

2021 MOVING FORWARD BUSINESS



2021 Moving Forward Business Survey

Survey Results

March 18, 2021

Presented & Analyzed by:



In Partnership with:



Table of Contents

Section 1: Executive Summary	3 - 10
Introduction	3
Survey Process & Format Notes	3 - 4
Takeaways By Section	
Categorization Section (Q1-Q6)	5
Workforce Section (Q7-Q11)	5 - 6
Business Needs Section (Q12-Q16)	6
C-19, Govt. Communication (Q17-Q22)	6 - 7
C-19 Effect/Specific Bus. Issues (Q23-Q29)	8
Concerns & Future Outlook (Q30-Q36)	9
Top Takeaways from Survey (One Page)	10
Section 2: Question by Question Breakdown	11 - 22
Categorization Section (Q1-Q6)	11 - 12
Workforce Section (Q7-Q11)	13 - 14
Business Needs Section (Q12-Q16)	14 - 16
C-19, Govt. Communication (Q17-Q22)	17 - 18
C-19 Effect/Specific Bus. Issues (Q23-Q29)	19 - 20
Concerns & Future Outlook (Q30-Q36)	21 - 22
Section 3: Open-Ended Detail Summary	23 - 36
Q16: Business Needs	23 - 24
Q18: Funding Program Recommendations	25 - 26
Q20: Positive Covid Business Changes	27 - 28
Q21: Communication of Covid Changes– State	29 - 31
Q29: Recommended Policy Change	32 - 34
Q36: Additional Concerns/ Message for Legislators	35 - 36

Section 1. Executive Summary

Moving Forward Business Survey Results

Dear Legislators and Maine Business Leaders:

Herein is the preliminary report of the **2021 Moving Forward Business Survey** which was written and analyzed by the Maine Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (MACCE) in partnership with the Maine Tourism Association (MTA) and the Maine State Chamber of Commerce. Our hope is that you'll find this information helpful in creating recovery plans for our businesses and for the business community to have a better understanding of how their fellow businesses are doing.

For background, MACCE is the non-partisan network of local and regional chamber executives from around the state. We decided to create a follow-up survey to our *Re-Opening Maine's Economy* survey we created in May, to see how businesses did this year, and what their needs are headed into 2021. The survey was created for the sole purpose of helping legislators know what businesses needed as of December 2020. The survey was for open two and half weeks in December closing December 23, 2020. The original plan had been to analyze the results over a few weeks and publish a final report in January. Clearly, we missed that goal, due to several factors outlined in the next section, but nevertheless we know there is some very useful information contained within. For those looking **for an at-a-glance bullet point list of key takeaways, turn to Page 10 now.**

We received 514 responses representing over 26,000 employees from all across the state. Over 35 industries were identified. The survey covers six distinct sections of business topics including the effects of Covid-19 and predictions for 2021.

Survey Process & Format Notes:

Before analyzing any results there are a few key takeaways about the survey itself, and the process we used in creating the survey, that need to be recognized.

First and foremost, the survey took much longer than we ever could have anticipated to analyze, partly due to the timing of the survey analysis coinciding with the our organizations' year-end and partly due to the formatting and nature of the questions. We asked six open-ended questions, in addition to six additional questions where you could write-in a response under "other", essentially creating twelve open-ended questions to quantify. Twelve open-ended questions is a tremendous amount of information for any survey.

Secondly, the nature of the open-ended questions led to analysis of each individual response. Though we sorted the open-ended questions into quantifiable themes, just because an answer wasn't mentioned often doesn't mean it doesn't have value. Several questions asked 'how would you change this' and whenever you ask 'how' you will always get more in-depth answers. A great example is Question 29 asking for a proposed policy change— there may be only three suggestions for insurance changes, for instance, but each of those could be a recommended policy on their own.

Additionally, the length of the survey and the format of the survey were factors in participation. The length made it a time commitment, during a time of year when some businesses may not have had the 20-25 minutes to devote to it. We wanted the survey for the end of the year, but for some industries the holiday shopping season is their busiest time of year. Yet with our goal of giving the results to the incoming legislature we didn't feel we could wait longer into 2021 to get the results.

Survey Process & Format Notes:

Also, the survey was a one-sitting survey meaning you couldn't begin it and finish it later. This resulted in less responses as the survey went along as people either ran out of time, or closed it thinking they could revisit it later. Therefore all percentages in the survey are by percent of those who gave a response and not necessarily of all 514 responses, unless otherwise noted. For all of the questions there are still a few hundred responses, so it's definitely still a statistically significant survey, but we do need to recognize that all 514 respondents did not answer every question. Anecdotally, the average N/R for a typical question was between 15-20% of respondents, meaning 80% or so did submit an answer (meaning on average 80-110 respondents did not give an answer).

In future surveys we'll aim to keep the questions to around 15-20 (not including categorization questions such as name of business, size of business, etc.) Also we we'll limit future surveys to a maximum of 3-4 opened questions. Finally, in terms of formatting, we will require answers for more questions before you can move on, or perhaps include a 'chose not to answer' selection.

Lastly, this is considered the "preliminary report", because it's the baseline from which future results could be compared. By that, we mean that with the categorization questions there is an opportunity to thin-slice the responses should there be parties interested in that data. We did ask for employee size of businesses, industry sectors, seasonal/full time, trade groups associations, and region of the state categorization questions. Should a legislator, trade association, county/municipal office want to segment the data we could provide some data points of just the sub-group they were interested in. *Note: In those scenarios, business names and contact information for the respondents would not be shared, unless the respondent volunteered to be contacted as asked in Question 36.*

At this time, there is no plan for MACCE to segment the data any further than we have, but we will try to accommodate all requests that come forward. Please reach out to Cory King at executivedirector@midcoastmaine.com with any such requests or more information on the format or this analysis of the survey.

Top Takeaways from the Survey:

Following the overview by section we will have a single -page for **Top Takeaways from the Survey** (page 10) which are a culmination of the section overviews, and should be considered the key takeaways from this survey. If you wanted a single-page overview, this is the page.

Overview by Survey Section

The survey is comprehensive in that it covers multiple topics, which is where a lot of the value lies. The survey is divided into six sections:

Categorization Questions (Q1-Q6)

Workforce Questions (Q7– Q11)

Needs Questions (Q12– Q16)

Covid-19, Government Programs and Communication (Q17– Q22)

Economic Effect of Covid-19 on Key Business Issues (Q23-Q29)

Concerns & Future Outlook (Q30– Q36)

Each section had some key takeaways we found, but you may find more answers on your own by looking at the **Question-by-Question Breakdown (Section 2)**, or the **Open-Ended Questions Detail Summary (Section 3)**.

Categorization Section Takeaways (Q1– Q6)

- 6 out of 10 respondents were from businesses with under 10 Employees (62.6%) while nearly 8 out of 10 were businesses with less than 25 employees (79.1%) (Q2)
- Though only accounting for 7.6% of respondents (39 in total) the over 100+ employee businesses account for 79% of the employees in the survey (20,821 of 26,406) (Q2)
- The median sized business in this survey is 5 employees (Q2)
- 1 out of every 5 respondents claimed either York or Cumberland counties as a key service area for their business, with the Hancock and Kennebec Counties accounting for 1 out of every 8 respondents. (Q3)
- Not surprisingly the top three industries respondents self-identified with were: **Lodging & Campgrounds** (23.2%), **Restaurants/Bars** (15.4%) and **Retail** (14.2%) with **Event Planning** and **Non-Profits** rounding out the top 5 (7.6% each). The top three in this survey were the same top 3 industries in our May *Re-Opening Maine's Economy* survey (Q5)
- Over 35 industries were tracked with 14 industries having at least 20 responses each which means we could certainly identify industry trends for those business sectors if someone were to want to look at those responses only (Q5)
- Approximately 2/3 of respondents were year-round businesses and 1/3 were summer seasonal businesses. We only had one respondent who responded as primarily a winter seasonal business (which may have to do with asking businesses to take the survey in December). (Q6)
- Overall, your average respondent then was under 25 employees (79%), does business in York, Cumberland, Hancock or Cumberland County (65%), identified with at least one trade association/chamber (511 responses out of 514 respondents), and is likely year-round business (68%). (Q2-Q6)

Workforce Section Takeaways (Q7– Q11):

- Over half of the respondents say they have approximately the same number of employees as last year (56.0%) which could be an indication of funding program success, while a 1/3 had less employees (34.7%) (and nearly 10% had more employees than last year) (Q7)
- The losses though did outweigh the gains, as the total losses from respondents was 2,191 less employees than last year. If the businesses who responded to the survey are an accurate cross-section of all businesses, then you could surmise that the average Maine business has four less employees than last year (Q8)
- While 57% of businesses say they have what they need for employees right now, 1 out of 3 respondents said they need more employees (31.9%) (Q9)
- When asked about the applicant pool, almost half (49.0%) of the respondents said the **majority of applicants** have the qualifications they would expect from a typical new hire, while an additional 17.0% said that exactly half of the applicants have the typical qualifications they would expect from a new hire. (Q10)

Workforce Section Takeaways (Q7– Q11) *continued from previous page:*

- 1 out of 3 respondents (33.5%) said less than half of the applicants have the typical qualifications they would expect from a new hire (Q10)
- The top two reasons for not hiring specific candidates were (Q11):
They did not have the skills needed in their background (46.5%)
They don't want to work the hours/shifts available (45.9%)

Needs Section Takeaways (Q12– 16):

- When asked what amount of money they would need to guarantee they would be open 12 months from today, the average from all responses was approximately \$65,000. If this survey is an accurate cross-section of all Maine businesses, then we can surmise that the average Maine business says they would need \$65,000 on top of the business they are expected to do, in order to guarantee they will be open 12 months from today (Q12)
- The same number of respondents who said they would need over \$100K in order to guarantee they would open a year from today, was equal to the number of respondents who said they do not need a single dollar (about 1 in 4 for each of those). The other 50% had requests between \$1 and \$100,000. (Q12)
- Maine businesses could use a reimbursement on average of \$6,000 to cover building modifications they made to adhere to Covid mandates, for alterations like: plexiglass installation, outdoor service stations, walls and barriers, directional signage and other physical alterations for customer and employee safety (Q13)
- 4 out of 10 respondents said they either don't need any additional reimbursement for Covid building modifications or that the question does not pertain to their business. 5 out of 10 said they could use less than \$10,000 in reimbursements while about 1 in 10 could use reimbursements above \$10,000. (Q13)
- Maine businesses could use a reimbursement on average of \$4,000 to cover Personal Protective Equipment expenses they incurred due to Covid-19, for customer and employee safety (Q14)
- 3 out of 10 respondents said they don't need any additional reimbursement for Covid PPE, or that the question doesn't pertain to their business. Over 60% said they could use less than \$10,000 in reimbursements while about 1 in 10 could use reimbursements above \$10,000. (Q14)
- The overwhelming business need over the next 3-6 months is an **Injection of Cash** (51.4% of respondents picked this a top-three priority). It was nearly twice as likely to be included by a respondent than any other answer. The next four most popular answers were: Rent/Mortgage Relief (28.7%), Better Insurance Rates (24.8%), More Employees (23.9%) and Lower Utility Rates (21.3%) (Q15)
- Between "other" and Question 16 there were 289 unique suggestions business leaders had for business needs pertaining to all businesses or their industry in particular. Both employee training and a return to normal were popular suggestions (see Section 3/Page 23 & 24 for more results)

