

COVID-19 Small Business Survey Results

Municipality of Trent Lakes



INTRODUCTION

The Trent Lakes COVID-19 Business Survey began Friday, September 24, 2022 and closed Friday, October 8, 2022.

The objective was to provide insight into how Trent Lakes businesses were 2 years into the pandemic.

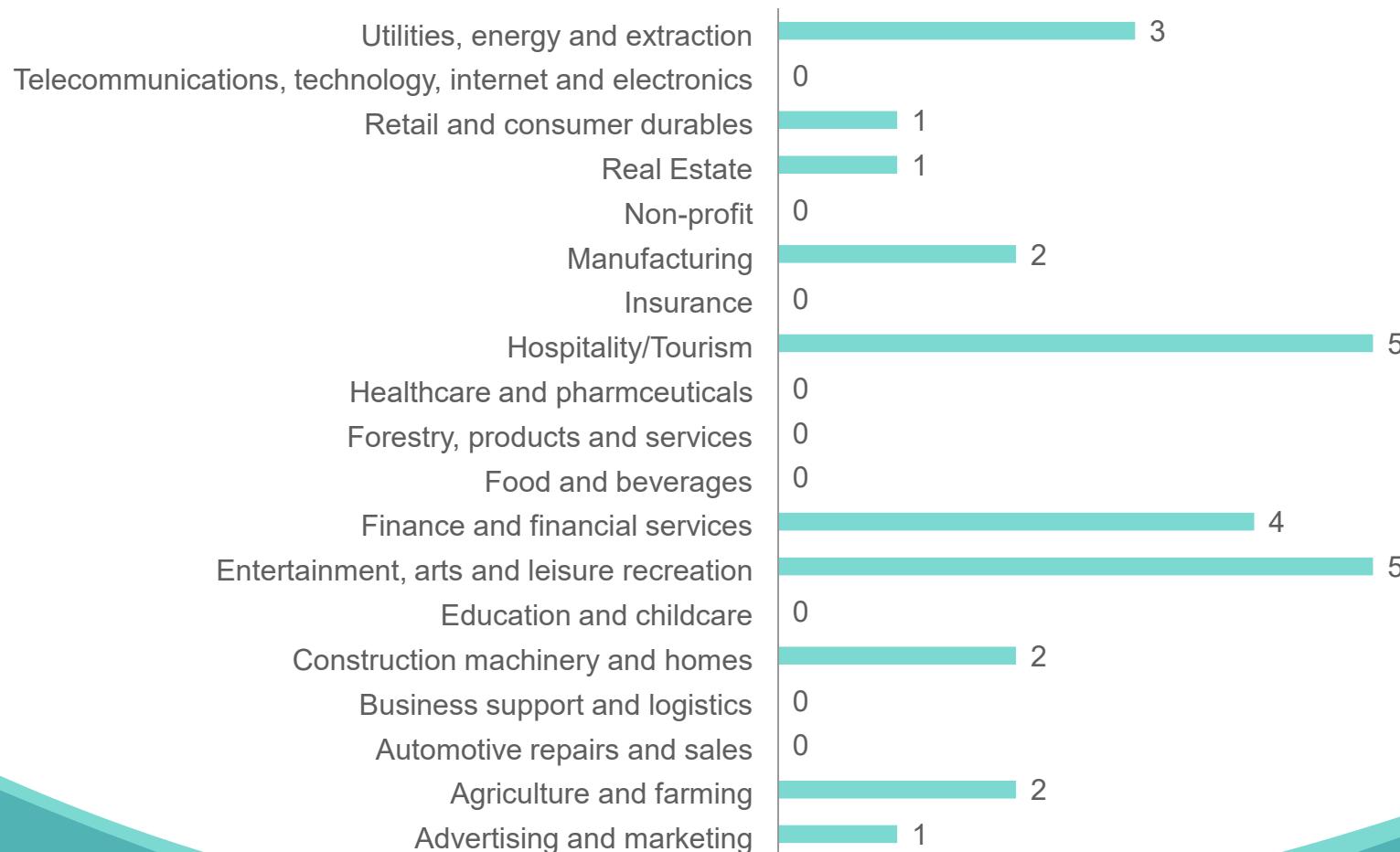
A link to the survey was sent to businesses on the Trent Lakes website, social media accounts, the business e-mail directory and the Trent Lakes Facebook Networking group.

26 businesses participated from fairly a wide-range of businesses.



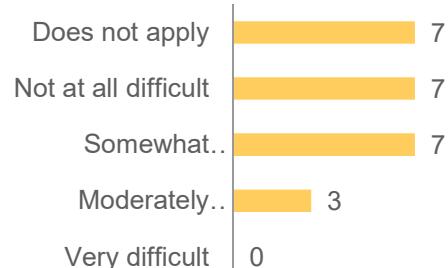
Survey responses by industry

Participants were asked to select the industry that best described their principal industry.

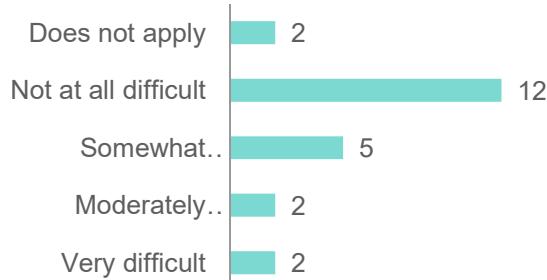


As a result of COVID-19, are you finding it difficult to pay the following expenses?

