienced an increase in business since restrictions were lifted. **Health Care** has seen issues with providing COVID-19 vaccinations. **Retail trade** had issues with supply chain and staffing. They grew in sales and funding from the government. **Early childhood development** had issues hiring staff and marketing.

**Mason County**

Thirty-eight Mason County businesses participated in the survey. In general, the most common challenge to Mason County businesses was hiring and retaining employees. The pandemic also severely disrupted retail foot traffic as well as the supply chain. Many experienced growth (possibly due to increased outdoor tourism and increased online commerce), but not all businesses fared well. **Accommodations and Food**

**Service** had issues with staffing and had to get creative to stay open during the lockdowns. Some of these businesses thrived with increased tourism at the time. **Retail Trade** had issues with the customers adhering to mandates and customer traffic. They saw a major turnaround when the mandates were lifted with some having record number of sales. Manufacturing had issues with hiring people. They had success in online sales and increasing business size. **Healthcare & Social Services** also had issues with people following safety mandates. They are seeing more patients since some restrictions have been lifted. **Manufacturing** had issues finding employees and trouble getting the stock of supplies that they needed. They improved with online sales and creativity. **Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting** saw issues with supply chain and hiring.

### **Muskegon County**

Thirty-four Muskegon County businesses replied to the survey. In general, Muskegon County businesses had issues with staffing and lockdown restrictions. Many noted growth in remote work and increased tourism. **Manufacturing** had issues with inventory, hiring, and following the CDC guidelines while remaining open. They have grown in being able to work remotely, creating more business when restrictions lifted, and growing as teams. **Accommodations & Food Service** had issues with staffing and positive cash flow. They had growth in increased tourism and demand. **Agriculture, Forestry, Hunting & Fishing; Public Administration; Finance & Insurance; Health Care & Social Services, and Landscaping** businesses expressed issues with options being closed due to lockdowns and hiring employees. Many of these businesses grew new connections in the community, new employees, and using new technology.

### **Newaygo County**

Seven Newaygo County businesses replied to the survey. In general, these businesses faced challenges with lack of customers and hiring or retaining employees, yet they indicated growth in new employees and online sales. **Retail Trade, Finance & Insurance, Public Administration, Recreation, Health Care & Social Services** all had issues with revenue, lack of customers, and keeping employees. They all saw growth in new employees, online availability, and valuing the employees.

### **Oceana County**

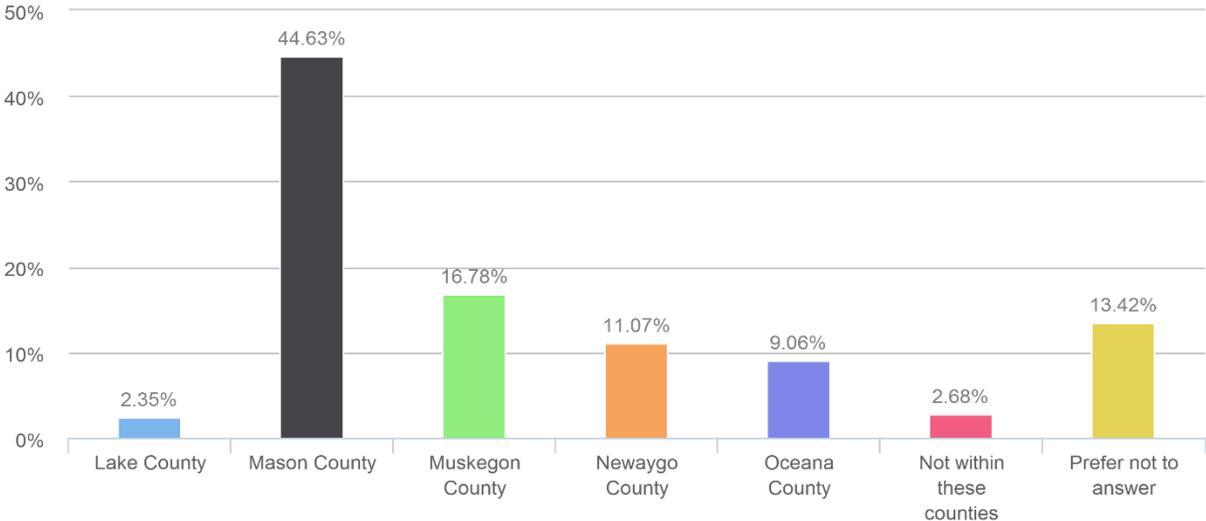
Thirteen Oceana County businesses replied to the survey. Overall, these businesses faced challenges with supply chain and revenue, and indicated growth with creativity and life outside of work. An **Accommodations & Food Services** response indicated issues with finances but also growth through the realization there is more to life than running a business. **Retail Trade** experienced issues with supply chain and price increases but grew in creativity. **Agriculture, Forestry, Hunting & Fishing; Health Care & Social Services; Manufacturing; and Entertainment** all indicated challenges with unemployment, finances, and supply chain. They reported growth in the amount of work and online work opportunities.

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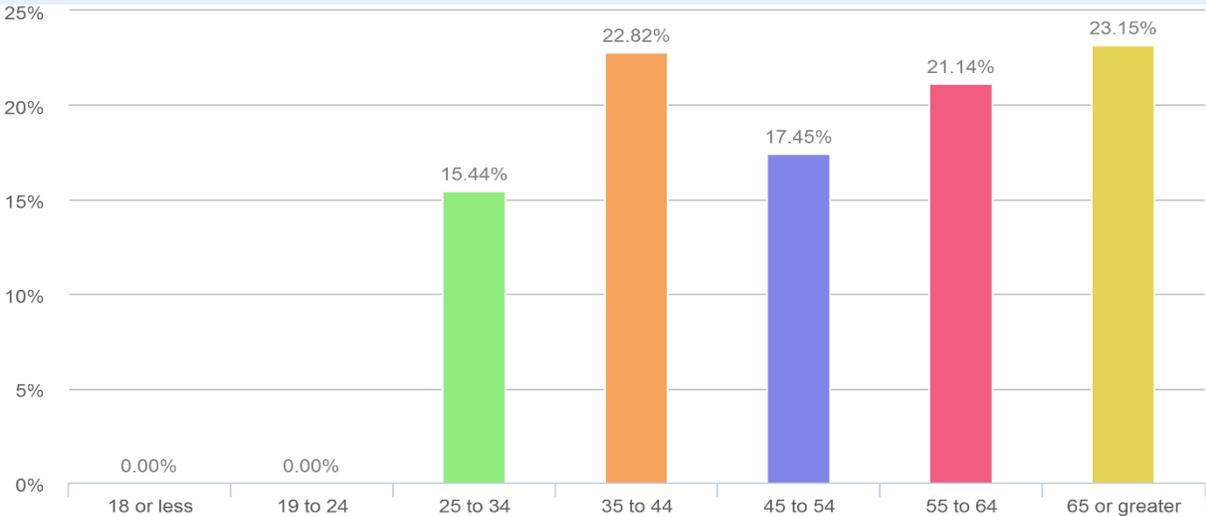
# Pandemic Impacts Survey: Households