Covid-19, Government Programs & Communication Section Takeaways (Q17 - 22):

- Over 64% of respondents utilized the Paycheck Protection Program (Q17)
- 32% utilized the EDIL program; 27.5% utilized the Small Business Recovery Grants (Q17)

Covid-19, Government Programs & Communication Section Takeaways (Q17 - 22):

- Only 31 of 400 respondents to this question selected either that they ‘tried to acquire support through funding programs but were unsuccessful’ (24), or that they ‘didn’t know enough about these programs to apply’ (9) which is great news for the communication and effectiveness of the programs. (Q17)
- Between other on Q17 and the open-ended Q18, we received 240 unique suggestions and comments on the funding programs ranging from ways to improve the programs to the effect the programs had on business sustainability (Q17/Q18– Sec. 3- Page 25 & 26 for additional results)
- Over 68% of the respondents mentioned a positive takeaway from Covid-19 changes they made in their business. The most popular changes were New Cleaning Protocols which was selected by 59.0% of respondents, followed by More Zoom/Remote Meetings (42.7%), Flexible Scheduling (28.8%) and Remote Work Spaces (25.8%) (Q19) Over 25% of businesses will continue with both remote work spaces and flexible scheduling, while over 40% will continue with more remote/ Zoom meetings with their teams. 6 in 10 will maintain new cleaning protocols (Q19)
- Between “other” on Q19 and open-ended Q20, we received 185 unique suggestions and comments on positive Covid-Changes people will make, though 11 of them were comments of ‘nothing good came from Covid-19’ which based on the other responses doesn't seem accurate (Q19/Q20– Sec. 3-Page 27 & 28 for additional results)
- Q21 was our most answered open-ended question and relates to how well the State of Maine communicated Covid-19 changes. Though *Section 3* covers this question much more in-depth (*pages 29-31*), the general takeaway is that more people felt positive than negative about the communication from the state. We came to this conclusion because we quantified the comments by theme, and for those that made comments which were purely a grade of the effectiveness (as opposed to suggestions for improvements or other process commentary), we found the positive outweighed the negative in the following way (Q21):
 - Respondents whose responses were classified as: Very Effective, Effective or Perfect (119)
 - Respondents whose responses were classified as: Not Good, Poor or Terrible (36)
 - Respondents whose responses were classified as: Average or Clearly Communicated (35)Only other response themes with double digit responses:
 - More Advanced Notice Needed (24 Responses)
 - Chambers & Trade Associations Were a Big Help (17 Responses)
- Q22 made statements about the state’s communications and asked respondents to select the statements that most matched their views. The responses confirmed what we found in Q21. Here are the top 6 responses:
 - I believe the State is doing the best they can in a tough situation (57.8%)**
 - The State of Maine had to do whatever was necessary to keep our citizens safe and healthy (43.4%)**
 - I felt like there was inconsistencies in which industries were allowed to open first (40.4%)**
 - The State had some good plans for some industries but I believe they over-reached on others (29.2%)**
 - I’m unclear on what metrics were used and what the thresholds there were for the State to initiate new changes (25.3%)**
 - The State let us know clearly how and why they were making their decisions (25.0%)**

Economic Effect of Covid-19 on Key Business Issues Section Takeaways (Q23-Q29):

- Questions 23– 26 focused on how Covid effected 12 key business issues that Economic Development leaders have been tracking for 4-5 years or more. No business topic received higher than 10% responses for “Covid had a positive effect on this issue”. The highest respondent was for Energy Costs where 8.1% of respondents said Covid-19 had a positive effect on this issue (32 of 392 respondents) (Q23-26)
- In terms of workforce, Covid-19 had a much more severe negative impact on finding available entry-level workers (41.6%) than finding other workers when compared to finding professional level (26.4%), or skilled technical workers (28.6%). (Q23)
- Looking at all the key issues that were tracked, Covid-19 seemed to most negatively impact these three issues (Q23 - Q26):
 - **Finding available entry level workers (41.6% of respondents said COVID-19 made this harder)**
 - **Availability of Maine’s Transportation System (39.2%)**
 - **Cost of Healthcare (36.1%)**
- Looking at all the key issues that were tracked, Covid-19 did not seem to have an affect one way or the other on these three issues (Q23 - Q26):
 - **Availability of High Speed Internet (46.4% said Covid did not affect this issue)**
 - **Energy Costs (41.1%)**
 - **Property Taxes (37.0%)**
- When asked to rank the key issues from Q23-Q26, in terms of what would have the most positive impact on their organization should a policy change be made, the top five answers were (Q27):
 1. **Cost of Healthcare (568 points)**
 2. **Effective State Regulations (513 points)**
 3. **Availability of Entry Level Workers (498 points)**
 4. **Personal Income Taxes (439 points)**
 5. **Availability High Speed Internet (410 points)**
 - However, **Availability of Entry Level Workers**, and **Effective State Regulations** both had more first place votes than **Cost of Healthcare**, but more people ranked Cost of Healthcare ahead of the other two overall.
- When asked to rank the key issues, in terms of what would have the most positive impact on all Maine Businesses should a policy change be made, the top five answers were (Q28):
 1. **Cost of Healthcare (585 points)**
 2. **Availability of Entry Level Workers (498 points)**
 3. **Availability High Speed Internet (458 points)**
 4. **Effective State Regulations (409 points)**
 5. **Personal Income Taxes (383 points)**
 - **Cost of Healthcare** and **Availability of Entry Level Workers** tied for the most first place votes with **Effective State Regulations** a distant third.
- With those results you can surmise that respondents said the top areas in which a policy change would help their organization AND all Maine Businesses are: Cost of Healthcare, Effective State Regulations and Availability of Entry Level Workers. (Q27 & Q28)
- Q29 had 179 unique responses for recommended policy changes (Sec. 3– Pages 32-34 for more results)

Concerns & Future Outlook Session (Q30-Q36):

- When asked the likelihood that they will be open one year from today, only 7.5% said that it was somewhat unlikely or extremely unlikely, while 81.8% it was somewhat likely or extremely likely they would be open. Reported another way, for every business who is somewhat unlikely or extremely unlikely to open, 11 others say they are likely to be open. Or businesses are 11 times more likely to be open a year from now than not. (Q30)
- When asked to rank a list of business concerns, from most important to least important, the ranking was as follows (Q31):
 1. Cash Flow (2,804 points)
 2. Having Enough Customers (2,660 points)
 3. Keeping Employees & Customers Healthy (2,433 points)
 4. Having Enough Employees (1,967 points)
 5. Survival of Fellow Businesses (1,709 points)
 6. Being Open for Tourists ASAP (1,603 points)
 7. Better Tax Environment (1,554 points)
 8. Work-Family Balance (1,543 points)
 9. Making Investments in the Future (1,529 points)
 10. Lower Utility Rates (1,353 points)

- The top three results were overwhelmingly popular with 71.7% of respondents ranking those as their top priority. Cash flow was twice as popular as the other two for first place votes. (37% to 17% to 17%)
- When asked to rank a list of societal concerns, from most important to least important, the ranking was as follows (Q32):
 1. Health & Safety of my Family (2,801 points)
 2. Health & Safety of our Community (2,790 points)
 3. Having a Strong Economy (2,486 points)
 4. Having Adequate Healthcare (2,206 points)
 5. School Closings/Re-openings (1,971 points)
 6. Livable Wages (1,704 points)
 7. Affordable Housing (1,448 points)
 8. Daycare/Childcare Needs & Affordability (1,423 points)
 9. Racial Equality (1,292 points)
 10. Robust Public Transportation (720 points)

The top three results were overwhelmingly popular accounting for 77.7% of the first place votes.
- Respondents were nearly twice as likely to say they were optimistic than pessimistic (41%- 23%) about their expectations for Maine's Business Climate 12 months from now; but 1/3 of respondents said they were unsure (35%) (Q33)
- Question 34 had 140 unique closing comments with commentary on politics dominating with 15% of comments though other helpful topics are also covered (see Sec. 3– Pages 35-36 for more results) (Q34)
- 263 respondents (51.2%) asked for the final report to be sent to them directly; and 147 respondents (28.6%) left their e-mail addresses to be followed up with by their trade association or chamber of commerce should the need arise (Q35 & Q36)

Top Takeaways from this Survey

The ***Moving Forward Business Survey*** had 514 respondents from over 35 industries and each county is represented. The survey was taken in December of 2020 with the expressed intent of getting the final results to legislators and other business leaders to help shape policy with the direct responses from Maine businesses. The survey had 28 content questions with 8 additional categorization questions which did not give content opinions but were used to help sort the data.