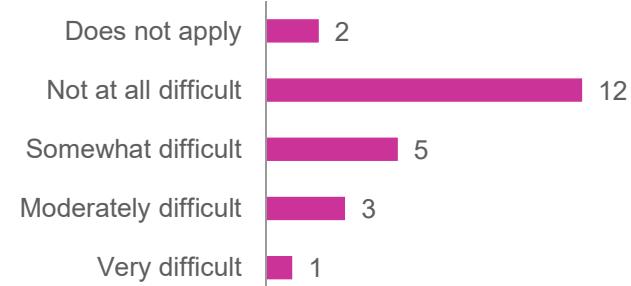
Payroll



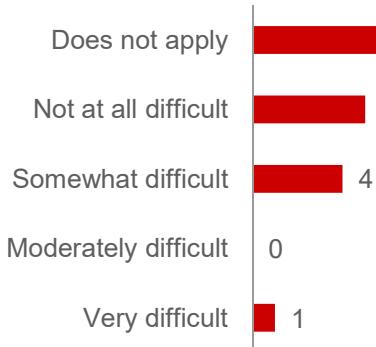
Insurance



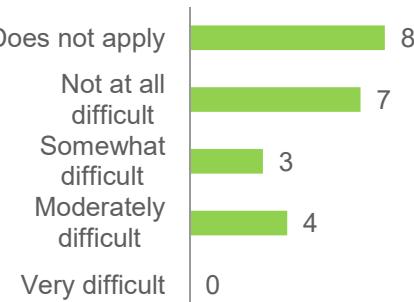
Utilities



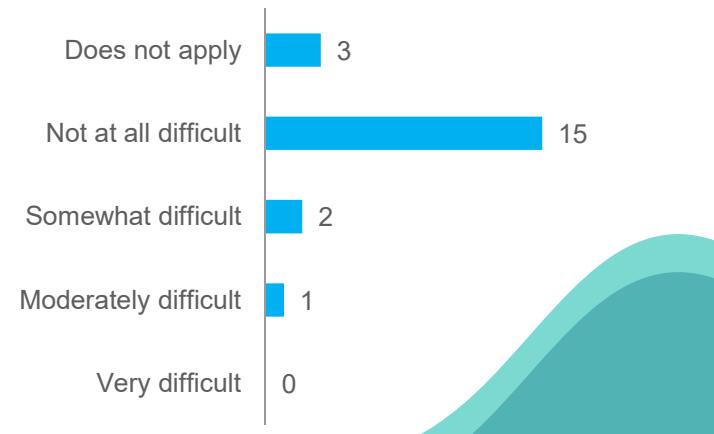
Mortgage/Rent/Lease



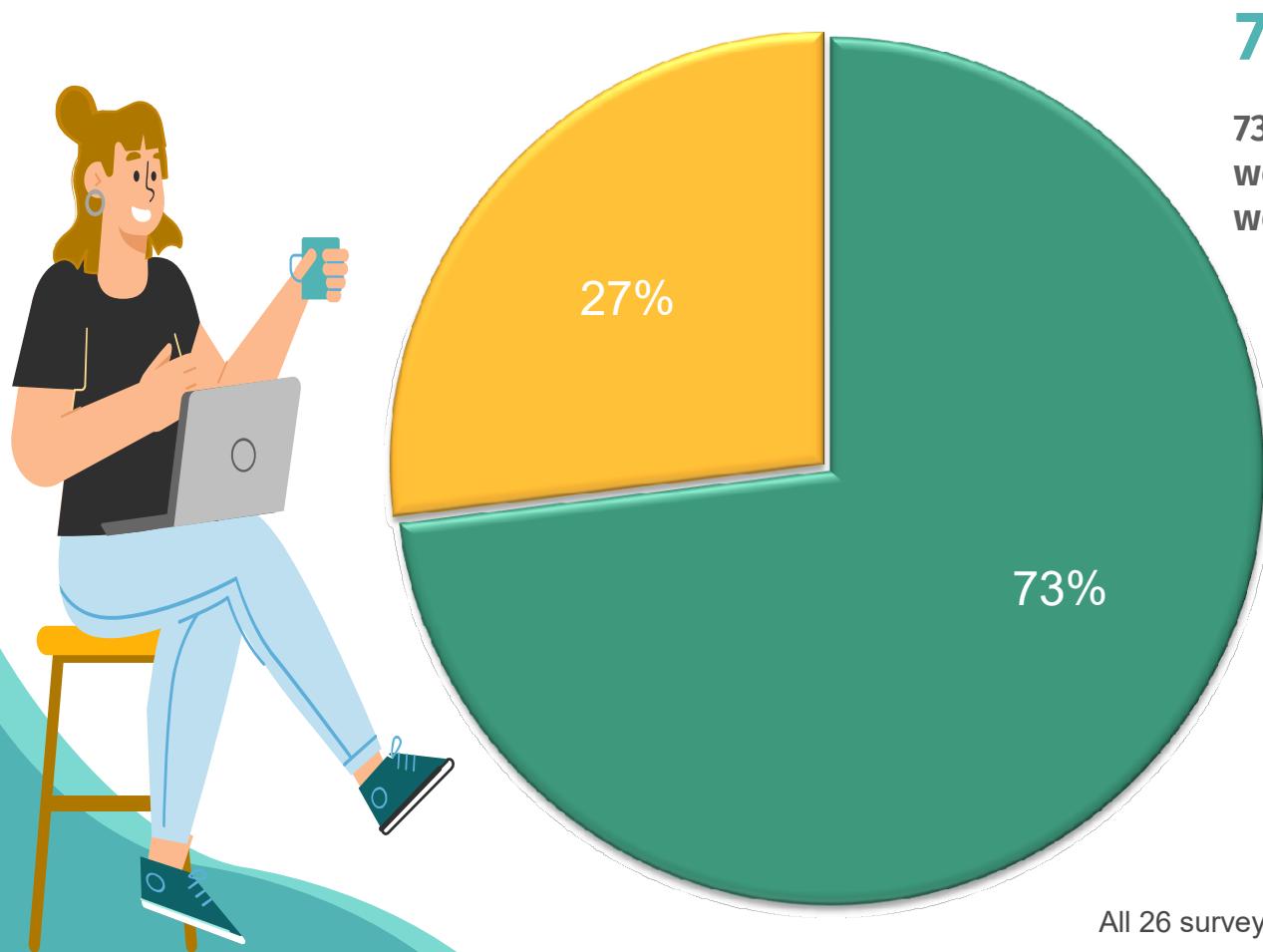
Inventory



Protective Supplies



Was your business well equipped to work from home?