Number of completed surveys: 298

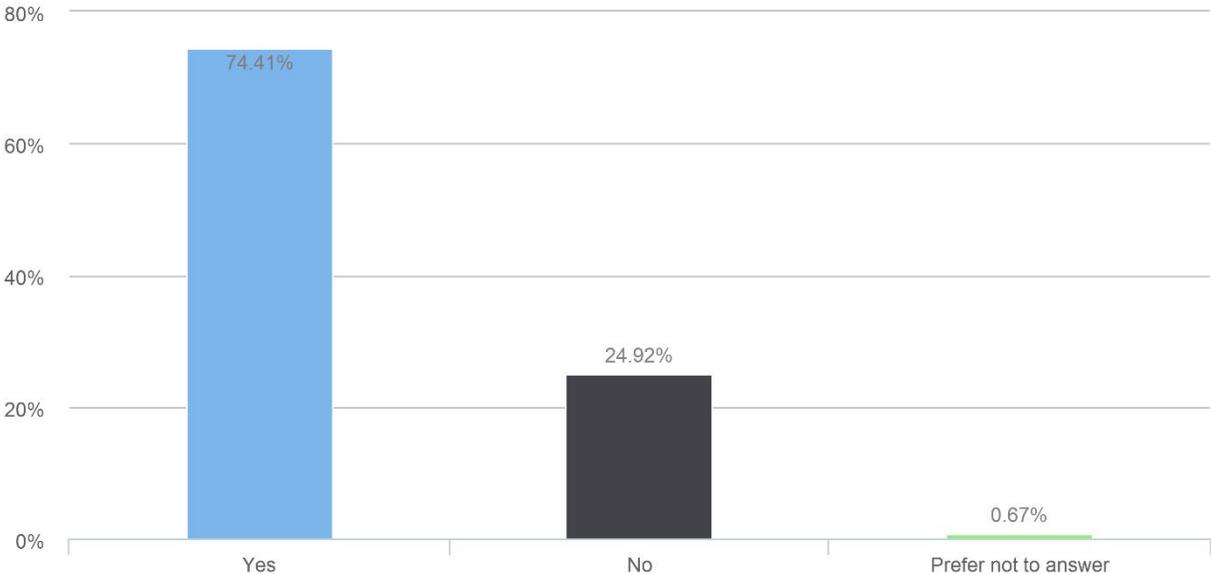
## 1. Please select the county where your household is located.



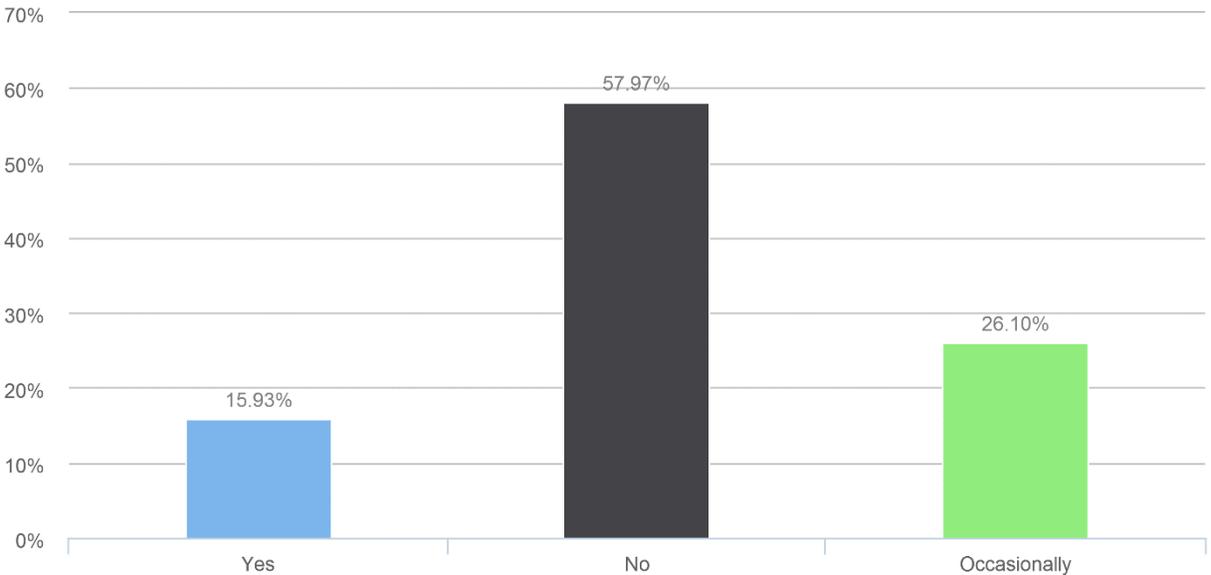
## 2. What is your age range?



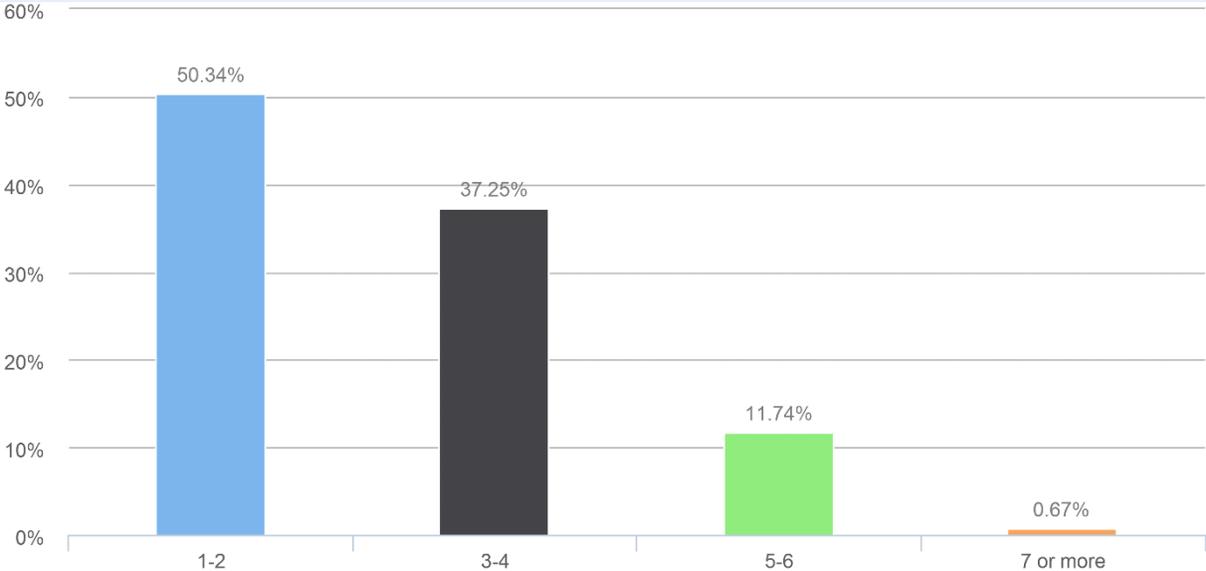
3. Are you currently employed?



