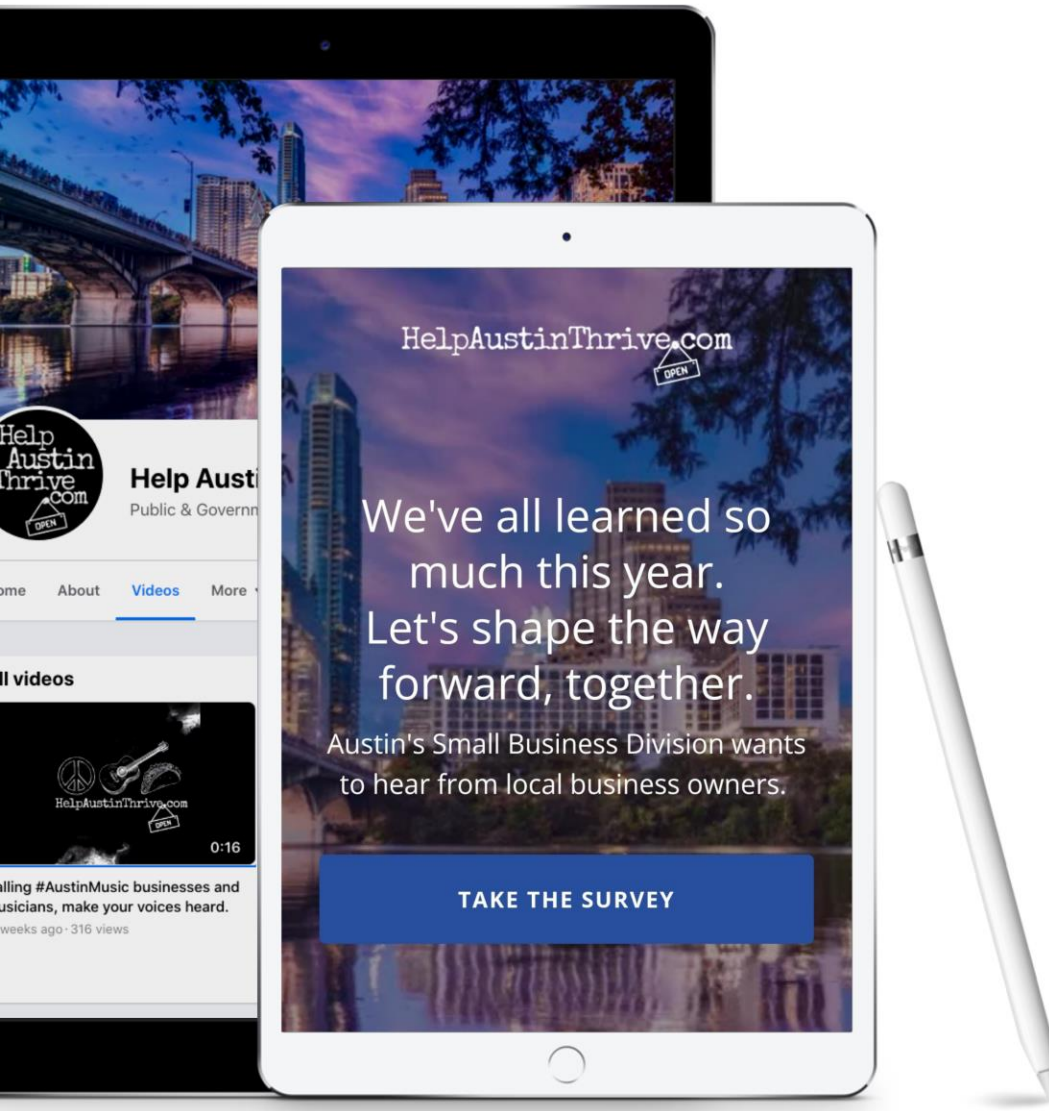


City of Austin 2022 Small Business Needs Assessment



About This Report

- This study was commissioned by the City of Austin Economic Development Department Small Business Division
- The report provides a summary analysis of data from an online survey and through a series of focus groups, and interviews with local business owners
- Participants were recruited with a community outreach campaign that included email, social media and search engine marketing
- For the privacy of respondents, the personal contact information for participants has been removed from the public report

Research and Report provided by
Distance Learning Media, LLC



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Primary Purpose & Secondary Focus	4
Participant Information	5
Three Key Themes	6
- On Resilience and Recovery	7
- On Community Connection	8
- On Hope for Growth	9
Objectives & Methodology	10
The Campaign	11
Mobile-Friendly Campaign Website	12
Email Marketing & Outreach	13
The Online Survey	14
Social Media Outreach	15
Social Media Video Ads	16
The Focus Groups	17
5 High-Priority Industries	18
One-On-One Interviews	19
Survey Participants	20
General Data About Participants	21
Industries Represented by Respondents	24
Top Challenges Reported for Hiring	25
Minority-Owned Businesses Participating	26
Woman-Owned Businesses Participating	27
LGBTQ-Owned Businesses Participating	28
Veteran-Owned / Veteran-Led Businesses	29
How Business Owners Self-Identify	30

On the Impact of the Covid Shutdown	31
Business Closings Due to Covid	32
Revenue Impact of the Covid Shutdown	33
Workspace Changes Pre vs. Post-Covid	34
How Staffing Was Impacted by Covid	35
Financial Assistance During Covid	36
How Businesses Adapted During Covid	37
Crisis Preparedness Post-Covid	38
Confidence in the Future	39
Participants Shared "Nuggets of Wisdom"	40
Learning Preferences	43
Interest in Marketing/Communications Classes	44
Interest in Legal or Finance Classes	45
Interest in Productivity or Management Classes	46
Interest in Government & Procurement Classes	47
In-Person vs. Virtual	48
Types of Instructors	49
Class Formats	50
Preferred Methods of Class Discovery	51
Participant "Write-In" Responses	52
-- Musicians & Music Industry	54
- Music Industry Respondents.....	55
- Class Topics of Interest to Music Industry	56
- Music Industry Focus Group Notes	57
-- The Arts & Creatives	59
- The Arts & Creatives Respondents.....	60
- Class Topics of Interest to Creatives	61
- Arts & Creatives Focus Group Notes	62

-- Restaurants & Food Services	64
- Food Service Industry Respondents.....	65
- Class Topics of Interest to Food Services	66
- Food Service Focus Group Notes	67
-- Travel & Tourism	69
- Travel & Tourism Industry Respondents.....	70
- Class Topics of Travel & Tourism	71
- Travel & Tourism Focus Group Notes	72
-- Green & Eco-Focused	74
- Green or Eco-Focused Participants	75
- Green & Eco-Focused Focus Group Notes	77
-- Veteran-Owned or Veteran-Led	79
- Class Topics of Interest to Veteran-Owned	80
General Findings & Recommendations	81
General Findings	82
Interview Notes	85
Focus Group Notes	87
Recommendations	91
- On Topics of Interest for Small Business Classes.....	91
- On Accommodations for Time-Challenged Entrepreneurs	93
- On Providing & Promoting Value in Small Business Classes	95

Executive Summary

This Needs Assessment is a little bit different from those in the past.

This study is conducted every four years by the City of Austin to keep in touch with the kinds of education and events people in the community want, or need, to manage and grow their businesses.

Primary Purpose

The primary purpose of the study is to evaluate small business education programming - popular class topics, methods of instruction, gaps in current services, and more. It is a chance to learn what is working well, what needs improvement, and to discover any new or emerging trends that should or could be addressed by City programs.

Secondary Focus

The timing of this year's study resulted in an opportunity to talk with Austin business owners about their experiences during the pandemic and resulting shutdown. This year, questions about the impact of Covid-19 were included in the online survey, in focus group discussions, and in the one-on-one interviews.

While the majority of responses were obtained through an online survey, focus groups were the most revealing. The group-discussion format allowed us to probe answers and fostered an exchange of dialogue that an online survey simply cannot accommodate. Dialogue in the focus groups wasn't just between participants and moderators, it was also largely peer-to-peer. Individual interviews were also revealing as participants provided honest insights and feedback about their experience running a small business in Austin.

Photo: Pennybacker Bridge in Austin
Source: Getty

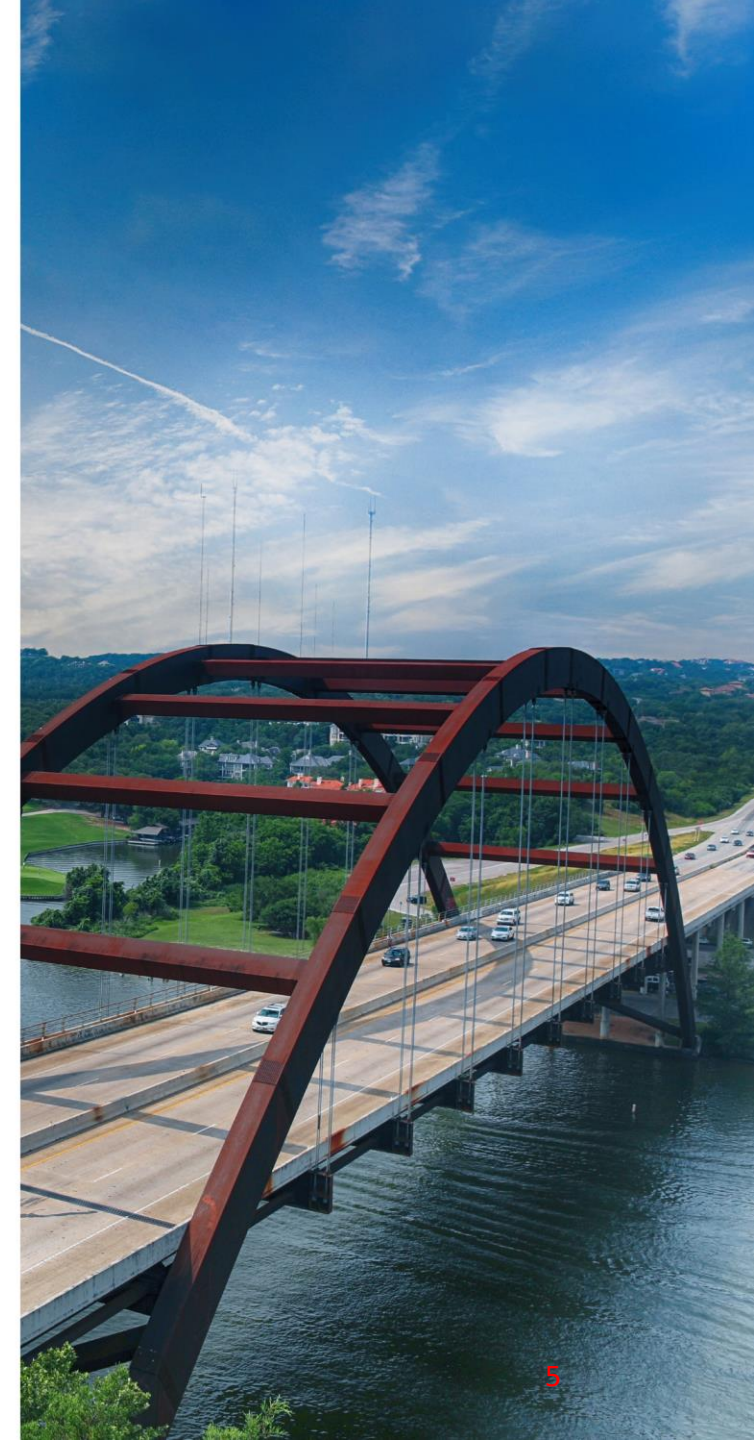


Executive Summary

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

This report reflects data from a variety of participants, including 1,061 online survey responses, 105 focus group participants, and 15 one-on-one interviews.

- Responses came from every Austin zip code, so all Council districts are represented
- At least 48% identify as women
- At least 30% identify as belonging to one or more minority group
- At least 9.6% identify as LGBTQ
- At least 9.3% are veterans
- 59% have been in business for at least 7 years
- 80% report having 10 or fewer employees
- 6.7% of participants are in the music industry
- 7.7% of participants are in the arts or creative industry
- 18.1% of participants sell eco-friendly "green" goods or services



Executive Summary

THREE KEY THEMES

Three themes emerge from within the data gathered and general analysis of the conversations with business owners and comments from study participants:

Resilience & Recovery

Time and again, participants mentioned their reliance on special recovery programs and learning new ways to adapt and grow in a post-Covid world.

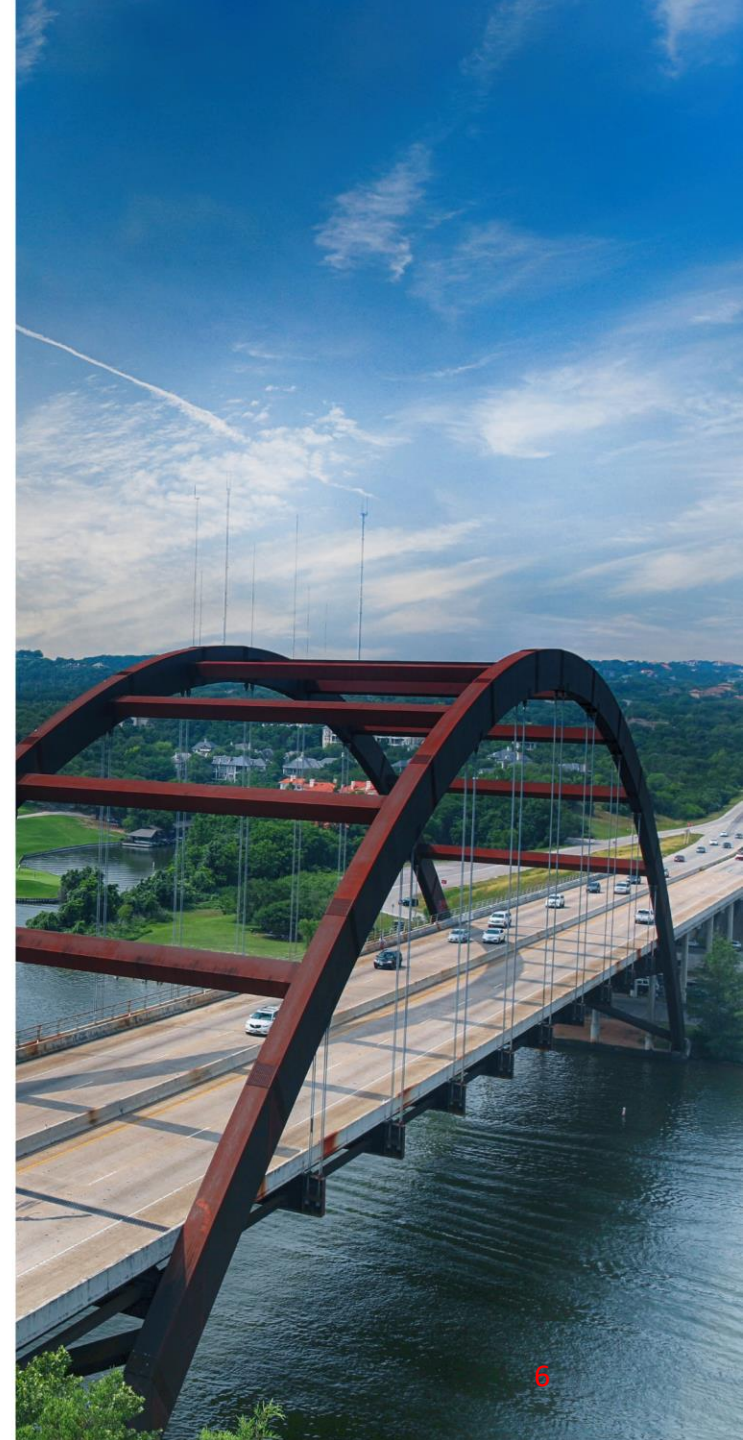
Community Connections

Study participants consistently relayed a new and profound appreciation for their own communities - peers, colleagues, organizations, friends & neighbors.

Hope for Growth

While most participants provided responses that reflect a sincere hope for the future, and a desire for growth, the study data also reveals consistent struggles resulting from Covid and the shutdown. Austin's small businesses need simple, easy-to-access programs, tools, and resources to stay open.

Photo: Pennybacker Bridge in Austin
Source: Getty





Executive Summary

ON RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY

Covid-19 and the Resulting Shutdown Presented Difficulties for Austin Businesses But ATX Locals Did Not Accept Defeat

The small business community in Austin lost many beloved businesses to the pandemic, closed permanently as a result of lost revenue during the Covid-19 shutdown. Those that remain open and operating today have managed to keep things afloat by cutting costs, adapting their business models, working together with other businesses and organizations, and by accessing programs and financial assistance provided by local, state, and federal agencies.

- A majority of businesses participating in this study did have to close their doors for at least some time during the shutdown. For most, closing down was only a temporary act, but staffing needs also changed as well as day-to-day operations.
- More than half added new online payment options as well as curbside pick-up and local delivery. Many reduced the number of products or services they offer.

Today, most of these businesses are still somewhat reliant on assistance from state or federal programs to keep their businesses running. They express concerns about finding and keeping employees and they are open about the daily struggles to keep up with changing mandates, rules, and requirements.

Nearly all of the businesses participating in this study were of the mindset that they were open for business and ready to adapt as needed now, and for what the future holds.



Executive Summary

ON COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Austin's Local Business Community Nurtures Deep Roots with Strong, Bending Branches

Across all industries, participant demographic groups, experience, and revenue levels, a significant group of responses expressed a sense of unity with their local peers. They told us stories of how they helped each other, talked openly about their own struggles, and were met with support and encouragement from other participants in group discussions. This was an unexpected result given the difficulties of the past few years for small business owners.

During the Covid shutdown, Austin business owners discovered new ways to work together and were happy to share tips and ideas with others - including direct competitors - in the spirit of community.

Participants expressed pride in their work, leaning into their collective role as employers and local leaders, and seemed to believe that finding purpose in that responsibility would help them right the ship; not only for their own businesses but also for the culture and well-being of Austin as a whole.

They adapted in difficult times, becoming more flexible and seemingly stronger as a result. It was not all good news, but their tone and sentiment definitely worked to hide the challenges and highlight the positives from the past 2 years.



Executive Summary

ON HOPE FOR GROWTH

While Many Participants Expressed Genuine Hope for the Future, Data Suggests There Are Challenges Ahead

There is a sort of juxtaposition right now, in terms of Austin's small business community and the growing popularity and population of the city. While home values soar and new people continue to move into the area at a faster rate than most other parts of the country, many local business owners are both enjoying the fruit of that growth and feeling the pressure that it brings.

In the midst of a grand recovery effort to move past the pandemic and into the future, many business owners are also facing some real challenges in terms of the costs associated with buying or leasing commercial property, finding and keeping good employees, and keeping up with changing rules or regulations.

During this study, much of the data reveals high hopes for the future expressed by most of the business owners who participated.

It's important to note that they also reported significant challenges that can and will impede that growth. That dissonance - hopeful but worried - prompted study facilitators to ask if those expressions of hope were genuine or more like an authentic attempt to focus on positivity over their fears. The answer was clear, with real and practical support from city, state and federal agencies and with a strong peer-to-peer community in place, they believe they can overcome all of it. Not individually, but together.



