

2021 MOVING FORWARD BUSINESS



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Massive Survey Outlines Biggest 2021 Maine Business Needs

Signs of Optimism, Injection of Cash and Covid Reimbursements Highlight Results

Augusta, ME – Over 500 Maine business leaders from 35 industries helped the Maine Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (MACCE), the Maine State Chamber of Commerce and the Maine Tourism Association (MTA) chart the course for 2021 by participating in the *2021 Moving Forward Business Survey*. The six-part comprehensive survey was administered in December 2020 to capture the perspective of business owners heading into 2021. Survey analysis finished two weeks ago and the final 36-page report is being released to Maine Legislators to provide them with the information directly from Maine business owners to help them shape policy and decide how to invest the funds Maine receives through the American Rescue Plan.

The survey had 28 content questions with 8 additional categorization questions that will help with segmentation of answers, should a legislator or interested party want to sort responses by business size, geographical region, industry, trade association affiliation or seasonality of businesses.

Several key takeaways include:

- 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)

The survey was divided into six sections: Categorization Questions, Workforce Questions, Business Needs Questions, Covid-19, Government Programs and Communication Questions, Economic Effect of Covid-19 on Key Business Issues Questions, Concerns & Future Outlook Questions. The organizations that created the *2021 Moving Forward Business Survey* did so specifically to make this a comprehensive survey rather than making it multiple surveys.

“The impact of this survey is just how much quality information it contains,” says survey architect and MACCE past-President Cory King. “These initial findings are very insightful, but this data set could be segmented by business size, or industry type and you could find an entirely new set of findings. For instance, what’s the main reason retailers don’t hire some candidates? Is that the same reasons as restaurants or are there hiring issues more prevalent in certain industries than others. It’s fascinating data.” King concludes.

The survey introduction specifically stated that the information would be used to help inform Maine legislators and that was important to the survey creators too. “We are always trying to give our state legislators the information they need so they can make the best policy decisions to help Maine businesses, and this survey clearly points out what is needed,” says Dana Connors President/CEO of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce. “The policy issues mentioned here are the same ones we hear often- cost of healthcare, availability of high speed internet, personal income taxes- all are vitally important to our business leaders.”

“One interesting part for me was the percentage of optimism for the upcoming tourism season, which has grown in the last few months,” says Tony Cameron, the Chief Executive Officer of Maine Tourism Association. “This survey was taken in December, and comparing those results to a survey we conducted just last week with strictly tourism businesses, optimism has increased from about 40% of respondents to 69% of respondents.”

“This survey will be an effective research document and gives us benchmarks so we can judge the effectiveness of new policies, just like the MTA did with their industry specific follow up” King added. “Dozens of chambers of commerce and trade associations can use this document to see if there has been improvement in specific areas, and where more attention is needed.”

Other key takeaways included:

- 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)

For more information on this survey, please contact Cory King, Southern Midcoast Maine Chamber at executivedirector@midcoastmaine.com The eight-page Executive Summary is available upon request. The Executive Summary includes more information on the survey's process, over 30 additional key takeaways by section of the survey and the single-page Top Takeaways page which is nearly identical to the information provided in the message above.

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About the Maine Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives:

The Maine Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, is organized to provide exceptional services to our members in the areas of professional development, information, networking opportunities, and advocacy of the local chamber's role in community and economic development. The group is primarily comprised of local and regional chamber directors, and business trade association partners.