These are the top takeaways from the survey, in our opinion:

- Respondents were nearly twice as likely to say they were **optimistic than pessimistic** (41%-23%) about their expectations for Maine's Business Climate 12 months from now; but 1/3 of respondents said they were unsure (35%) (Q33)
- The overwhelming business need over the next 3-6 months is an **Injection of Cash** (51.4% of respondents picked this a top-three priority). It was nearly twice as likely to be included by a respondent than any other answer. The next four most popular answers were: Rent/Mortgage Relief (28.7%), Better Insurance Rates (24.8%), More Employees (23.9%) and Lower Utility Rates (21.3%) (Q15)
- The average Maine business says they would need **\$65,000 on top of the revenue** they are expected to make, to **guarantee** they will be open 12 months from today (Q12)
- Maine businesses could use a reimbursement on average of **\$6,000 to cover building modifications** they made to adhere to Covid mandates (Q13)
- Maine businesses could use a reimbursement on average of **\$4,000 to cover Personal Protective Equipment expenses** they incurred due to Covid-19, for customer & employee safety (Q14)
- More people felt **positive** than negative about the communication from the state about Covid-19 recommended changes.(Q21)
- Businesses said the top areas in which a policy change would help their organization **AND** all Maine Businesses are: **Cost of Healthcare, Effective State Regulations and Availability of Entry Level Workers**. Additionally, policy changes to the Availability of High Speed Internet and Personal Income Taxes also ranked highly. (Q27 & Q28)
- Over half of the respondents say they have approximately the same number of employees as last year (56.0%) which could be an indication of funding program success, while a 1/3 had less employees (34.7%) (and nearly 10% had more employees than last year) (Q7)
- While 57% of businesses say they have what they need for employees right now, 1 out of 3 businesses said they need more employees (31.9%) (Q9)
- Over 68% of the respondents mentioned a **positive takeaway from Covid-19** changes they made in their business. (Q19)
- Over 25% of businesses will continue with both **remote work spaces** and **flexible scheduling**, while over 40% will continue with **more remote/ Zoom meetings** with their teams. 6 in 10 will maintain new **cleaning protocols** (Q19)
- 1 out of 3 respondents (33.5%) said **less than half** of the applicants they get have the typical qualifications they would expect from a new hire (Q10)
- The top two reasons for not hiring specific candidates were: They did not have the skills needed in their background (46.5%) and they don't want to work the hours/shifts available (45.9%) (Q11)

Section 2. Question by Question Breakdown

Categorization Questions (1-6)

1. Name of your organization *Will not be shared, for categorization only*

514 Responses

2. Number of Employees *Please include all FT and PT employees as a full number) as you are currently staffed*

26,436 Employees

Responses: 514	Number of Responses	% of Respondents
Under 10 Employee Businesses	322	62.6%
10-24 Employee Businesses	85	16.5%
25-49 Employee Businesses	43	8.4%
50-99 Employee Businesses	25	4.9%
Over 100 Employee Businesses	39	7.6%

3. County of Organization

If you cover a broader area please select more than one or region. If you cover the entire state please select ENTIRE STATE only

	Number of Responses	% of Respondents
Androscoggin	30	5.8%
Aroostook	21	4.1%
Cumberland	101	19.7%
Franklin	13	2.5%
Hancock	71	13.8%
Kennebec	60	11.6%
Knox	25	4.8%
Lincoln	16	3.1%
Oxford	31	6.0%
Penobscot	29	5.6%
Piscataquis	32	6.2%
Sagadahoc	23	4.4%
Somerset	17	3.3%
Waldo	15	2.9%
Washington	6	1.1%
York	101	19.7%
Entire State	39	7.6%
Northern Maine	4	0.8%
Eastern Maine	6	1.2%
Central Maine	4	0.8%
Southern Maine	21	4.1%

4. For ease in reviewing the results, what is the primary chamber of commerce, business association or CVB you identify with *Please limit answers at 3 maximum; Leave blank if you are not associated with any Chamber, Association or CVB*

511 Responses

5. What industry are you in:

	Number of Responses	% of Respondents
Lodging & Campgrounds	119	23.2%
Restaurants/Bars/Bakeries/Coffee Shops/Caterers	78	15.2%
Retail- including grocery	73	14.2%
Events/Event Planning & Weddings	40	7.8%
Non-profit: Charitable, Libraries, Community Org.	40	7.8%
Other	38	7.4%
Tours/Tourism	34	6.6%
Recreation	33	6.4%
Finance & Insurance (Bank, Credit Unions, CPAs, Insurance)	30	5.8%
Manufacturing	28	5.4%
Arts, Theater, A/V technology and communications	27	5.3%
Healthcare	23	4.5%
Education	22	4.3%
Nature & charter based tourism, including excursions	22	4.3%
Professional Services- Legal, Consulting etc.	22	4.3%
Entertainment	19	3.7%
Construction incl. In-Home Service: Contractors, plumb., elec., landscaping	18	3.5%
Realtors/ Real Estate	14	2.7%
Boating, Marine, Marina	12	2.3%
Fitness	12	2.3%
Government/Municipal	12	2.3%
Housing/Property Management	12	2.3%
Transportation and automotive services	10	1.9%
Marketing, media, sales and services	9	1.8%
Childcare/ Daycare	8	1.6%
Salons/Stylists: cosmetology services, spa, tattoo, massage and nails	7	1.4%
Farming, Agriculture & Commercial Fishing	6	1.2%
Technology- IT and computers	6	1.2%
Utilities (Gas and electric services)	6	1.2%
Wholesale trade/sales	6	1.2%
Museums/Historical	5	1.0%
Photography	5	1.0%
Cleaning/Janitorial	2	0.4%
Pet Care	2	0.4%
Senior Living/Retirement Homes, Assisted Living	1	0.2%

6. Is your business seasonal?

Please classify your organization from the following options:

Responses: 509	Number of Responses	% of Responses
Primarily Summer <i>(over 65% of your work/income happens in Summer)</i>	160	31.4%
Primarily Winter <i>(over 65% of your work/income happens in Winter)</i>	1	0.2%
Year-Round	348	68.4%
No Response	5	

Workforce Questions (7-11)

7. Do you have more employees overall, then you had last year, less employees, or approximately the same?

Responses: 473	Number of Responses	% of Responses
Same amount of employees (approx.)	265	56.0%
Less Employees	164	34.7%
More Employees	44	9.3%
No Response	41	

8. If you answered more or less, how many more or how many less? If there was no change, please answer 0. (Please count the total number of FT and PT people as a single number)

Overall: - 2191 Employees (2,191 less employees)

9. Do you have the number of employees you need, or do you need more?

Responses: 473	Number of Responses	% of Responses
Have What I Need	269	56.9%
Need More	151	31.9%
N/A or I Don't Do the Hiring	17	3.6%
Other	36	7.6
No Response	41	

Of the 41 Other responses the **top five responses** are summarized as: Volunteers (6), Seasonal (4), Will Hire Later (4), No Money to Hire (4), Need Less (4), Depends on Regulations and Restrictions (4)

10. What percentage of your new hires have the training/experience/skills you would want from a typical new hire?

If this question is not applicable, you do not know the answer, or you do not conduct the hiring, please enter N/A in the text box

Responses: 426 (N/A: 226); Respondents who hire: 200

Top Three Exact Answers

	Number of Responses	% of Responses
Exactly 100% (All applicants have the typical skills)	45	22.5%
Exactly 50% (Half of the applicants have typical skills)	35	17.5%
Exactly 0% (None of the applicants have typical skills)	16	8.0%

Answers by Range

Majority of Applicants Have the Typical Skills (Respondents answered 51 - 100%)	98	49.0%
Exactly Half (50%)	35	17.5%
Less Than Half of Applicants Have the Typical Skills (Respondents answered 0 - 49%)	67	33.5%
N/A, Don't Know or I Don't Do the Hiring (Respondent does not do hiring)	226	
No Response (Skipped Question)	88	

11. When looking at the candidates applying for positions with your organization, what would you say are the primary reasons you do not hire them?

(Select all that apply)

Responses: 457 (N/A: 76) Respondents Who Hire: 381	Number of Responses	% of Responses
Don't have the skills in their background	177	46.5%
Don't want to work the hours/shifts available	175	45.9%
They did not interview well	143	37.5%
Don't have the experience/licenses required	111	29.1%
Don't have the education/training required	76	19.9%
Can't find reliable transportation	67	17.6%
Drug convictions/Can't pass background check	56	14.7%
Other (please specify)	65	17.1%
N/A, Don't Know or I Don't Do the Hiring <i>(Respondent does not do hiring)</i>	76	
No Response <i>(Skipped Question)</i>	59	

Of 65 Other responses, the **top five** responses are summarized as: Not Currently Hiring (16), No show at Interview/First Day (9), Can't find quality applicants (6), Lack of Motivation (5), No Housing (4), Poor References (4)

Needs Questions (12-16)

12. Taking into account your anticipated revenues over the next 12 months, with the current business climate, how much in additional funds would you need to safely guarantee your business would be open one year from today?

The average of all responses (422): \$66,220.38

Responses: 422	Number of Responses	% of Responses
<u>Top Three Exact Answers</u>		
Zero <i>(No additional funds needed to be open one year from today)</i>	104	24.6%
Over \$200K	62	14.7%
\$25K - \$50K <i>(None of the applicants have typical skills)</i>	48	11.4%
<u>Answers by Range</u>		
Zero <i>(No additional funds needed to be open one year from today)</i>	104	24.6%
Under \$100K over Zero	212	50.0%
Over \$100K	106	25.1%
No Response (Skipped Question)	88	

13. If there were a Covid Business Equipment Reimbursement program for businesses who installed sneeze guards, signage, stickers, plexiglass and other physical adjustments to your business work space in order to accommodate the Covid mandates that were required of businesses, how much would you apply for?

Please do not include any funds you have previously been reimbursed through other community or government programs.

The average of all responses (391): \$6,142.52 (did not include 1 outlier response of \$1.5M)

Responses: 392	Number of Responses	% of Responses
Zero (No funds needed)	129	32.9%
Above Zero, Under \$10K	191	48.7%
\$10K and over	37	9.4%
Not Applicable to Our Business	34	8.7%
No Response	122	

14. If there were a Covid Personal Protective Equipment Reimbursement program for businesses who purchased PPE for employees and/or customers such as: masks, face guards, hand sanitizer, antiseptic wipes, protective eyewear, additional gloves, gowns, hair nets, and other personal protective equipment in order to accommodate the Covid mandates that were required of businesses, how much would you apply for?

Please do not include any funds you have previously been reimbursed through other community or government programs.