Objectives & Methodology

ONLINE SURVEY

The study generated 1061 survey responses from local small businesses with under 100 employees using a survey created to measure interest in and sentiment toward City of Austin small business classes and more

FOCUS GROUPS

The study hosted a series of live, virtual focus groups, open to any kind of small business, including special topics designed to engage 5 key groups: Music, The Arts, Restaurants, Tourism and Green businesses

COVID INSIGHTS

The study also gathered insights from participating business owners about the impact and outcomes of their experiences managing a small business in Austin during the Covid pandemic and resulting shutdown

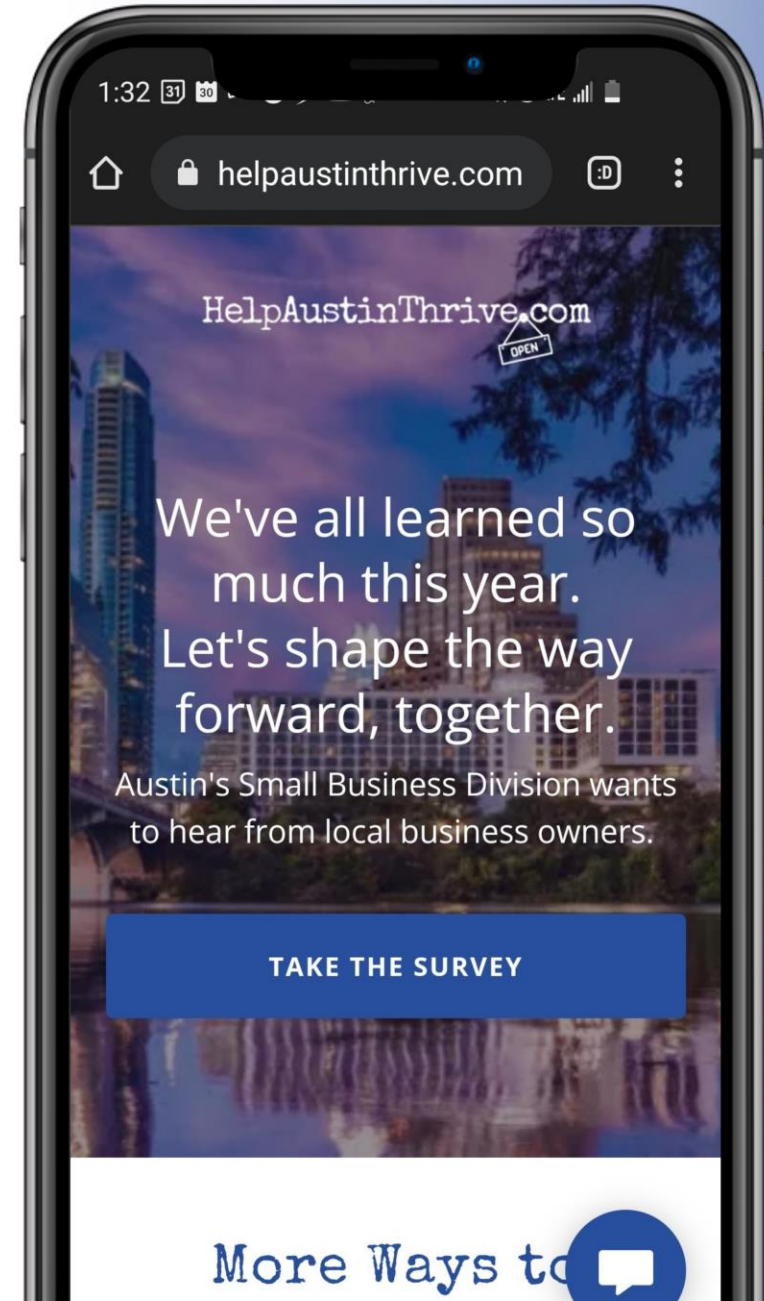
The Campaign

- Building on the success of the previous needs assessment campaign, we again engaged with HelpAustinThrive.com
- Having a simple domain name provides an easy way for participants to find the survey
- It also gives partner organizations and local leaders a simple way to invite others
- The "Peace, Guitars & Tacos" graphic is intended to capture an ATX vibe, making the official study more approachable, and less institutional
- The images and messaging are intentionally friendly, casual, welcoming and inclusive
- The hanging OPEN sign denotes small business and signals re-opening after the covid shutdown



Mobile-Friendly Campaign Website

- A mobile-friendly website was created for the campaign to make it easy to invite participants and to share on social media as needed
- The site provided multiple links to take the online survey, information and registration links for focus groups, and provided some background information about the study as well
- A hidden page on the site at HelpAustinThrive.com/art was made available to local organizations and groups interested in sharing information about the study to access suggested social media posts, shareable post images and videos targeting specific industries





Email Marketing & Outreach

- More than 80,000 emails were sent out in order to engage local business owners and organizations to participate in this study
- A variety of industry-specific contact lists were provided by the City's Small Business Division to invite and include businesses that have attended past business classes and/or participated in other events or activities
- Study facilitators also leveraged an existing network of thousands of local business owners and nonprofit organizations to help get the word out
- Austin area organizations that focus on small local businesses, and nonprofits serving key industries were also engaged to help invite their members and followers to participate in the study

The Online Survey

DLM worked with City of Austin Small Business Program staff to create a set of questions designed to engage participating local business owners

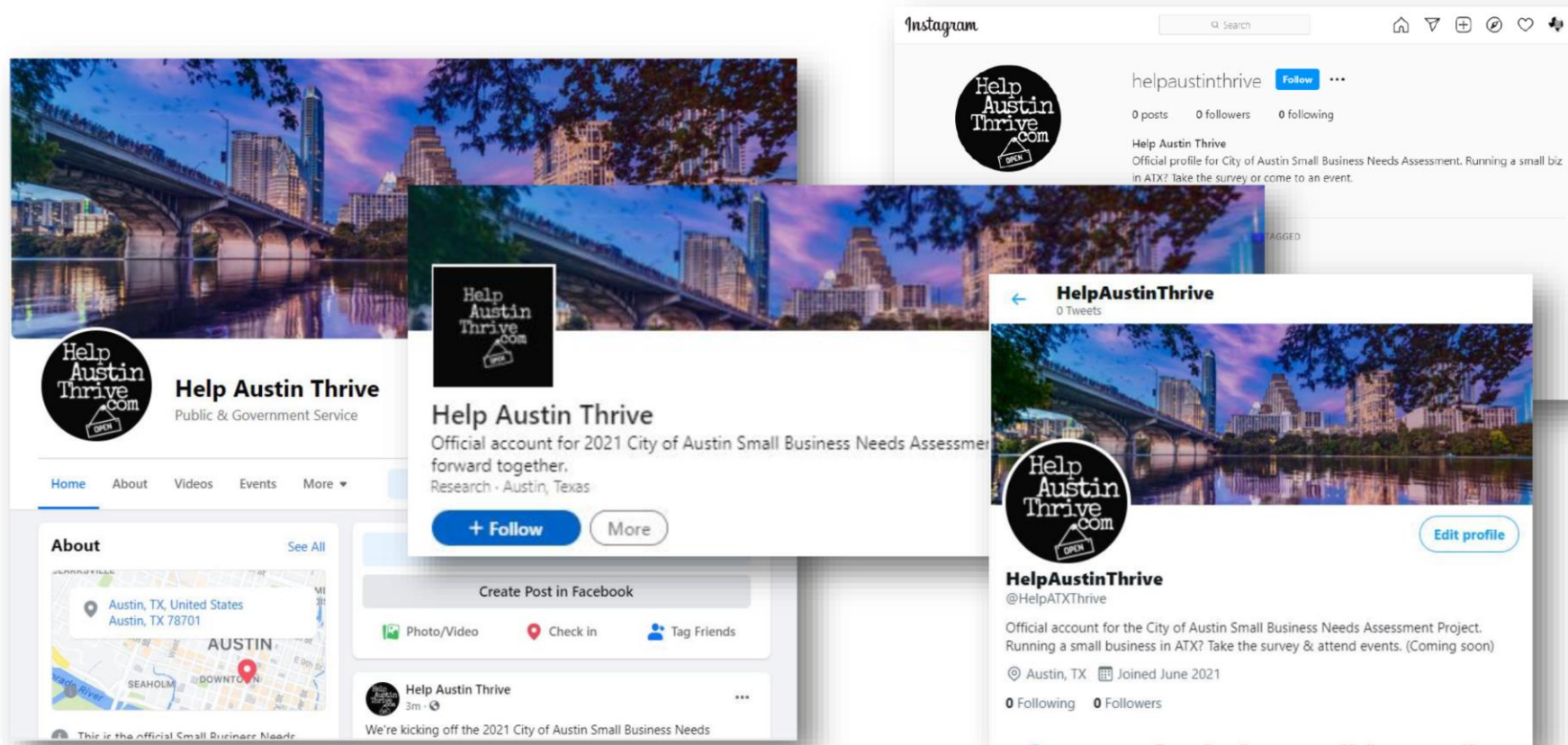
Questions focused on educational resources provided by the city as well as supports and other programs designed to help small business owners in Austin

Some questions were also created to gather insights and data around the impact of Covid19 and the shutdown on local businesses

The survey also included specific questions for each of the 5 key industries with skip-logic designed to dig deeper on some topics when a participant shared information that related to a focus area

Social Media Outreach

Social media profiles for the campaign were created and populated with easy-to-share posts and information about the study, the survey and focus groups



Social Media Video Ads

These are samples from a collection of more than 30 video ads that ran during the campaign, each designed to target and engage business owners in a specific industry or group, like gig-economy workers, food services, creatives, musicians, freelancers and "green" or eco-focused businesses



Video Ad: Food Businesses
Shows BBQ chopping



Video Ad: Creatives/The Arts
Shows freelance artist painting mural



Video Ad: Music & Musicians
Shows musicians playing on stage



Video Ad: Food Businesses
Food Truck chef prepping an order



Video Ad: Creatives/The Arts
Jewelry maker designing a piece



Video Ad: Green / Circular Businesses
Flyover of Barton Springs & green spaces

The Focus Groups



105 participants attended a series of live, virtual focus groups as part of this study. Session facilitators guided the discussion among local business owners in 1-hour sessions via Zoom

Consistently, conversations took a natural turn toward each person's experience with the Covid19 shutdown, and their own path or plan for resilience and recovery

Each session devoted time to a special topic with industry-specific discussion around 5 key groups: Music, The Arts, Restaurants, Tourism and Green or Eco-Focused businesses

The groups started out fairly small, but by the end of the study, each focus group was progressively larger because some people who attended early sessions decided to return and participate again

Facilitators asked open-ended questions to allow for free discussion around a variety of general topics but also deployed a few poll questions that were the same across all sessions

When asked why they would return to another session, participants cited the level of engaging conversation with peers, a sense of camaraderie with other participants and access to ideas for new ways to approach some of their own challenges

5 High-Priority Industries

The study measured responses from all types of small business, but also included some special survey questions and focus group discussion topics to allow additional data focused on these five high-priority local industries:



**Musicians &
The Music Industry**



**The Arts
& Creatives**



**Restaurants
& Food-Service**



**Travel & Tourism
+ Heritage Tourism**

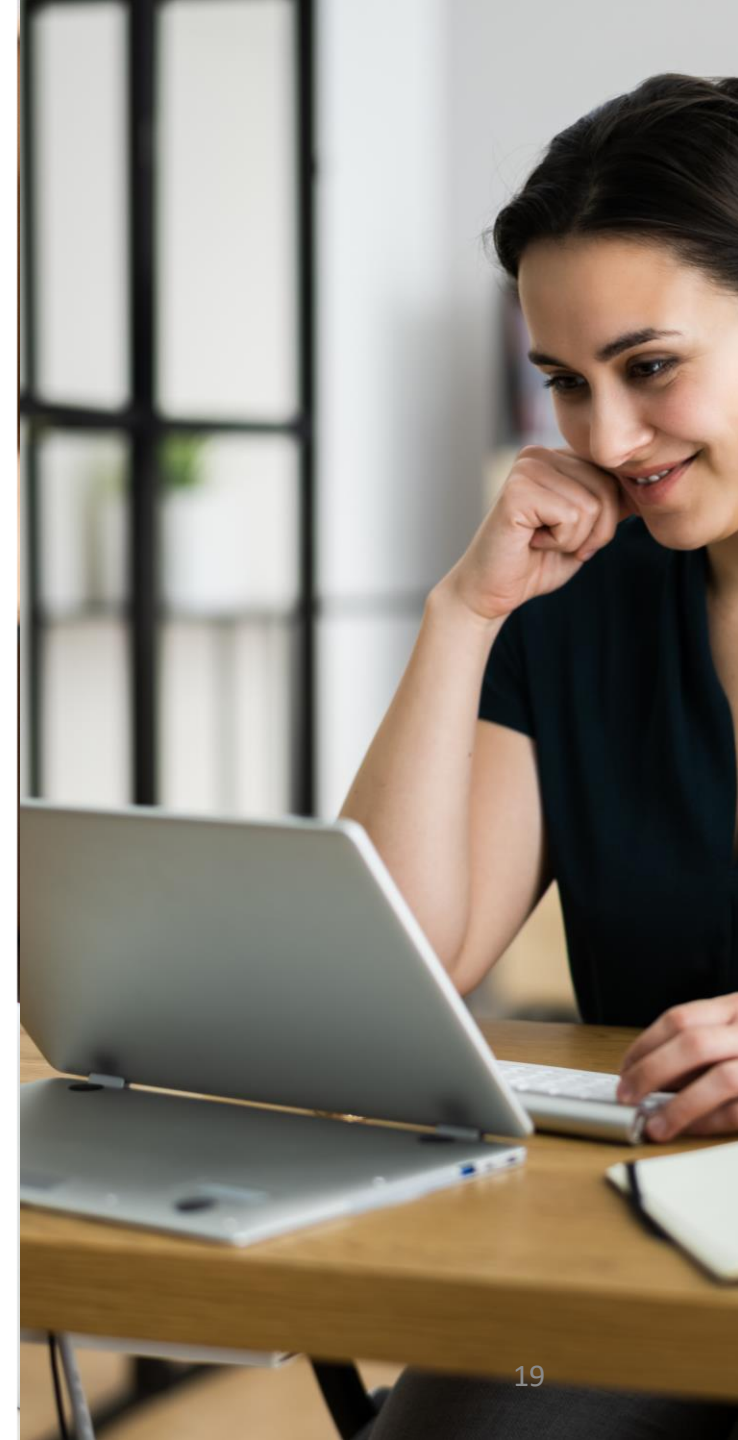


**Green or Eco-
Focused Businesses**

One-on-One Interviews

Facilitators conducted a series of virtual meetings with individual business owners, for a deeper dive with some of the study participants, to gain insights and understanding from their personal stories. Businesses were selected to represent a balanced cross-section of industries, areas of town, and time in business. Participants included retailers, food services, arts and music-related businesses, with locations across the north, south, east, west and downtown/central Austin areas.

- 15 business owners were interviewed about City business education classes and about how they were able to keep their businesses open or to re-open after the shutdown
- Most of the owners interviewed received 1 or 2 PPP loans and reported that those funds were critical to their ability to stay open or to re-open
- Many expressed concerns around the state of commercial real estate in the city and the high cost of entry to ownership and/or increases in rent
- The businesses that have been around longer, more than 10 years, revealed a significantly lower level of awareness about educational and supportive programs offered by the city than those that were founded more recently
- Most also shared that they have built up new relationships and put new resources in place during the pandemic to better manage the next crisis, whatever it might be

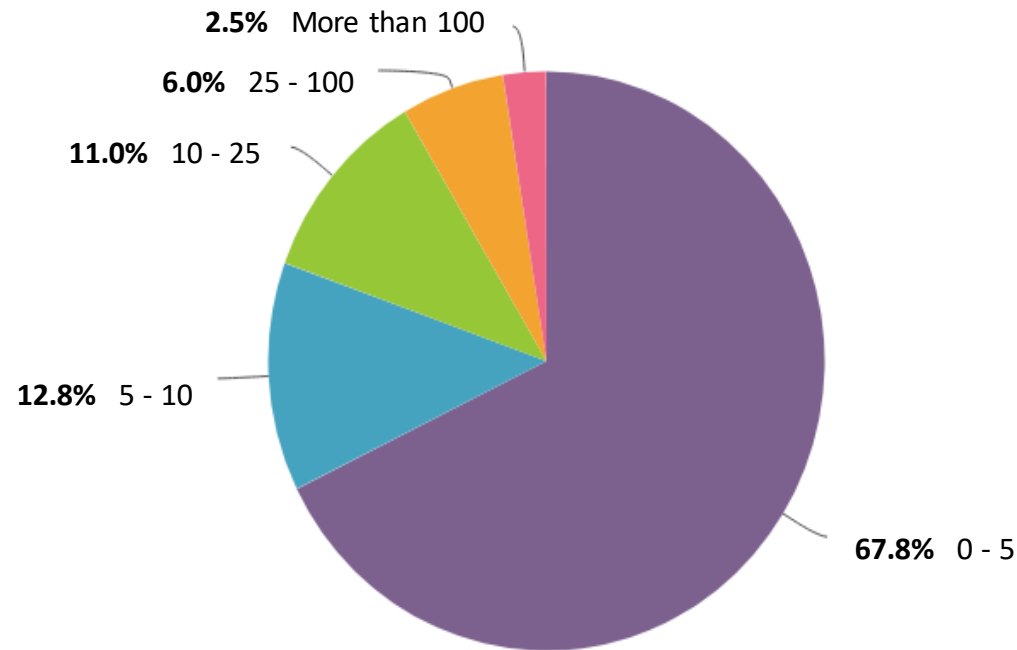


Survey Participants

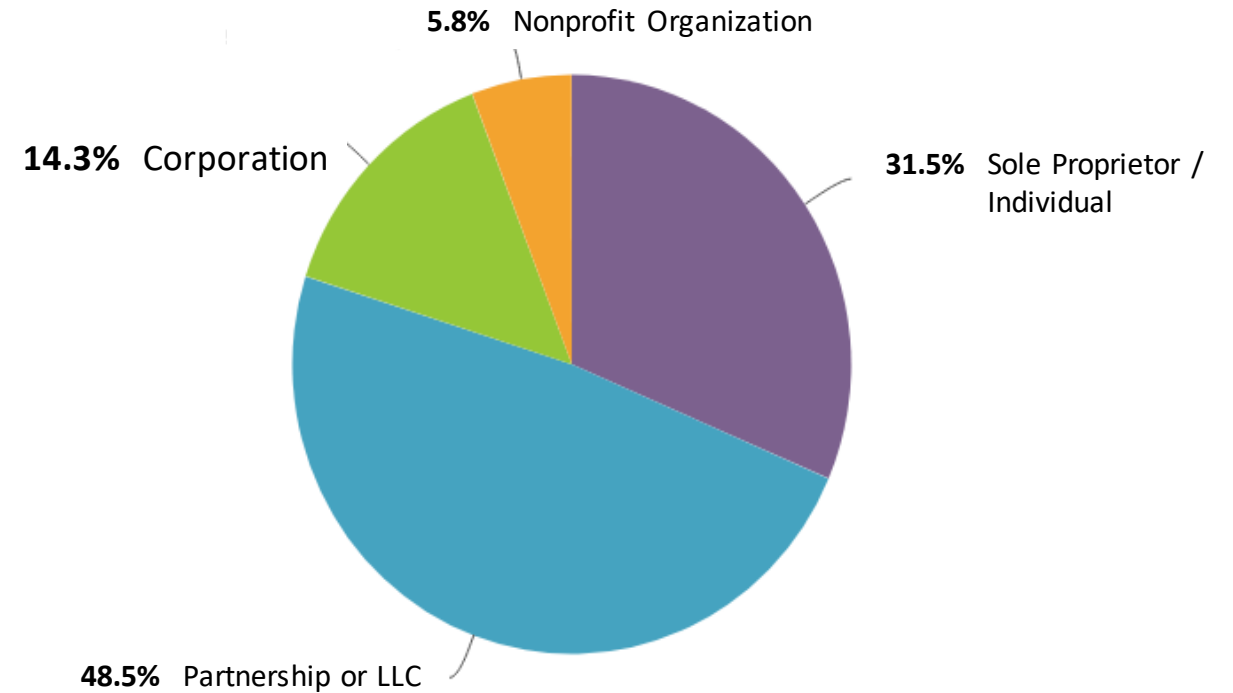
General information about the small businesses that participated in the online survey for this study



