

2021 Connecticut Economic Development Needs Assessment Survey Data Report



This report was written by and based on analysis conducted by Laura Brown, Community & Economic Development Educator, University of Connecticut Extension and Jade Hardrick, CEDAS Intern.

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Background

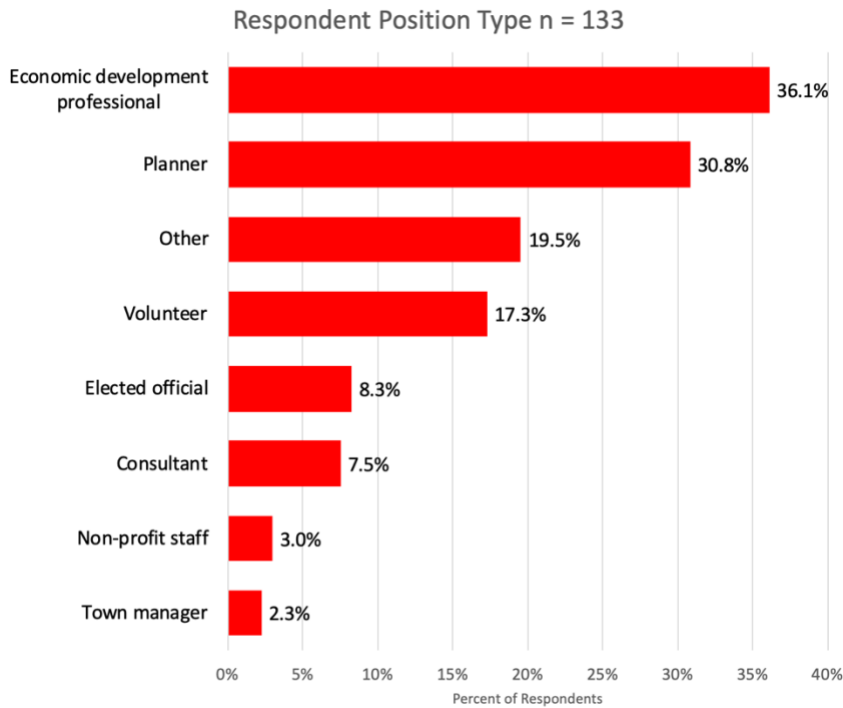
The purpose of the 2021 Economic Development Organization Survey was to understand current areas of focus, challenges, opportunities, as well as educational and professional needs in economic development emerging as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This information may be used by municipalities, local elected officials, and resource providers to support economic development programs that are most effective and relevant to communities across the state. The survey was assessed as a Qualtrics online questionnaire in May-June 2021 with a response period of three weeks. A link to access the questionnaire was disseminated through the Connecticut Economic Development Association, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, the state economic development practitioner's listserv, as well as the Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association and personal distribution lists of coordinating partners. The survey included 18 questions regarding the geographic scope of economic development functions, constituents, primary areas of work, barriers and opportunities for economic development, COVID-19 response, professional and training needs, and demographic information about economic development staff. A copy of the survey tool is available upon request and as an appendix to this report. This project was reviewed by the University of Connecticut IRB and was determined to not qualify as human subjects research under 45CFR46.102. Significant findings are highlighted in bold in the text below. There were 140 respondents to the survey included in the statewide analysis.

Key Findings

- **Economic developers take on a diverse range of roles in communities including business assistance (60%), real estate/infrastructure development (13%), and land use planning (11%).**
- **While resource limitations including lack of funding for municipalities or development topped the list of barriers to economic development,(28%), engagement and capacity challenges such as NIMB-ISM (Not In My Backyard), lack of care/interest, and lack of regional collaboration/coordination pose a significant barrier to economic development (20%).**
- **Respondents overwhelmingly identified housing/development improvements (45%) as the most significant emerging opportunity, encompassing nearly half of all responses.**
- **When asked what might have helped them respond more effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic funding for organizations and businesses topped the list. However, many identified some resilience factors that might have allowed them to be more prepared, particularly related to communication with businesses and residents.**

Position Type

Q3. Which of the following most closely describes your position? Select all that apply.

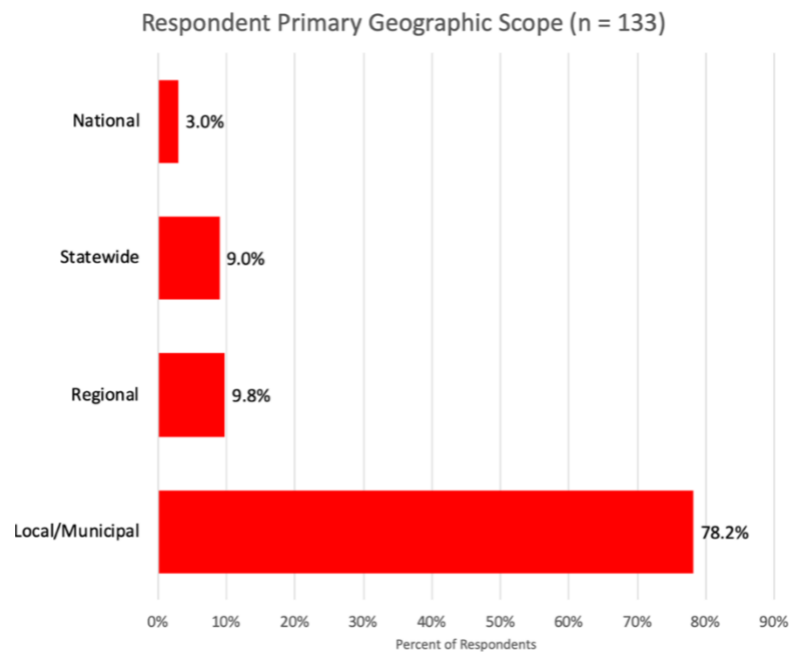


The majority of respondents were either economic development professionals (36.1%) or planners (30.8%). However 19.5% identified as “Other” and 17.3% as volunteers. Other responses are listed in the Appendix.

Geographic Scope

Q4. Which of the following best describes the primary geography for which you conduct economic development activities?