The average of all responses (391): \$4,232.54

Responses: 391	Number of Responses	% of Responses
Zero (No funds needed)	93	23.8%
Above Zero, Under \$10K	238	60.9%
\$10K and over	34	8.7%
Not Applicable to Our Business	26	6.6%
No Response	123	

15. Please select up to three of the following as your most important business needs over the next 3-6 months you are open:

Responses: 422	Number of Responses	% of Respondents
Injection of Cash	217	51.4%
Rent/Mortgage Relief	121	28.7%
Better Insurance Rates	105	24.8%
More Employees	101	23.9%
Lower Utility Rates	90	21.3%
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	77	18.3%
Business Infrastructure Improvements	63	14.9%
Improved Supply Chain	62	14.7%
Loan Deferments	44	10.4%
Covid Protocol Business Equipment (plexiglass, social distancing equipment)	37	8.8%
Childcare for Staff	33	7.8%
More Affordable Inventory/Access to Inventory	31	7.3%
Free Training for Employees	22	5.2%
Other	72	17.1%
No Response	94	

*Of the 72 Other responses, the **top five** responses are summarized as: Remove/Relax Covid Restrictions (10), Return to Normal (8), More Customers/Clients (7), Covid-Testing/Vaccines (5), Less Regulation (5)*

16. Please expand on your business needs here with any other comments you would like to share (300 word max):

217 Responses

Results can be found in Section 3. Open-ended questions

Covid-19, Government Programs & Communication Questions (17-22)

17. During Covid-19 did your organization acquire support through any of the following programs that were offered by the State and Federal Government? *(Select All That Apply)*

Responses: 400	Number of Responses	% of Responses
Paycheck Protection Program (PPP)	258	64.5%
Economic and Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL)	128	32.0%
Small Business Recovery Grants	110	27.5%
Enhanced Unemployment	42	10.5%
Keep Maine Healthy Grants	17	4.3%
We Did Not Try To Acquire Support Through These Programs	63	15.8%
We Tried to Acquire Support but Were Unsuccessful	24	6.0%
We Didn't Know Enough About These Programs to Apply	9	2.3%
Other (Please Specify)	43	10.8%
No Response	114	

Of the 43 Other responses, the **top five responses** are summarized as: Do not Qualify (10), Maine Tourism, Hospitality & Retail Recovery Grant Program (5), CARES Act (4), No help needed (3), EMDC grant (2), Not enough losses (2)

18. If you utilized any of the programs listed in Question 17, are there any changes you would propose to any of those programs so they would be more effective (in case they were to re-emerge in the future)? *(300 word max)*

197 Responses

Results can be found in Section 3. Open-ended questions

19. Are there positive business changes that you made to accommodate the Covid-19 requirements that you will likely end up continuing with? *Please select those positive changes from the list below (Select all that Apply):*

Responses: 361	Number of Responses	% of Responses
New Cleaning/ Sanitizing Protocols	213	59.0%
More Zoom/Remote Meetings	157	42.7%
Flexible Scheduling	104	28.8%
Remote Work Spaces	93	25.8%
Streamlined Agendas for Meetings	40	11.1%
Other	96	26.6%
No response	153	

Of the 96 Other responses, the **top five responses** are summarized as: New Contactless Protocols (11), Increased Digital Presence (9), New Programs Created (9), Commentary on Changes (8) and Curbside/Takeout (7)

20. Is there anything else you would like to add about positive Covid-19 changes that you will use going forward? *(300 word max)*

89 Responses

Results can be found in Section 3. Open-ended questions

21. In looking at how the State of Maine communicated Covid regulations and changes to Covid protocols for businesses since the pandemic began, how would you rate the effectiveness of that communication from State of Maine? We are trying to evaluate how clearly the State communicated the message rather than how the message positively or negatively impacted your business.
(50 Word Max)

336 Responses

Results can be found in Section 3. Open-ended questions

22. In terms of the State of Maine communicating Covid regulation changes, which of the following statements are most accurate to your feelings (Select all that apply):

Responses: 408	Number of Responses	% of Responses
I believe the State is doing the best they can in a tough situation	236	57.8%
The State of Maine had to do whatever was necessary to keep our citizens safe and healthy	177	43.4%
I felt like there was inconsistencies in which industries were allowed to open first	165	40.4%
The State had some good plans for some industries but I believe they over-reached on others	119	29.2%
I'm unclear on what metrics were used and what the thresholds there were for the State to initiate new changes	103	25.3%
The State let us know clearly how and why they were making their decisions	102	25.0%
The guidance the State laid out is very clear and businesses should accept it for the health of everyone	98	24.0%
I'd like a better understanding of how decisions got made for my industry	97	23.8%
I like how the State specifically worked with industry leaders to help with the decisions they needed to make	91	22.3%
In a capitalist society the business owner should be able to say what happens in their business, not the State	68	16.7%
The regulations were fair to all industries, for the most part	49	12.0%
Other	80	19.6%
No Response	106	

Of the 80 Other responses, the top five responses are summarized as: Well Done (10), Poor Job (9), Unhappy with Hospitality Decisions (7), Better Communication Needed (6), Alternate Approach Suggested (5), Big Business Favoritism (5)

Economic Effects of COVID-19 on Key Business Issues (23-29)

Over the last five years, there have been 10-15 specific business issues that have been repeatedly identified by Maine business leaders as key indicators to success and growth. The questions in this section will discuss 12 of the key issues that were identified in multiple business surveys to see what effect COVID-19 has had on these specific issues, if any.

23. Covid-19 effect on: Availability of finding workforce

	COVID-19 made it <u>easier</u> to find these workers	COVID-19 did not affect this	COVID-19 made it <u>harder</u> to find these workers	Not applicable/ Don't know	No Response
Finding available entry level workers	15 (3.8%)	67 (16.8%)	166 (41.6%)	151 (37.8%)	115 (399 Resp.)
Finding professional level workers	6 (1.5%)	73 (18.5%)	104 (26.4%)	211 (53.6%)	120 (394 Resp.)
Finding available skilled technical workers	6 (1.5%)	61 (15.6%)	112 (28.6%)	213 (54.3%)	122 (392 Resp.)
All workers (avg.)	27 (2.3%)	201 (17.0%)	382 (32.3%)	575 (48.5%)	Total Resp. 1,185

24. Covid-19 effect on: Taxation

	COVID-19 had a positive impact on this issue	COVID-19 did not affect this issue	COVID-19 had a negative impact on this issue	Not applicable/ Don't know	No Response
Property Taxes	5 (1.3%)	139 (37.0%)	87 (23.1%)	145 (38.6%)	138 (376 Resp.)
Personal Income Taxes	8 (2.0%)	104 (26.2%)	108 (27.2%)	177 (44.6%)	117 (397 Resp.)
All Tax (avg.)	13 (1.7%)	243 (31.4%)	195 (25.2%)	322 (41.7%)	Total Resp. 773

25. Covid-19 effect on: Natural Resources & Regulation

	COVID-19 had a positive impact on this issue	COVID-19 did not affect this issue	COVID-19 had a negative impact on this issue	Not applicable/ Don't know	No Response
Availability Nat. Resources for Production Purposes	6 (1.5%)	56 (14.2%)	101 (25.6%)	231 (58.6%)	120 (394 Resp.)
Effective State Regulations	19 (5.0%)	55 (14.4%)	126 (33.0%)	200 (47.6%)	132 (382 Resp.)

26. Covid-19 effect on: Business Costs & Availability

	COVID-19 had a positive impact on this issue	COVID-19 did not affect this issue	COVID-19 had a negative impact on this issue	Not applicable/ Don't know	No Response
Cost of Healthcare	18 (4.5%)	111 (28.0%)	143 (36.1%)	124 (31.3%)	188 (396 Resp.)
Energy Costs	32 (8.2%)	161 (41.1%)	80 (20.4%)	119 (30.4%)	122 (392 Resp.)
Availability of High Speed Internet	20 (5.1%)	183 (46.4%)	95 (23.9%)	99 (24.9%)	117 (397 Resp.)
Access to Maine-Based Research & Development	16 (4.0%)	97 (24.5%)	41 (10.4%)	242 (61.6%)	118 (396 Resp.)
Availability of Maine's Transportation System	6 (1.5%)	62 (15.6%)	156 (39.2%)	174 (43.7%)	116 (398 Resp.)

27. Prioritizing The Most Essential Issues in Need of Policy Changes for Your Organization

Please select the **five most important issues from the following list of key issues**, and rank that top five in order of importance with the highest ranking going to the issue you feel is most in need of policy changes. Your top ranking should illustrate the issue that would have the most amount of positive effect on your organization should a positive policy change be implemented in the next 18 months.

*The highest priority should be ranked "1"; the second highest priority should be ranked "2" and so on.

Overall Priorities to Help Your Organization (Weighted for all responses)

1. Cost of Healthcare (568 points)
2. Effective State Regulations (513 points)
3. Availability of Entry Level Workers (498 points)
4. Personal Income Taxes (439 points)
5. Availability High Speed Internet (410 points)
6. Property Taxes (367 points)
7. Energy Costs (317 points)
8. Availability of Professional Workers (291 points)
9. Availability of Skilled Technicians (239 points)
10. Availability of Transportation System (141 points)
11. Other (99 points)
12. Availability Nat. Resources– Production (76 points)
13. Access to Maine Research & Develop.(43 points)

There were some reporting issues with Q27 as apparently the instructions were not clear, and **97 respondents** ranked each topic by importance on a 1-5 scale rather than prioritizing their top five answers. **146 respondents** did not respond at all. Partial answers were accepted if respondents listed less than five priorities (for instance if they only selected a top priority).

% Listed as of Top Priority

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1. Availability of Entry Level Workers | 18.4% |
| 2. Effective State Regulations | 16.0% |
| 3. Cost of Healthcare | 14.9% |
| 4. Availability High Speed Internet | 12.1% |
| 5. Availability of Professional Workers | 9.2% |

% Listed as of Top 3 Priority

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. Cost of Healthcare | 45.0% |
| 2. Effective State Regulations | 41.7% |
| 3. Availability of Entry Level Workers | 38.7% |
| 4. Personal Income Taxes | 31.7% |
| 5. Availability of High Speed Internet | 31.4% |

% Listed as of Top 5 Priority

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. Cost of Healthcare | 62.4% |
| 2. Effective State Regulations | 56.1% |
| 3. Personal Income Taxes | 54.2% |
| 4. Availability of Entry Level Workers | 51.3% |
| 5. Availability of High Speed Internet | 46.1% |

28. Prioritizing The Most Essential Issues in Need of Policy Changes for ALL Maine Businesses

Please select the **five most important issues from the following list of key issues**, and rank that top five in order of importance with the highest ranking going to the issue you feel is most in need of policy changes. Your top ranking should illustrate the issue that would have the most amount of positive effect on ALL Maine businesses should a positive policy change be implemented in the next 18 months

Overall Priorities to Help ALL Maine Businesses (Weighted for all responses)

1. Cost of Healthcare (585 points)
2. Availability of Entry Level Workers (498 points)
3. Availability High Speed Internet (458 points)
4. Effective State Regulations (409 points)
5. Personal Income Taxes (383 points)
6. Property Taxes (362 points)
7. Availability of Skilled Technicians (345 points)
8. Availability of Professional Workers (339 points)
9. Energy Costs (302 points)
10. Availability of Transportation System (112 points)
11. Other (58 points)
12. Access to Maine Research & Develop.(53 points)
13. Availability Nat. Resources– Production (50 points)

There were some reporting issues with Q28 as apparently the instructions were not clear, and **78 respondents** ranked each topic by importance on a 1-5 scale rather than prioritizing their top five answers. **166 respondents** did not respond at all. Partial answers were accepted if respondents listed less than five priorities (for instance if they only selected a top priority).