General Data About Participating Businesses

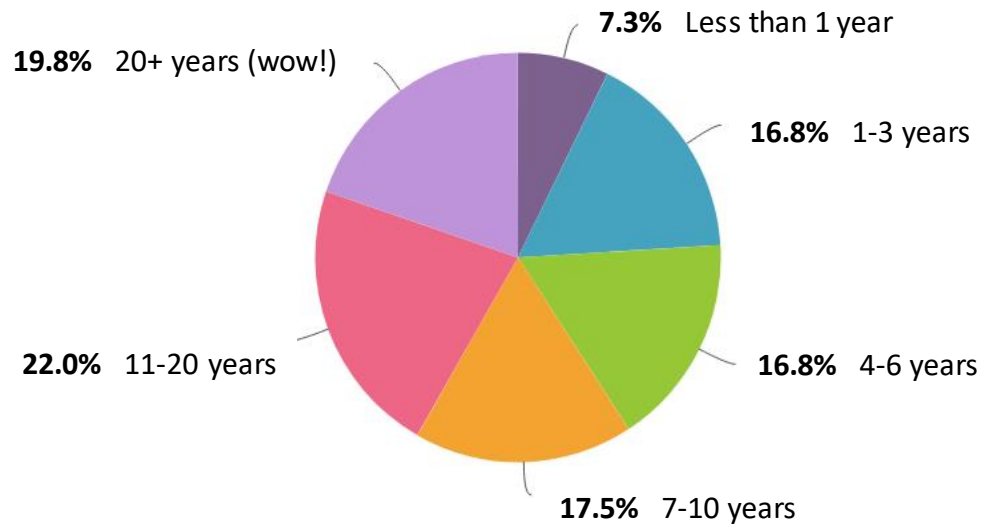


Current Number of Employees

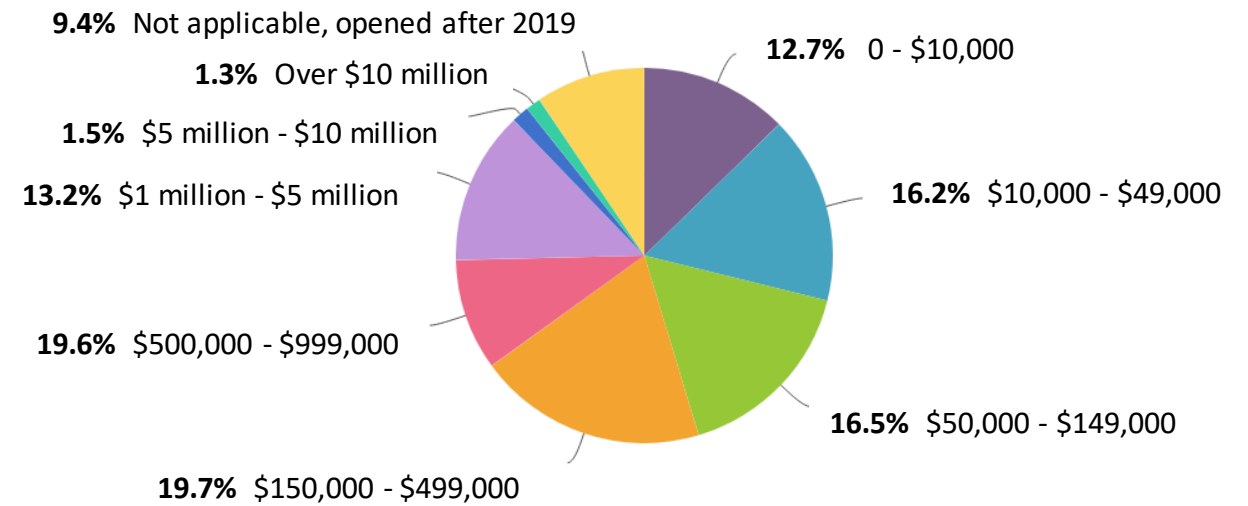


Legal Structure of the Businesses

More General Data About the Businesses

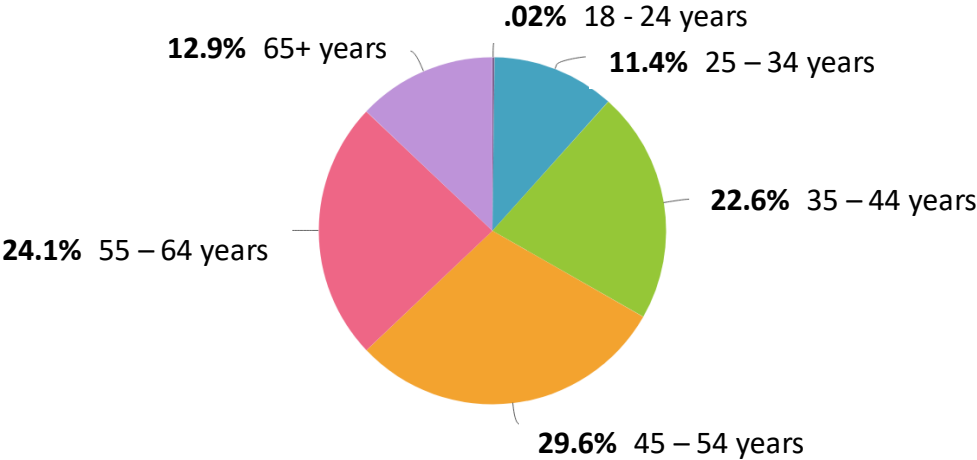


Number of Years in Business

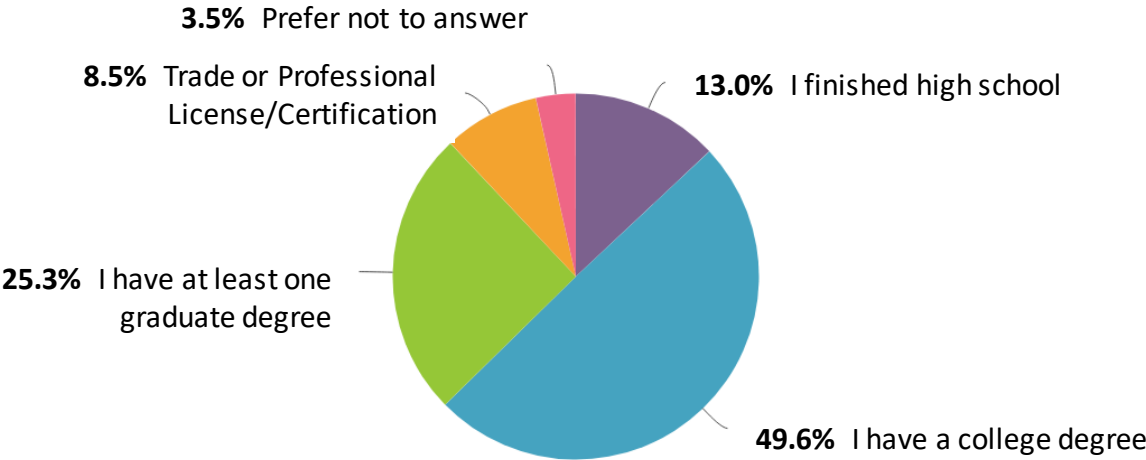


**Average Annual Revenue
(Pre-Covid)**

General Data About the Business Owners

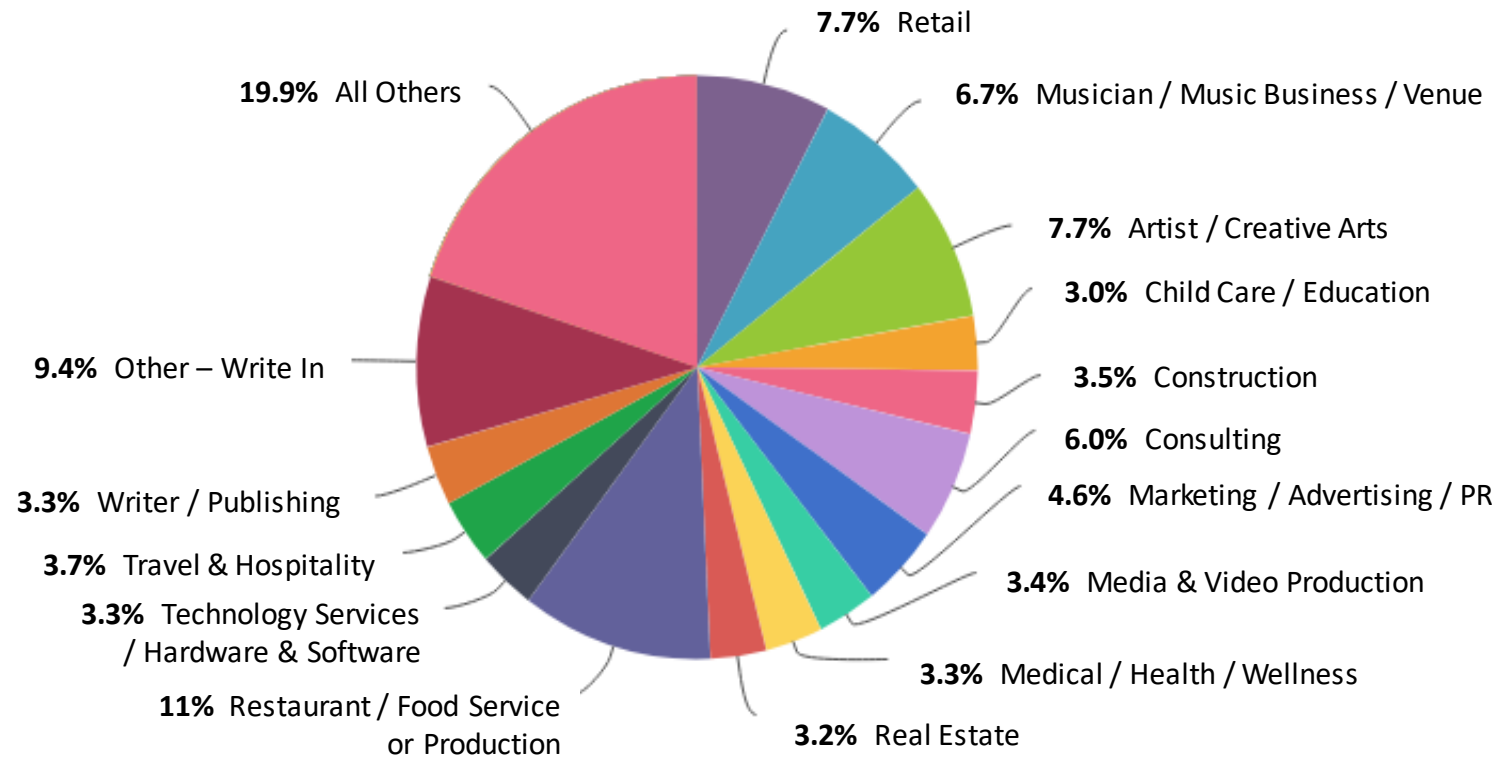


Age of the Business Owner



Owner's Highest Level of Education

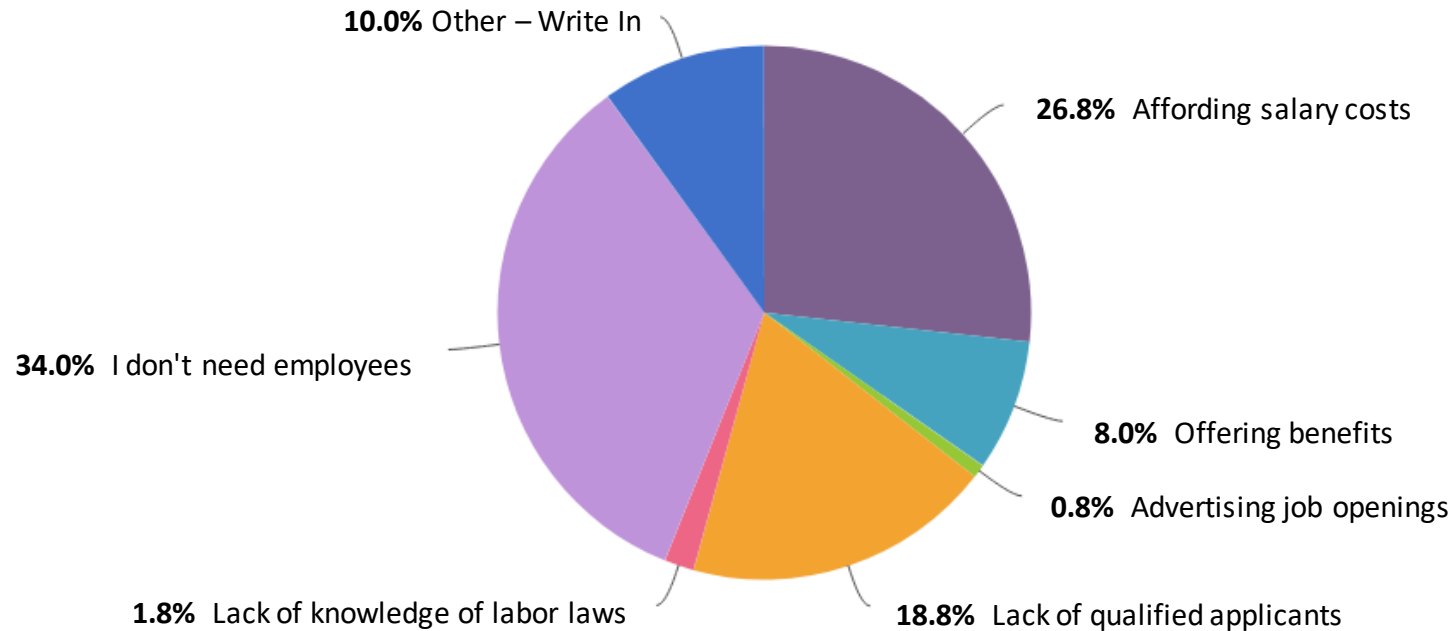
Industries Represented by Respondents



Breakdown of industries represented as "19.9% All Others"

1.5%	Pet or Animal Related Services
1.6%	Legal Services
1.9%	Trade Services (Plumbers, Mechanics)
2.0%	Designer / Planning
2.1%	Wholesale Goods
2.4%	Financial Services/Insurance
2.8%	Architecture
2.8%	Salon / Spa
2.8%	Sports / Fitness

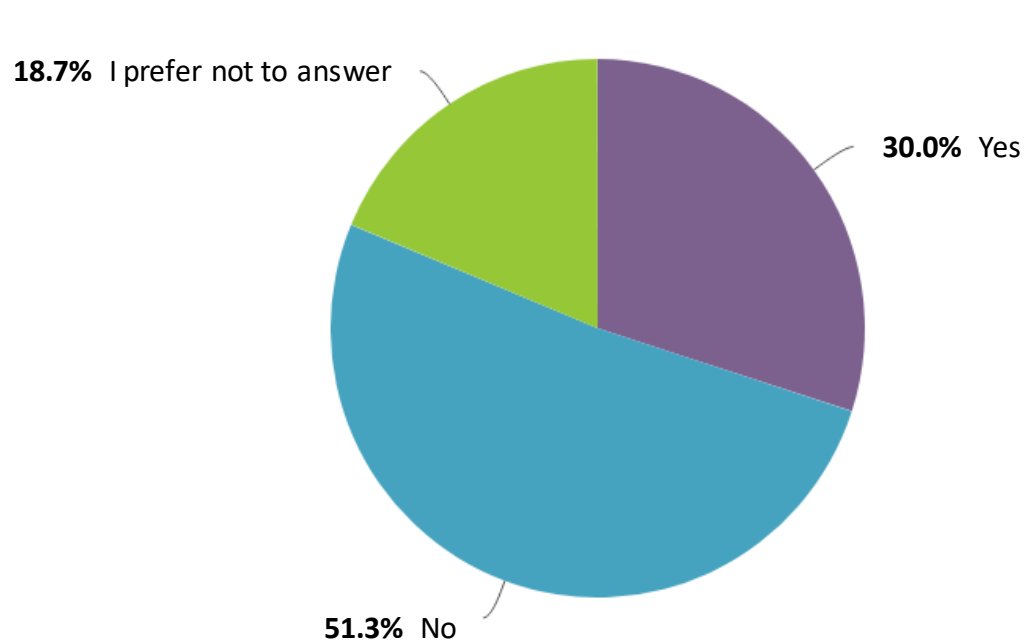
Top Challenges Reported for Hiring



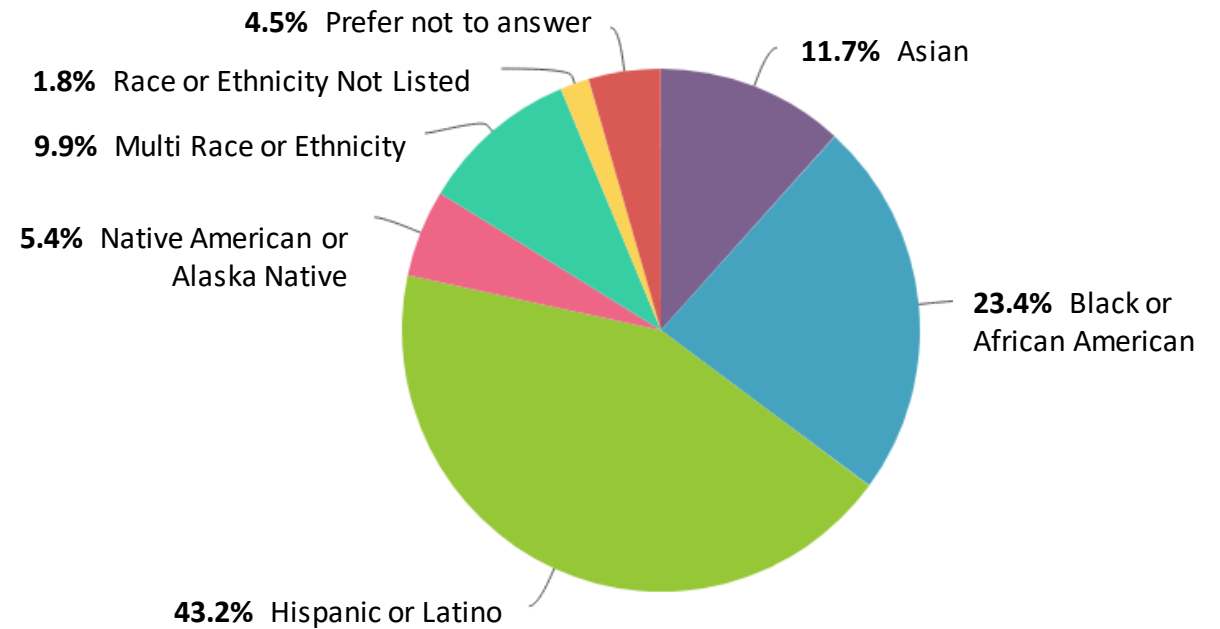
Summary of write in responses:

- Not enough applicants and interview no shows topped the list
- Cost too high to pay a living wage, need to increase revenue first
- Difficult to find applicants who care about the work or their job
- Cost for a recruiting service is too much, recruiting requires tech skills

Minority-Owned Businesses Participating

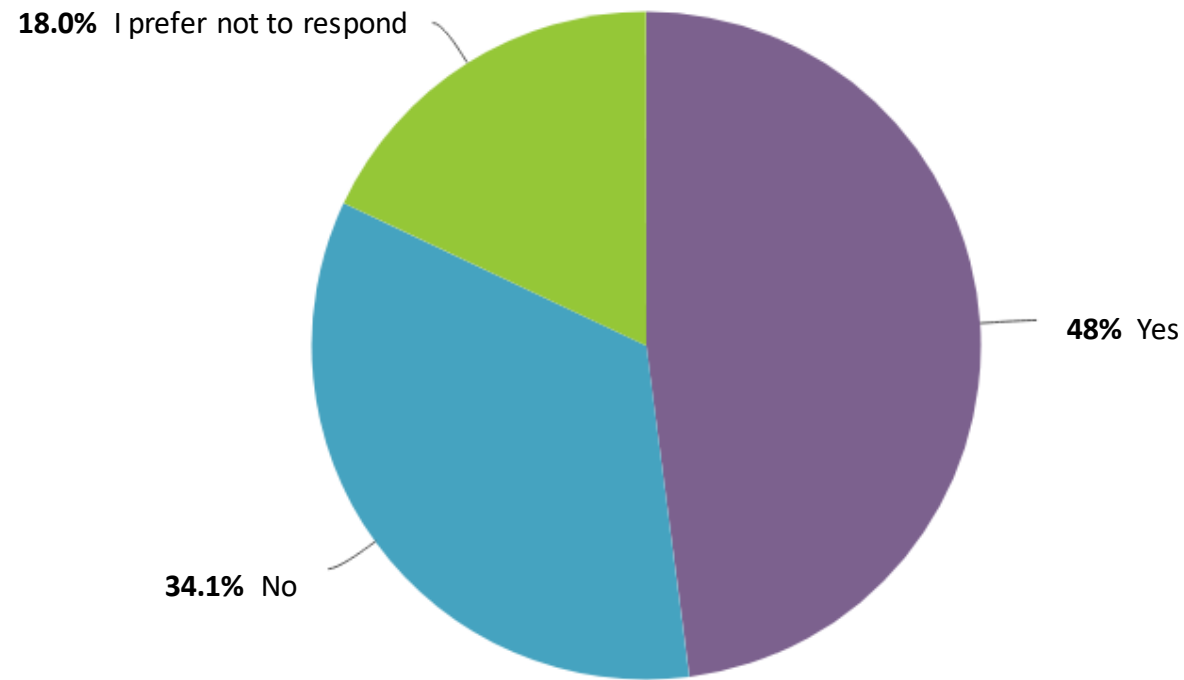


Percentage of Responses Representing a Minority-Owned Business



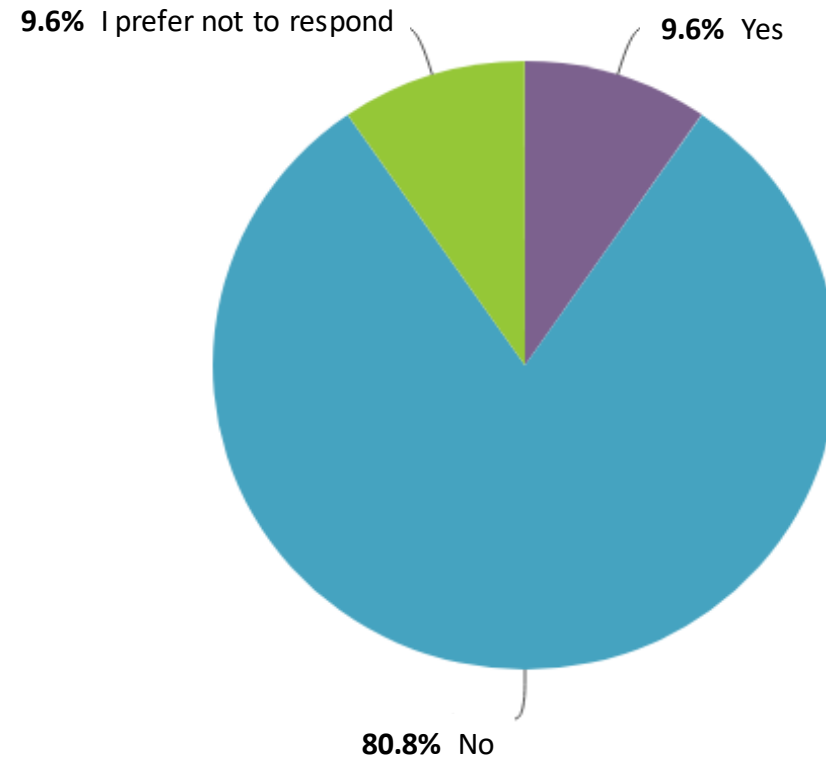
Breakdown of Minority Groups as Reported by Respondents