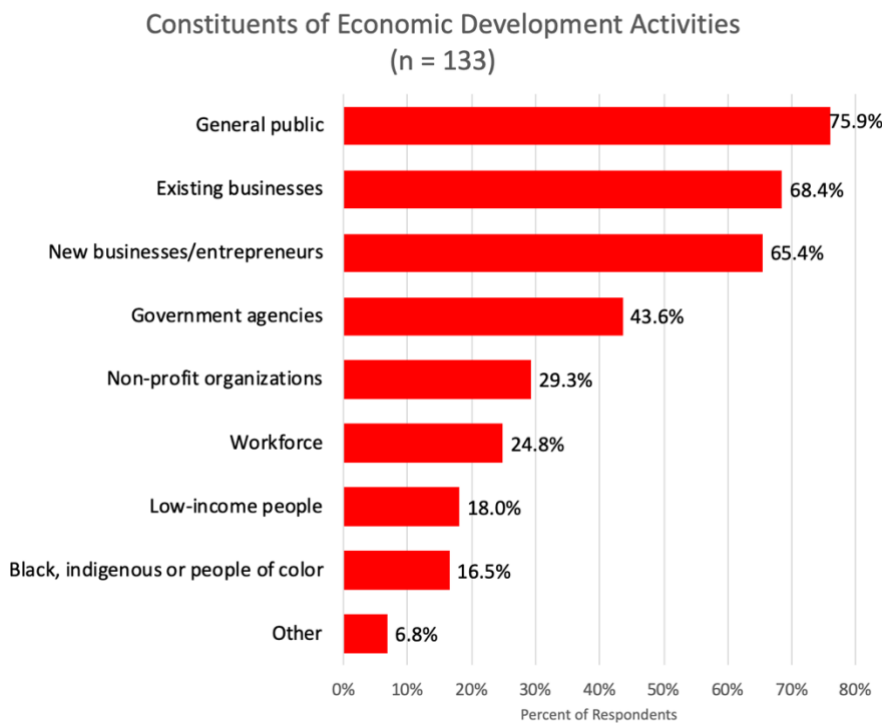
The majority of respondents represented municipalities (78.2%) followed by those representing regional entities (9.8%), and state entities (9.0%). Three present (3% of respondents work at the national level.



Q5. Please specify the towns or cities for which you are engaged in economic development activities. Select all that apply.

Of Connecticut’s 169 municipalities, there were responses from economic development staff or volunteers representing 120 of them, indicating that 49 communities are not represented in this data. Sixty-two municipalities had one respondent and 58 had more than one.

Q6. Which of the following best describes the primary constituents of your economic development related work? Select all that apply.



The vast majority of respondents indicated that their economic development activities focused on the general public (75.9%), followed by existing businesses (68.4%) and new businesses/entrepreneurs (65.4%). Nearly a third of respondents indicated working primarily with non-profit organizations about one-quarter with workforce constituents. Eighteen percent of respondents reported that low-income people are a primary audience and 16.5% reported racially minoritized people as primary constituents. “Other”

responses included: Eastern CT Farms, local business expansion, town commissions, black businesses, new investments/policies, municipalities, women-owned business, agricultural Businesses, housing developers and property owners.

Answers to the following qualitative questions were coded using a coding schedule developed through review of the data by the research team.

Q7. What area or areas of work occupy the majority of your time and resources related to economic development right now? (i.e. business assistance, housing development, entrepreneurship support, etc.)

Answers to this question highlight the diverse range of activities that Connecticut’s economic development practitioners take on in communities.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the most common responses were in the areas of business assistance (60%), real estate/infrastructure development (13%), and land use planning (11%). The remainder of responses were a broad range of responses grouped as “other” (15.8%). In the area of business assistance, responses included: entrepreneurship, business retention and expansion activities, business and community promotion/attraction, main street/downtown development and overall recovery. In the area of estate/infrastructure development, multiple respondents noted housing, new developments, and brownfields occupied the most time. Land use planning included responses related to land use regulation, parking policies, and agriculture. Responses categorized as “other” included tourism development, advocacy, grant-making, convening stakeholders and commissions, other community affairs, transportation, blight, organizational and community development.

Q8. What are the most significant barriers or challenges to economic development in your community?

While resource limitations including lack of funding for municipalities or development topped the list of barriers (28%), engagement and capacity challenges such as NIMB-ISM (Not In My Backyard), lack of care/interest, and lack of regional collaboration/coordination pose a significant barrier to economic development (20%).

Top responses were followed by job and workforce issues (14%), regulatory or administrative issues including current zoning regulations and government practices (13%). Other barriers identified included high costs (7.6%), overall economic markets (5%), lack of education, information or training (4%), Downtown needs (2%), COVID-19 (2%), inequitable access to resources (2%), water sewer infrastructure (2%), transportation (1%) and brownfields (1%).

Q9. What are the most significant emerging economic development opportunities in your community?

Respondents overwhelmingly identified housing/development improvements (45%) as the most significant opportunity, encompassing nearly half of all responses. This included mixed-use developments, septic system upgrades, more affordable housing, demand increase in the housing market, commercial development, and change in some zoning regulations.

This was followed by entrepreneurship and support for small businesses (19%), growing industries (14%) with numerous respondents indicating renewable energy such as solar power as an opportunity but also, technology, manufacturing, health care, bioscience and collaboration/leadership (9%). Other opportunities identified included logistics - warehouse, distribution, and transportation (5.1%), tourism (5.1%), and population growth (3.6%).

Questions for Resource and Education Providers

Responses to these questions are de-identified and included in full in the appendix.

Q10. What specific research or analysis would help you or your community advance economic development? (If a research team or class of students was available to do a project for your community, what would it be?)

Responses mention numerous times included:

- Research about mixed use development including, streetscapes, walkability, safety
- Identifying strategies for advancing economic development
- Housing studies, including housing density analysis and needs assessment, impacts of housing diversification, demand analysis
- Land use - including identifying areas of greatest priority, impacts of land use on taxes and services, improvements and impacts of urban renewal, zoning audits, parking surveys, identifying uses for existing vacant properties, septic services analysis, repurposing big box stores
- Market analyses/research and retail needs assessment (SWOT)
- Regional analysis of businesses including small business churn and specifically, business inventories, business clusters, opportunities for at-home businesses
- Business needs including business feasibility analyses, customer attraction, business startup information
- Grants and funding
- Data needs, including jobs data, visitor counts, demographics, workforce demographics,
- Economic development planning, tourism data, including visitor counts
- Regional coordination and intermunicipal cooperation
- Assistance with projects such as creating local associations, wine trail development

Q11: What specific areas of training or education would help you be more effective?