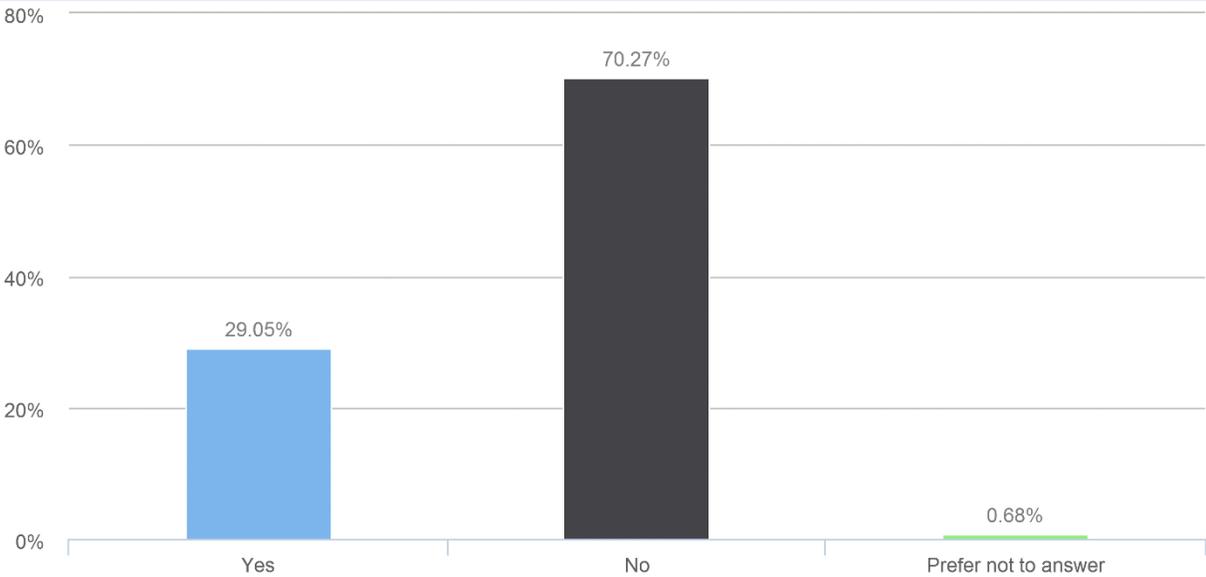
4. Do you work from home?



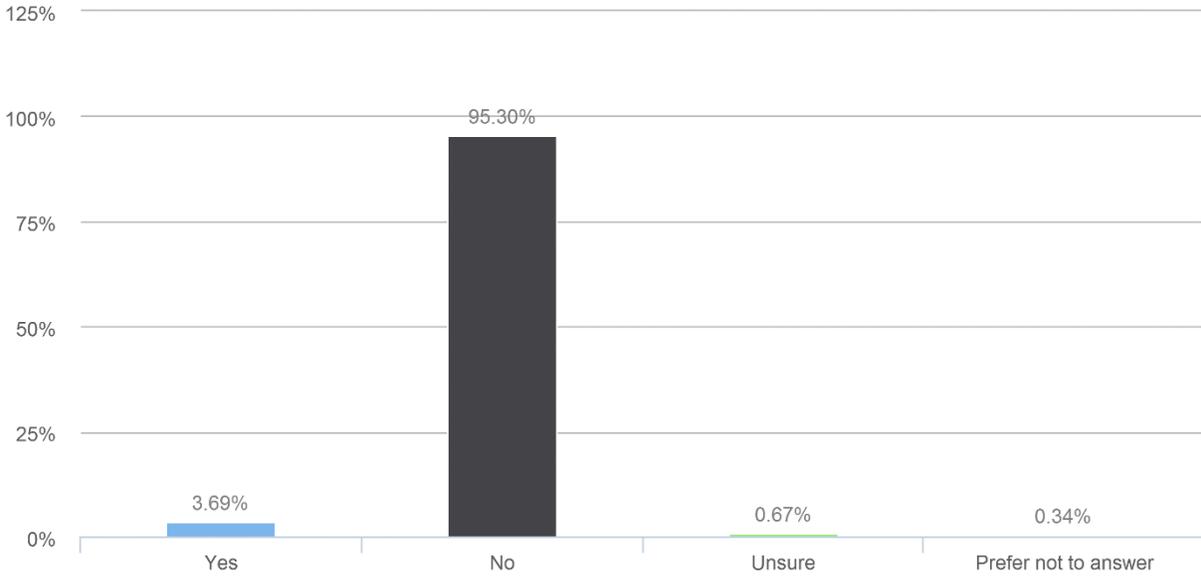
5. How many people live in your household?



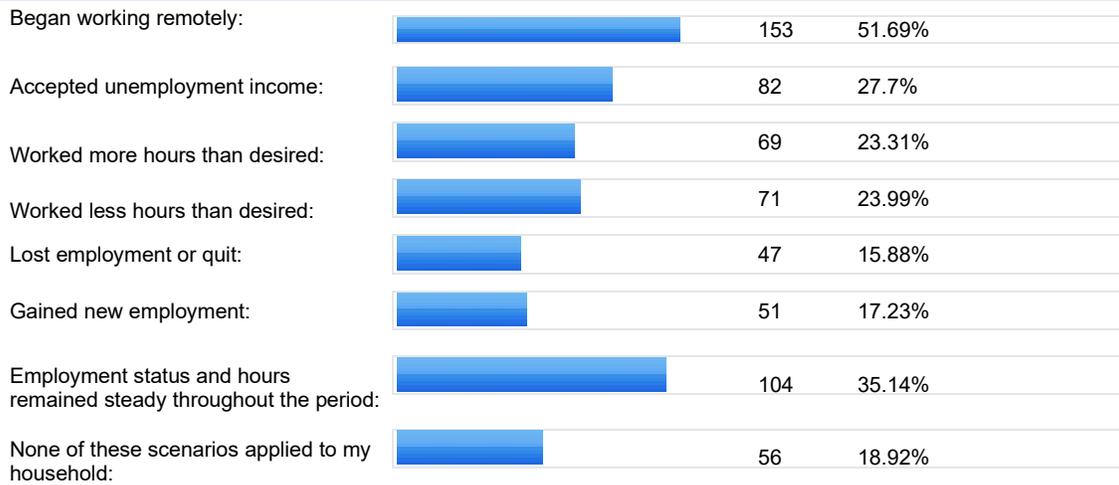
6. Has anyone in your household experienced a loss of employment income due to the pandemic since April 2020?