Woman-Owned Businesses Participating



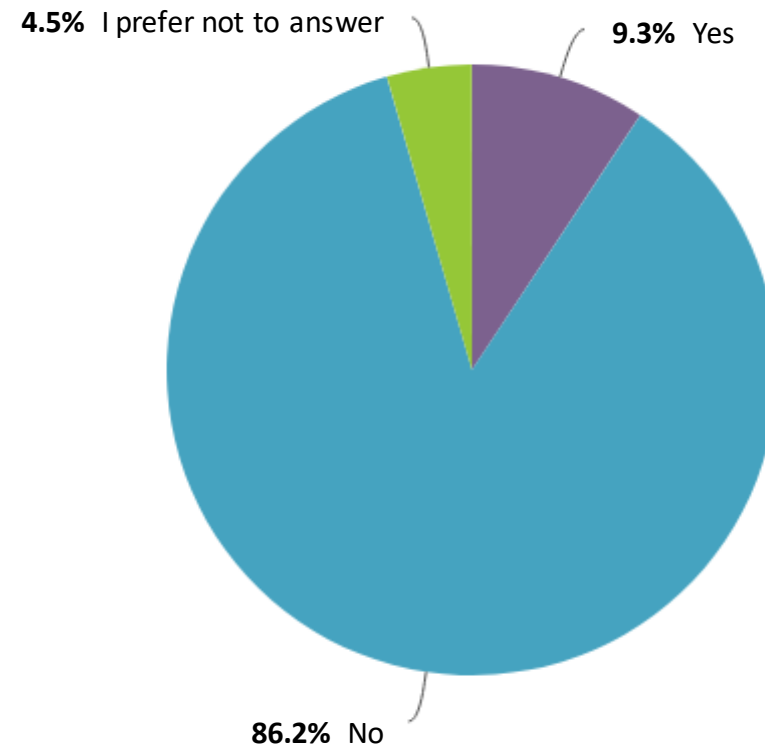
Percentage of Responses Representing a Woman-Owned Business

LGBTQ-Owned Businesses Participating



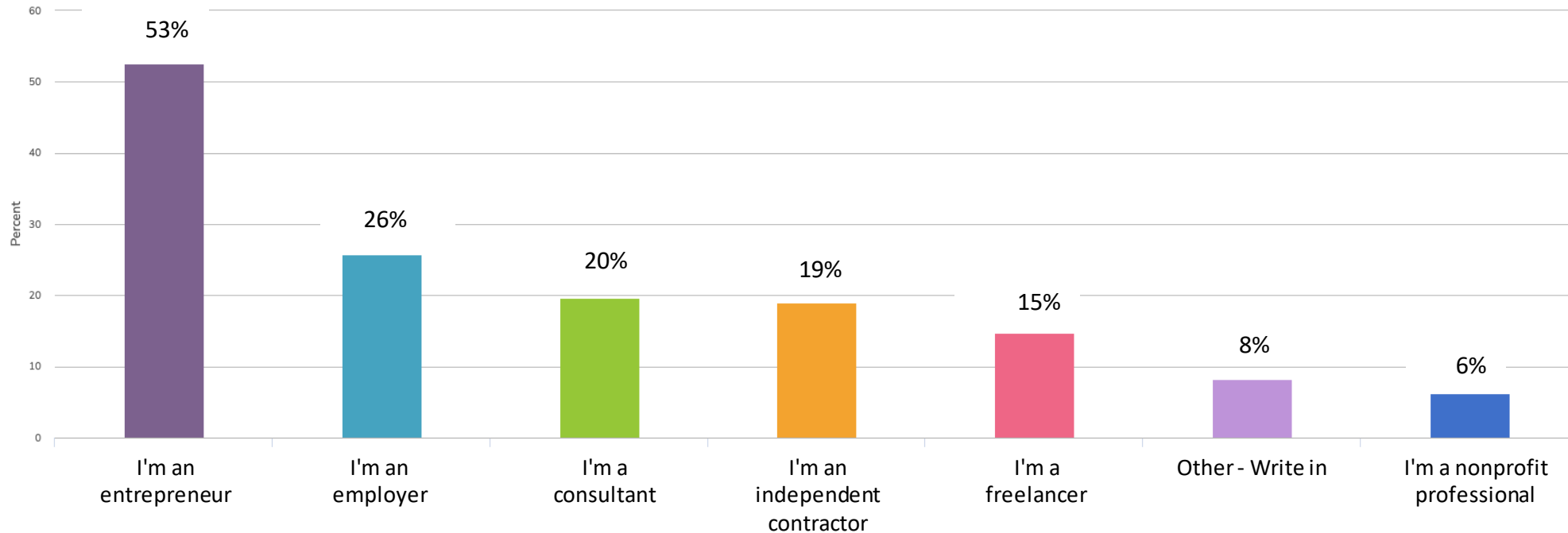
Percentage of Responses Representing LGBTQ-Owned Business

Veteran-Owned / Veteran-Led Businesses



Percentage of Responses Representing a Veteran-Owned / Veteran-Led Business

How Participating Business Owners Self-Identify



Notes: *Write in responses included a few references to small business owner, and a variety of industry-specific terms like artist or musician; some combined multiple titles provided in the list, i.e. freelance consultant*

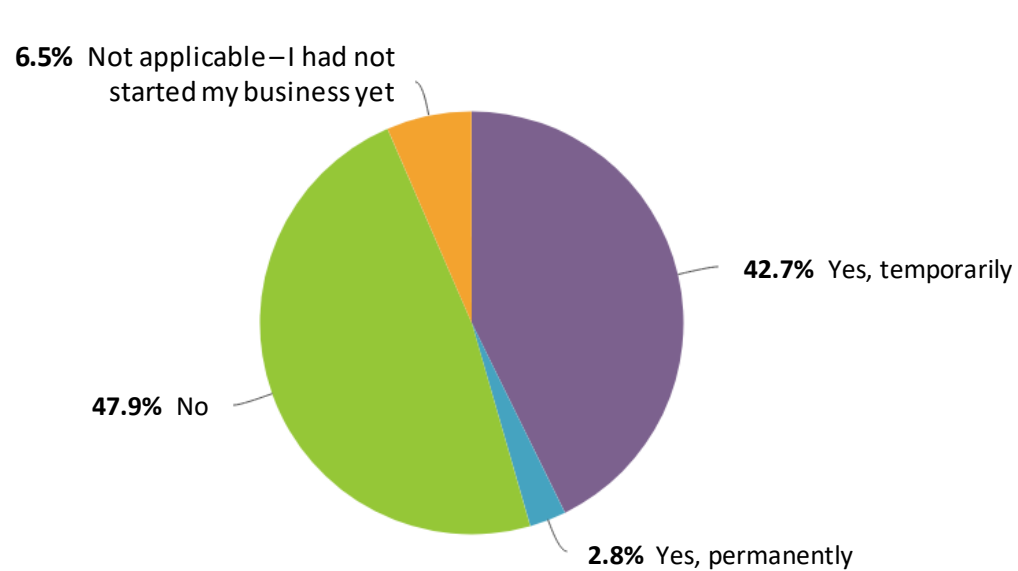
Participants were able to select more than one option from the responses provided. That is why the % totals more than 100.

On the Impact of the Covid Shutdown

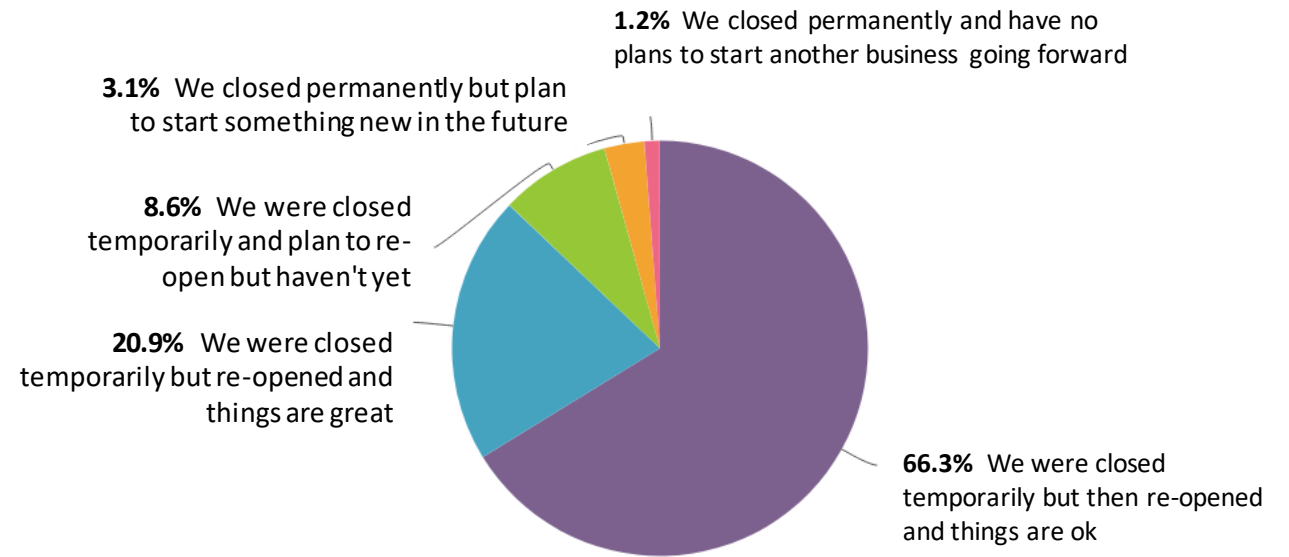
Survey results that reveal overall impact of the pandemic on participating businesses, including changes in staffing, ways they have adapted, resources made available to them and their level of confidence in the future; Industry-specific findings are provided later in this report



Business Closings Due To Covid

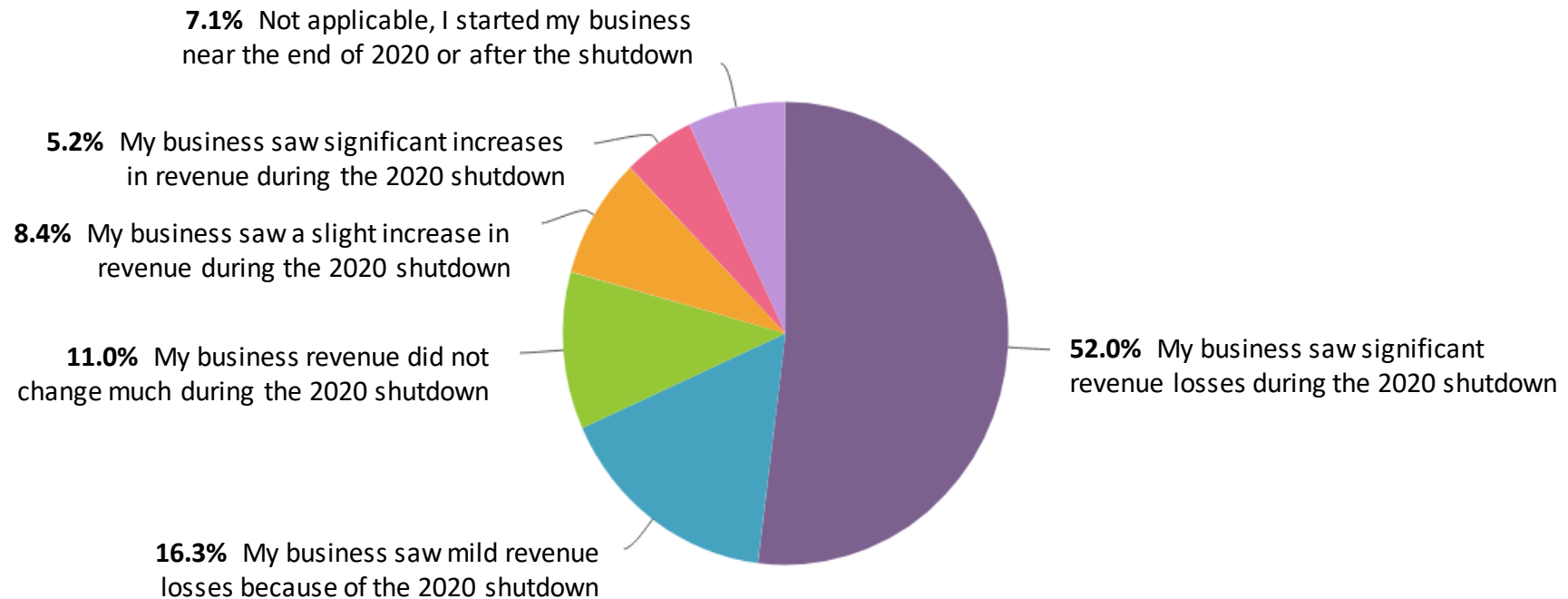


Did you have to close during covid?



Where do things stand today?

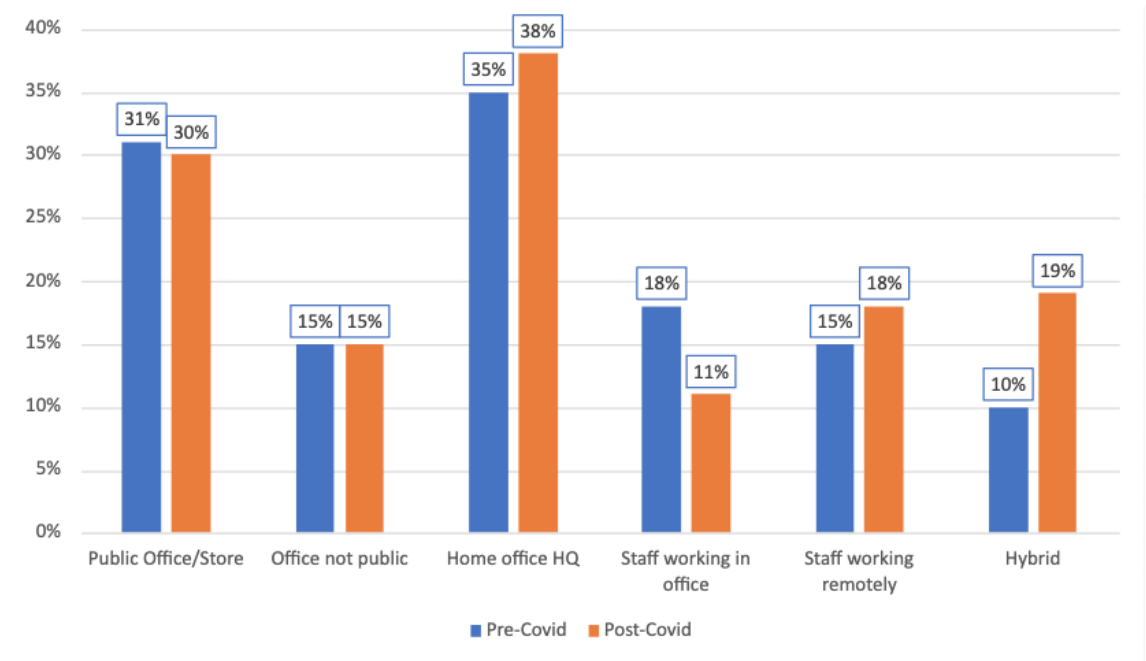
Revenue Impact of the Covid Shutdown



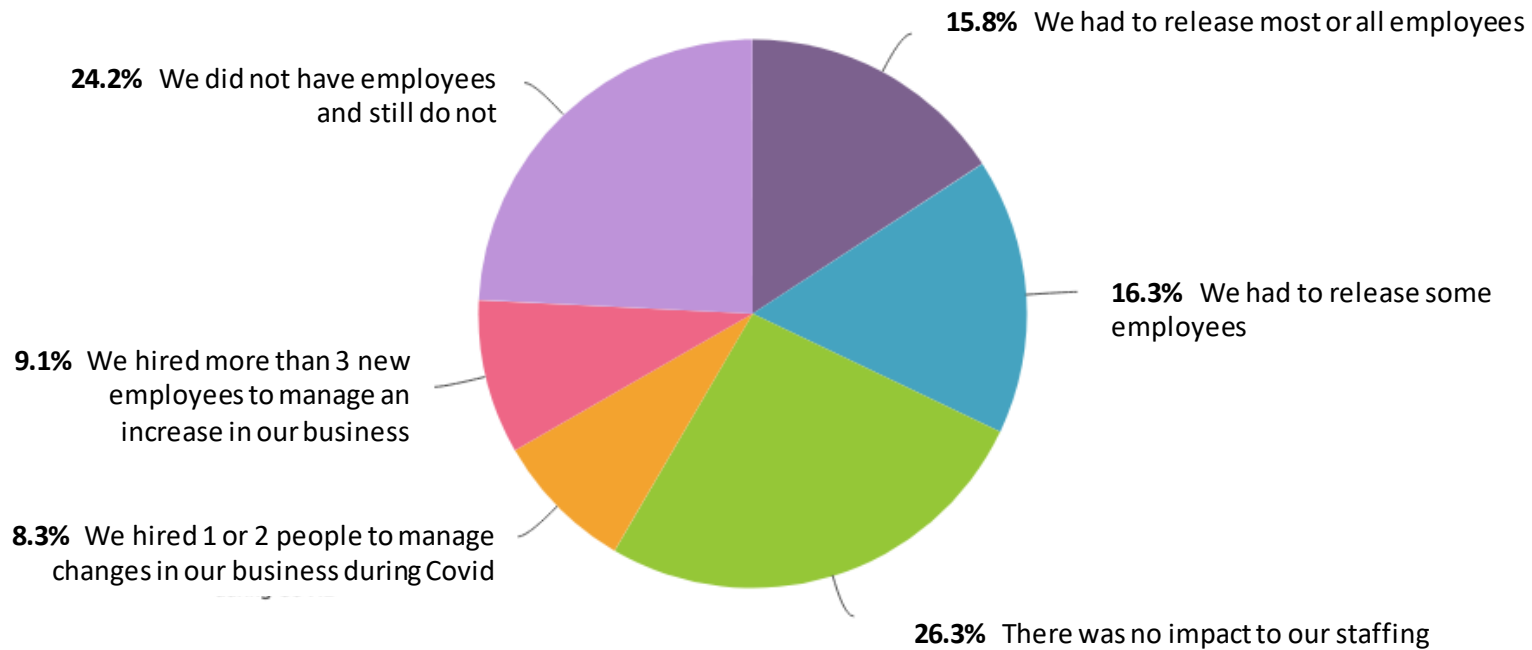
Workspace Changes Pre vs. Post-Covid

Notes:

- More than 35% of participating businesses were already operating from a residential home office, and an additional 3% shifted to home offices post-Covid
- Remote work went up by the same 3%, but the number of businesses working from an office went down by 6%
- The number of businesses now allowing for a hybrid working model has nearly doubled, as 19% now allow staff to split time between an office and working remotely



How Staffing Was Impacted by Covid

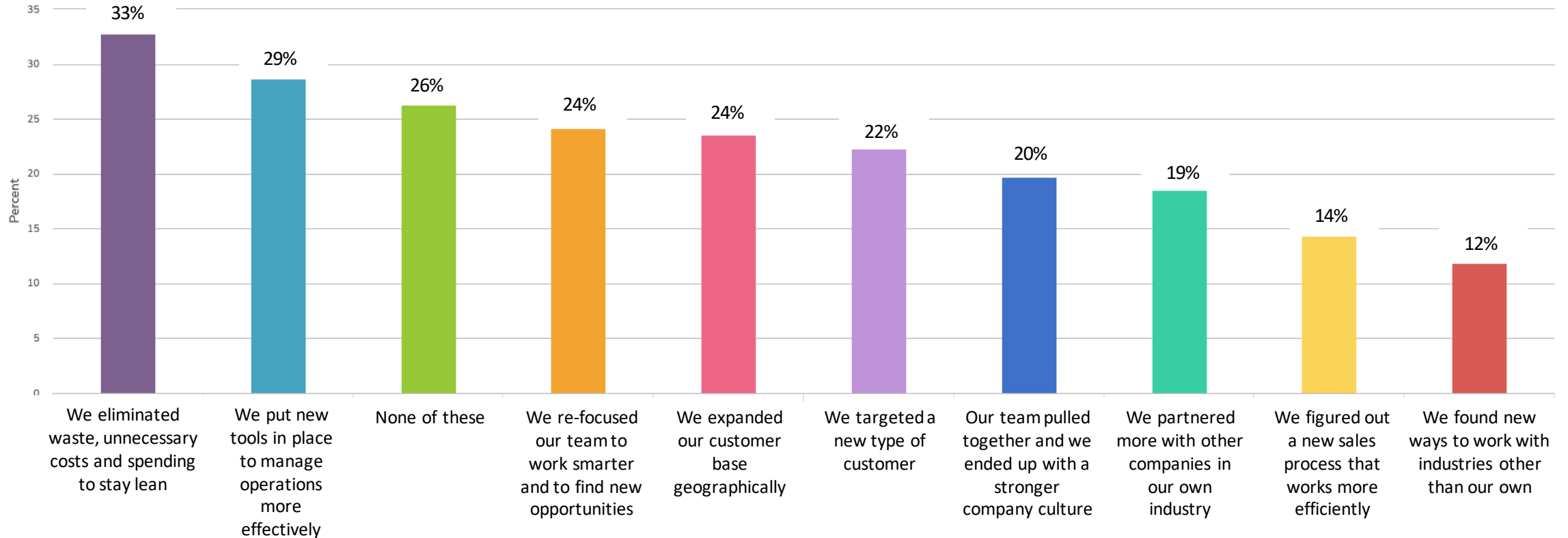


Financial Assistance During Covid

	1st PPP Loan	2nd PPP Loan	EIDL \$10K Grant	EIDL Initial Loan	EIDL Increase	City of Austin Grant	Travis County Grant	Other Loan/Grant
% of Respondents Who Told Us They Applied for Funds	52%	52%	52%	54%	73%	59%	80%	60%
% of Respondents Who Told Us They Received for Funds	49%	48%	48%	46%	26%	41%	20%	40%

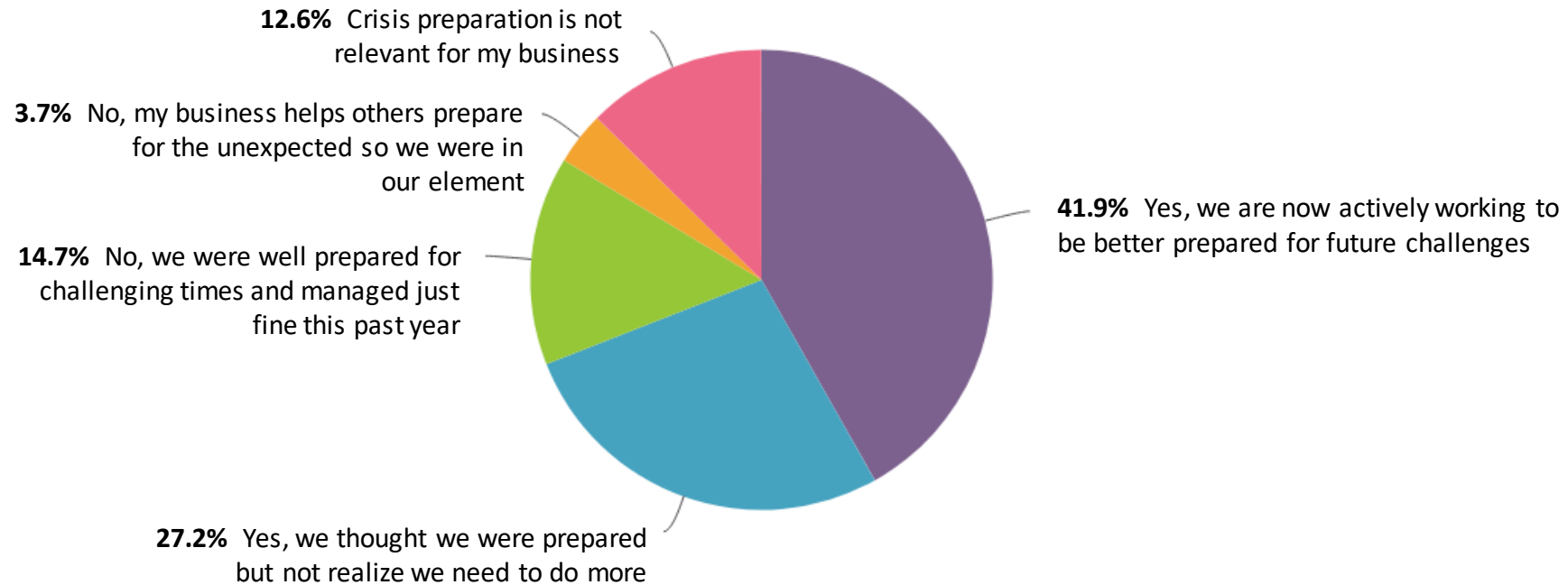
Important clarification - Each participant was asked to indicate whether they applied for, and/or received, funds for each of the programs listed, so these % points are specific to this study and not the programs, as a whole. The % reported for participants who received financial assistance listed only reflects the % of this study's respondents who gained access to those funds. It does not reflect a percentage of the total number of applicants who applied, overall, outside of this study.

How Businesses Adapted During Covid



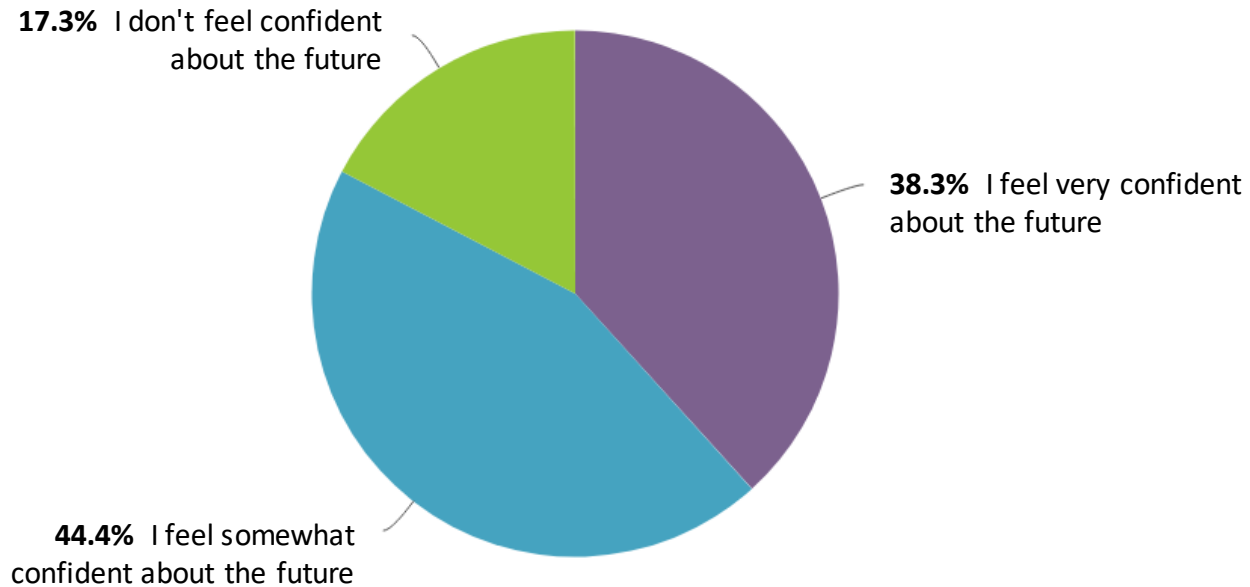
Participants were able to select more than one option from the responses provided. That is why the % totals more than 100.

Crisis Preparedness Post-Covid



Confidence in the Future

Respondents were asked specifically about their level of confidence in the future for their own small business



Notes:

- These responses largely mimic or mirror the sentiments logged during focus group discussions about confidence in the future
- **Overall, these stats reveal that 82% of participating small business owners in Austin feel at least somewhat confident about the future for their business**

It is important to note that while these overall stats may seem very positive, we have to assume that some business owners who might have been less confident about the future may also have decided not to participate in a study like this one



Participants Shared "Nuggets of Wisdom"

Survey participants were asked to share any lessons learned from surviving the shutdown. Below is a truncated list of relevant responses.

On Sales, Operations, and Customer Service...

- Adapted to include virtual classes, opened up our whole client base way beyond just local
- We added online ordering and it was a game changer, as long as we kept our information updated, we eliminated so many calls for clarification and confusion
- We started virtual meetings for all interactions, at first as a necessity but then we realized how much time we were saving on getting to and from meetings, and clients seems happier too
- Having virtual options ends up making in person meetings and events even more valuable and unique, we scaled up with higher revenue by charging more for in person experiences while still servicing others at a lower cost where we could
- Started using Instagram as an information resource in addition to marketing, hosted some live events and workshops, got our inventory online and kept them engaged, used our existing client contacts to reach out and manage those relationships in a personal way
- We made sure that our clients could book their own appointments, and change them easily, from their cell phone or computer. Automated tools are so much better than they used to be, low cost
- We added a subscription model to our offerings, letting people make a monthly payment automatically and then they can access whatever they want to of our classes and online guides, we sold it as a benefit we were offering because of covid but we are going to keep it, worked great
- Your online presence makes such a huge difference, take the time to make it work for you
- We started shipping direct to the consumer, instead of selling to the retailers, this helped us keep going and we were less impacted by Covid

*Photo: Texas State Capitol Building
Source: iStock*

A vertical photograph of the Texas State Capitol Building, showing its iconic dome and classical architecture. The building is set against a clear blue sky, and some greenery is visible at the bottom left.

"Nuggets of Wisdom" (continued)

On Sales, Operations, and Customer Service... (continued)

- We kept putting off getting our programs online but then we HAD to do it and it stretched our capacity then but now we are so glad we did it
- Build everything new for virtual business and then adapt that to an in-person model, we changed everything and next time we'll be ready
- We got very clear about what we really do and what we really sell, then made a map of our best customers and what they really want or need from us and then approached everything with that
- Cutback on what you offer, we limited our menu and save so much time while customers really did not even seem to notice that we had removed less popular items

On Managing Employees...

- Treat your employees well, pay them well –they will stay during the hard times
- Empower staff to make informed decisions. Give people space to process what is happening and provide guidance
- We changed our staffing to an all -remote model and gave people the option to use a WeWork type space if they wanted to "be" somewhere
- We streamlined job descriptions, cut out unnecessary work for people and gave them more meaningful, impactful roles in the company
- We trained our staff to teach virtual classes and engaged customers that way, each staff member managed a topic and offered their classes on their own schedule, we had no idea that teaching people about our products would yield so much revenue

*Photo: Texas State Capitol Building
Source: iStock*

A vertical photograph of the Texas State Capitol Building, showing its iconic dome and classical architecture. The building is set against a clear blue sky, with some greenery visible at the bottom.

"Nuggets of Wisdom" (continued)

On The Importance of Networking...

- I waited too long to look for help and underestimated how long or bad it would be, I should have asked for help sooner
- Find partners, focus on your industry and what you can do to help others in that industry or in other industries that might work well with you
- Collaboration and resource sharing became our top priority for survival
- Find others to talk to and work with, it is like therapy and has been very helpful to see that my situation is not as bad as I thought, which helped me get motivated to do even more –helping others also helps me
- Musicians helped each other, we may not have made more money but a lot of organizations worked together to help us find jobs, get signed up for unemployment, etc - it helped a lot
- I had to learn to get out of my own narrow idea of what my industry is so that I could realize that other industries might need music (what I do) for anything and I ended up finding a lot of opportunities that allowed me to make some money as a musician through corporate projects

On How To Survive...

- Stay flexible, you have to stay flexible to get through the roughest times
- Right from the start of everything, we adopted the attitude that "this is the new normal" instead of "this is temporary" and it allowed us to make necessary permanent adjustments to better manage in the future
- Save your money, guard your cash, keep a close eye on expenses, remove waste from your budget wherever you can, be open to closing temporarily if you need to make sure you and your family are ok first, don't give away everything just to run your business
- Be willing to invest in changes like new, more efficient equipment that makes it possible to expand services without having more staff
- Prioritize adaptation, build community support networks and stay relentlessly hopeful
- Don't panic– keep plugging away and prepare for more challenges– be kind to yourself and others

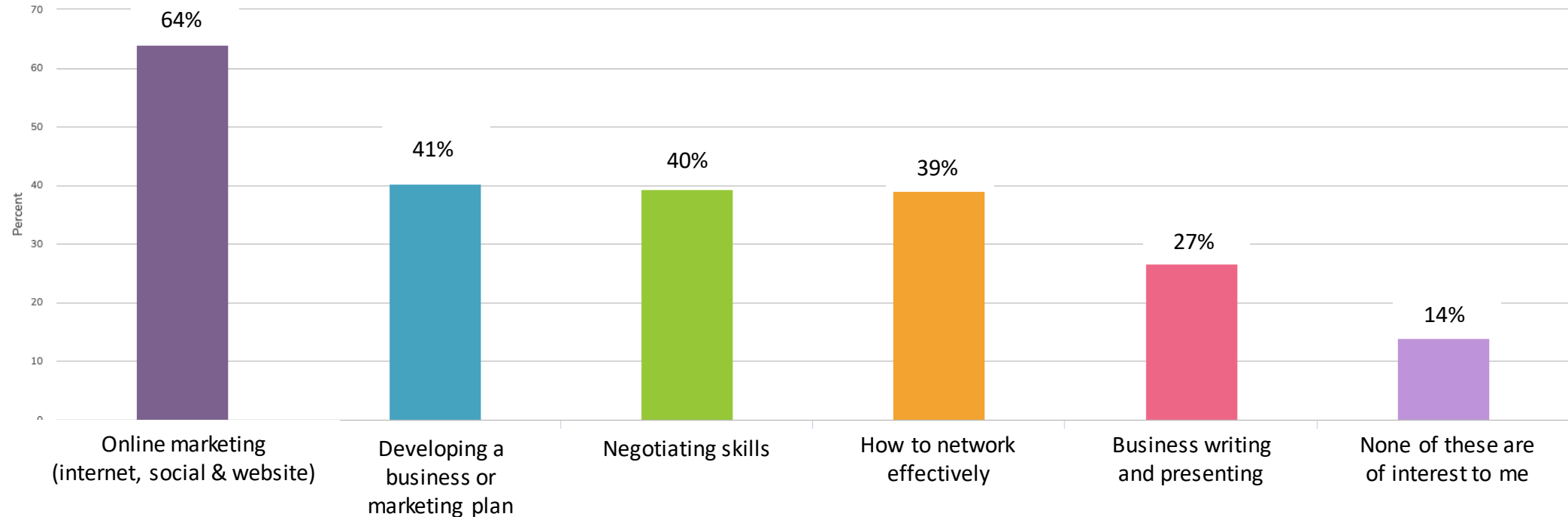
*Photo: Texas State Capitol Building
Source: iStock*

Learning Preferences

This section will show findings related to interest in general class topics, virtual classrooms vs in-person education, instructor credentials and more; Industry-specific findings are provided later in this report



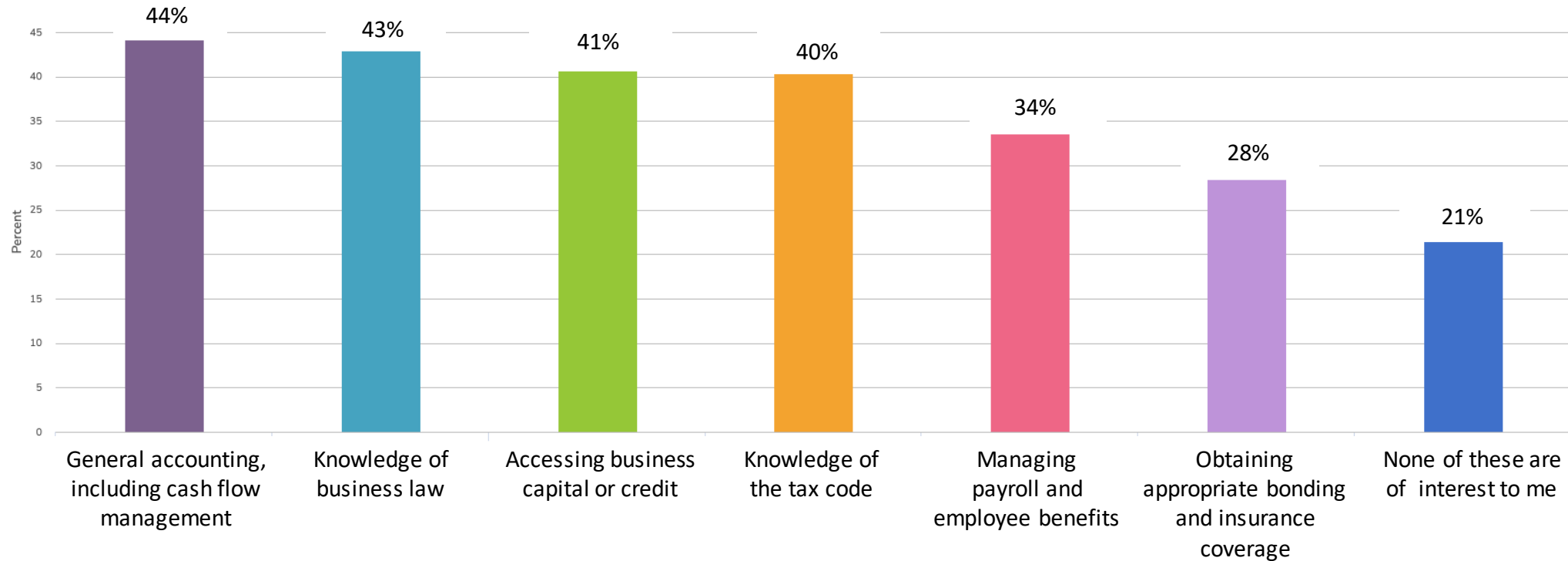
Interest in Marketing/Communication Classes



Percentages shown are based on responses from 1022 survey responses to this question. Some of the participants did not complete all questions of the survey.

Participants were able to select more than one option from the responses provided. That is why the % totals more than 100.