Responses to these questions are de-identified and included in full in the appendix. Responses were reviewed by UConn, Advance CT and CCM staff which included some discussion of additional requests. Major areas of requested training and education include (in no particular order):

- Marketing and branding -
 - Social media presence
 - Digital: online/web best practices
- Data sources like PolicyMap, big data
- Understanding what other towns are doing, sharing best practices
- Understanding emerging industry sectors and clusters
- Options in online processing (permits)-
- Conducting self-assessments
- Market research and analysis
- Basics of economic development

- Real estate development and finance
- Collaboration - Regionalism (shared services) (ARPA funding example - Sam Gold)
- Encouraging investment and finance (accessing private investment)
- Entrepreneurship basics
- Client surveying/community surveys
- Strategic planning for economic development
- Community transparency in the ED process
- Aligning zoning codes with community goals

Q12: Briefly describe how your community responded to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Responses to these questions are de-identified and included in full in the appendix. While some communities shut down completely, many specifically described assisting with outdoor dining and restaurant promotion, as well as creating support systems for businesses. Some also described shifts in procedures such as online permitting and sales, supporting entrepreneurs, donations, business lists, and new programming such as tax abatements and energy assistance.

Q12b: What might have helped you to respond more effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic?

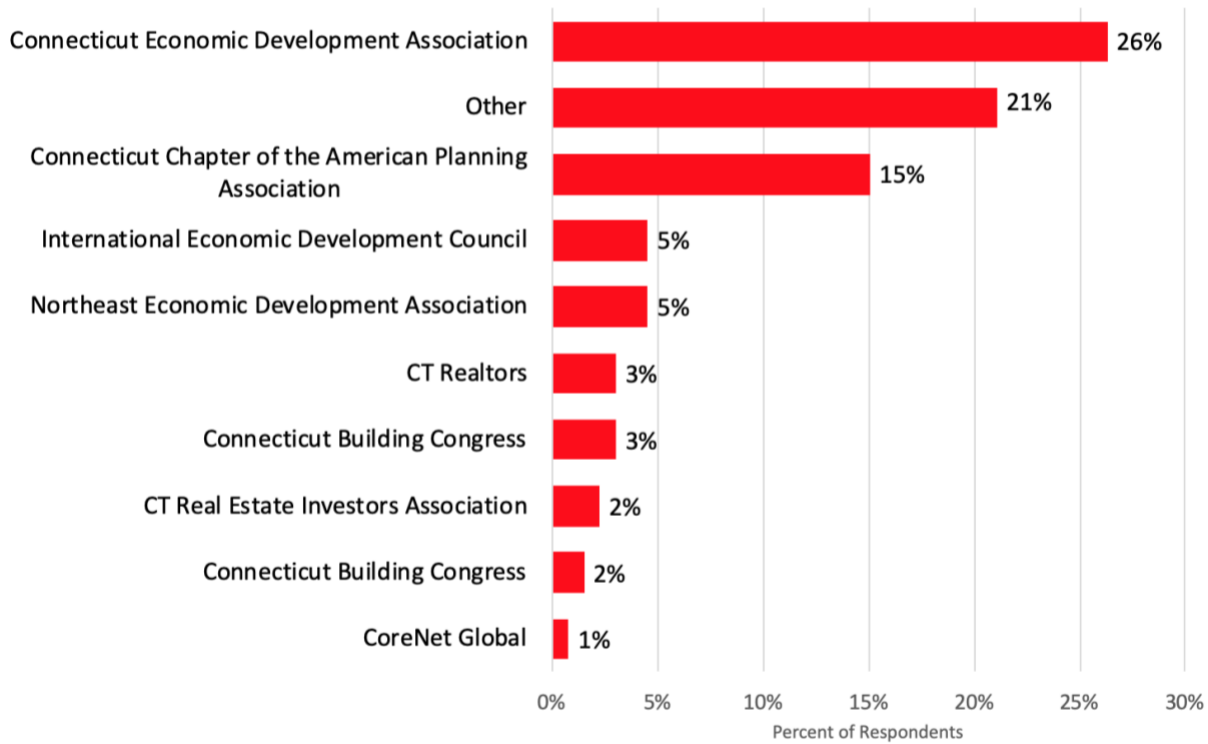
Responses to these questions are de-identified and included in full in the appendix. **Funding for organizations and businesses topped this list. However, many identified some resilience factors that might have allowed them to be more prepared, particularly related to communication with businesses and residents.** These included having access to email, business lists and contact information, existing list of state and federal resources, better methods for communicating with businesses. Other top responses included zoning updates and more flexible zoning, better planning and strategy prior to the pandemic, and clearer guidance.

Group and Organization Membership

Q13: What economic development related groups or organizations do you currently belong to?

Not surprisingly, respondents belong to a diverse range of organizations, likely depending on their areas of background and specialization. Nearly a third of respondents reported belonging to the Connecticut Economic Development Association. “Other” responses included: regional and local chambers of commerce and business associations (5), Council of Governments (2), Connecticut Main Street Center (3), International Council of Shopping Centers (1), American Planning Association (3), Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (2), development or community improvement district (3), land bank (1), Association of State Floodplain Management (1), Congress for New Urbanism (1), Urban Land Institute (1), Local Economic Development Commission (1), NAIOP Commercial Real Estate Development Association (1), Brownfield Coalition of the Northeast (1).