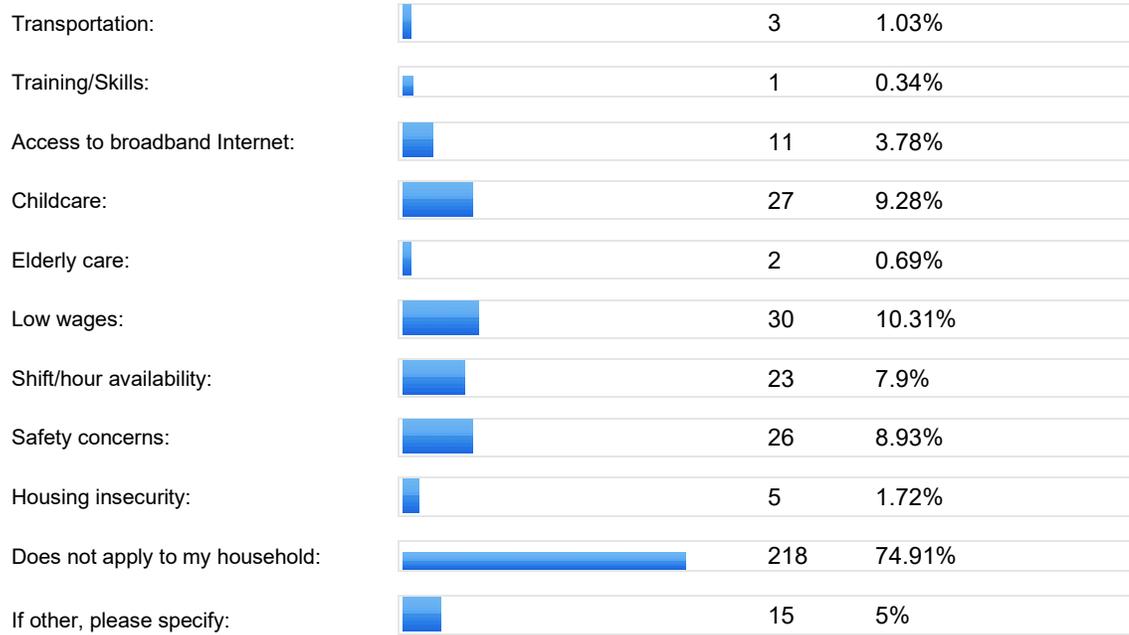
**7. Has anyone in your household needed assistance finding employment since April 2020?**



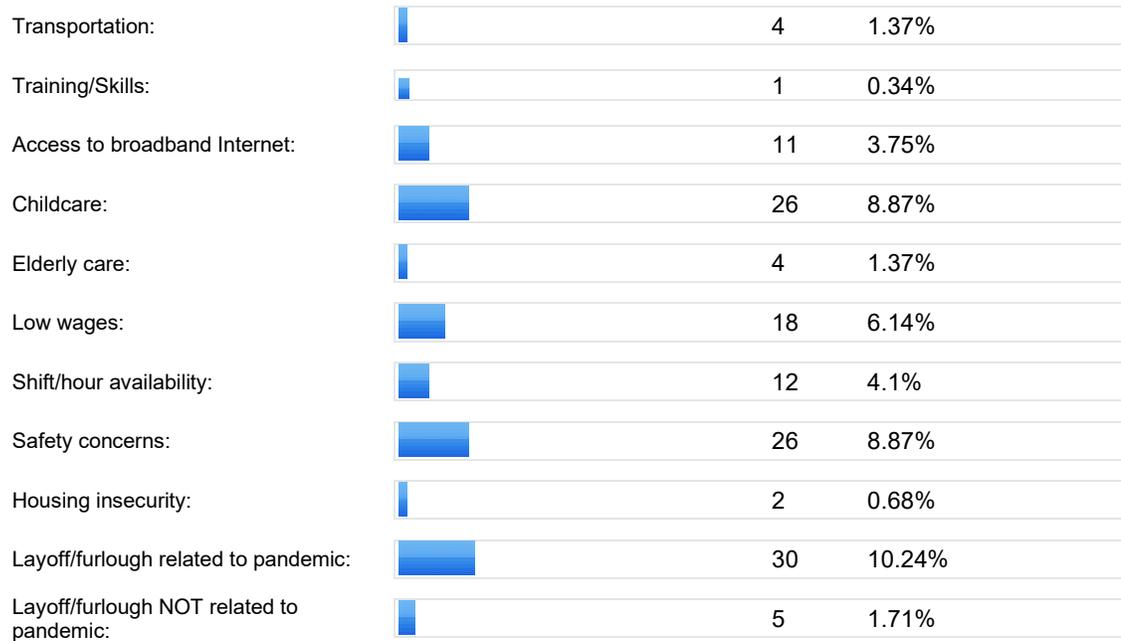
**8. Have any of the following scenarios applied to anyone in your household since April 2020? (select all that apply)**