73% said Yes

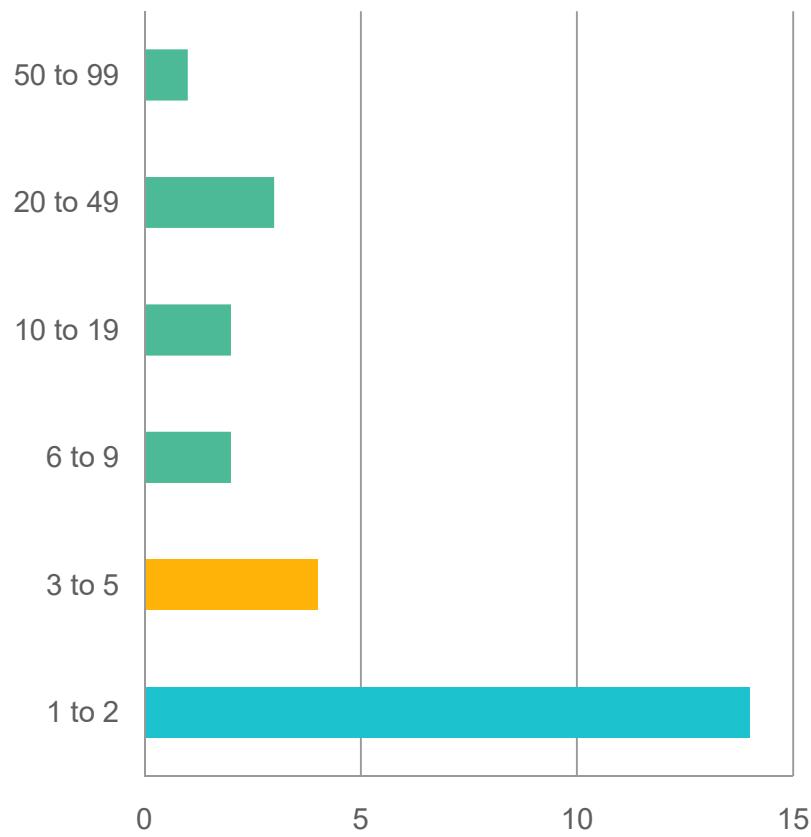
73% indicated that they were well equipped to work from home.

27% said No

27% indicated that they were not well equipped to work from home

All 26 survey responders answered this question.

How many people are employed by your business during prime or high season of operation?



54% Reported 1 - 2 employees. This included solo and self-employed business owners and entrepreneurs.

15% Reported 3 - 5 employees.

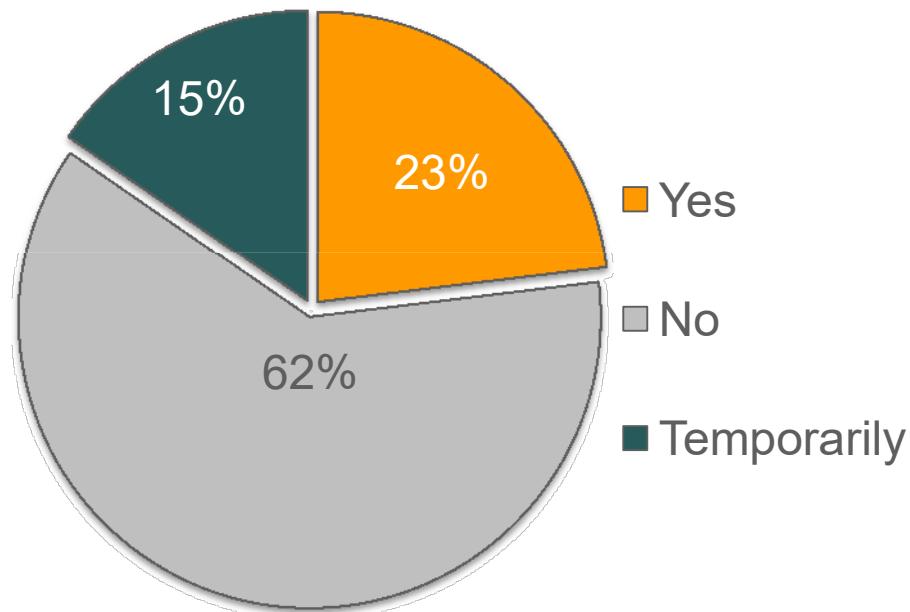
11% Reported 20 - 49 employees.

8% Reported 6 - 9 employees..

8% Reported 10 - 19 employees.

4% Reported 50 - 99 employees.

Did you have to lay off any of your staff?



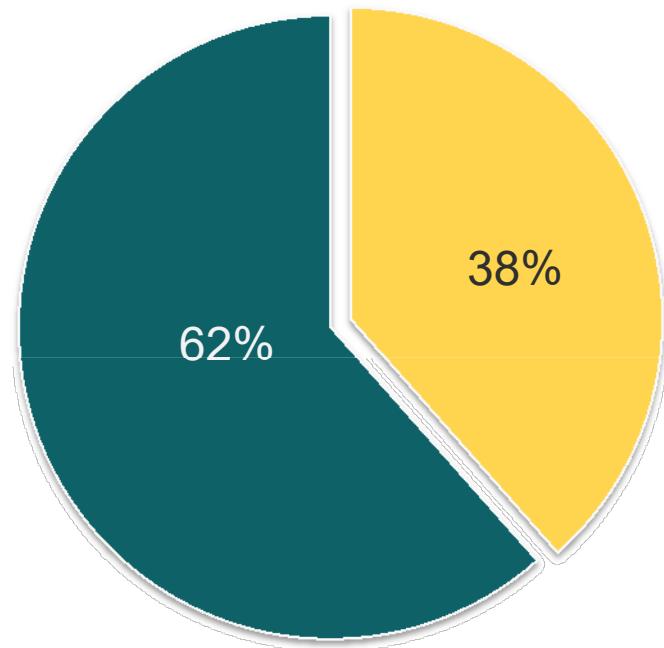
1.

When businesses were asked if they had to lay anyone off, 62% answered that they did not.

2.