Group and Organization Membership (n = 133)



Demographics

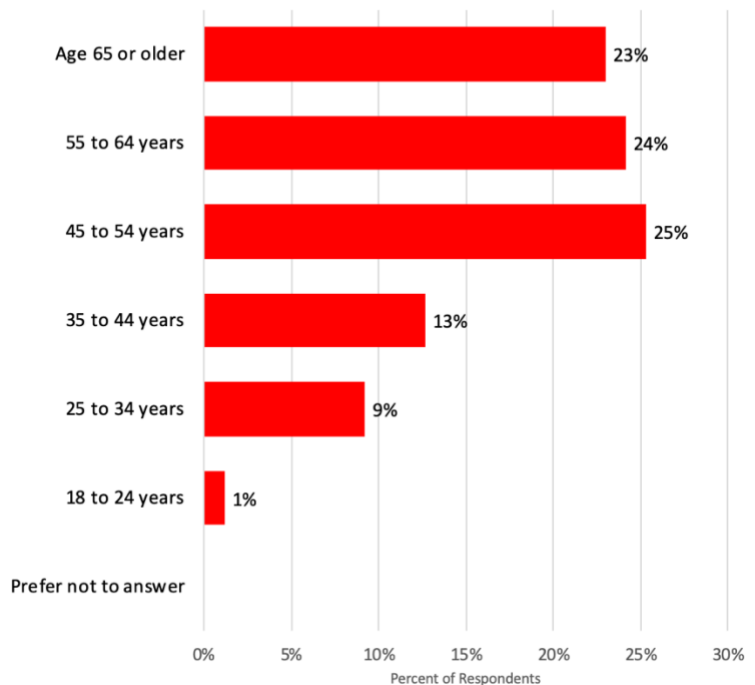
Q14: How many years have you been working in economic development?

Connecticut’s economic developers have experience in their positions. On average respondents had been working in economic development for 11 years. Responses ranged from one year to 36 years.

Q15: What is your age?

Respondents to this survey were about evenly split among the top age cohorts with about 25% indicating being age 65 or older, 25% aged 55-64, and another 25% aged 45-55.

Age of Respondent (n = 87)

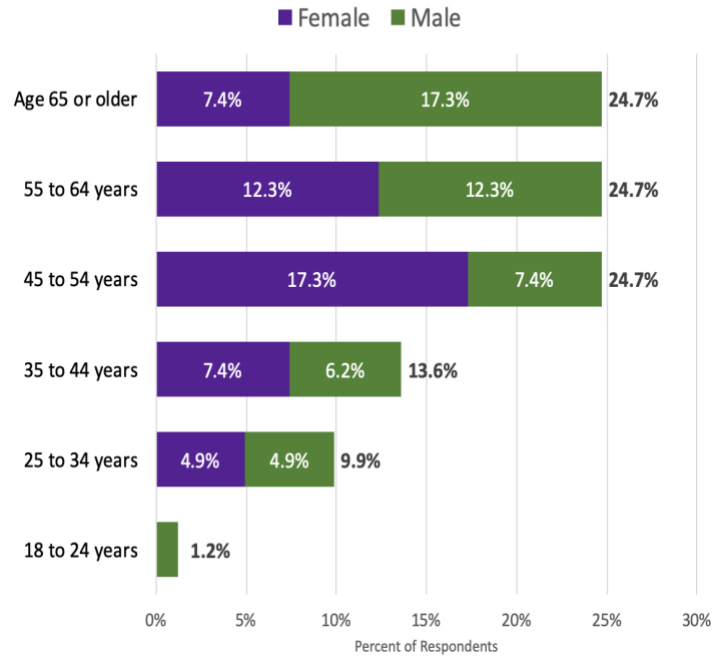


Q16: How do you describe your gender? (Male, Female, Prefer to self-describe, Prefer not to answer.)

Those who responded to this question were about equally split, self-describing as male (47.7%) and female (46.5%). 0.5% of respondents preferred not to answer and no respondents selected “Prefer to self-describe.”

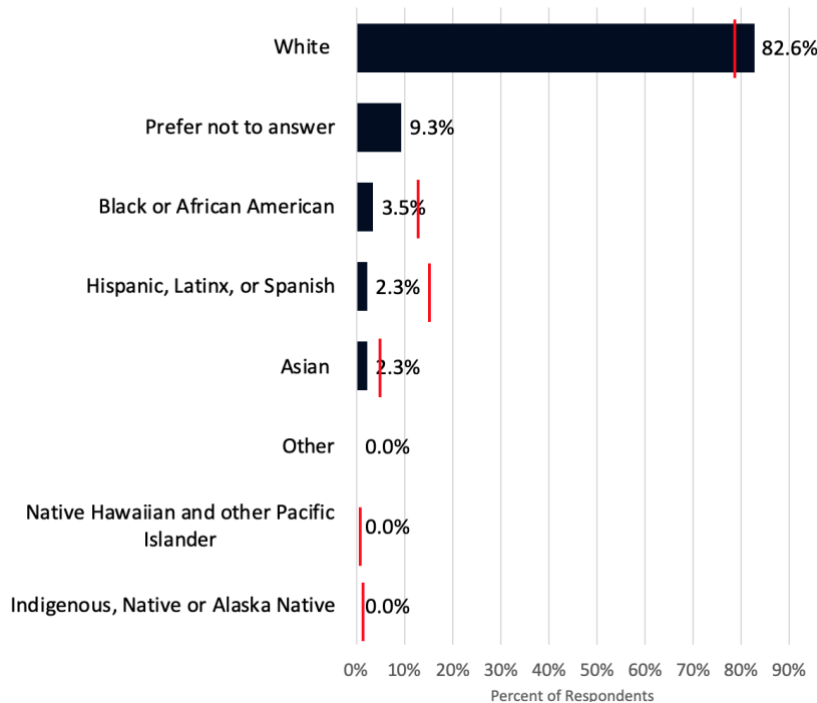
These older age cohorts skewed with significantly more respondents identifying as male while younger cohorts were nearly gender balanced. Connecticut is likely to see a large transition in economic development leadership in the next decade as these professionals retire. Significantly fewer respondents were under 35 years old. (In the chart below “Prefer not to answer” responses were removed for analysis).

Gender of Respondent by Age Cohort (n = 81)



Q17: Do you identify as any of the following? Select all that apply.

Self Identified Race of Respondent (n = 86)



STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEMOGRAPHICS shown as a red line census.gov/quickfacts/CT	
White	79.7%
Black or African American	12.2%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent(a)	0.6%
Asian	5.0%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.1%
Two or More Races, percent	2.5%
Hispanic or Latino, percent(b)	16.9%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	65.9%

APPENDIX

Complete responses can be found below for questions related to research, training and education.

Q10: What specific research or analysis would help you or your community advance economic development? (If a research team or class of students was available to do a project for your community, what would it be?)

Easily accessible data and some regular reports/analysis about small businesses by geography, so that we are able to learn more about the impact they are having on the local economy, and what they may need to grow. It'd be especially helpful to better understand trends/needs of minority/immigrant owned businesses, especially the type that has been in business for many years, but does not have good relationships or knowledge of advisory/technical assistance services that can help them to grow their business.