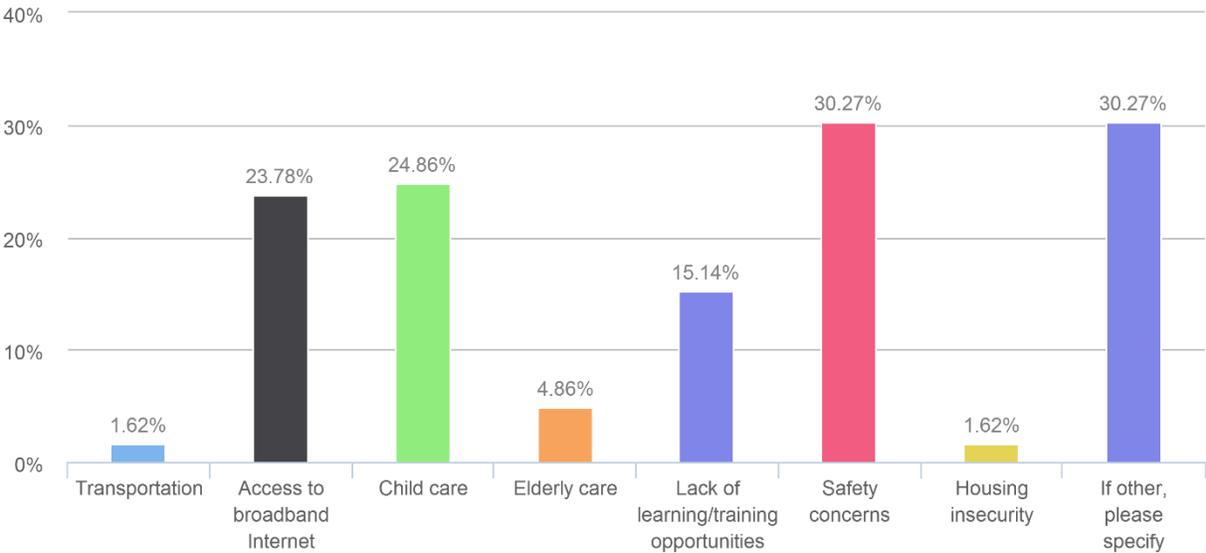
**9. What factors negatively impacted your ability or willingness to SEEK employment throughout the COVID-19 pandemic?**



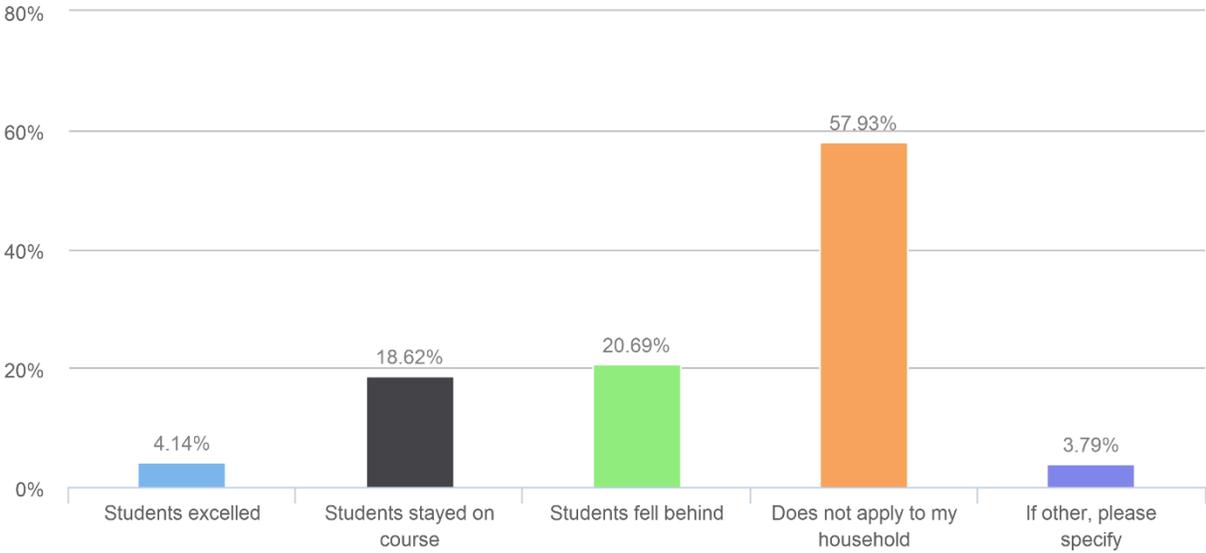
**10. What factors negatively impacted your ability or willingness MAINTAIN employment throughout the pandemic?**



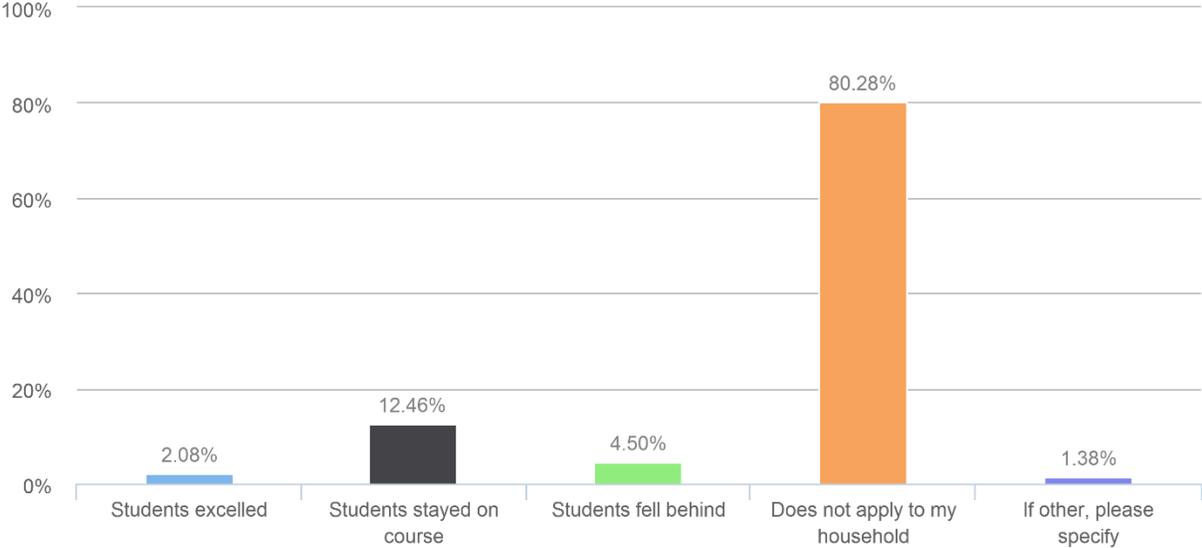
11. What learning obstacles were faced in your household due to the COVID-19 pandemic? (select all that apply)