% Listed as of Top Priority

- | | |
|--|-------|
| T-1. Cost of Healthcare | 19.4% |
| T-1. Availability of Entry Level Workers | 19.4% |
| 3. Effective State Regulations | 14.1% |
| 4. Availability High Speed Internet | 12.0% |
| 5. Personal Income Taxes | 8.8% |

% Listed as of Top 3 Priority

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. Cost of Healthcare | 43.8% |
| 2. Availability of Entry Level Workers | 36.4% |
| 3. Availability of High Speed Internet | 34.6% |
| 4. Effective State Regulations | 29.1% |
| 5. Personal Income Taxes | 27.9% |

% Listed as of Top 5 Priority

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. Cost of Healthcare | 61.5% |
| 2. Availability of High Speed Internet | 53.0% |
| 3. Availability of Entry Level Workers | 52.6% |
| 4. Property Taxes | 47.4% |
| 5. Personal Income Taxes | 46.7% |

29. Recommended Policy Change

Please select one of the key issues listed in Q28 or Q29 and tell us what would be a recommended policy change you would like to see. Be as specific as possible. (300 word max)

180 Responses

Results can be found in Section 3. Open-ended questions

Concerns & Future Outlook (30-36)

30. Given your current situation, what is the likelihood you will be open one year from today?

For seasonal businesses, instead of one year from today, consider the question as 'for your next opening day'.

Responses: 368	Number of Responses	% of Responses
Extremely Likely	217	59.0%
Somewhat Likely	84	22.8%
Can't Say One Way or the Other	43	11.7%
Somewhat Unlikely	13	3.5%
Extremely Unlikely	11	3.0%
No Response	146	

31. Please rank the following business concerns you have from most important to least important.

Ranking of 1 means most important, 2 means second most important, and so on.

Overall Business Concern Priorities (Weighted for all responses)

1. Cash Flow (2,804 points)
2. Having Enough Customers (2,660 points)
3. Keeping Employees & Customers Healthy (2,433 points)
4. Having Enough Employees (1,967 points)
5. Survival of Fellow Businesses (1,709 points)
6. Being Open for Tourists ASAP (1,603 points)
7. Better Tax Environment (1,554 points)
8. Work-Family Balance (1,543 points)
9. Making Investments in the Future (1,529 points)
10. Lower Utility Rates (1,353 points)

% Listed as of Top Priority

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Cash Flow | 37.5% |
| T-2. Having Enough Customers | 17.1% |
| T-2. Keeping Emp. & Cust. Healthy | 17.1% |
| 4. Being Open for Tourists ASAP | 8.7% |
| 5. Having Enough Employees | 8.4% |

% Listed as of Top 3 Priority

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Cash Flow | 73.5% |
| 2. Having Enough Customers | 67.3% |
| 3. Keeping Emp. & Cust. Healthy | 47.9% |
| 4. Having Enough Employees | 34.2% |
| 5. Being Open for Tourists ASAP | 28.0% |

Not every respondent ranked all ten issues, and thus total number of responses varied. For example, some people only listed one priority as the top priority, some only listed 2 or 3, and so on.

Percentages for top priority (listed to the right) is based on the total number of top priority answers submitted (368 responses)

Percentage of top 3 and top 5 priority is based the average number of the all responses on each issue, which was 336 responses.

% Listed as of Top 5 Priority

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Cash Flow | 87.5% |
| 2. Having Enough Customers | 86.3% |
| 3. Keeping Emp. & Cust. Healthy | 76.5% |
| 4. Having Enough Employees | 60.7% |
| 5. Survival of Fellow Businesses | 42.9% |

32. Please rank the following societal concerns you have from most important to least important. *Ranking of 1 means most important, 2 means second most important, and so on.*

**Overall Business Concern Priorities
(Weighted for all responses)**

1. Health & Safety of my Family (2,801 points)
2. Health & Safety of our Community (2,790 points)
3. Having a Strong Economy (2,486 points)
4. Having Adequate Healthcare (2,206 points)
5. School Closings/Re-openings (1,971 points)
6. Livable Wages (1,704 points)
7. Affordable Housing (1,448 points)
8. Daycare/Childcare Needs & Affordability (1,423 points)
9. Racial Equality (1,292 points)
10. Robust Public Transportation (720 points)

% Listed as of Top Priority

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Health & Safety of My Family | 37.3% |
| 2. Having a Strong Economy | 24.9% |
| 3. Health & Safety of Our Community | 15.5% |
| 4. School Closings/Re-openings | 9.4% |
| 5. Livable Wages | 3.9% |

% Listed as of Top 3 Priority

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Health & Safety of My Family | 76.5% |
| 2. Health & Safety of our Community | 69.9% |
| 3. Having a Strong Economy | 57.2% |
| 4. School Closings/Re-openings | 38.3% |
| 5. Having Adequate Healthcare | 32.2% |

Not every respondent ranked all ten issues, and thus total number of responses varied. For example, some people only listed one priority as the top priority, some only listed 2 or 3, and so on.

Percentages for top priority (listed to the right) is based on the total number of top priority answers submitted (362 responses)

Percentage of top 3 and top 5 priority is based the average number of the all responses on each issue, which was 332 responses.

% Listed as of Top 5 Priority

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Health & Safety of our Community | 94.3% |
| 2. Health & Safety of my Family | 91.3% |
| 3. Having a Strong Economy | 79.8% |
| 4. Having Adequate Healthcare | 69.3% |
| 5. School Closings/Re-openings | 58.1% |

33. Which of the following describes your feeling towards the business climate in Maine 12 months from today?

Responses: 371

	Number of Responses	% of Responses
Optimistic	153	41.2%
Unsure	133	35.8%
Pessimistic	85	22.9%
No Response	143	

34. Are there any other concerns not addressed in the questions above that you would like legislators in Augusta to be aware of as they head into session?

140 Responses

Results can be found in Section 3. Open-ended questions

35. Please enter your email address if you would you like to receive these results when the survey is completed (your e-mail will not be shared for any other purpose).

263 Responses

Respondents will be sent the final report

36. Would you like to leave an e-mail address to be contacted in case your local Chamber, association or CVB wants to follow-up with you on any of your answers?

We will disclose your e-mail only to those you noted in Question #4. If yes, please enter your email address below.

147 Responses

Respondents contact info will be shared with organizations in Question #4

Section 3. Open-Ended Questions Detail Summary

Question 16. Please expand on your business needs here with any other comments you would like to share (300 word max):

Q16: Top Five Themes & 2-3 Examples of these responses (Total Responses– 217):

#1 More Employees/Training Help (23 responses– 10.6%):

“Despite reported high unemployment, and a willingness on our part to train people, we cannot find enough manufacturing employees. Also having trouble recruiting professional staff (engineering especially).”

“We need seasonal workers who are willing to work day/evening shifts in a kitchen environment or serving guests. Many local staff this year did not want to come to work because of COVID risk which meant we couldn't open as much as we normally do.”

“The biggest challenge we face is most definitely finding people who are willing to put in the hard work to maintain a job. The quality of many candidates is terrible. We are growing rapidly and need employees desperately for that growth.”

#2 Additional Capital for Survival (20 responses– 9.2%):

“Business grants are vital to help with cashflow as well as low interest loans. Until there is truly an end in site of the pandemic, all small businesses will need continued help throughout all of this.”

“Second round of grants by the state of Maine, with larger maximum award of up to \$200,000. SBA loan forgiveness for an additional 6 months. Additional PPP. Local property tax relief. Main St Lending program changes to allow asset heavy businesses (i.e. B&B's, hotels) to apply.”

#3 (tie) Industry Specific Commentary (15 responses– 6.9%)

“Lifting of Covid restrictions on Tasting Rooms. We are a retail manufacturing business, open 11 to 5 with 90% of our business retail off premise (at home) consumption - and the state is treating us like a bar. We have had no reply from the many phone calls and emails to the Governor's office and the DECD. They have classified all businesses with our licenses as bars - but they aren't. They are unwilling to look closer at the businesses that are manufacturing wine/spirits/beer and let those businesses that are primarily retail to open. We all aren't bars.”

“1. Bookings/Reservations = cash - we need people to feel travel is safe 2. In six months we will need to be hired to capacity which is 8 people. We are currently at 2 people and that is enough in the off season. 3. We want to purchase pumps, mixing valve and hose to plumb hot water into every cabin to facilitate increased hand washing.”

“Accountants like myself benefitted greatly from the way our government chose to handle the pandemic. We are looking to expand and serve even more clients in the next year.”

#3 (tie) Travel Business- Return to Normal (15 responses– 6.9%)

“Relaxed COVID restrictions for out of state travelers”

“We simply need an environment where Maine accepts out-of-State visitors without onerous rules & restrictions, and where we and other businesses in the hospitality, activities, and retail industries are allowed to be open and serve our customers with safety standards in place.”

“Cruise Ship activity in Portland that allows independent local tours”

Continued from Previous page

Question 16. Please expand on your business needs here with any other comments you would like to share (300 word max):

Q16: Top Five Themes & 2-3 Examples of these responses (Total Responses– 217):

#5 Return to Normal (10 responses– 4.6%)

“Hope to safely be able to open at a financially successful level before my finances run out.”

“We need the economy to get back on track so that people are willing to make future plans. When they are stuck in limbo they don’t choose to renovate or organize or downsize.”

“I need to survive the next 10+ months - it doesn’t matter how much we follow protocols or tell our customers about it, if the general public does not feel safe, they will not come out, and they are not. Therefore, I need to layoff staff most likely and try to pay rent until this is all over.... probably about 10-12 mos. out.”

Other responses by theme

Government Overreach (8)
Additional Capital for Infrastructure Improvements (7)
Misc. (7)
PPE Access & Affordability (7)
Capacity Restrictions Hurting Revenues (6)
Supply Chain Stability/ Inventory Concerns (6)
More Customers (5)
Broadband Expansion (4)
Communication- Better Messaging and Communication (4)
Funding Programs kept us going (4)
Taxes (4)
Vaccine (4)
Better Insurance Coverage (3)
Business Expansion (3)
Change the Tone- Promote Successes not Fear (3)
Childcare/Eldercare Support Needed (3)
Consistent regulations would be helpful- too much change (3)
Don't qualify for funding- unique circumstance (3)
Marketing Needed (3)
More Covid Compliance Needed (3)
More funding for Chambers and 501c6 orgs (3)
Unemployment Incentivizes People to Not Work (3)
Visa Expansion/Notification for Summer Season (3)
Don't Qualify for funding- sole proprietor (2)
Grants Not Loans (2)
Loan Forgiveness/Loan Deferment (2)
Reimbursement for Covid Protocols (2)
Rent/Utility Forgiveness & Support (2)
Uncertainty for What the Future Will Bring (2)

Other Comments That Stood Out

“Less money going to local and state taxes. Less going to insurance companies.”