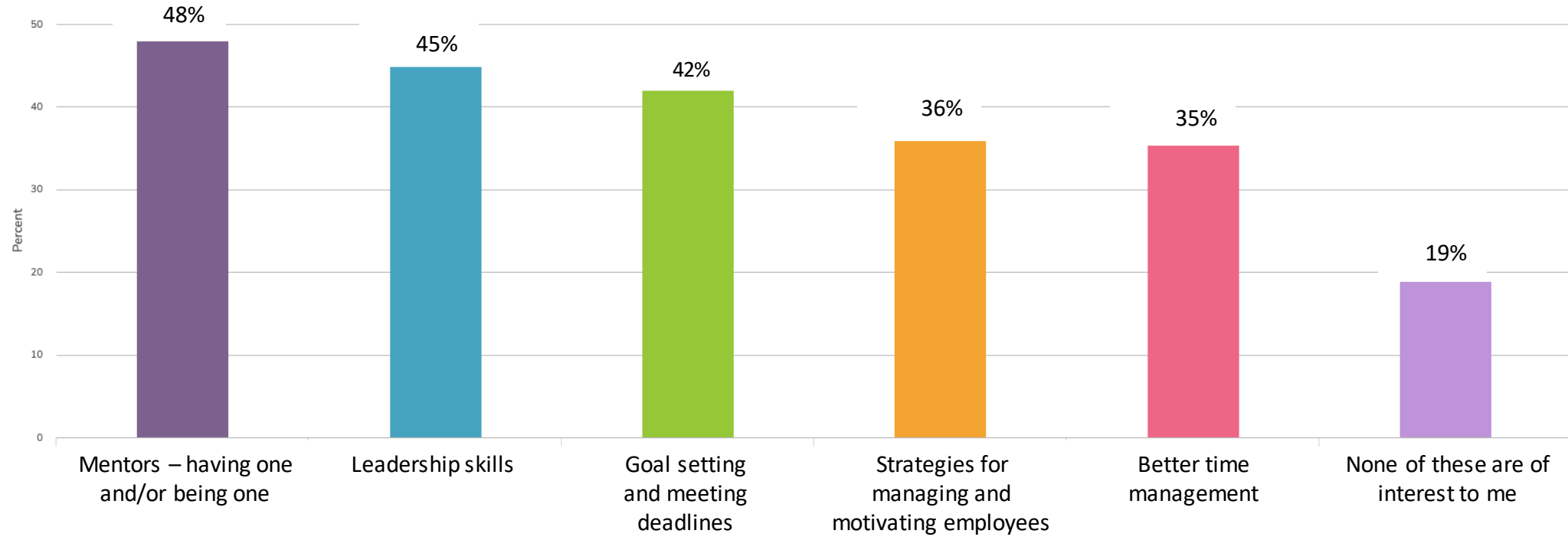
Interest in Legal or Finance Classes



Percentages shown are based on responses from 1022 survey responses to this question. Some of the participants did not complete all questions of the survey.

Participants were able to select more than one option from the responses provided. That is why the % totals more than 100.

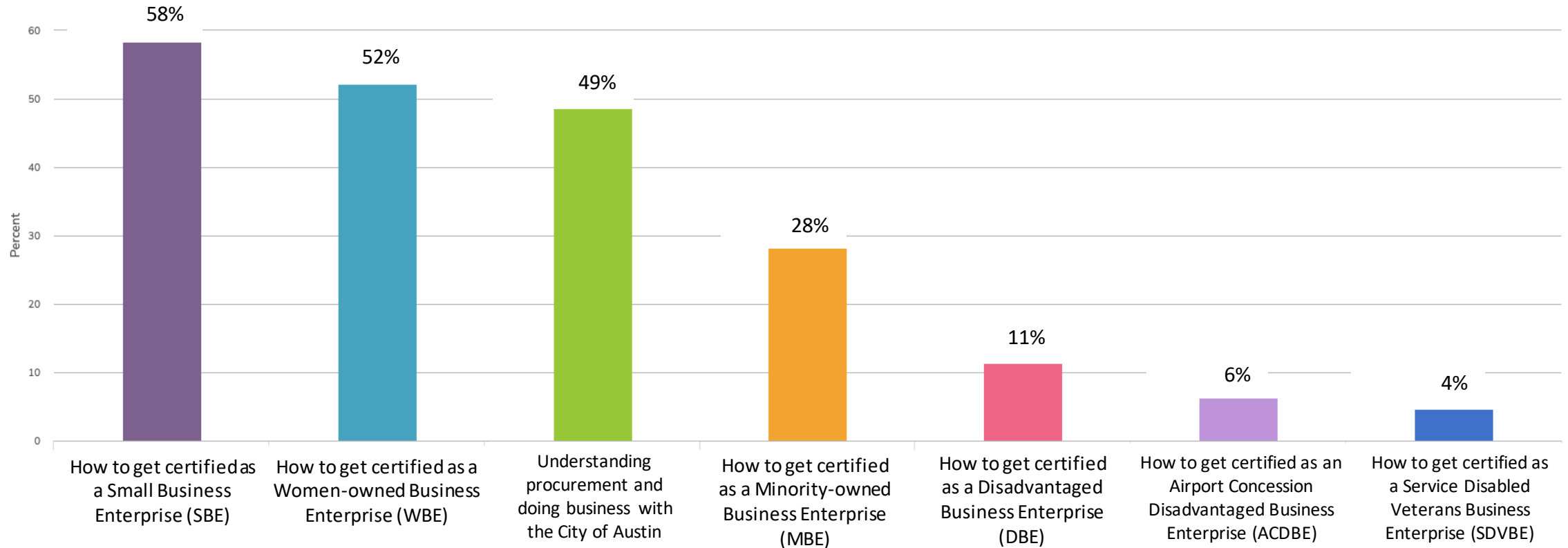
Interest in Productivity or Management Classes



Percentages shown are based on responses from 1021 survey responses to this question. Some of the participants did not complete all questions of the survey.

Participants were able to select more than one option from the responses provided. That is why the % totals more than 100.

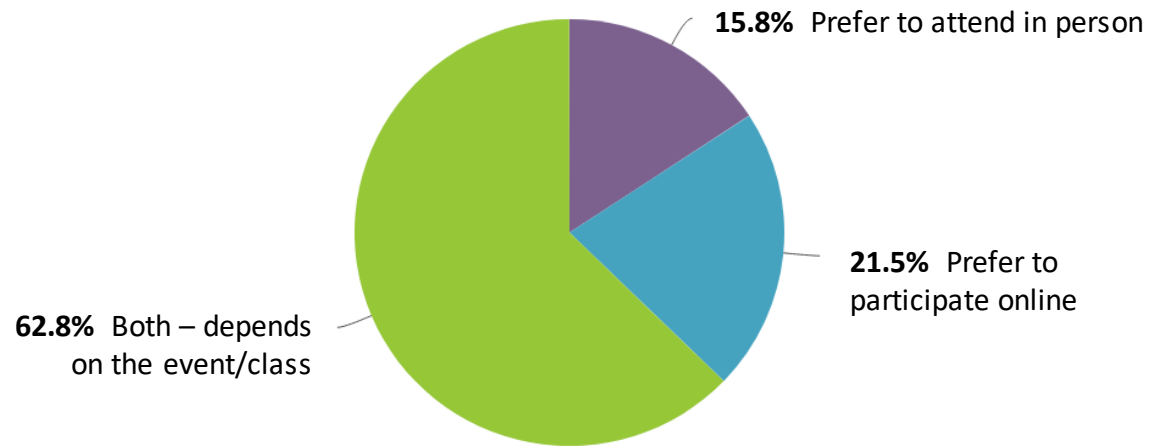
Interest in Government & Procurement Classes



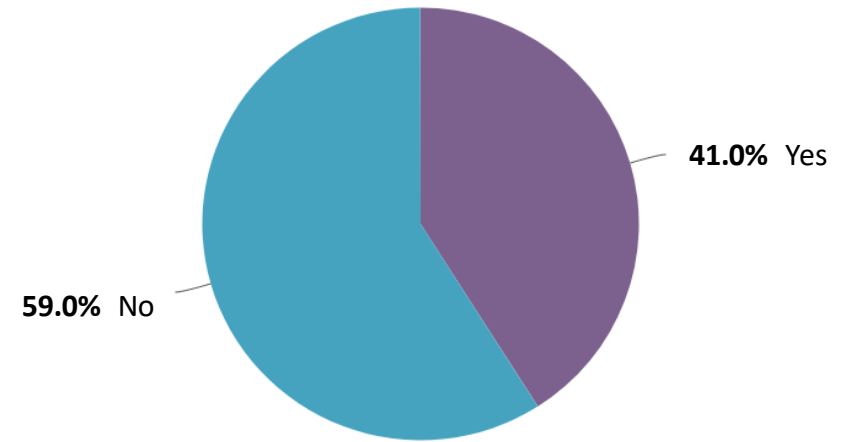
Percentages shown are based on responses from 1020 survey responses to this question. Some of the participants did not complete all questions of the survey.

Participants were able to select more than one option from the responses provided. That is why the % totals more than 100.

Learning Preferences: In-Person vs. Virtual



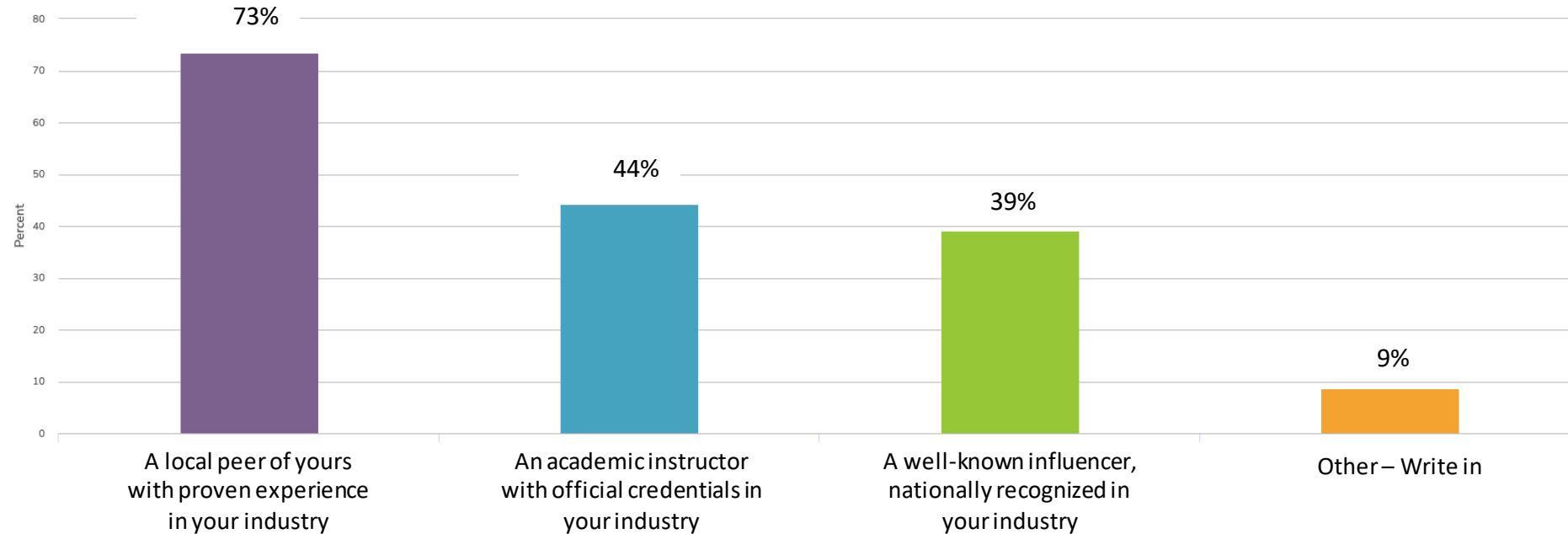
Preference between in-person or virtual



Has your preference changed since Covid?

Notes: *41% of respondents have changed their attitude toward live and virtual learning, but not in just one direction; in discussion groups many now want more in person because of the shutdown while others now want virtual because they have learned how to do it and are more adaptable to the benefits it offers*

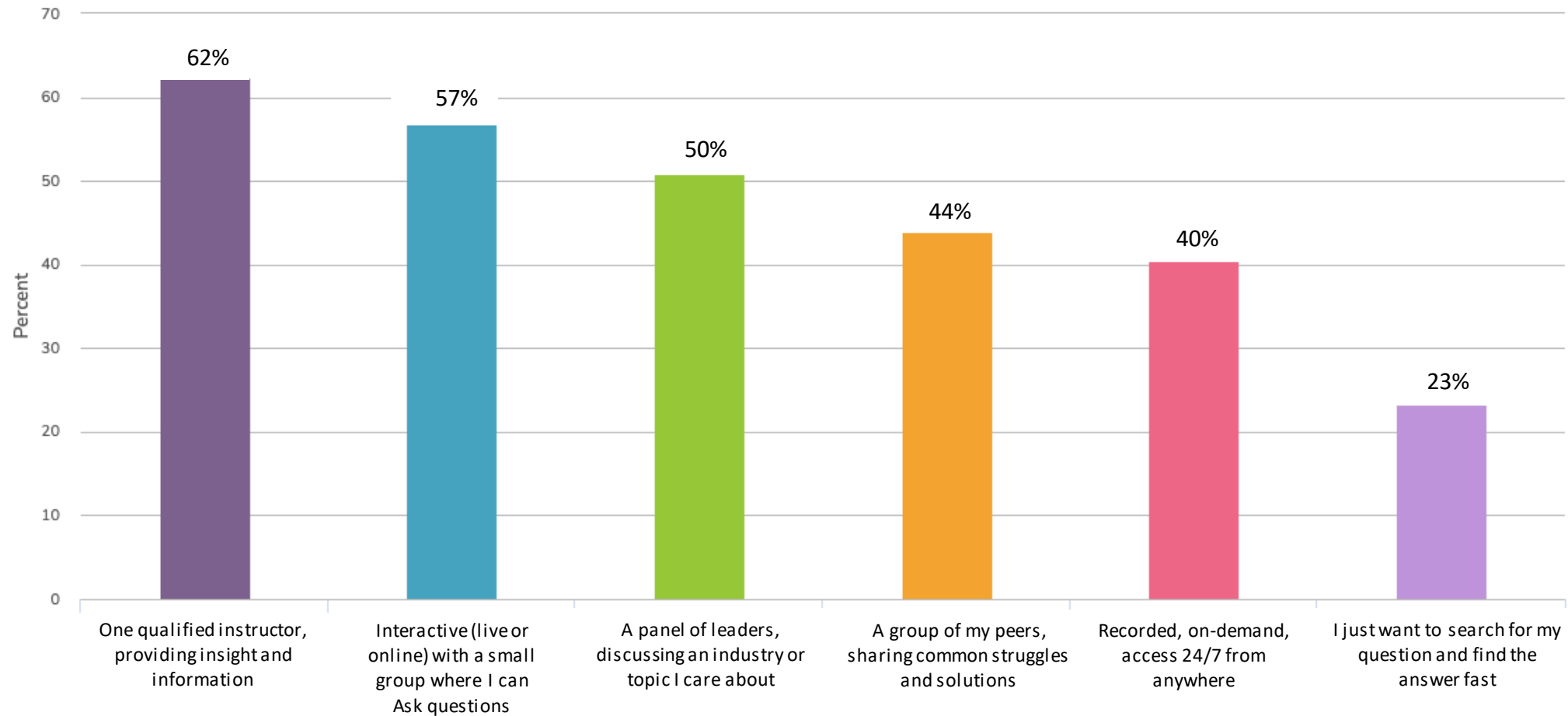
Learning Preferences: Types of Instructors



Notes: *Write in responses included some specific names of local and national speakers or instructors, along with some varied combination of the three options provided*

Participants were able to select more than one option from the responses provided. That is why the % totals more than 100.

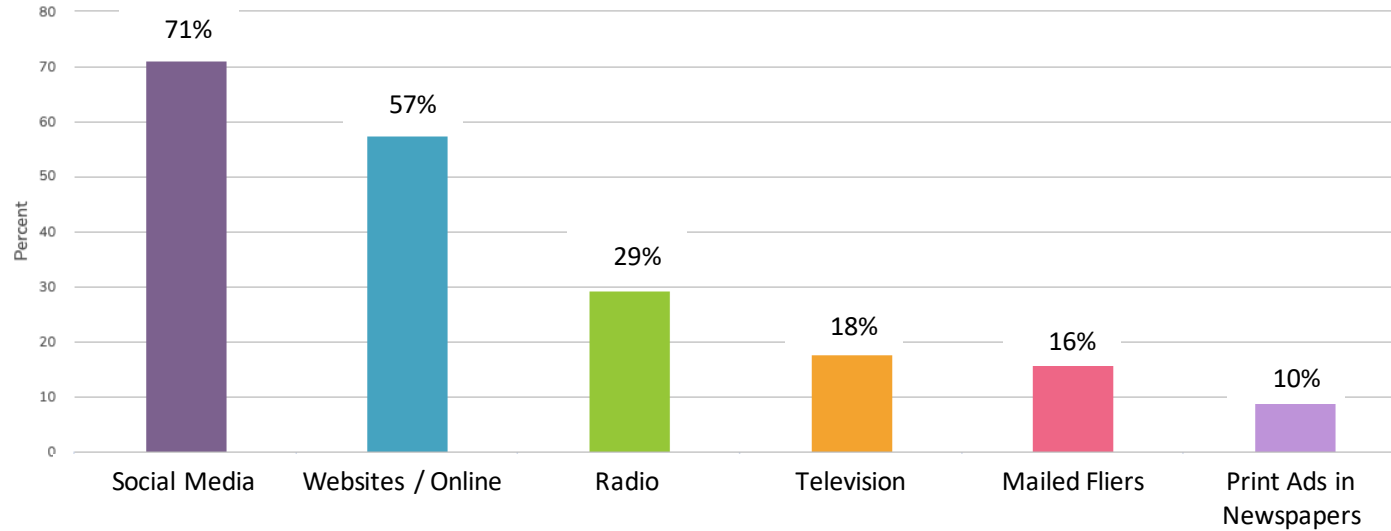
Learning Preferences: Class Formats



Percentages shown are based on responses from 1020 survey responses to this question. Some of the participants did not complete all questions of the survey.

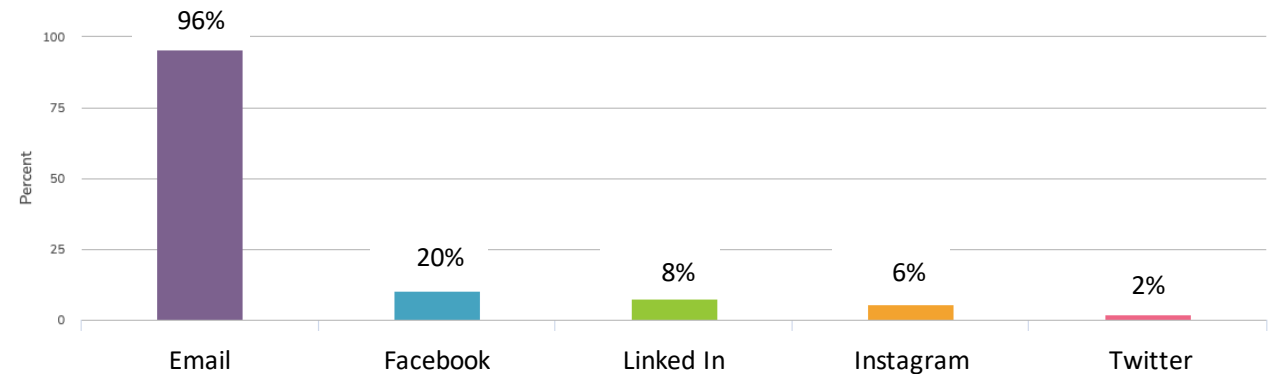
Participants were able to select more than one option from the responses provided. That is why the % totals more than 100.

Preferred Methods of Class Discovery



- Types of Media Most Likely To Be Seen

Types of Outreach Preferred From the City -





Participant "Write-in" Responses

Ways The City Could Help More

- Provide mentors or peer group sessions
- Help with getting aid/support, loans, grants
- More assistance grants like the one for Zach Scott
- Solutions customized for specific industries or groups
- More funding is needed for solopreneurs
- More active assistance with PPP loan forgiveness
- More networking would be nice
- Offering some of the classes after 5pm would be really helpful for those of us that work days

"There can always be better ways to help but I think the City of Austin has been fantastic in looking out for the needs of small businesses in the area."