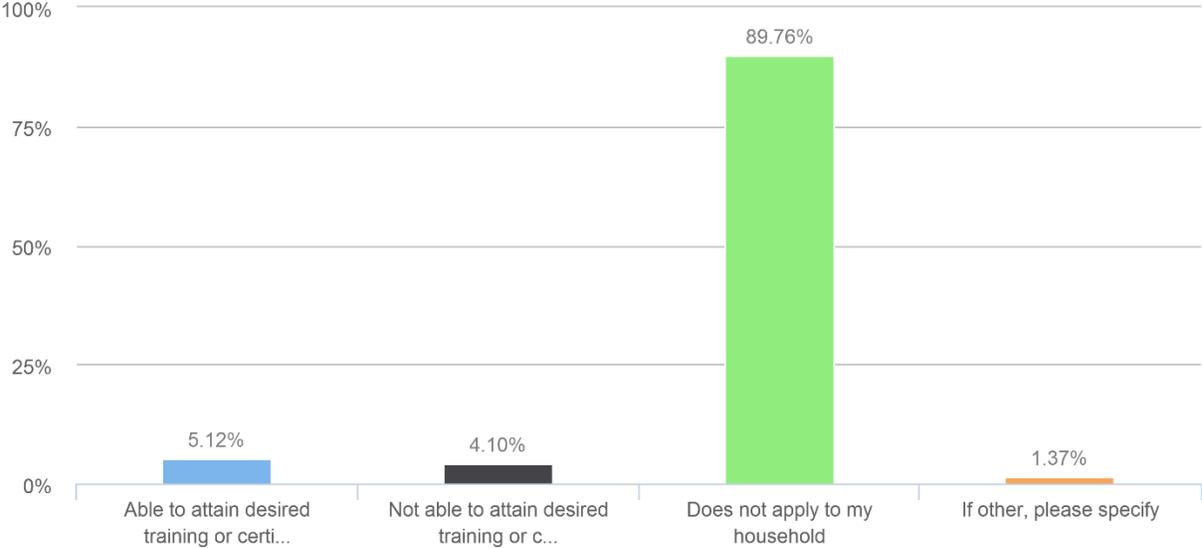
12. Please rank the overall PRESCHOOL-12th GRADE learning experience in your household during the COVID-19 pandemic:



**13. Please rank the overall COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY learning experience in your household during the COVID-19 pandemic:**



**14. Please rank the overall post-secondary skills training experience in your household during the COVID-19 pandemic:**



**15. IN YOUR WORDS: Please share your household's biggest challenge as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

*(See Synopsis of Written Comments below)*

**16. IN YOUR WORDS: Please share a positive household experience/effect as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

*(See Synopsis of Written Comments below)*

## **Synopsis of Written Comments**

### **Lake County**

There were seven household survey respondents from Lake County. All indicated being aged 45+ and none worked from home. The biggest challenges revolved around the disruption of daily life and an inability to complete needed tasks. On the bright side, there has been more time to do things not once achievable while having to work.

### **Mason County**

There were 133 surveys completed by Mason County households. Most respondents indicated occasionally or never working from home. The biggest challenges included schooling for children, slow internet service, lost wages/reduced hours, rent payments, mental health, and fear of COVID. Noted positives included being able to slow down, spend more time doing what they want and with family, vaccines, stimulus checks, and more room for creativity.

### **Muskegon County**

A total of 49 Muskegon County individuals participated in the household survey. Respondents included a mix of those working from home and those working in person. The biggest noted challenges included online school, internet usage, lack of socialization, safety from COVID, cost of living, and trying to simultaneously manage remote schooling and remote working. Commonly noted pandemic positives included the ability to work from home, less commuting, and more time at home.

### **Newaygo County**

There were 31 household survey respondents from Newaygo County. Most indicated either working in-person or occasionally from home. Common challenges noted by respondents included working from home, isolation, changing rules, and getting household necessities. Pandemic positives cited include less money spent, more family time, more time for housework, and working from home.

### **Oceana County**

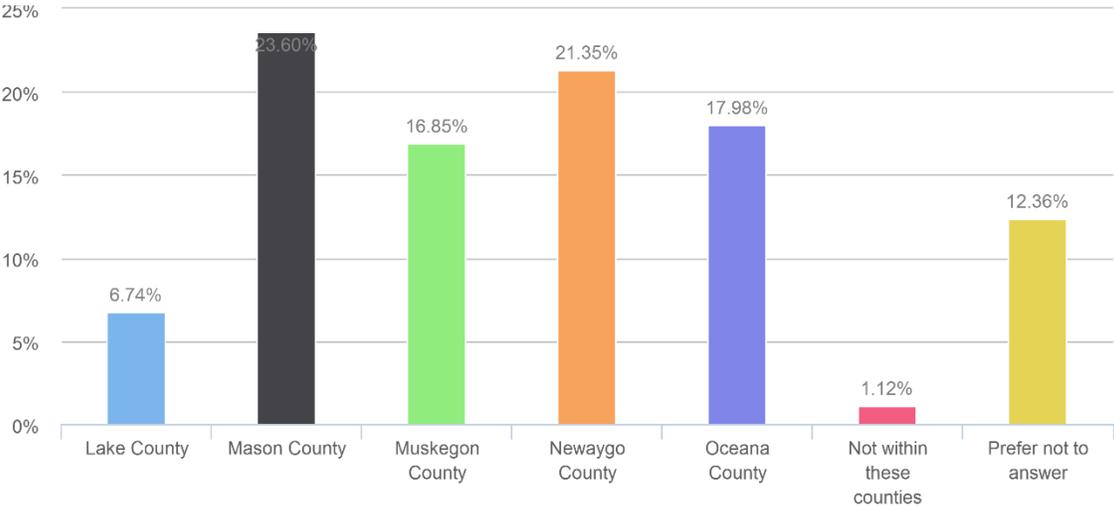
Twenty-six household survey respondents hailed from Oceana County. Most indicated either working in-person or occasionally from home. Common challenges noted by respondents included online schooling, safety, helping others, money, and inflation. Positives associated with the pandemic included being home, family time, and saving money while not traveling.

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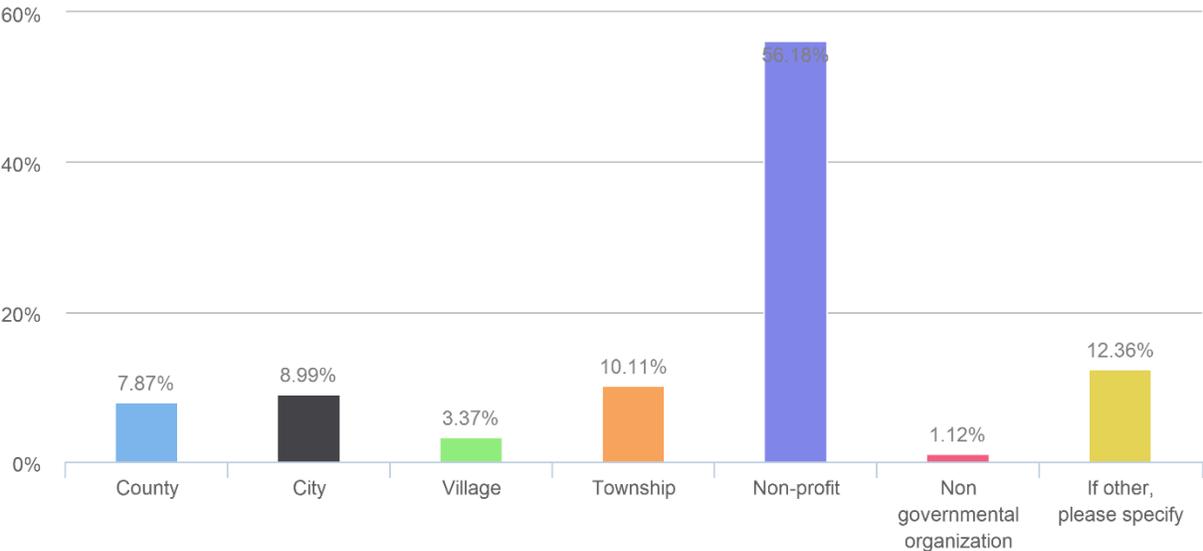
# Pandemic Impacts Survey: PUBLIC & NONPROFIT AGENCIES