“A more stable supply chain with minimal interruptions, stable pricing (no duties), and consistently high on time delivery (less logistical interruptions).”

“We need capital money to replace worn out old buses with newer more efficient models”

“Over the next 3-6 months, we anticipate more employees working from home, so will need rural broadband, appropriate technology and tech support.”

“Our fitness center revenue has decreased by \$60,000 because of current restrictions. Gathering limits have shut down various fundraising events that raise money for our non-profit resulting in a loss of \$100,000 +”

“Until the virus is under control, we need clearer, well broadcast restrictions. Too much stress placed on front facing employees.”

“While its great that we were offered low interest loans to get through this what we really need are grants. Most businesses can't afford more loans to get through closures”

“Our business is still strong, but there is a fair amount of uncertainty about the future. We may need additional PPE and CPE in the near future.”

Question 18. If you utilized any of the programs listed in Question 17, are there any changes you would propose to any of those programs so they would be more effective (in case they were to re-emerge in the future)? (300 word max)

Q18: Top Five Themes & 2-3 Examples of these responses (Total Responses– 197):

#1 Well Done (13 responses– 6.6%):

“I felt that the programs were well thought through. Nice job.”

“PPP was a tremendous help and keep our employees working even though the future was unknown”

“We understand juggling this money is challenging. Technical difficulties and communication about the availability of grants has been difficult, but under the circumstances it’s been wonderful what has been accomplished.”

#2 (tie) Clarity/Consistency of the Rules (11 responses– 5.6%):

“Clearer and more fully developed language around legal requirements and processes for eligibility, forgiveness and/or repayment of loan(s). In other words, no changes once it’s rolled out.”

“Didn’t dare to take some where as the repayment/forgiveness was unclear. And the last thing I need is a loan.”

“More clear concise instructions. More detail on tax implications, effect on revenue, loan pay back and forgiveness.”

#2 (tie) New PPP/Better PPP (11 responses– 5.6%)

“Additional PPP support to provide financial support of their salaries and or anticipated yearly monies made for part time employees until we can return to service.”

“The PPP money should not be counted towards Maine grant programs. Additionally, the PPP money basically kept our employees afloat through the spring shut down. The question now is how to maintain the biz through the winter and early spring when there is limited cash to carry us through.”

“The first round of PPP was too early and we actually felt penalized for getting it early, more PPP would certainly help!”

#4 Expand what funding Can Cover (10 responses– 5.1%)

“Ability to pay vendors with relief money.”

“Increased flexibility of how funds can be used”

“PPP doesn’t work. Our payroll expenses are only 17% of overall business expenses. Fixed costs around mortgage, insurance, property tax and other monthly fixed costs are far more costly.”

#5 Make Funds Non Taxable Income (9 responses– 4.6%)

“Make a simple loan forgiveness form for loans under \$150,000. And make the loan forgiveness tax exempt both state and Fed.”

“Remove the tax burden. Or at least minimize it. Pretty hard for a business to repay up to 30% of the “emergency” monies needed to stay open.”

Continued from Previous page

Question 18. If you utilized any of the programs listed in Question 17, are there any changes you would propose to any of those programs so they would be more effective (in case they were to re-emerge in the future)? (300 word max)

Other responses by theme

Better Communication (7)
Grants Not Loans (7)
Quicker Disbursement of Funds (7)
Application Process Improvements (6)
EIDL- Grant not Loan (6)
Lengthen Coverage Window of PPP (6)
Can't Demonstrate Loss- New Owner (5)
Easier Forgiveness Paperwork (5)
Limit it to those who need it; not wealthy (5)
Seasonal Improvements to PPP (5)
Streamline the Process (5)
Inclusion of My Industry (4)
Multiple Changes Suggested (4)
Easier Paperwork (3)
Education on Benefits of Each Program Needed (3)
Eligibility Clarifications (3)
Focus on Small Businesses (3)
Forgiveness Automatic (3)
Higher Funding Limits (3)
Online Application Improvements (3)
PPP Changes Helped (3)
Alternative Funding Idea (2)
Another Round of Funding Please (2)
DUNS Clarification/Suggestion (2)
Enhanced Unemployment Hurt Workforce (2)
Fairness Commentary (2)
Lockdowns/Regulations Are the Culprit (2)
Misc. (2)
New EIDL/Better EIDL (2)
Poor Job (2)
PPP Changes Were Frustrating (2)
Self-Employed Support Needed (2)
Suggest EIDL Become Forgivable (2)
Target Industries forced to Close First (2)
Banks- Better Cooperation (1)
Congressional Support Needed (1)
CRF funds for Schools (1)
Did Not Qualify for EIDL (1)
EIDL Lowering PPP Amount Not Helpful (1)
Government Overreach (1)
Industry Specific Comment (1)
Lower Minimum Award Amount (1)
Microbusiness Support (1)
Multi-location businesses hurt by Employee Cap (1)
PPP and Unemployment Worked Against each Other (1)

Other Comments That Stood Out

"The self employed- unemployment benefits were slow in coming and the questions and qualifications were not accurate for owners of small business LLC that had zero income under normal definitions."

"Treat individual businesses separately that fall under one ownership umbrella."

"We were a brand new business which opened March of 2020. We had no payroll records and no profit and loss statements. There was no way for the regulating agencies to know what are loss was but we know that we are about a year behind where we would have been if Covid hadn't happened."

"Better communication as to whether a grant was being awarded, or even that the application was received."

"Enhanced unemployment could provide partial payment for self-employed whose business did not close, but were severely impacted by a reduction in business. Program as implemented last spring required us to choose between receiving unemployment and reopening at reduced level."

"The PPP forgiveness form was not easy to navigate."

"Earlier explanation about the DUNS - too many independent/self employed people not familiar with this, and caught off guard at last minute. These programs are stellar for those businesses large enough to have their own accountants & lawyers."

"EIDL should be forgiving more debt. I need more debt like I need a hole in the head."

"Easing of restrictions on businesses that where created less than 1 year prior to the pandemic. Increase in Maine grant program max amount. Longer time to expend PPP. Increase in max allowance for PPP for operating expense - Operating 60%, labor 40%. End enhanced unemployment prior to high season (before May, 2021)."

Question 20. Is there anything else you would like to add about positive Covid-19 changes that you will use going forward? (300 word max)

Q20: Top Five Themes & 2-3 Examples of these responses (Total Responses– 89):

#1 No positive changes (11 responses– 12.4%):

“Nope. It’s really not positive in any way for our business. We were shuttered this past summer because it was unsafe to operate, and we cannot afford to do this again next summer, so we must sail.”

“The vast majority of changes have been negative for us, resulting in higher costs of operation and less amenities for our customers.”

“No - there has been nothing positive overall about this experience.”

#2 Improved Services; More Efficient (9 responses– 10.1%):

“Cashless campus, no contact check ins on campus. Increased cleaning protocols. We will also try and do more online programming.”

“We developed some virtual educational programs and are improving our social media presence. This will be invaluable moving forward. Also used the shut down time to improve our governance structure and work on website.”

“Catalyst for removing "dead weight" in our operation, including inventory, procedures and tasks”

#3 Outdoor Dining and Pick Up Helped (5 responses– 5.6%)

“Our town encouraged increase in takeout ordering, car side pickup and the flexibility to add additional outdoor seating in previously unused space.”

“Outdoor dining options - outdoors are healthy and suits Maine well. We also built a gate house for temperature checks. The gate house allowed us to monitor the arrival of guests and traffic and ensure we had extra safety. This added a level of personalization to the arrival process and increased name usage upon arrival to the next steps.”

#4 (tie) Cleaning Protocols a Keeper (4 responses- 4.5%)

“We are definitely keeping the facility cleaner, of course, that comes at a greater cost.”

“We are even cleaner than we were pre-Covid, this is always a plus in the Hospitality business.”

#4 (tie) Increased Online Presence (4 responses– 4.5%)

“Emailing more with clients (less postage)”

“Outdoor yoga offerings, online offerings”

Continued from Previous page

Question 20. Is there anything else you would like to add about positive Covid-19 changes that you will use going forward? (300 word max)

Other responses by theme

Gave Us Time to Reevaluate All Processes & Change (3)
Less travel (3)
Remote Work (3)
Streamlined Menu/Food Offerings (3)
Industry Specific Comment (2)
Misc. (2)
More Creativity; Urgency to Make Change Now (2)
Plexiglass a keeper (2)
Remove restrictions now (2)
Stronger Teamwork After Working through Crisis (2)
Allow less masks outside (1)
Already doing most of these positive things (1)
Awareness of Airborne Diseases (1)
Best Employees Shown Through (1)
Created Better Communication (1)
Created New Successful Products (1)
Doing well despite the challenges (1)
Eagerness to Get Outdoors Helped My Business (1)
Emphasis on Health is Making us Healthier (1)
Employee Empowerment Against Unreasonable Customers (1)
Everything is more stressful (1)
Flexible Work Schedule (1)
Happy to Follow Safety Guidelines (1)
If rates keep rising, we will close (1)
Landscaping Improvements (1)
Many Silver Linings (1)
Mask requirements will stay for a while (1)
More Safety (1)
Need Rapid Covid tests (1)
Not Going to Rush Back to "Normal" (1)
Public Restroom (1)
Reduced Hours Helped (1)
Remote Meetings Not as Valuable (1)
Reservations Helpful (1)
Secondary Markets opened up via Remote Work (1)
Still Figuring Out the Best Ways (1)
Technology So Valuable (1)
Temperature Checks (1)
Too early to Tell What We Will Keep (1)
UV-C Lighting installed (1)

Other Comments That Stood Out

*"Plexiglass probably should always have been installed
Reinforced the need for cleanliness protocols"*

*"We are open less hours. We anticipate never opening
on Monday's again and keeping a 35 hour open hours
work week."*

*"We now know who our core, dependable staff are and
have a greater appreciation for them."*

*"I feel that since initiating the social distancing protocols,
it has empowered my employees to stand up to
unreasonable customers, and also allows them to be
more conscious of their own physical and mental health.
Scheduling and appointments also allow for the ability to
juggle both the production side of the business with the
retail."*

*"No good crisis should go wasted" - we rethought all of
our service/event offerings and adapted. This is always a
good process."*

*"Forced to be creative and diverse in our offerings. New
ways to connect with our community!"*

*"A big help for our whole town (and I suspect all towns)
would be public bathrooms, not port-a-potties, that were
cleaned hourly, that we could send our clients to. It would
make a huge difference for guests to our town and take
the frustration level down about 3 notches, which would
help a lot."*

*"We have been forced to reduce menu items in part due
to safety & availability. This has proven to allow more
control of food cost"*

*"My team has built strong communication and focus
through the COVID protocols and caring about one an-
other, our drivers and our customers. I'm very proud of
the work we are doing in providing essential public
transportation."*

Question 21. In looking at how the State of Maine communicated Covid regulations and changes to Covid protocols for businesses since the pandemic began, how would you rate the effectiveness of that communication from State of Maine? We are trying to evaluate how clearly the State communicated the message rather than how the message positively or negatively impacted your business. (50 Word Max)

Q21: Top Five Themes & 2-3 Examples of these responses (Total Responses– 336):

#1 Very Effective (64 responses– 19.0%):

“The state communication of changes to recommendations and guidelines has been excellent. The adoption of those guidelines by the general business community has been half-hearted at best and a prime reason we are likely to have more restrictions and shut downs in the near future.”