How to encourage investment in the town

1. Regional governance and shared services

Desirability of the area to developers and what would be the best avenue to grow

Market research directed at new apartment residents to gauge the type of uses that they would like to see within walking distance.

Parking survey

Realty canvas

Market appeal of our town over the other towns in our region

A study of the needs of home-based businesses

Master Plan of development for Downtown, including city-owned property adjacent to Main Street, train/bus Station, and confluence of two rivers

We have been looking for a comprehensive review and analysis of the current housing stock in our community and ideas on how to promote rehabilitations and improvements. This idea preceded the current legislative call for a limited study on affordable housing

Demographic survey

Survey to support business visitation program, analysis of existing business community and relationships (suppliers, etc.)

We need help getting grants for area improvement and we need an additional secretary in the zoning enforcement/building official office.

Long range plan of economic development and redevelopment

How housing density supports local business cost of going through zoning procedures to developers/business owners

Identifying the barriers that are keeping businesses from locating in this community.

Evaluate and recommend best marketing practices for a municipality; conduct a parking study on Main Street to determine how many more parking spaces are needed to suit the needs of our Main Street businesses.

I'm not sure but I would like to see what other towns in northwestern Connecticut are doing to sustain their communities.

Identify the volume and dynamics of visitors/tourism to the region.

Realistic parking ratios for businesses;

The town has done enough surveys

The benefit of water/septic in the community, the impact of more businesses in town

Matching community needs with available commercial units, presently vacated.

A mock-up of how the village might look with mixed use and walkability.

Business and/or retail development

What new emerging "sustainable" commercial/light industrial entities would be interested in locating in our town.

Business feasibility analysis

Workforce demographics (who lives here and what do they do); business demographics (local and regional employers, who's growing, who's not, who's next)

Housing needs assessment

Accurate Jobs Data: Jobs that were lost and the number of hours per week those jobs entailed, the hourly wage paid for those jobs, and the benefits provided. Then the same information for the jobs created or reopening since the ease of the COVID-19 restrictions. This would allow a much more accurate gage of the recovery and estimate of the value of dollars available in our communities.

Research and analysis of work at home individuals

Updating economic development Plans Data gathering Communication tools

What will make Connecticut more attractive for businesses investment here?

We worked with UConn engineering students for two years on updating parking and safety concerns.

Research that would identify residents' needs.

Introduction of manufacturing & technology education programs into Schools system would lead to career pathways and skills that would attract new business investment

Not sure

Deeper dive in one part of town that was destroyed by urban "renewal" (destruction) in the 70s; Help find developers who will come in and build in that area....mixed use...our zoning rules have been modified and a TIF has been developed, so we have things to offer

Identifying what opportunities we have and projecting out the impacts they would deliver; e.g. availability of vacant/developable land; infrastructure to support specific industries; human capital resources.

Study the options for reuse/redevelopment of vacant office space.

Market analysis that would inform a business recruitment strategy

Focus on an area or areas in town and study best business types to be located there and how the zoning regulations should be adjusted to allow for highest and best uses

Branding, infographics, flyers, marketing via social media, demographic data (really detailed), business data (more detailed than just a list...for example...AdvanceCT just asked how many of us knew whether our businesses were owned by Gen X or Boomers. Many of us had no clue. This requires phone calls and door knocking. Creating updated contact information lists. Other surveys etc.

Grants and funding opportunities

Intermunicipal cooperation and coordination

We have a hard time keeping a comprehensive, up-to-date list of all the businesses in our community. We would also like to know which businesses are run by minorities, women, and veterans.

Help to populate information into our ED website

streetscaping to enhance pedestrian access and safety

How to keep employees of major employers in town to enjoy business and resources

How to become more walkable; marketing and branding analysis/guidance; types of businesses that would succeed here; how to reuse large empty/mostly empty buildings

Quantify the negative economic impact of CT's well earned reputation as a high cost and overly regulated State. Could be measured by lost opportunity. 2. Quantify the negative business impact on escalating energy costs and the projections of energy prices continuing to rise. Perhaps research outcomes could find their way into legislative dialog and subsequent action.

Continued education and engagement in suburban communities about the positive side of diverse housing options.

Market analysis, community outreach, creation of design concepts

Market analysis on trends that could then prompt zoning changes to make approval processes more flexible and easy.

Small business development

Research leading to the compilation of the following: an inventory of available commercial property within the municipality, a guidebook on available grant funding by project type, a municipal marketing packet (hard copy and virtual), dedicated economic development website, a program for municipal zoning officials on the impact of zoning on inclusive growth and what can be done to modernize codes

As part of a 'First Impressions' Pilot Study, we have come to realize the need for better housing stock. Over 60% of our housing was built before 1935, as part of an industrial mill town, and today we have over 55% of our housing stock as rental properties. A Master Plan concept of housing redevelopment as it incorporates changes in Zoning regulations. Giving our community members the opportunity to fill our workforce needs would be a win for both the business sector and them. Town does not have a transit system and many have no means to get to a job.

building permit stream lining

how to get more young adults to stay in Connecticut (more jobs?), how to get seniors from leaving Connecticut (lower taxes?).

Three projects that could be initiated within the WestCOG CEDS. Might be plausible, or at least components of these projects. The output is plans to then be implemented by the COG and member communities. They are detailed in the WESTCOG CEDS <https://westcog.org/wcedd/> Projects include; Coordination Plan for Industry Needs and Higher Education Regional Agricultural Viability Study Regional Tourism Development and Marketing Plan

Our community has a four to five lane ugly and dated road (Silas Deane Highway) that bisects the town. I would like a study to determine if road narrowing, traffic calming measures and bike and pedestrian improvements would make the real estate on the Silas Deane more valuable and cause a return of investment.

Surveys on community needs

Market research and financial feasibility

1. How mixed uses can benefit the community. What could the buildings they would be in look like? What kind of uses could do well together? Parking, how mixed uses can share parking due to offset demands and lower ownership rates so less parking would be necessary than in the past. How mixed uses can allow for and encourage reuse of upper floors on main streets and in older commercial areas; these spaces are often underutilized for years which leads to deterioration and low reinvestment by owner, due to difficulty in getting approved to put new businesses in. If residential uses were on upper floors, they would put 'feet on the street' which would help local businesses have a new customer category from the usual day-time workers and day and weekend shoppers/diners.

