

Waukesha County Business Survey

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The Waukesha County Business Survey was conducted in cooperation with the Waukesha County Business Alliance, Waukesha County Center for Growth, the Waukesha-Ozaukee-Washington (WOW) Workforce Development Board and Waukesha County.

The data contained in this executive summary was obtained by surveying Waukesha County employers from July 2021 through August 2021. Respondents included businesses from 35 of the 37 municipalities in Waukesha County, a wide range of business sectors and companies sized from self-employed to operations with more than 1,000 employees in Waukesha County. The survey touched on topics in key areas such as workforce development, business growth, physical specifications and economic visioning.



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KEY FINDINGS

Business Growth

Despite the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses are optimistic about growth. Over 79 percent of businesses plan to expand in the next three years. These results are on par with prior years, including 82 percent in 2019 and 76 percent in 2017. The primary modes of growth include expanding sales (74 percent), hiring additional employees (70 percent) and expanding product/service offerings (52 percent).

According to the results, the top challenge to growing business is the difficulty in finding skilled workers, which was reported by more than 73 percent of businesses. In a demonstration of just how severe that problem is in comparison to others, the next closest responses were limited access to capital (14 percent) and lack of public transportation (13 percent).

Need for Space

According to the results, businesses in Waukesha County are in need of additional space for continued growth and expansion. More than 48 percent of businesses are already using 100 percent of their current square footage and just over 25 percent are using more than 75 percent. In addition, 44 percent of businesses own their current location, 46 percent lease and 10 percent do both.

KEY FINDINGS CONT.

Growth During COVID-19

While the COVID-19 pandemic stifled numerous industries in Waukesha County, there was also growth among the business community. Just over 73 percent of businesses report sales have grown in the past year, which is down only slightly from 78 percent in 2019. Optimistically, over 88 percent of businesses project sales to grow in the coming year.

Workforce

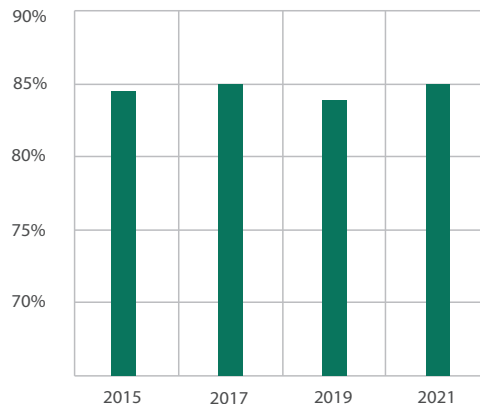
Waukesha County businesses continue to be in a workforce expansion mode. Despite the pandemic, 85 percent of businesses plan to expand their workforce in the next three years, which is the same pace as the past six years. Hiring of individuals is expected at all levels, with 50 percent of businesses planning to add 1-9 employees, 40 percent planning to add 10-99 employees, and nine percent planning to add more than 100 employees.

However, despite plans for workforce growth, more than half of respondents in all but three industries reported difficulty attracting and retaining employees. In industries like construction, engineering and manufacturing, more than 86 percent of companies are experiencing difficulty attracting and retaining employees. The current workforce challenge, coupled with planned workforce growth in the next three years, demonstrates the critical need to both get more talent into the state of Wisconsin and Waukesha County, as well as creativity from employers to increase the talent pipeline. Only 27 percent of survey respondents hire individuals under the age of 18, and 27 percent hire individuals with a criminal background. Even with advancements in automation, we need more individuals in the labor force to meet employer demand.

Workforce Training

The primary factors driving employers' investment in training are employee retention, increase in quality and productivity gains. The three biggest barriers to providing training for employees are split evenly between productivity loss due to time off the job (30 percent), cost (30 percent) and employee interest (28 percent). Other significant barriers to training included lack of available relevant courses (24 percent) and need for more flexibility in training (22 percent).

Percent of Employers Who Plan to Expand Workforce in the Next Three Years



Employers who actively attract employees from outside of Wisconsin: **31%**

Employers who hire individuals under the age of 18: **27%**

Employers who hire individuals with a criminal background: **27%**

Employers who offer tuition reimbursement: **50%**

Employers who plan to invest in automation or robotics in the next year: **25%**



WAUKESHA COUNTY

According to the survey, more than 90 percent of businesses reported Waukesha County as a desirable or somewhat desirable place to do business. When asked about their satisfaction with the services and amenities in the municipality in which their business is located, respondents said the following:

- Parks and recreation: 78 percent satisfied or very satisfied (21 percent neither satisfied nor dissatisfied)
- Retail, food and beverage: 73 percent satisfied or very satisfied (20 percent neither satisfied nor dissatisfied)
- Local streets and highways: 64 percent satisfied or very satisfied (25 percent neither satisfied nor dissatisfied)
- Public utilities: 62 percent satisfied or very satisfied (33 percent neither satisfied nor dissatisfied)
- Permitting and licensing: 46 percent satisfied or very satisfied (46 percent neither satisfied nor dissatisfied)
- Land Availability: 33 percent satisfied or very satisfied (53 percent neither satisfied nor dissatisfied)

In addition, the top three factors businesses report considering when relocating their business include:

1. Workforce availability
2. Proximity to customers
3. Available existing building space

Workforce Housing

There is a continued need for education around workforce housing in Waukesha County. Roughly 42 percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that the availability of affordable housing is an issue in attracting and retaining employees, while nearly 40 percent neither agree nor disagree on the matter. These findings indicate there's an opportunity to further educate the business community on the current availability and price point of housing, the potential impact on workforce, and the need to advance additional workforce housing projects in Waukesha County.

STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES

Strengths

- Expanding and growing physical space
- Growth mode
- Planning for sales increases
- Employment opportunities

Opportunities

- More specified and flexible training
- Attracting and retaining skilled labor
- Physical space for continued growth
- Widen the talent pool

WHAT'S NEXT?

The survey data collected will be valuable as the Alliance, Center for Growth and Waukesha County work together to address the needs of the business community. Top priorities outlined from the results include:

1. Addressing talent needs countywide
2. Facilitating business growth and expansion
3. Continuing to explore options for workforce housing

Additional information can be found at:
www.waukesha.org/WaukeshaCountyBusinessSurvey