“The State of Maine did an excellent job with daily briefings, etc. Their website was also very friendly and easy to use.”

“Maine has been one of the best States when it comes to communicating.”

#2 Effective (39 Responses– 11.6%):

“I thought communications were reasonable and timely, given changing circumstances/knowledge.”

“I think it has been generally well-done. I wish we had focused MUCH MORE on what each of us could do to improve our own health. Vaccines may curb the spread of Covid - 19, but they will never improve our basic health.”

“The State communication for the most part was clear. At the beginning there was some question on what businesses were deemed essential.”

#3 More Advanced Notice Needed (24 Responses– 7.1%):

“The message was clear but often last minute. Made it very difficult to relay to potential customers in a timely manner. Example; If you decided to open campgrounds to Maine residents on Memorial Day instead of June 1st the State should provide more than 2 days notice.”

“Only criticism is timing--very awkward for a hotel dependent on out of state guests to have little or no advance warning of tightening of travel restrictions as reaching those guest last minute is often impossible and the message is always negative. Destroys hard won trust and necessitates a substantial increase in marketing costs.”

#4 Poor Job (20 responses– 6.0%):

“I think the State did a poor job in communicating with businesses. We had to try and catch the news . Government shut downs affected our ability to get answers. How can they expect us to work remotely and they were closed. The legislature should also have been working to make sure that businesses had the proper support.”

“Poorly. While the communications may have been formal, the rationale for the regulations seem quite subjective and unscientific. Too many small companies were shut down while larger more people intensive businesses remained open.”

“Poorly communicated. Media is neither thorough nor accurate. State excluded alternate options - media still hiding UVC and other options.”

Continued from Previous page

Question 21. In looking at how the State of Maine communicated Covid regulations and changes to Covid protocols for businesses since the pandemic began, how would you rate the effectiveness of that communication from State of Maine? We are trying to evaluate how clearly the State communicated the message rather than how the message positively or negatively impacted your business. (50 Word Max)

Q21: Top Five Themes & 2-3 Examples of these responses (Total Responses– 336):

#5 Average Job (18 responses– 5.4%):

“Average. Too many general regulations”

“Fairly clear to business, yet not totally clear to consumers, much confusion when policies go back and fourth and have exceptions”

“Overall I think communication was great, but I was checking the state website every day for a while. I remember some ambiguity about certain issues, like what exactly it meant to quarantine when entering the state, etc. Our visitors were mostly careful, but I think some potential visitors (the most careful ones) concerned about following rules just didn't come. We stopped asking where they were from until they volunteered that info.”

Other responses by theme

Chambers and Trade Associations were a big help (17)
Clearly communicated (17)
Perfect Job (16)
Not good (14)
Terrible communication (12)
Communication Good; Details Could be Better (7)
Travel Restrictions Communicated Poorly/ Bad PR (7)
Difficult to Keep On Top of So Many Changes (6)
Direct E-mails to Businesses Would Have Been Better (5)
Improved over time (5)
Industry Communication Could Have Been Better (5)
Simpler and Clearer Guidelines Needed (5)
Inconsistent (5)
Better Communication Needed (4)
Never saw direct state communication, always through media (4)
Businesses Should Have Been Sent directives for their industry, not forced to seek them out (3)
Government Overreach (3)
Industries Needed More Input (3)
Midday Announcements are tough (3)
Misc (3)
Understood Communication, but didn't like it (3)
Ambiguous at times (2)
Centralize the messages (2)
Checklists by Industry not clear (2)
Didn't understand how decisions were made (2)
Feedback Didn't Seem to Get Through (2)
Forced to find answers on State Website (2)
Mandates too Strict (2)
Signing up for e-mails was very helpful (2)
What do we do if we have a positive case? (2)

Other Comments That Stood Out

“It was communicated clearly to those in state. However guests visiting our state were very confused about what they needed to do in order to come. Our hotel staff ended up answering 100s if not 1000s of calls and telling them about the state's ever changing rules.”

“It was frustrating because things changed all the time and I wasn't "connected" to anything that gave me regular updates. I would discover things through social media. Also, regulations and requirements of the governor are often confusing.”

“The state was very clear in its communication. However, the state lacked transparency on decisions it was making. The state of NY offers a better model on that front. I believe the state was dishonest with us regarding restrictions on visitors from MA this summer.”

“Minimal direct communication w/businesses. Had no idea I was eligible to petition for Essential status”

“Seems like the rules changed daily and it was a little difficult to keep track.”

“Communication was clear and effective.”

Continued from Previous page

Question 21. In looking at how the State of Maine communicated Covid regulations and changes to Covid protocols for businesses since the pandemic began, how would you rate the effectiveness of that communication from State of Maine? We are trying to evaluate how clearly the State communicated the message rather than how the message positively or negatively impacted your business. (50 Word Max)

Other Comments That Stood Out

"Sometimes I had to rely on my local Chamber of Commerce to interpret the protocols and changes that kept coming."

"The updates were overall clear and accessible through e-mail alerts as well as being passed on from affiliated lobbying groups such as Maine Tourism Association and Maine Professional Guides Association."

"Direct emails to the business would've been preferred. Having to watch news daily to figure it out was complicated"

"I think the State did a good job, and showed improvement as the emergency continued. My suggestion for improvement would be an alert system that could alert business owners based on industry or business type."

"I think they did a good job for the most part. I think they could have done a better job talking with industry leaders"

"Communication was regular, but often times took some sifting through as acronyms or legal jargon was mixed in and lost on the lay person."

"I have felt communication from the State regarding the pandemic had been exceptional. I particularly appreciate that they have used several different channels in order to get the word out when something has changed or a new order has been issued, so I have never felt in the dark about what's going on. I've received email messages from several organizations (including your own), and have heard frequent news reports when something has been updated. The website is very well designed, and it is easy to find the information I'm looking for when I go there."

"I felt the details and frequency of the communications were adequate. There were a couple of times that decisions were made but the protocol and guidelines for us to follow had not been updated or clear. I also feel that some of the decisions were being made in a bubble rather than reaching out to industry experts in the state of Maine that were already making changes and adopting national standards."

"Very effective. Not always easy to take , but they did a good job in terrible circumstances. I do think they reacted a little too quickly in shutting things down for the summer season in March and a little too slowly in anticipating the surge after the season, but hindsight is 20/20."

"We feel for the most part it was communicated effectively. However I would say there is still confusion on what a business should do if an employee tests Covid positive...i.e. how many days closed? How many negative tests required before reopening. There seems to be such different reactions from each business on what is "right"."

"Weekly summaries were useful. Brief overviews with links to in-depth details for those who want/need them are also helpful, especially given the high volume of info and frequency of the updates."

Question 29. Recommended Policy Change. Please select one of the key issues listed in Q28 or Q29 and tell us what would be a recommended policy change you would like to see. Be as specific as possible. (300 word max)

Q29: Top Five Themes & 2-3 Examples of these responses (Total Responses– 179):

#1 Affordable Healthcare/Healthcare Suggestion (25 responses– 14.0%):

“Costs of Healthcare - need to buy across state lines -have more competition in Maine”

“Accessible and affordable health care for all; to have a healthy economy, we need a healthy workforce, and we cannot do this when people are forced to go to work sick because they cannot afford to go to the doctor or take time off to recover, and especially for those potential workers with chronic illness, getting the healthcare they need to be able to work is critical.”

“Lower the Medicare eligibility age to 55 years and have a public healthcare option for businesses”

#2 Broadband/High Speed Internet (22 responses– 12.3%):

“Increased broadband will help attract businesses, remote workers, and help with students who have to study at home.”

“It is well past time to simply install fiber optic networks state wide. Clearly the private sector will not in any useful way government must step in.”

“I think the State of Maine should create it's own, state-wide, high speed broadband network - free within the state (paid for by property and/or income tax)”

#3 Tax Suggestion (21 Responses– 11.7%):

“High personal income taxes make Maine an unattractive place to live. With the WFH [Work from home] movement stronger than ever, people don't need to live here. NH offers a lot of the same benefits of living in ME, but without a personal income tax rate. Want a 7% raise this year? Move to NH and WFH!”

“Property tax- The fact we pay taxes to buy equipment and then pay yearly on that as well but then go through a ridiculous process to get some money either waived or refunded (BETTE and BETTR) is ludicrous. Just funds some govt jobs. We have to cut tax and regulations here. I could go on but start there.”

“The Maine tax structure needs modification; moving to a use based (sales) structure so we tax our guests more rather than our residents. I don't see how we can tax our residents to success.”

#4 Multiple Suggestions (12 responses– 6.7%):

“Implementing rent control in cities and/or building affordable long-term housing. Both would attract and keep workers looking for high quality of life. Investment in alternative transportation, incl bike trails, light rail/bus, regional ferry service.”

“Portland needs to assess its lack of pedestrian spaces. Developments of them should not only be private. The addition of outdoor dining should extend permanently into the future and be supported by pedestrian "malls" all over the peninsula and perhaps a trolley system to parking garages that can pepper the peninsula! Parking is only going to get more challenging and businesses ALL want the foot traffic.”

“Childcare, workforce development, affordable housing, and transportation”

Continued from Previous page

Question 29. Recommended Policy Change. Please select one of the key issues listed in Q28 or Q29 and tell us what would be a recommended policy change you would like to see. Be as specific as possible. (300 word max)

Q29: Top Five Themes & 2-3 Examples of these responses (Total Responses– 179):

#5 tie Education Suggestion (9 Responses– 5.0%):

“Expansion of community college programs, incentives for new trade schools, tax incentives for employers who hire x # of employees”

“Offer basic life skills training throughout education to enable entry level employees to manage their lives within the income that entry level jobs provide.”