38% indicated that they did have to lay off staff. (23% yes + 15% temporarily)

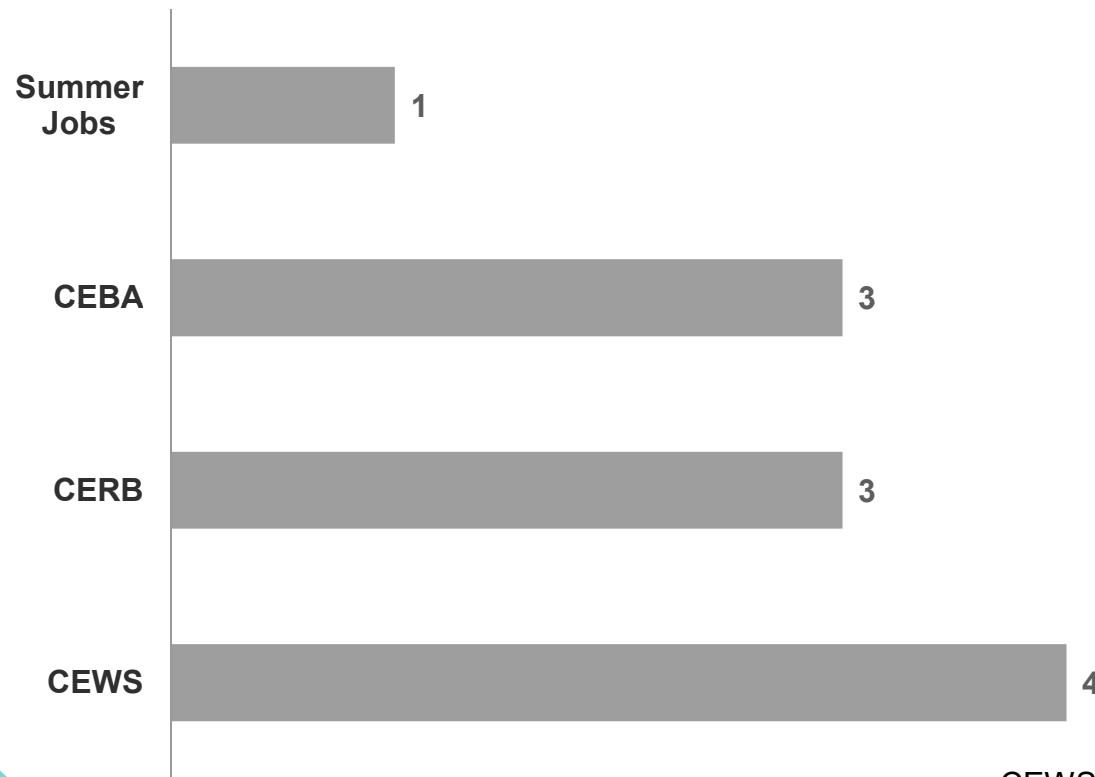
It should also be considered some businesses may not have acquired their peak season complement of staff.



Did you
apply for
any
government
funding?

62%
responded
No

Can you tell me which government funding you applied for?



10 businesses responded they applied for funding. Only 9 businesses felt comfortable sharing which funding they had applied for. 1 business reported they had applied for 3 different funds.

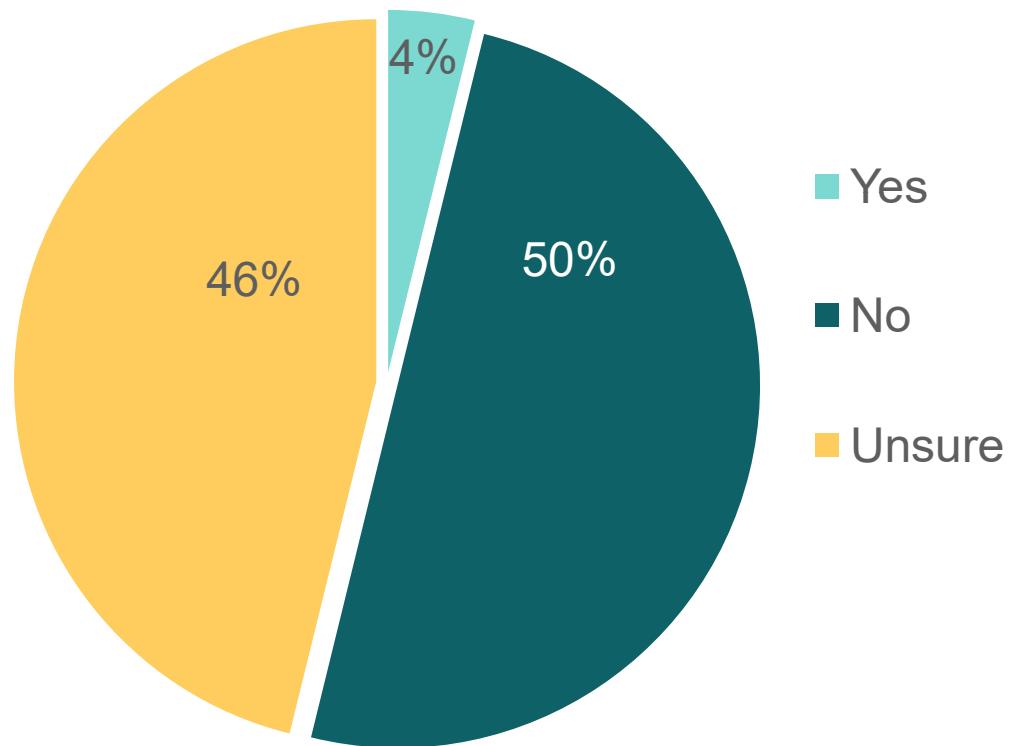
CEWS = Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy
CEBA= Canada Emergency Business Account
CERB = Canada Emergency Response Benefit

Do you anticipate needing additional support over the next 12 months?