Number of completed surveys: 89

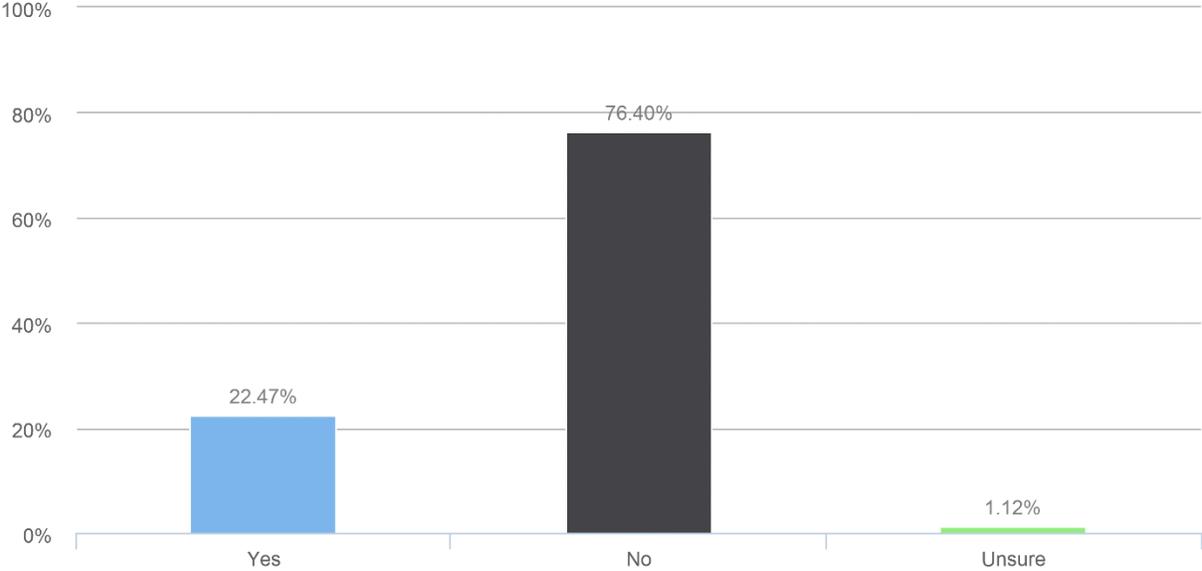
## 1. Please select the county where this public organization is located.



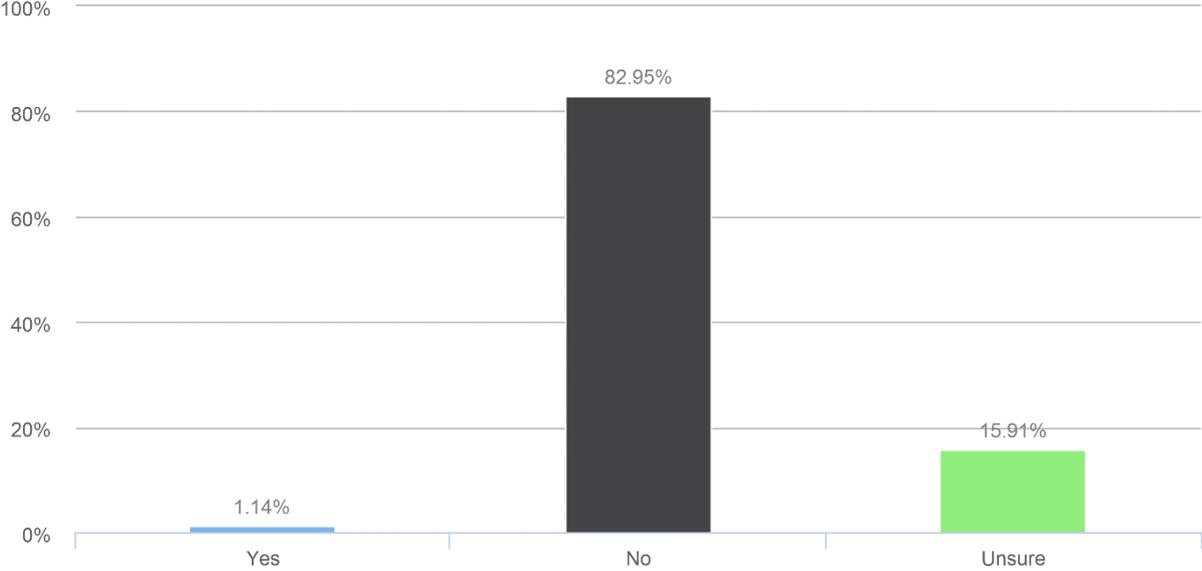
## 2. What type of public organization do you represent for the purpose of this survey?