- Anonymous Survey Participant

Class Topics Suggested by Businesses

- How to Offer Health Insurance for Employees
- How to Buy Commercial Property
- Sales Strategies / Pitching Your Business
- Improving LinkedIn Prospecting Results
- Help with Patents & Intellectual Property
- Blockchain Machine Learning using AI
- How to Motivate the Young Workforce Today
- How to Network Effectively
- Retirement Planning for Small Business
- How to Apply For & Win Grants
- Turnkey Solutions & Software That Really Work
- How to Start A Non-Profit
- How to Price Your Services

Photo: Tower at the University of Texas at Austin
Source: iStock



More Participant "Write-in" Responses

What Participants Liked About Past Classes

- Learning from others in my field, from my peers
- Engaging instructor with helpful knowledge
- Provided tips I could use immediately and got really positive outcomes from doing them
- Liked having the chat function to interact with other attendees, could see all participants
- Loving being able to fully attend virtually when I used to only go to in-person classes
- Loved when I can submit work for review and get real feedback from instructors and peers
- Learning from others in my industry really helps me, other musicians give me honest feedback
- Instructors providing not just what to do but also what not to do, to avoid common mistakes
- Leaving time for dialogue and discussion among attendees
- Lots of specific examples and benchmarks to support the value of the information

"I attended a number of City of Austin classes pre-pandemic and found each one to be hugely beneficial, y'all do good work"

- Anonymous Survey Participant

Special Interest Comments

- Thank you for reminding businesses to be more climate friendly and resilient
- We are half female-owned and half minority-owned, need some help figuring out how best to get support for either because we are technically neither in this current state
- You forgot one very important question – how many new small businesses who planned to open in 2020 delayed due to Covid?
- Thanks for asking for our opinions, I hope that the city can continue to help artists and small business owners because the pandemic is obviously not over
- Thank you for doing this! I hope you get good responses, and that equity is a priority for this project

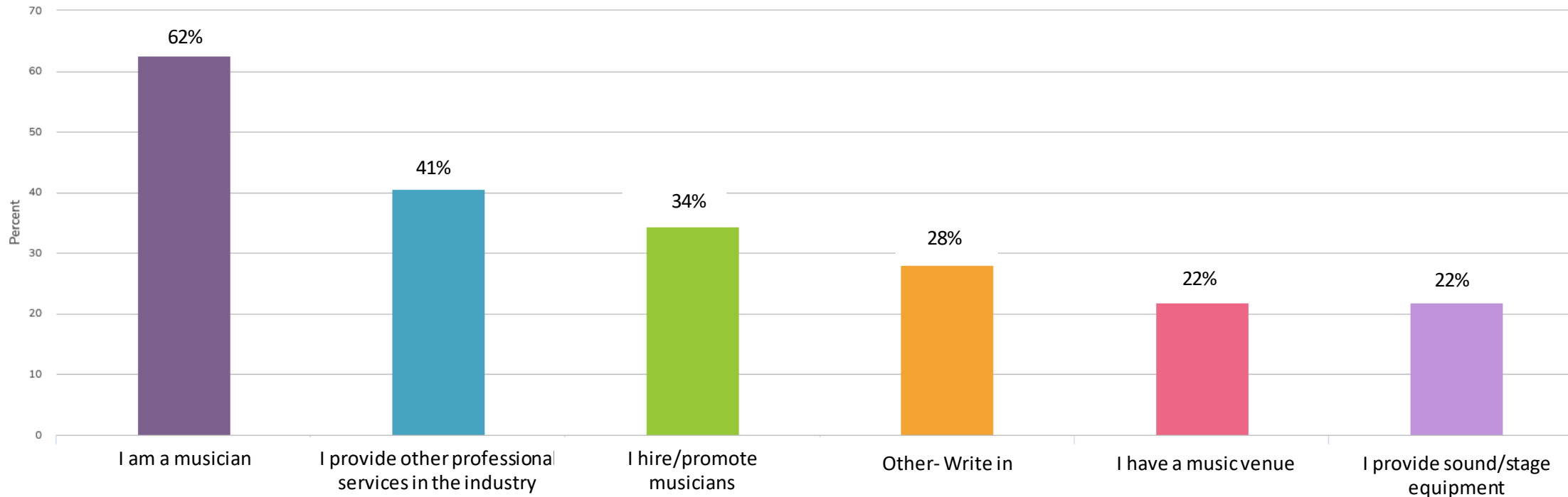
Photo: Tower at the University of Texas at Austin
Source: iStock

Musicians & Music Industry

Survey Responses and Focus Group Discussion Points



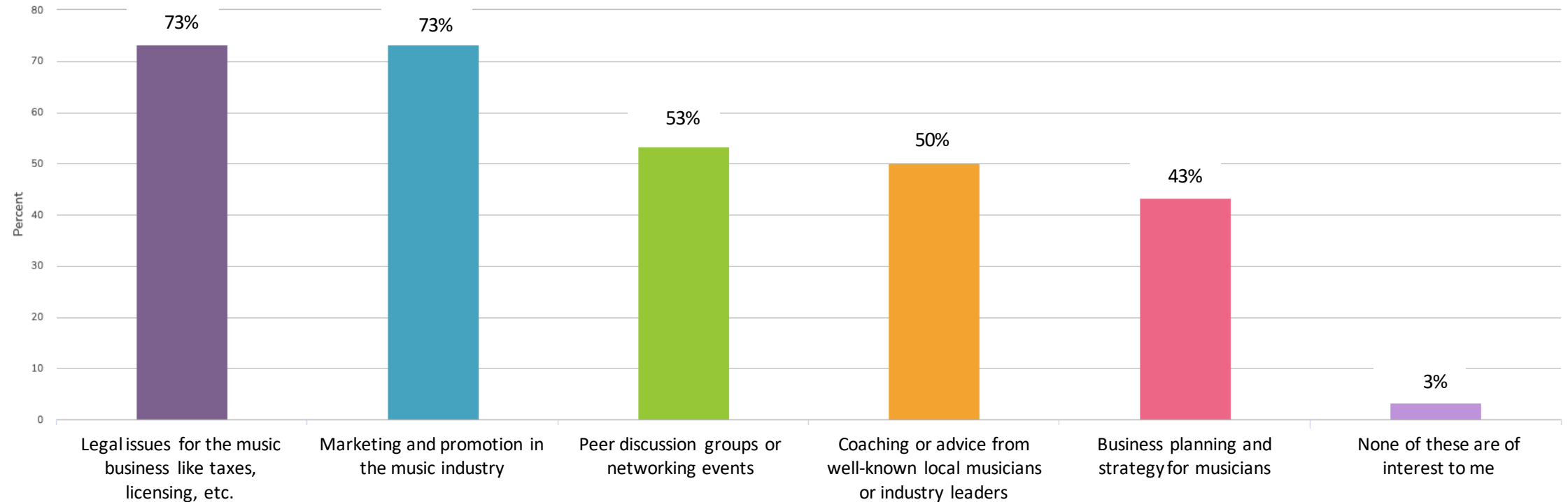
Music Industry Respondents



Notes: *Almost 30% elected to write-in entries to provide additional insight into their music-related business model. Most of the write-in entries cited nonprofit work, and/or highly-specialized musical disciplines, education, and teaching a specific style of music.*

Participants were able to select more than one option from the responses provided. That is why the % totals more than 100.

Class Topics of Interest to Music Industry



Participants were able to select more than one option from the responses provided. That is why the % totals more than 100.

Music Industry Focus Group Notes

- The musicians and music industry professionals who participated in this group discussion arrived with open hearts and minds, a willingness to share their own experiences, and *a newfound appreciation for collaborating with other Austin musicians* since the beginning of the shutdown
- *Many of the stories and struggles participants shared mirrored those from other focus groups* - limited resources, reliance on recovery programs and a profound sense of loss, particularly with so many local music venues shuttered temporarily and/or closing for good
- At the beginning of this conversation, most of the musicians in the group were not very interested in taking business classes offered by the city but *after some discussion about possible topics and the option of virtual learning most of these participants became very interested in taking classes*
- *Everyone in this discussion showed interest in attending classes on any topic if it meant they would find other musicians in the room*, especially if they were well-known and successful; some also related an interest in helping to teach each other so they could share various business skills
- *This group did not strongly identify as small business owners or entrepreneurs at first*, but by the end of the conversation they were clearly beginning to relate to themselves in that light; this was largely facilitated by a few business-minded musicians and venue owners who participated in the discussion, sharing their own perspectives on making money in the music industry



Photo: live music performance by KP and the Boom Boom
Source: VisitAustin

Music Industry

Focus Group Notes (continued)

- Facilitators asked the same kinds of questions that were asked in other groups, but this was not like other groups because *the level of care and kindness toward other participants was particularly high*; emotions were very high but not negative, more like people were carrying concerns for their future
- Most *people made a point of sharing positive stories* of triumph, whether it was their own or success seen by a colleague or friend, always showing support and giving tips or strategies that worked for them or others – some found unusual or new ways to perform, others found new types of clients or just made peace with the idea of having to wait until covid passed before music would be their primary focus again
- The most memorable segment of the discussion came from a musician who had turned his van into a mobile music venue so that his fellow musicians could continue to perform in some way, he said *"With Covid, I think we all realized how much we need each other"* and others in the discussion responded in unison with "Yes!" And "Exactly"; people became emotional, some participants cried
- The people in this discussion did not know each other, but many had heard of each other or were following each other via social media. Many shared contact information in the chat to keep in touch and cited that *just having the chance to talk to other musicians was helping* them feel more hopeful and connected
- The music focus group session had some of the hardest, saddest stories to share of loss – not just as a result of the covid shutdown but also as a trending concern in the Austin music scene overall; but this conversation could also be characterized as offering the most uplifting stories – it was not all bad news, many were learning new skills and seeing their own work in music through new eyes



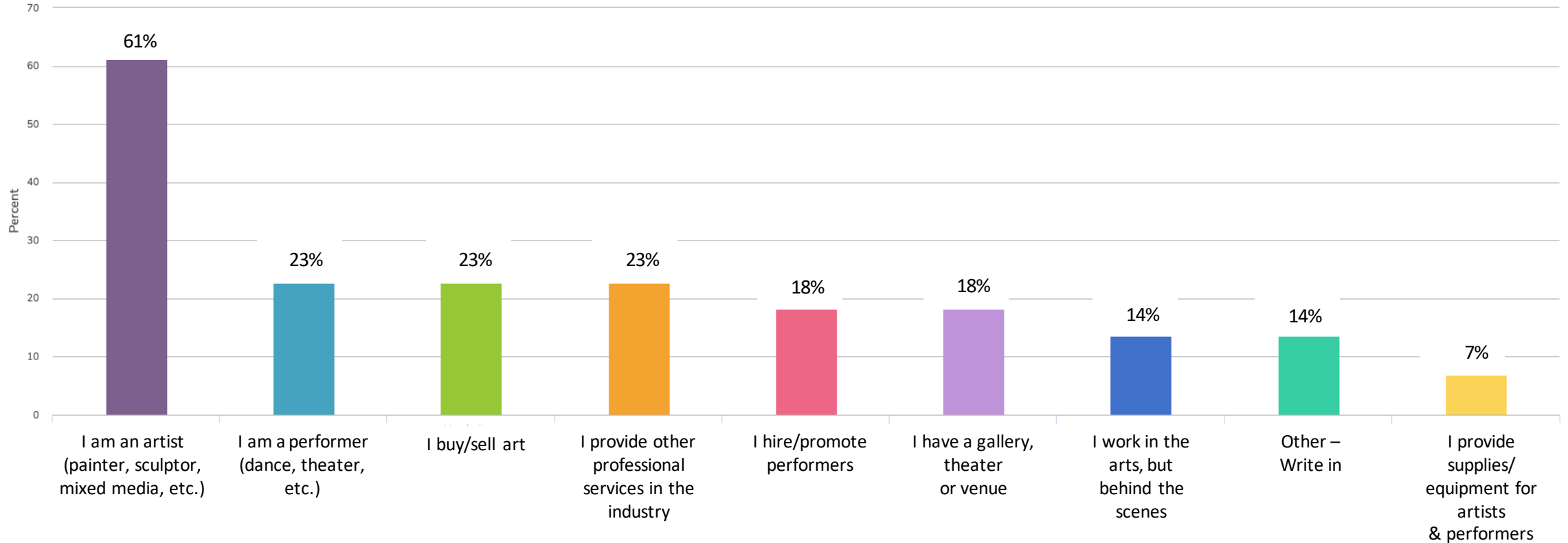
Photo: live music performance by KP and the Boom Boom
Source: VisitAustin

The Arts & Creatives

Survey Responses and Focus Group
Discussion Points

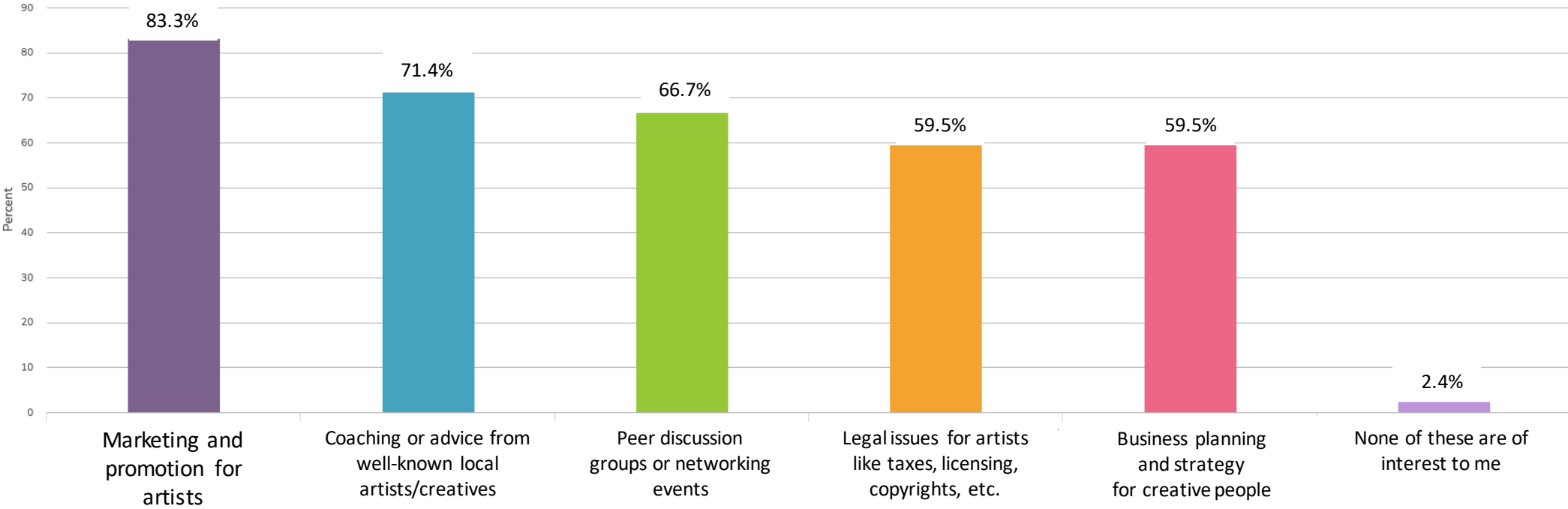


The Arts & Creative Respondents



Participants were able to select more than one option from the responses provided. That is why the % totals more than 100.

Class Topics of Interest to Creatives



Participants were able to select more than one option from the responses provided. That is why the % totals more than 100.

Arts & Creative Focus Group Notes

- The arts and creative discussion group was *mostly individual business owners or solopreneurs, working on their own to grow a freelance business or small consultancy* along with several representatives from local nonprofit organizations focused on the arts
- *This group had a lot to say about the small business classes offered by the City*, with multiple participants having attended various sessions over the years
- There was *plenty of back and forth about what people got out of the various courses*, and some participants also shared information about SCORE
- Most of the participants reported that their *revenue had largely dried up during the shutdown* and that *access to recovery programs saved their businesses*
- *The most common method of adaptation these participants reported was to begin partnering with other organizations and to crossover into other industries*, where their creative abilities stood out; all who reported having adapted this way said they would continue to do so even after covid had passed



Arts & Creative

Focus Group Notes (continued)

- Many participants in *this group relayed struggles related to having to rely on other businesses, like venues, in order to keep operating* – most in that situation were actively working to find ways to manage their own space or adapting their performance or gallery needs to operate with virtual spaces
- Most of the *participants in this group reporting having additional "side gigs" or said that their creative business would have to take a back seat* to other work opportunities, in order to manage their expenses
- There was a lot of talk around sharing resources in this group, the idea of cooperatives came up and *many were surprised to learn that cooperative businesses were an option* for their kind of business
- *Almost all participants assigned higher value to classes and training that have a cost to attend*, associating more value with a higher fee. They also acknowledged that they cannot always attend training events because of the cost and that they do want low-cost options from the city. *In this group, free classes are perceived to have low to no value.*
- *The mood of this group was very upbeat*, despite the considerable losses to income and opportunities and everyone was glad to share ideas and information

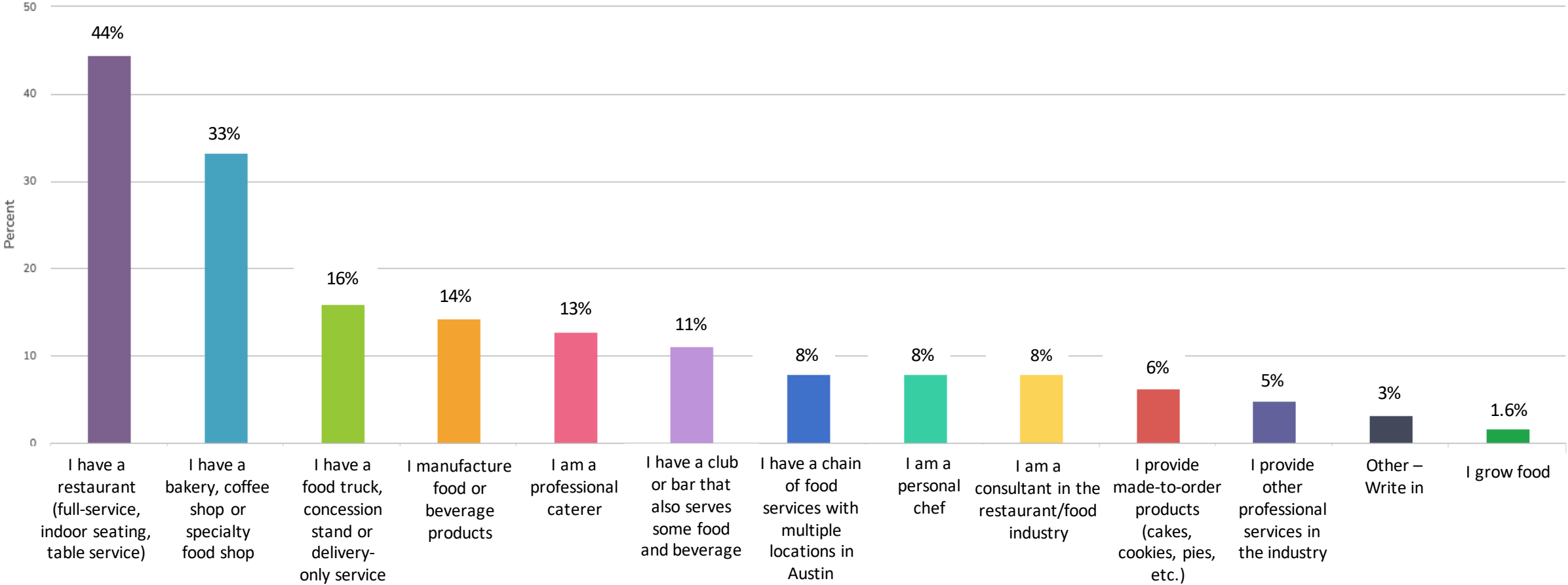


Restaurants & Food Services

Survey Responses and Focus Group Discussion Points

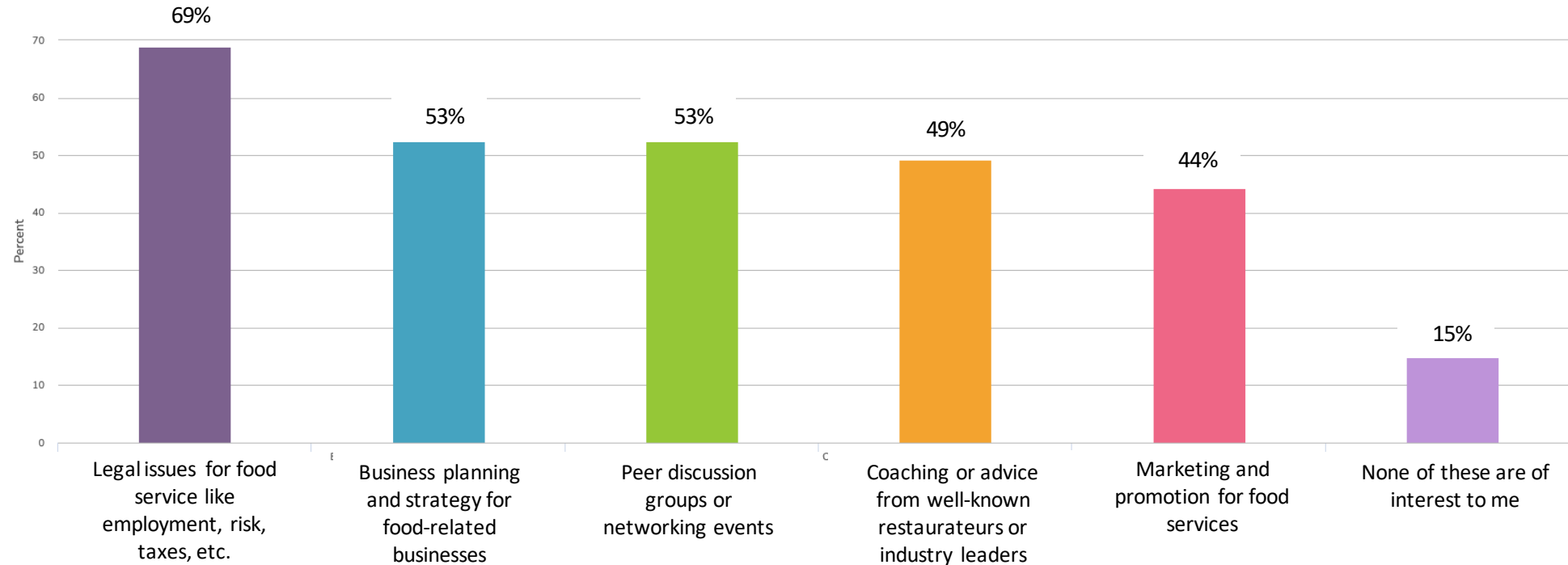


Food Service Industry Respondents



Participants were able to select more than one option from the responses provided. That is why the % totals more than 100.