2. (also related to 1) This message often needs to go beyond local land use decision makers to business owners and business associations: How bringing people to downtown can grow the pie, it can be good for all businesses not just a particular business or by business type that may benefit from a community event. 3. How towns and business associations can help each other out by 'cross-pollinating' - look for ways to promote the area (inclusive of everything it offers) during every event - give people a reason to come back another time. 4. Local land use commission members are not provided the opportunity / or guided to consider the impacts of the regulations they put in place. All too often they react and then react some more instead of stepping back to see what effect the regulations they have in place have had on the community and whether they should continue or should make changes. Land use regulations never make anything happen in terms of development but they surely can prevent it, complicate it, delay it and discourage it. It is highly unlikely the land uses that are regulated to within an inch of their lives are likely to do well in an area unless they have lots of other things going for them - CT would do well to consider how towns can get out of the way of great things and allow them to happen—guidance can still happen but not with a strangle hold on the necks of those who are willing to take the risks and innovate new ideas and concepts of businesses that can create new opportunity.

Zoning audit

Assistance with Bike/Walking trails

1. Development of Business Directory and Business Inventory 2. Market Analysis and Strategic Action Plan for town center and commercial corridor...

Analyze trends, contact prospective investors and showcase the town

The area plays a legacy role in the Maritime Sector/ Blue Economy. With advancements in tech and industry growth, municipalities are challenged to provide zoning regulations that support development and allow for flexibility in spaces. As staff and commissions review zoning regulations, it would be nice to have information on industry trends, a map of Connecticut ecosystem in comparison to other hubs, and workforce development programs (existing and needed).

trending businesses and better understanding of their location and service needs

Evaluate the economic impact of land use change. Impact on services, taxes, and goods available at the local level. Provide more services locally. Pop up stores impact. How to get people off line shopping and back into local neat stores with new products. New ways top attract customers.

Visitor Surveys and Head Counts of visitors to our community

Develop a plan for linking commercial/retail areas to the town center. Would include walkable and bike paved paths and traffic calming along state highways.

Setting up a new website—working through the large amount of data that must be narrowed down for the new site.

Methods to reposition and market traditional big box retail/strip mall locations.

Economic Development Commission is currently working on creation of an "Eastern Connecticut Farm Trail," much like the Wine Trail; research on how the Wine Trail was created/its members/offerings/etc., compile listing of farms/agriculture commissions in Eastern CT/contact info and, if they could, reach out to those farms/commissions to gauge interest/commitment in participation

Economics of multi-family versus commercial investments

Market research to determine trends in the tourism industry, regional housing demand, analysis of costs to redevelop outdated shopping centers/strip malls. Research to identify businesses to target for recruitment. Research/Survey of local industries/businesses to determine their needs.

How to work with UConn to advance economic development that will both benefit UConn and the town of Mansfield.

Housing demand analysis, business attraction studies, social media information

Create a local merchants/business association

Toolkit for entrepreneurs, how to start a business

Workshopping entry level entrepreneurship opportunities

Small town main street revitalization

Have a SWAT with what needs the community feels is lacking from a retail perspective. Developing a "medical" advanced manufacturing hub.

Q11: What specific areas of training or education would help you be more effective?

Policy Map or similar type tools that can help us to better understand our local economies and plan for the future. Not all municipalities or even large entities can afford these types of customized data/analysis/report on a regular basis, so either providing the platform/training or the reporting itself would be very helpful.

Economic development —how to encourage investment in the town

1. DEI 2. Conversion to digital platforms

Accessibility to what other towns are doing

How to mine data sources that are updated frequently.

Public engagement

Emerging sectors like blue economy

Marketing

Municipal planning

Economic development incentives

Project management

Explain how to get a special permit, explain to the public how board of appeals works

marketing

infrastructure needs and tax incentives

Marketing

Not sure

n/a

None

How to best market our town

Branding and marketing

Marketing

Digital marketing & social media

Economic development financing

Periodic reviews of grant and aid programs and their requirements. Things are changing and/or being amended very quickly.

New technologies

Sharing economic best practices

Political

State grants
Manufacturing & technology
Updating on new zoning laws
The Economic Development commissioners need training - what they can do, can't, and understand
Much stronger, better coordinated worker training programs linked to current employer needs
How to encourage entrepreneurs
Not sure
Developing financial packages, land banking, financing large mixed use projects and P3s
Market analysis
How do we get better participation and engagement in our econ dev programs?
City planning
Marketing
Marketing; research, analysis and evaluation of technical info re feasibility and economic impacts
Better understanding of commercial real estate transaction variables so we can better understand how we can influence "deal making"
Dispelling the myths of Affordable Housing
Model standards for form-based codes
Commercial real estate education
More course similar to IEDC
Case studies illustrating successful efforts
Fund development, establishing public/private partnerships, economic development leadership training
Tax incentives offered by the state and Feds to accomplish some redevelopment projects
Economic Development Basics. I've been thrust in this role and not even sure what I should be learning.
New Urbanism
Greening communities, merging traditional planning and zoning with new approaches, redevelopment of blighted, outdated commercial/industrial properties
Real estate development finance
Economic development training -- courses for the certification are rarely in New England which means an plane ticket (in many cases), rental car and hotel room on top of the fee to attend. I have taken a few of the courses online but the rest I would have to travel to so that is difficult and expensive.
Reading zoning
Public finance

Town planning

Land use and equity

Education of local commissioners re economic dev.

networking with other EDC's

Commercial Real Estate and Finance

Workshops on effective marketing techniques, how best to engage businesses to participate, etc.

Market Research

Business recruitment strategies

Educating public (baby boomers) on trends

economic development certification programs

Advanced manufacturing / Affordable Higher Education locally

Q12. Briefly describe how your community responded to the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are a statewide nonprofit that partnered with several municipalities to help small businesses access Covid relief grants. We also offered deferrals to our borrowers.

With grit and determination

1. Direct support to business/community 2. Continuity of government operations and 3. Planning for economic bounce-back and reopening.

Set up a COVID-19 Economic Recovery Committee that sponsored some educational webinars along with the Chamber of Commerce. Also did some restaurant promotions for take-out.