**3. Has your organization laid off or furloughed staff due to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic?**



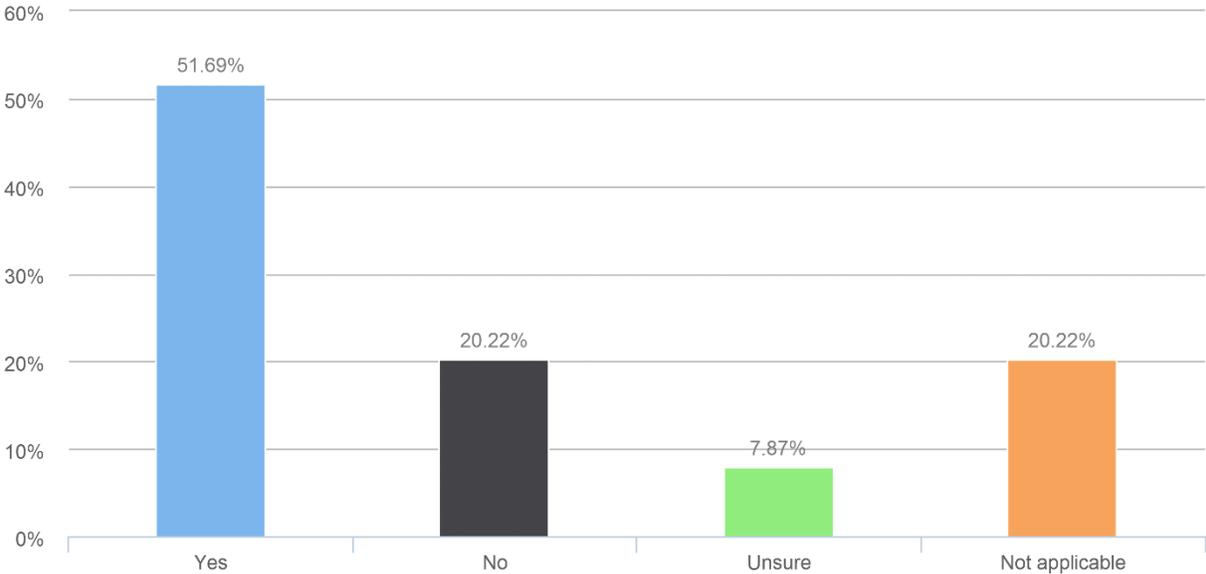
**4. Do you anticipate the need for future staff layoffs or furloughs due to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic?**



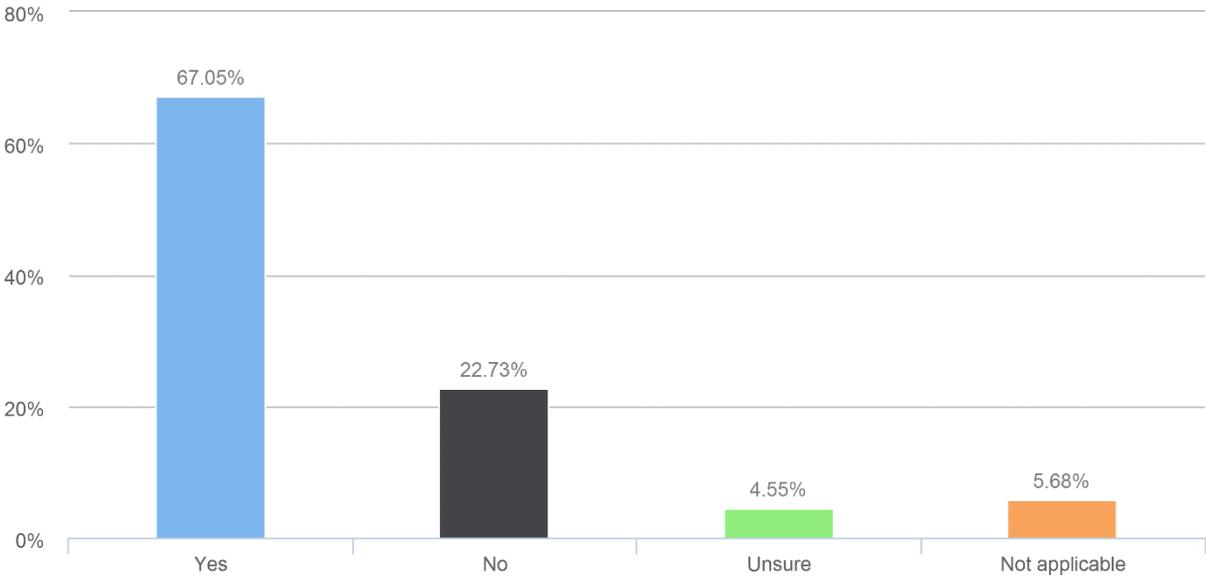
**5. How does your organization plan to spend its American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding?**

Infrastructure project:		13	14.94%
Building & equipment maintenance or upgrade:		9	10.34%
Planning/ordinance documents:		0	0%
Leverage as local match for grant application:		6	6.9%
Increased online/technology capacity:		9	10.34%
Workspace adaptation/alteration:		6	6.9%
Contribute to a multijurisdictional effort (pooling resources):		1	1.15%
Contribute to non-profit/non-governmental organization:		2	2.3%
Will not receive ARPA funding:		48	55.17%
If other, please specify:		19	21%

**6. Do you feel your organization was able to meet the needs of businesses since April 2020?**



**7. Do you feel your organization has been able to meet the needs of residents and/or individuals since April 2020?**



**8. IN YOUR OPINION: What has been your organization's biggest challenge due to the COVID-19 pandemic?**

*(See Synopsis of Written Comments below)*

**9. IN YOUR OPINION: Please share something positive or an opportunity that has resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic.**

*(See Synopsis of Written Comments below)*

**Synopsis of Written Comments**

**Lake County**

Seven Lake County organizations responded to this survey, including four nonprofit organizations and three government entities. Responses indicated challenges with conducting public meetings, engaging the public, and finding volunteers. Noted positive experiences included improved relationships with small businesses and a newfound flexibility to conduct virtual meetings.

**Mason County**

Twenty-one Mason County organizations responded to this survey. Nearly three out of every four responses were from nonprofit organizations. Churches, government, and education were represented as well. Noted challenges primarily involve engaging with donors, stakeholders and volunteers, as well as difficulties with adapting to virtual

meetings. The most common positive aspect of the pandemic involved the increased flexibility and lower costs associated with virtual meetings.

### **Muskegon County**

Fifteen Muskegon County organizations responded to this survey: nine government entities and six nonprofits. A common theme among noted challenges involved maintaining services through the transition to social distancing. The most common positive aspect of the pandemic involved the eventual increased flexibility and lower costs associated with virtual meetings.

### **Newaygo County**

Nineteen Newaygo County organizations responded to this survey, over half of which were nonprofits. Libraries, chambers, and local governments were represented as well. Many noted challenges revolved around a lack of funding or donations compared to need in the community as well as the process of adapting to social distancing and virtual modes of business. The challenges produced a number of unexpected positive effects: greater awareness of needs in the community; stronger family and workplace relationships; and creative solutions to meeting community needs.

### **Oceana County**

Sixteen Oceana County organizations responded to this survey: ten government entities and six nonprofits. Respondents commonly noted challenges surrounding misinformation and misunderstanding of COVID-19 risks and government mandates. On the positive side, many noted experiences with better communication, increased use of technology for remote working, increased outdoor activities, and new funding sources for local governments.

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