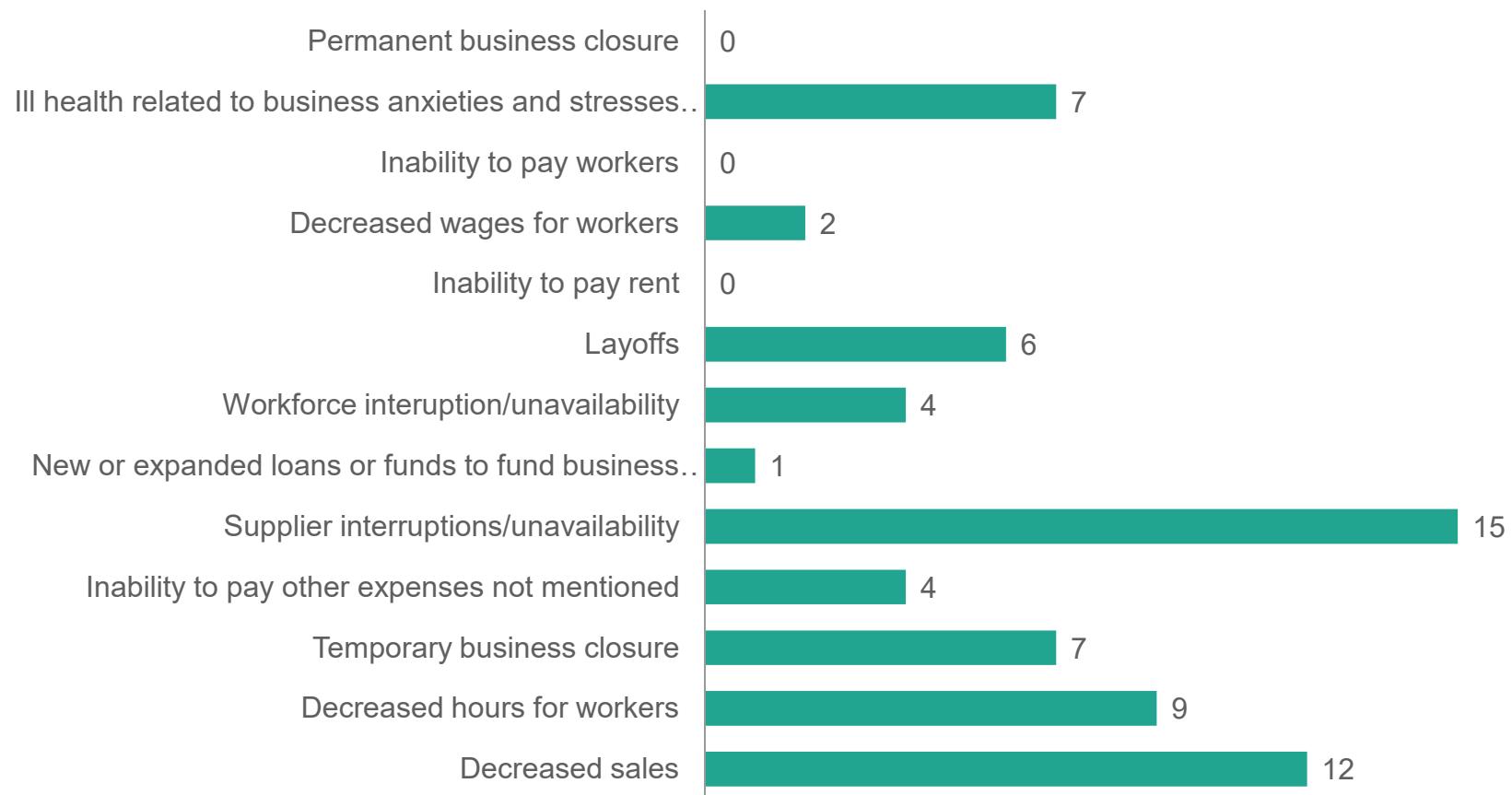
50% were confident enough to reply no.

46% were unsure.

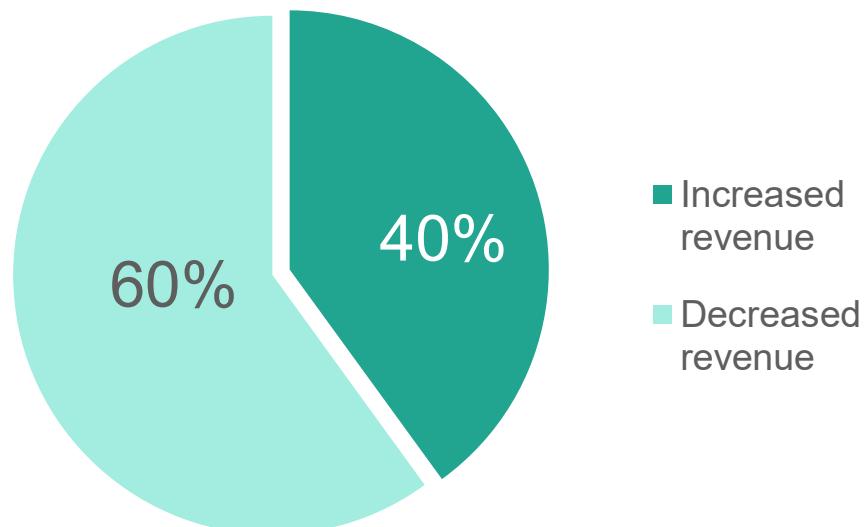
4% anticipated that they would need additional support.



Did you experience any of the following?