“Programs to help generate interest in and skills for manufacturing employment among former retail, hospitality, and restaurant workers.”

#5 tie Employee Training/Employee Recruitment Help (9 responses– 5.0%):

“Encourage skilled workers to move to Maine. Access to affordable training and education programs for existing employees and new hires. Encouraging skilled technical training in high school.”

“Skilled workers and professional level workers are very hard to find in Maine. Entry-level is easy to find, but the lack of real education and keeping people in Maine, or having people move to Maine is a serious problem.”

Other Comments That Stood Out

“Entry level workers are the biggest challenge that we face. An abatement or decrease in property taxes would also be helpful to try to make it through the winter”

“Eliminate the personal income tax completely. Bring trade training back into the High Schools, particularly in Greater Portland where they been removed. We need trades people. Energy costs are high for manufacturing. State and municipal regulation and review is too slow. 14 weeks to get Fire Marshall approval for fire safety reviews on construction, months to get through local planning boards, etc. Everything moves too slow with the expectations that business will just go along with it. Well, they move to other states instead. Is that what we want. We can all tell stories of companies who left Maine because it is too hard to get through the process. One manufacturer I know went to NH and hired 65 people even though they were already in Maine because Maine gave them the bum's rush when they wanted help to grow here.”

“Property taxes are our biggest 'pass-through' expense to our tenants. Therefore, efforts to stabilize or reduce property taxation will be beneficial in reducing their cost of doing business.”

“Stop paying individuals more money to stay at home instead of working. We have jobs available but why would someone want to work when they can stay at home, collect unemployment and make more money?”

Continued from Previous page

Question 29. Recommended Policy Change. Please select one of the key issues listed in Q28 or Q29 and tell us what would be a recommended policy change you would like to see. Be as specific as possible. (300 word max)

Other responses by theme

Effective State Regulations (7)
J1 Visa/H2B Employment Suggestion (7)
Minimum Wage (6)
Unemployment Enhancement Hurts Workforce (6)
Commentary- Energy (4)
End Covid Restrictions (4)
Commentary- Legislative (3)
Insurance Suggestion (3)
Make Maine Attractive for Young Workers (3)
More Business Input in Decisions (3)
Commentary- Evaluate All Policies (2)
Find Employees Who Want to Work (2)
Government Overreach (2)
Travel/Tourism Suggestion (2)
Aquaculture Leasing Suggestion (1)
Clarification of Industry Regulations (1)
Commentary- Climate Change (1)
Commentary- Local Municipal Policies (1)
Commentary- School Funding (1)
Commentary- Wages (1)
Covid Compliance Guidance Needed (1)
Debt Suggestion (1)
DEP Suggestion (1)
Enforcement Shouldn't Be Business Responsibility (1)
Equity Needed for Lower Income Citizens (1)
Feedback Needed on Previous Request (1)
Housing Suggestion (1)
Infrastructure Suggestion (1)
Licensing- Alcohol/Beverage (1)
Licensing- Registered Maine Guides (1)
Lodging Tax Suggestion (1)
New Mainer Suggestion (1)
Paid Time Off Suggestion (1)
Penalties for Covid Non-Compliance (1)
PPP Income as Non-Taxable Income (1)
Regional Covid Guidelines Needed (1)
Regulatory Review Needed (1)
Small Business Leeway (1)
Transition from Unemployment Suggestion (1)
Transportation (1)
Utility Cost Reimbursement (1)

Other Comments That Stood Out

“Energy costs for most businesses are unchanged when we were shut down. You still need to run the refrigerators and freezer even when sales drop down to zero. Cash flow in early spring is critical to most seasonal businesses operations. Please do not shut down businesses again- find a better way. But reimbursement for utilities seems a straight forward way to immediately impact a bottom line for a small business.”

“Create incentives to get people into, back into the workforce. Make Maine, especially rural Maine a more attractive place for young people to live.”

“J1 student program should be reinstated asap”

“Healthcare and Work Comp insurance costs are a serious debilitating, economic condition for small business' for such little ROI. Regulation is needed to control the outlandish expenses.”

“Other; Equity. Maine will never reach it's potential as long as so many of its citizens live in poverty. Hungry children can't learn. Adults on the margin can't contribute. Families without health insurance can't function effectively. Human potential is a dear resource and we are squandering it.”

“Effective State Regulations - Reform. With state revenue projections cut significantly, we need to do things more economically. Maine needs to overhaul existing funding streams and institute reforms that encourage consolidation and mergers, results-based, rather than program driven funding allocations, etc.”

“State aquaculture leasing system at DMR needs more staff in order to process applications in timely manner. Currently there is a 2 year backlog”

“Why doesn't the state hold zoom calls with key owners of every industry in Maine to determine what effects they are feeling and ideas they have?”

“Maine's new PTO law needs more flexibility and should be less micro-managing. Our PTO policy was generous before and surpassed state law. We had to make it less generous in order to make it manageable under the new law. This also cost us \$10k in legal consultations. The 40 hours of PTO should be a minimum with businesses allowed to administer flexibly.

Question 34. Are there any other concerns not addressed in the questions above that you would like legislators in Augusta to be aware of as they head into session?

Q34: Top Five Themes & 2-3 Examples of these responses (Total Responses– 140):

#1 Commentary on Politics (21 Responses– 15.0%)

“It is particularly important for State legislators to take a leading role in collaboration seeking the win/win solutions over everything. Otherwise citizens lose.”

“Partisan politics has become the norm nation-wide and it must stop! By not working together on key issues that REALLY matter to our communities based on political posturing needs to stop.”

“Yes, our legislators need to be at work, not sequestered in their homes.”

#2 tie Minimum Wage (7 Responses– 5.0%):

“Address Minimum Wage such that Portland cannot have a distinct and higher wage than other cities/towns”

“We need a “training wage.” The minimum wage needs to go up, but we need a flexible program to hire young kids so they get to have work experience.”

“#1) all businesses need to be open, involve those that you want to close in discovering ways in which they can open. #2) just raising minimum wage cripples small business and maintaining the number of employees.”

#2 tie Multiple Suggestions (7 responses– 5.0%):

“Tax burden. Foundational jobs. Lack of dependence on tourism.”

“Invest in infrastructure to help businesses and communities thrive, balance public interest (conservation And environmental protections, public health, education, etc) with economic interests, look ahead to the future. Remember to look out for the vulnerable: 1 in 4 Maine kids are hungry, we have old drafty homes that are expensive to keep warm, and our seniors need as much public support and investment as our kids. Small businesses are the mainstay of the Maine economy, and should be helped to weather the pandemic.”

“Keep focus on pandemic and budget, don't overly tax businesses through regulation. Bring diverse businesses to the table, especially around issues like climate change.”

#4 tie Misc. (6 Responses– 4.3%):

“Not everyone has a guaranteed income- small business has been decimated.”

“What did you learn so that when COVID-20 hits you're better prepared to address both the health and business environment in Maine?”

#4 tie Tax Suggestion (6 Responses– 4.3%)

“As an accountant, I see clients move out of state every year. Often for just 6 months and 1 day. They do so because our income tax rates are high and they can choose to move elsewhere and save money. That's easier than ever now that WFH is so widely accepted.”

“Eliminate double and triple taxation. Personal property tax, lodging tax on long term (5 months plus) lodging. Etc.”

Continued from Previous page

Question 34. Are there any other concerns not addressed in the questions above that you would like legislators in Augusta to be aware of as they head into session?

Other responses by theme

Support Small Businesses More (5)
Enforcement Focus for Covid (4)
Keep Putting Health & Safety as Top Priority (4)
More Business Input (4)
Social Priorities are All Legitimate (4)
Unemployment System Commentary (4)
Clarify Guidelines (3)
Focus on Big Issues (3)
Housing Issues (3)
Long-term focus needed too (3)
Misinformation Commentary (3)
Non-Profits need support (3)
Vaccine Rollout Critical (3)
Affordable Healthcare/Healthcare Suggestion (2)
Broadband/High Speed Internet (2)
Covid Mandates Need to End (2)
Economic recovery Uncertainty (2)
Eligibility for Funding (2)
Hospitality Workers Need Vaccine (2)
Portland Only Mandates are Tough (2)
Racial Equity (2)
Aquaculture Commentary (1)
Arts & Entertainment Support (1)
Better Communication/Positive PR Needed (1)
Cannabis (1)
Covid Guidelines Hurt Economy (1)
Environment is Priority Too (1)
Faster Decisions Needed (1)
Freedoms & Safety (1)
Homelessness (1)
Hunger Prevention (1)
Inland Businesses Need Support too (1)
Insurance Concern (1)
J1/H2B/ Foreign Workers (1)
Labor Shortage (1)
Legislative Policy Comment (1)
Let us Open (1)
LGBTQ+ Protections (1)
My industry needs to open (1)
No Customer Forgiveness (1)
Openness to New Ideas (1)

Other Comments That Stood Out

“Find a fix for the unemployment system. I have employees who have been trying to file weekly certifications and they get an error message that it can not be done now and to try later. You try to call and it is a never ending hold cycle.”

“Rent and Mortgage relief could be essential for Mainers, particularly in the beginning of 2021. For mortgages: what about three months of forgiveness that gets tacked onto the end of the mortgage maturity (so extending the mortgage on the back end by three payments) For renters, what about a 50% forgiveness of rent for renters for three months and landlords can apply for the other 50% with the state. So if someone has a rent of \$950 every month, they don't have to pay rent for three months, and the landlord applies for half of that monthly payment (\$475 per monthly x for 3 months = 1425- assuming the tenant still lives there. Basically the state picks up half the rent and the other half is forgiven by the landlord. Evictions for non-payment would not be allowed for those three months.”

“I am stunned that no mention of equity was made. Racial equity is key, but so is overall equity. Until we find ways to reduce the number of people stuck at the bottom Maine will keep reinforcing the poverty cycle.”

“I would like the legislators to continue to put health of the community first despite business concerns. The perception of Maine being on top of Pandemic Control was excellent for business (and of course, good for its citizenry.)”

“The fear of the unknown is what hurts people the most. It creates anxiety and health issues. People need clear, open direction and the knowledge that there is a path forward with a positive end.”

“Focus on big issues not one items like what should our flag look like.”

“The homeless have not been addressed in any of these questions. The food insecurities that people deal with on a regular basis are not addressed. A living wage could help with the food issues but not always the homeless issue. Good mental health options needs to be addressed at some time.”

“Fastest & safest way to obtain a vaccine for us all. Thank you.”