More affluent members continued to patronize local businesses, ordering take out or pickup

A COVID business team representing each industry; grants, better communications

Very effectively—town buildings were closed to the public (but employees continued the operations of the town)

As far as I know, only one of our food service establishments closed permanently—a bakery. The problem was not a lack of individual customers but of their restaurant clients.

Businesses mostly adapted and persevered. Restaurants/bars were most notably effective in doing so. Community wide support and support from local government was significant. Other businesses, unfortunately, shuttered for good and could not sustain, during the pandemic. Unemployment rose to 11% in the community, but local non-profits stepped up to support food security and other related issues.

Created outdoor restaurant seating; remote leaning in school; municipal Zoom meetings; free testing at the town's farmers' market pavilion; art sculpture display through the town and its river trail

Ansonia was very proactive and changed and adopted to accommodate our restaurant cluster. Helped market and promote our restaurants to see them through the crisis. Held multiple clinics in the city and partnered with our local hospital. Handed out fliers, videos to educate the underserved populations.

Conduit of information with Chamber of Commerce to educate businesses on programs. Supported outdoor activities.

In general, we kept businesses running, by supporting businesses and wearing masks.

We moved slowly, but steadily despite the COVID-19 restrictions

Work from home

Business support system established right away.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the community hunkered down, ordered takeout, visited retail stores sparingly, and waited. Now that things are resuming, we have an uptick in business growth.

Norfolk responded very well. We are small enough that once the rules were established everyone followed them and supported each other. Infinity Hall music venue took the biggest hit. Station Place cafe closed and may reopen soon. Through the church, we have a food bank, and the community was very supportive. On the whole, it felt like we did a good job supporting each other and working together.

Virtualized services as possible.

Pivoted to allow more outdoor dining, remote meetings, modified permit processing procedures; shifted work focus somewhat

We had a 19-member COVID-19 Recovery team that assembled a 140-page report for the state. With great leadership of our Republican mayor and administration, the town survived with little loss of businesses.

We pulled together and got creative with how we could finance new ideas/businesses.

Quite a few businesses experienced setbacks.

Fairly resilient

The few businesses we have in town have survived.

Residents went out of their way to support local businesses.

Our mayor did an outstanding job of adhering to the stated Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and state public health guidelines, while using social media to keep in touch, on a what seemed an almost daily basis, with the community. He also used his executive authority to support small business as best as possible, by extending zoning regulations, etc.

Increased communications especially about local, state, and federal programs, increased partnership with local chamber to access more businesses, distributed Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), increased retention efforts, adopted deferral program for tax payments, started a column in the local online paper highlighting businesses and their challenges/successes through pandemic

1. Responded to immediate needs—assisting with food, home heating oil, and housing. 2. Responded to business needs—assistance with obtaining grants and loans, securing PPE and thermometers, providing informational fact sheets on Connecticut Health Department requirements. 3. Established programs to support local business—printing/publishing a daily guide to businesses that were open and how to access their goods and services, a daily restaurant guide with menu items and instructions to call in orders and for pick up/delivery. 4. Secured funds to run an eight-week restaurant promotion.

Transportation for seniors, weekly updates on local status of pandemic

Incredibly well. Organized, informed, focused.

Helped businesses get information to their clients immediately.

Offered a lottery proposal to encourage take-out restaurant purchases.

Helped businesses re-open with a lot of their input.

Manufacturing sector experienced few layoffs; hospitality sector (restaurants, etc.) had layoffs but rebounding, now; overall, municipality grand list grew by 4% in past year.

We shut down. For me, the biggest problem was not being able to use the library.

The elected officials "went underground." I'm sure they were working, but they cut off the public and didn't keep the public engaged or informed. The current elected body shut down meetings, public participation, and just worked in a vacuum.

Don't know.

We expedited our adoption of on-line services, in permitting and development review, while still maintaining office hours and field inspections. We coordinated with the local chamber to keep businesses informed of COVID-19 restrictions and funding.

Being more lenient with regulations, to allow for businesses to continue operations as usual, as much as possible, i.e., allowing outdoor seating at restaurants.

Survey and working across departments to make sure the activities chosen align with impacts. Multiple vaccination clinics, increased services with emergency response, social services, meal distribution, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving (HFPG) grant for food pantry, small scale manufacturing program, expanded business loans to grants, increased outreach, interviews, etc.

Cashed everything we were doing. Focused on local business support.

Sharing information about government funding, closure/reopening guidance, and web-based/social-media promotions.

Obviously, a big shift to online sales/services, as well as curbside pickup and delivery. Our economic development team worked tirelessly to put out emails full of tons of information on financial recovery options every week. Some businesses did shut down for good, but I will say that just as many (if not more) new businesses opened their doors for the first time, *during* the pandemic!

Support for small businesses

Promoted local businesses; had an online contest and raffle, for gift certificates to local businesses

Triage...educate...deliver value

Large efforts to keep critical resources available to the most vulnerable populations in the county. Deep partnership with local organizations to advocate for resources. Fundraising and distribution of funds to critical 501(c)3's.

Town declared local emergency, enabling leadership to exercise emergency powers and access to federal aid. Social distancing recommendations adhered to, and safety measures installed expeditiously, to enable essential programs and services to continue. Participated in tax deferment program. Relaxation of temporary sign restrictions, enabling onsite advertisement of changes to standard operating practices and special offerings, e.g., curbside pickup. Implemented *Temporary Outdoor Dining Certificate*, streamlined approval process, and established administrative authority, to permit expansions to permanent outdoor dining provisions.

I was the main contact for all businesses in Norwalk and was the liaison to the state for guideline guidance. Health department focused on releasing information that made sense. My office also assisted with grant distribution and technical assistance.

Comprehensive response to all aspects of the pandemic

n/a

Black businesses were closing at rates around 40% nationally—but we are a resilient community, and there have been a high number of start-ups or dreamers who are ready to start something new.

The greatest challenge was communicating to the business community, regarding the ever-changing Executive Orders and how to enforce, or *not* to enforce. Depending on the type of business (restaurants, retail, industrial/technology, service, etc.), each sector had different challenges to stay alive.

Overwhelming donations to food pantry, support to local restaurants, relaxed zoning regulations for outdoor dining.

The Council of Governments were asked to coordinate Long Term Recovery Committees under various sectors for each of the DEMHS regions in the state. Their mission was to obtain a list of unmet needs that industries face during the pandemic. This list is then provided to the state to use for strategic planning. WestCOG overlaps two of these regions. Lists were generated, however there has been limited communication from the state. LTR groups have shown frustration.