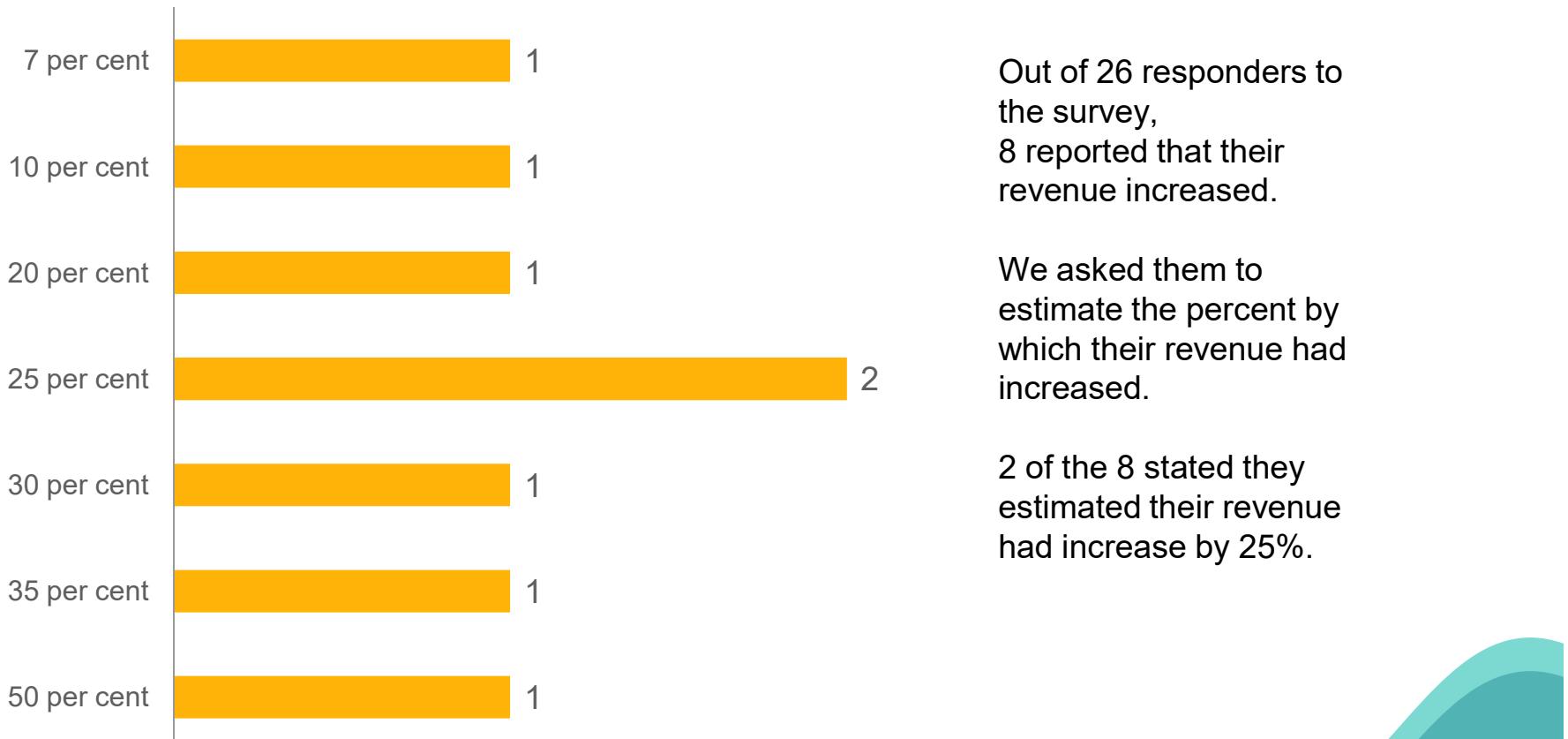
Did your business revenue increase or decrease since COVID-19?



60% of Trent Lakes businesses experienced a decrease in their revenue

40% of Trent Lakes businesses experienced an increase to their revenue

What percentage did your business revenue increase?



What do you think attributed to this increase during COVID-19 ?

- “Construction regarding my business appeared to increase.” When more people had to stay home and work remotely one business said it helped him access sites now empty of workers to navigate and he was able to perform inspections, repairs and audits faster either alone or social distancing with an onsite escort.
- “People working from home and moving out of urban areas.”
 - People moving out of the city • More people at home
 - Work from home helped with our expansion
- “Increase after COVID due to people unable to travel abroad.”
- “Lack of ability to travel outside Ontario.”
- “New customers.”

Do you have any ideas or suggestions to how this increase can be maintained into COVID-19 recovery?



Maintenance of a work from-home policy and COVID encouraging people to retire.



Reduce city population.

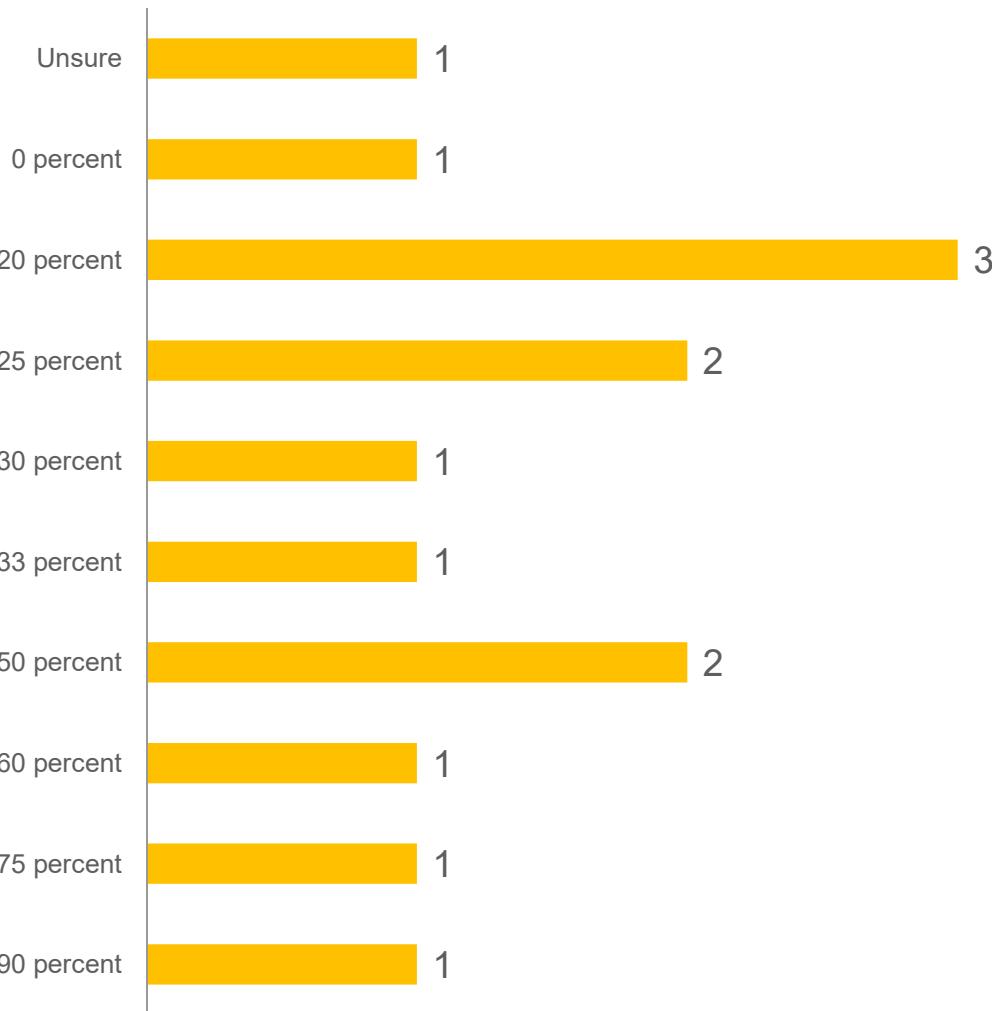


Better internet and improved connectivity.



More targeted advertising and awareness.

What percentage did your business revenue decrease?



Out of 26 responders to the survey, 14 reported that their revenue decreased.

Businesses were asked to approximate the percentage they thought that their business had decreased.



What contributed to your loss of revenue during COVID-19?

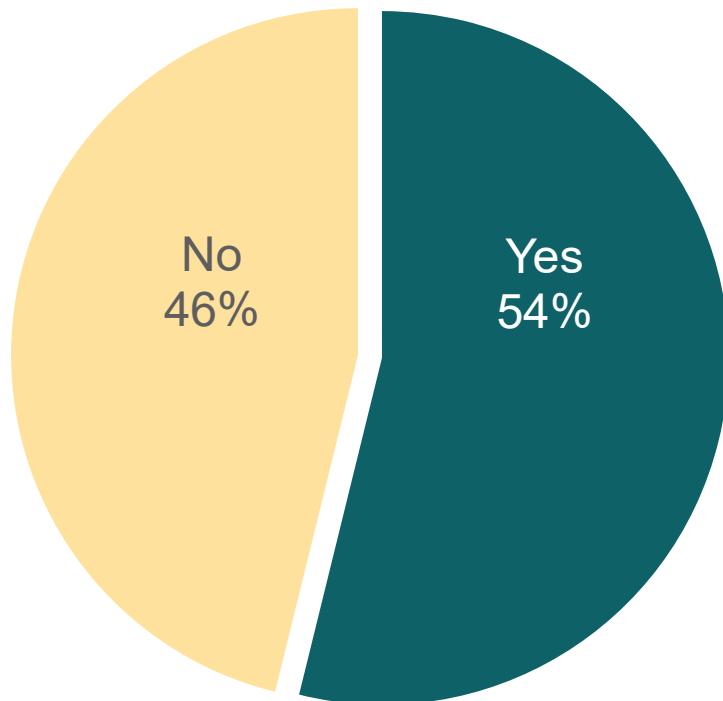
- Consumer fear during the initial lock downs.
- Less tourism, fear of contracting COVID therefore less in-person sales.
- Travel bans, people not wanting to travel because they are scared, activities in the area being shut down so there is no reason to come here.
- Lack of safe access.
- Closure.
- Loss of revenue when we had to shut down for several months.
- Isolation.
- No employees.
- Reduction in food services, shorter rental period for our cottages and cabins, retreat business on weekends down to zero.
- Closure of sales outlets for art (galleries, festivals, one man shows).
- No craft/trade shows to participate in. Lack of business from other businesses.
- Lockdown delayed opening. Restricted visitors and transient business.
- Decrease of freelance contracts; 2 not-for-profit contracts laid me off.
- The public not wanting to purchase new items and have us in their homes

Do you have any ideas or suggestions to assist your business to increase its revenue towards COVID-19 recovery?

- We are working within the mandates given by province - slowly opening up our food services and repeat business is coming back with vaccinated passport but slowly.
- Keep everything open.
- No more closures.
- Doing virtual presentations (cooking videos; virtual cook-along classes) instead of in-person events.
- We need better rural internet.
- Better online advertising and better tourist information posted on web page.
- Greater WEB presence/ Develop a better website to show art and conduct on line sales.
- Our recovery has already begun.
- We have changed business practices to adapt to customers wishes which is working so far.
- Now stability. If stable, more advertising and promotions.
- Businesses that can adhere to protocols, shouldn't be shut down.



Did you increase your online digital presence due to the COVID-19 pandemic?



54%

Reported that they did increase their online digital presence in response to the pandemic

What barriers made the pandemic more difficult? Part 1

- 7 separate comments were received regarding the lack of reliable internet service, expressing difficulty and frustration. From having to apologize to clients, to being unable to stream meetings, webinars or workshops without freezing or lagging, and even one report of having to hand deliver files to a client using a USB. Businesses were finding that trying to pivot and continue their businesses online difficult and an additional stress to cope with.
- Erratic government decisions.
- Closures.
- Had to reduce food services to just take out. Did not really work for us.
- Entrance into buildings became an additional cost with sanitation requirements. Rental units now a social bubble for one person - so less people but more cost for each rental.
- When our door closed temporarily Tourist travel thought the area had no place to stop in for information and restroom stops.

- *Fear of getting sick*

What barriers made the pandemic more difficult? Part 2

- Being isolated because of medical issues made grocery shopping, very difficult and the burden was put on my husband. With limited store hours and limited food availability in Buckhorn. This was challenging.
- No employees, hard to get materials and supplies.
- Unable to show work to the public in person due to lockdowns and COVID related restrictions.
- Customer fear. Not wishing to have sales or service staff in their homes.
- Cost of material and shortage of labour.
- Less face to face contact.
- People and noncompliance.
- Appointments / and walk ins.

- The extended time at each site in maintaining the COVID-19 rules to stay safe.
- I'm not a very technically able person to get in to social media platforms.
- Difficulty and frustration in interacting with municipal officials increased turn around times from the township. i.e. building permits.

● “... are safer than most businesses allowed to operate, and yet we had to close. This has an affect on the mental health of the business owners, and our guests that we had to turn away.”

What has been your single greatest challenge?

- 5 separate comments citing internet availability and lack of quality connectivity were received.
- Closures.
- People confused by government decisions, rules unclear.
- No employees, hard to get materials and supplies.
- Hiring staff and shortage of labour.
- Turn around times on building permits
- Delay for customers getting building permits due to lockdown.
- The extended time at each site in maintaining the COVID -19 rules to stay safe.

- Finding freelance jobs I could do safely from home.
- Finding new customers and making sales.
- Balancing and catering to different opinions .
- Food services and accommodations needing to be for a single person not for groups.
- Finding events and places for our visiting tourists to explore. So many things closed and events canceled.
- Keeping my work in the public eye when in person events were not being held.
- Budgeting for the next season, and wondering if we will be shut down again.
- Engaging referral partners.
- Trying to keep staff focused on the job and not the pandemic
- Staff morale.
- Overcoming the daily bad news and keeping staff focused on the positives.
- People.
- Anxiety.