Created a town wide business email list serve to inform of any and all assistance possibilities, latest news, etc. Deferred tax payments, repayments of Economic Development Administration (EDA) loan program. Created a partially forgivable (up to \$10,000) EDA loan, for those businesses located in town to remain open.

Not sure, still figuring it out

Being adaptive and responsive to business needs

This town allowed more outdoor dining than they already allowed. The town hall closed for a while. Many other towns seemed to shut down.

Convened many virtual meetings, conducted polls, provided guidance to elected officials.

Town pivoted very readily to online learning, meetings, and community engagement, as well as provided assistance to those in need.

Dispersed information on social media and to the chamber and restaurants; development team worked with health officials and fire marshal, to assist restaurants with outdoor dining.

We closed many town buildings to the public, dealt with layoffs, and are reeling from the effects of closures.

Pretty much stayed cloistered. Local services were hit hard, especially small businesses and restaurants.

Business seminars on the re-opening rules issued by the governor, restaurant curb side pick-up parking designation on Main Street, restaurant promotion flyer

We shut down all town facilities.

Dedicated most of our resources toward communication, outreach, advertising, etc.

Communicated resources clearly. Accommodated temporary outdoor dining. Promoted additional zoning flexibility.

Disseminated information to businesses regarding available programs; provided testing/vaccinations.

All the usual

There was a lot of community support for local businesses and fundraising to help households negatively impacted.

Lots of communication on the Mansfield Downtown Partnership website and direct e-mails to businesses, one-on-one calls with businesses about available financial resources

Used dedicated economic development website to share federal, state, regional, and local resources. Used social media to update public. Directly distributed masks and COVID-19 posters to local businesses. Conducted three phases of business sentiment surveys in 2020.

We worked hard to push residents and those who work here to eat and shop locally, through a handful of campaigns, including, Eat Local, Win Local, Bucks, Bingo and more...

Response was spotty at the governmental level. Some direct aid was solicited for Low/Moderate Income (LMI) families. There are high levels of Covid-skepticism in this region.

As I work statewide, I've observed numerous creative problem-solving, from use of traffic lanes to create outdoor dining, to murals and public art that attracts people to (safely) gather outdoors, to how restaurants and retail entrepreneurs pivoted to curbside and delivery, to restaurants partnering with churches and social institutions to deliver food and necessities to medical professionals and those in need.

We so far have weathered well. We had community outreach for our needs-based community in food, energy assistance, temporary housing. Continued outreach with our EDC corporation, in addressing the needs of the business community. Allowed "outside dining" for our restaurants and retail establishments due to COVID-19 restrictions. Business Expansion/New Development local tax abatements

Q12b: What might have helped you to respond more effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic?

What we learned, more than anything else, is that clear and effective communications, accessible to all, was the most important factor in dealing with an evolving situation. Having reliable sources of information and knowing how to get the word out is a major takeaway from the pandemic. This can be very useful in economic development planning, since it forced parochial Connecticut to communication cross sector/institution/borders.

More money, more education

Additional staff for outreach and ground game.

Tough question. Not really sure. The pandemic presented a number of moving targets, with no good feel for how long or how severe a crisis we would be facing.

Ability to educate businesses on their responsibilities

Someone in my office to assist with the applications

Early on in the pandemic, PPE was scarce and expensive—perhaps a state/federal stockpile that could have been in place to assist us

Additional staff devoted strictly to the pandemic response

No talk of Clorox as a remedy

Less restrictions

Money to support businesses

Permanent outdoor dining areas

No COVID-19

Mental health investment

A coordinated online presence for local businesses

A universal basic income; more businesses that can operate effectively without the public's presence

I'm not sure.

Tax offsets.

More long range planning capacity

Less BS from the media and government

A pot of money for the EDC

Broadband connectivity

More connectivity to local updates

Nothing

Further federal and state resources and support for local businesses

Full list of email contacts for businesses
More staff. I am the only staff person to manage/run all economic development programs.
Earlier action by federal agencies
Having access to emails.
Purchase reward certificates
Public health did great job.
Gazing into a crystal ball to understand mask use and social distancing
Not sure...a quicker turn around on the vaccine clinics, but it worked out. Keep the public in the loop, use social media (they didn't), the town manager put materials out, it was all soft stuff.
Better information; better understanding of the impacts.
Better communication with businesses. We pushed a lot of information out, but responses were limited.
More lenient zoning regulations
More staff
Better business data
Better communication tools to businesses
A better, easier way to get every single business registered for our e-blast, so they were kept abreast of important economic development information.
A more extensive database (contact information) of every business in our town by business category
Greater financial resources
A united federal government
Money
n/a
Funding...and lots of it!
More consolidated, concise communication
More money to very small businesses
Real expectation from the state regarding what the goals of the LTR process were. However, this event is unprecedented, so I don't know...
Up to date town wide contacts for all businesses/property owners
Zoning and policies in place to allow for quicker transition to manage business and citizen concerns
Resources for economic development
More effective ways of communicating. People need ways to be social and get together. It is too hard for people to be isolated for so long. More community events and ways to bring people together, and if they have to be done in a new, socially distanced way, then people can come up with new ways to do them, but

they need to be allowed and encouraged. Isolation has been very hard on children, teens and older people. The middle adults may have fared better because many were still employed and still had to get out of the house to go food shopping or whatnot, even if in very isolating ways. People who were dependent on others for transportation, food, errands, etc., would be even more isolated, as their rides were now more cautious about being willing to drive people around.

Clear asks from state

More funding

Difficult to assess

Guidance from state legislative delegation

Established relationships with local businesses.

Very effective methods of communication on line with residents.

Easier access to business funding for Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans and related assistance

More planning and less fear

Greater assistance to rural communities

Reliable information

More coordinated communication between all state agencies regarding business support programs and services.

Direct local funding (not through the state)

Not having had it happen...

A more concentrated mission to develop a town-wide pandemic response

I feel that so many agencies (public, private, nonprofit, etc.) were working to get information and resources out to those who needed them, particularly to business owners. I'm not sure if any other tactics could have helped. But on a strategic level, we have an opportunity to develop a state and local crisis management plan, that can guide us in how to mobilize and respond in the future.

In the beginning, more state and federal assistance with PPE.