What is the greatest challenge you have overcome during COVID-19 that you are the most proud of?



- ✓ Patience
- ✓ Overcoming my own anxiety and fear to keep moving forward.
- ✓ Staying safe and constantly following the rules so not to come in contact or spread Covid-19
- ✓ No staff member has gotten sick from COVID
- ✓ Always staying positive, keeping our staff informed of any changes, checking our emails and phone
- ✓ Maintaining the business and getting people back to work.
- ✓ messages and returning replies.
- ✓ Not using gov't assistance
- ✓ Just making it work
- ✓ Kept my business going.

- ✓ Lowering costs for packaging
- ✓ Attracting new customers
- ✓ Just being able to open our accommodations and trailer park and have it functioning and COVID free thus far.
- ✓ Accepting it has become a very part time embroidery business and cutting expenses
- ✓ Cutting expenses, in hopes that we will be able to rebuild.
- ✓ On rebound. 2021 income back to normal
- ✓ Figuring out how to safely to sell food
- ✓ Working with our suppliers
- ✓ Attracting new customers

- ✓ Improved social media capabilities
- ✓ Creating new opportunities with virtual events for existing and new clients.
- ✓ By tapping into a family member's expertise with technology we have begun to make better use of Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn thus expanding our client base and WEB presence.

What do you wish I had asked or suggest I ask next time?

For me regarding my business I do not have and suggestions.

Would be useful we knew the aim, goals survey

I think you covered everything

Broaden first question to allow for other (industries not listed). I would like to see more focus on the quality of the internet available in this area

Nothing that I can think of thanks.

Is CERB necessary ?

How can our township help to promote the ARTS as is being done in many other localities?

How can Trent Lakes help?

Get high speed internet into Cavendish

What could the township do to help my business thrive?
How would you rate the townships performance to stakeholders during the pandemic, what was the most disappointing thing about the township during the pandemic

What's next?

Keeping in touch

Continue to build relationships with our existing businesses to better understand their experiences and needs to assist in developing action items that are more responsive and beneficial.

COVID-19

With the peak of Omicron behind us Ontario has been able to cautiously and gradually move through its reopening milestones. The majority of COVID-19 related public health and workplace safety measures lifted on March 1, 2022.

Milestones remaining:

- **March 14**

Mandatory vaccination policies end. Organizations can retain their own policies. The province will continue to provide rapid-antigen tests to organizations.

- **March 21**

Most masking mandates end. Required safety plans and passive screening ends. Masks remain in place for public transit, long-term care, retirement homes and other health-care setting, shelters, jails and congregate care and living settings for individuals with developmental disabilities. Individuals can continue to opt to wear masks.

- **March 28**

Reopening Ontario Act (ROA) expires.

- **April 27**

Masking mandates end in all remaining settings. Remaining emergency orders under the ROA expire.

The Ministry of Health stated it was able to make these changes due to the availability of rapid tests and the province's high vaccination rate.

What's Next? continued...

Internet Connectivity

From the survey results reliable connectivity was a huge and repeated concern.

Both the federal and provincial governments have identified the need for high speed internet and connectivity as a priority and have each said that nothing has made that more evident than the pandemic. Below are 2 examples of programs that propose improvements to rural communities.

Ontario Connects

Infrastructure Ontario announced in March 2021, its plans to move forward with the Ontario Connects plan. It is an ambitious plan to bring high-speed internet to all communities across the Province of Ontario by the end of 2025.

Eastern Ontario Regional Network (EORN)

The Municipality is a member of EORN through the County of Peterborough. Created by the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus; EORN works with governments and community organizations to improve and leverage broadband access to fuel economic growth. With the announcement of the Ontario Connects plan the proposed EORN Gig Project is not proceeding at this time. However, EORN will monitor the progress of the Ontario Connects program and continue to be a strong advocate for broadband investment in our region.

EORN is currently delivering on a \$300 million Cell Gap Project to improve cell service coverage and capacity. The project is jointly funded by federal and provincial governments. The project will expand cell data coverage and capacity to support the use of typical Smartphone apps and streaming videos and ready the region for the next evolution of technology.

What's Next? continued...

Funding

The Government s of Canada and Ontario have taken immediate and significant action to support people, businesses and organizations facing hardship as a result of COVID-19.

The Government of Canada Financial support list can be found at:

www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/economic-response-plan.html

An example would be the various programs found under Canada wage and hiring support. These are several subsidy programs being offered to help businesses cover part of employee wages that enable the re-hire of workers, prevent further job losses and restore normal operations. At the time of this presentation these include the Tourism and Hospitality Recovery Program, Hardest-Hit Businesses Recovery Program, Canada Recovery Program, Canada Recovery Hiring Program and Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy.

The Provincial Government of Ontario support list can be found at:

<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-help-businesses-ontario>

An example would be the Ontario Small Business Relief Grant whereby eligible businesses that previously qualified for the Ontario Small Business Support Grant and that were subject to closure under the modified Step Two of Roadmap to Reopen have been prescreened and have received an email seeking to confirm their continued eligibility.

What's Next? continued...

Workforce and hiring

In our survey we did see comments from businesses that indicated that when they were able to open that they were having difficulties finding staff.

COVID-19 workforce labour hiring and retention was identified federally and provincially as a concern, and not isolated to our region. We expect this will draw a lot of attention and strategies from economic development partner organizations at federal and provincial levels.

Locally we are fortunate to have many collaborative partners in our region, many who have already begun to review how they can provide assistance, including but not limited to:

- Developing skills and education training for workers and employers.
- Entrepreneurship and small business startup and expansion assistance.
- Identifying strategies on labour force concerns of hiring and retaining.

Trent Lakes will continue to support and collaborate with:

- Chambers of Commerce,
- Small Business and Entrepreneurship Centres,
- Peterborough Innovation Cluster
- Peterborough & the Kawartha Economic Development
- Workforce Development Board
- Partnership of these agencies with Sir Sandford Fleming and Trent University for up-skilling and re-skilling opportunities.

Information on workshops, webinars, classes or programs are promoted on the Trent Lakes Business Networking Facebook Group and also shared via an email directory both with links to sign up on the Trent Lakes Economic Development webpage.

THANKS!

Do you have any questions?

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