Class Topics of Interest to Food Services



Participants were able to select more than one option from the responses provided. That is why the % totals more than 100.

Food Service Focus Group Notes

- The restaurant and food service *owners who participated in this discussion were all still in business, tentatively*; many shared that if things didn't change soon they would likely be unable to remain open
- *Most of the participants were able to secure recovery funding through a local or federal program*, like PPP, and most of them also shared concerns about running out of funding options within a few months
- A few of the *participants were hesitant to share that they had good news*, out of respect for those in the discussion who were not having very good luck
- The *good or positive stories they shared were mostly about finding new ways to operate*, adding local delivery or curbside service, reducing the menu for manageable costs, shifting focus to wholesale, or closing table service completely
- *All participants in food service reported the need to reduce staff and then the concern that they were having trouble bringing staff back*; some made the reduction permanent and removed table service from their offerings – those that did not remove table service were hurting the most in this group



Food Service

Focus Group Notes (continued)

- Some *participants shared stories of other restaurants who found ways to turn their inventory into a new type of business*, offering groceries and other staples like milk, eggs or bread; others talked of some restaurants who became heroes in the community, helping others, but they also expressed confusion about how those businesses did it in terms of the cost of giving vs selling
- *This group shared more concerns about the future than the other industries*, understandably; and they also were the least engaged in discussions about classes or education topics; *they were in survival mode, not growth mode*
- The food service focus group *appeared to have the highest level of stress and seemed more disconnected from community than other groups have expressed*
- *This group also requested more help from city and state resources with a more emphatic tone than the other groups* – one participant relayed it this way, "running a restaurant is hard enough without a pandemic, I know the city tried to help but the reality is that we might have been beyond help."

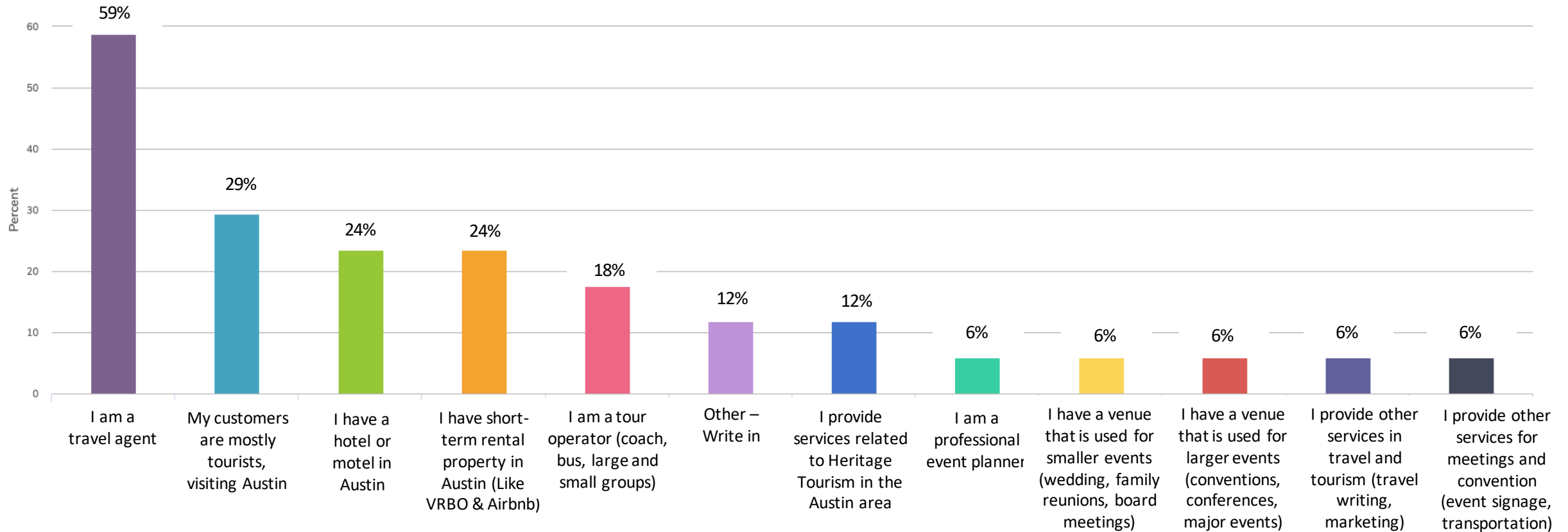


Travel & Tourism

Survey Responses and Focus Group Discussion Points; Including Heritage Tourism and services related to Meetings & Conventions

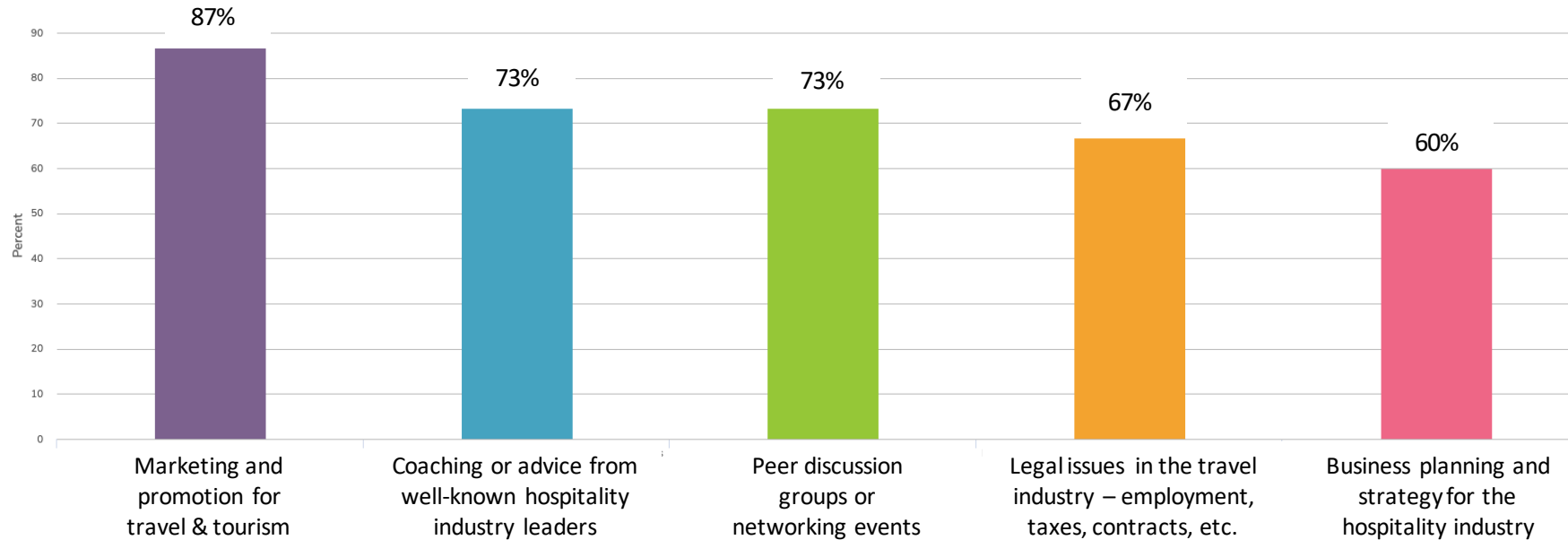


Travel & Tourism Industry Participants



Participants were able to select more than one option from the responses provided. That is why the % totals more than 100.

Class Topics of Interest to Travel & Tourism



Participants were able to select more than one option from the responses provided. That is why the % totals more than 100.

Travel & Tourism

Focus Group Notes

- The Travel and Tourism discussion group included some hotel and short-term rental owners, travel agents, event venues and people providing services to visitors like bus tours or entertainment
- *About half of the participants target Austin residents as clients who travel* to get away, while the other half deal directly with event service vendors and/or direct-to-consumers visiting the area
- Most of the participants reported interest in learning more about City of Austin business classes, *many were not aware that classes were already available* outside of those provided by SCORE and other local organizations
- *Only one participant was identified as a heritage tourism organization*, but once that topic was discussed there was considerable interest in learning more about that category



Travel & Tourism

Focus Group Notes (continued)

- *Most participants were very small operations with just 1 or 2 employees*, and they experienced significant losses during the pandemic shutdown, but most also received financial assistance through local and federal programs
- Some expressed concerns about ongoing challenges for the travel industry because of covid and *almost all have taken on a second job or "side hustle" to make ends meet*
- While *most of these business owners had not made significant changes to their business model to adapt during the pandemic*, almost all stated their interest in more opportunities to talk to each other, to network and to share ideas for making whatever changes were needed to keep their business afloat
- Class topics that had the most response were online marketing, leadership, negotiation skills and time management

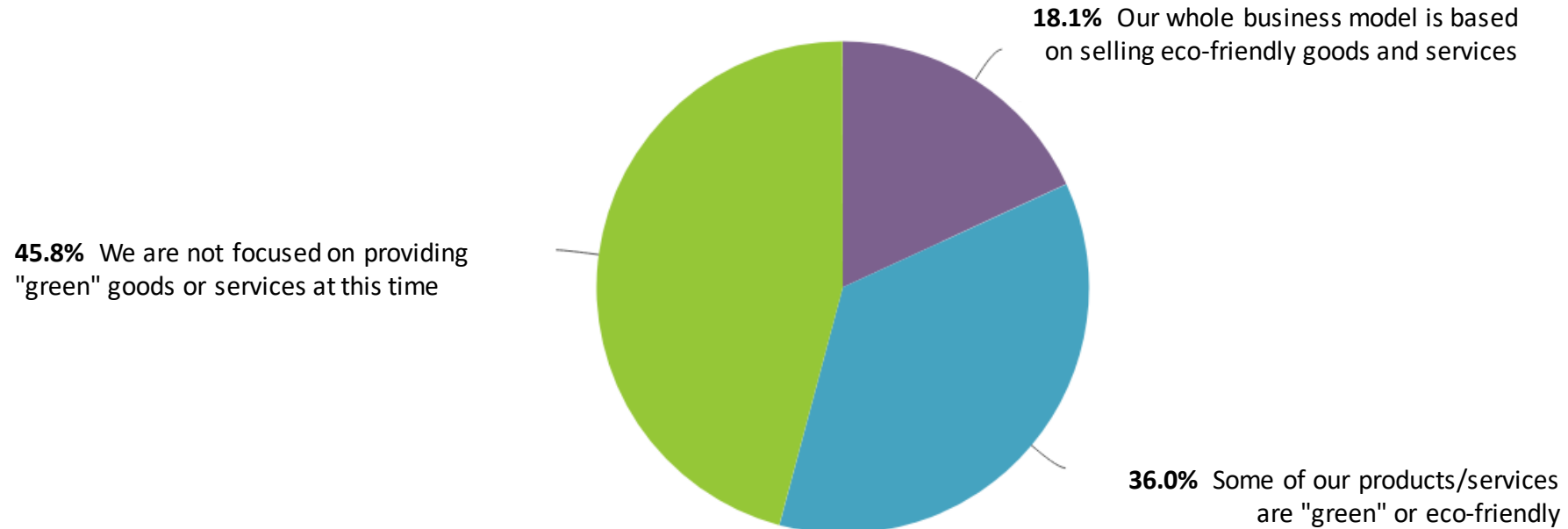


Green & Eco-Focused

Survey Responses and Focus Group
Discussion Points



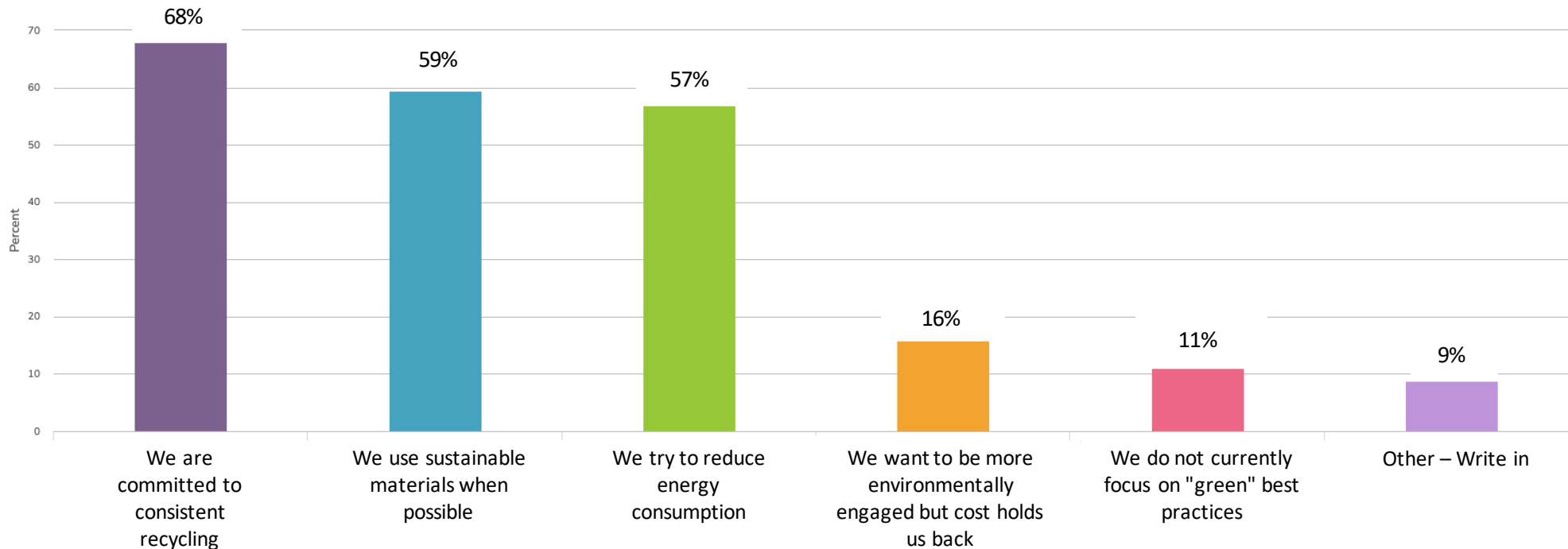
Green or Eco-Focused Participants



Percentage of Respondents With Businesses Focused Primarily on
Green or Eco-Friendly Goods & Services

Green or Eco-Focused Participants

All survey participants were asked about their level of eco-friendly activity in day-to-day business operations.



Participants were able to select more than one option from the responses provided. That is why the % totals more than 100.

Green or Eco-Friendly Focus Group Notes

- *Participation in the Eco-Focused Group was very engaged*, people arrived ready to discuss specific topics or issues
- Several of the participants were in attendance representing nonprofit organizations but *most of the people attending were running a for profit business that was focused on providing green products or services*
- Many of the *business owners in this group also mentioned other organizations that they work closely with* as an advocate for green or eco-friendly activities in Austin
- *This group related a little bit differently to discussion topics around business education than the others* as they were as *interested in making sure specific topics would be covered for non-green businesses* as they were in adding topics to the list of potential classes for themselves



Green or Eco-Friendly

Focus Group Notes (continued)

- There was *significant interest in virtual learning*, as participants cited reduction in traffic, time-savings and convenience in attending a class that is taught online
- These businesses were *very interested in events that facilitate idea sharing, networking, learning better negotiation skills, management and leadership* training
- Some *participants stressed an interest in becoming more involved at the city, county and state level with business education and training activities*, citing the value of some City of Austin classes they had attended that proved very helpful
- There was also *some important discussion around technology education and the need for more training on marketing*, public outreach and engagement

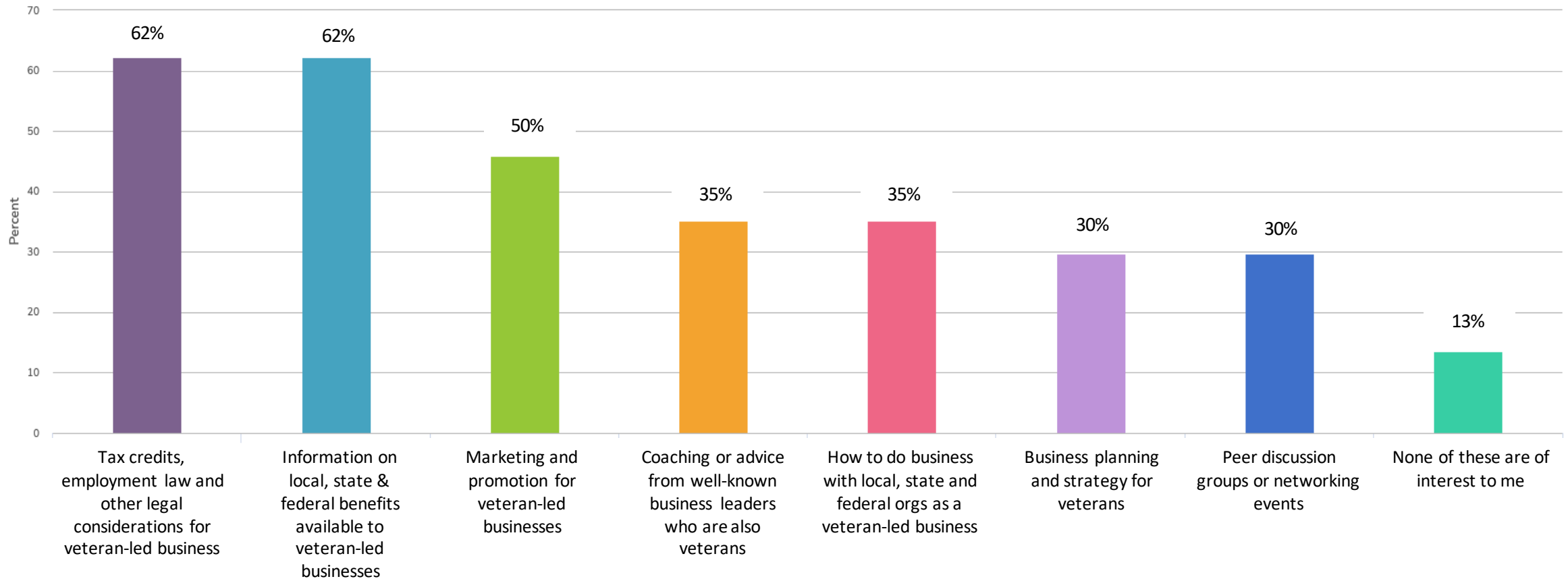


Veteran-Owned or Veteran-Led

Topics of interest for participating
veterans and vet-led businesses



Class Topics for Veteran-Led Businesses



Participants were able to select more than one option from the responses provided. That is why the % totals more than 100.

General Findings & Recommendations

Following is a summary of overall findings from survey data, focus group discussions and one-on-one interviews for this study.



General Findings

Below are general findings or data points discovered through analysis of responses to the online survey created for this study.

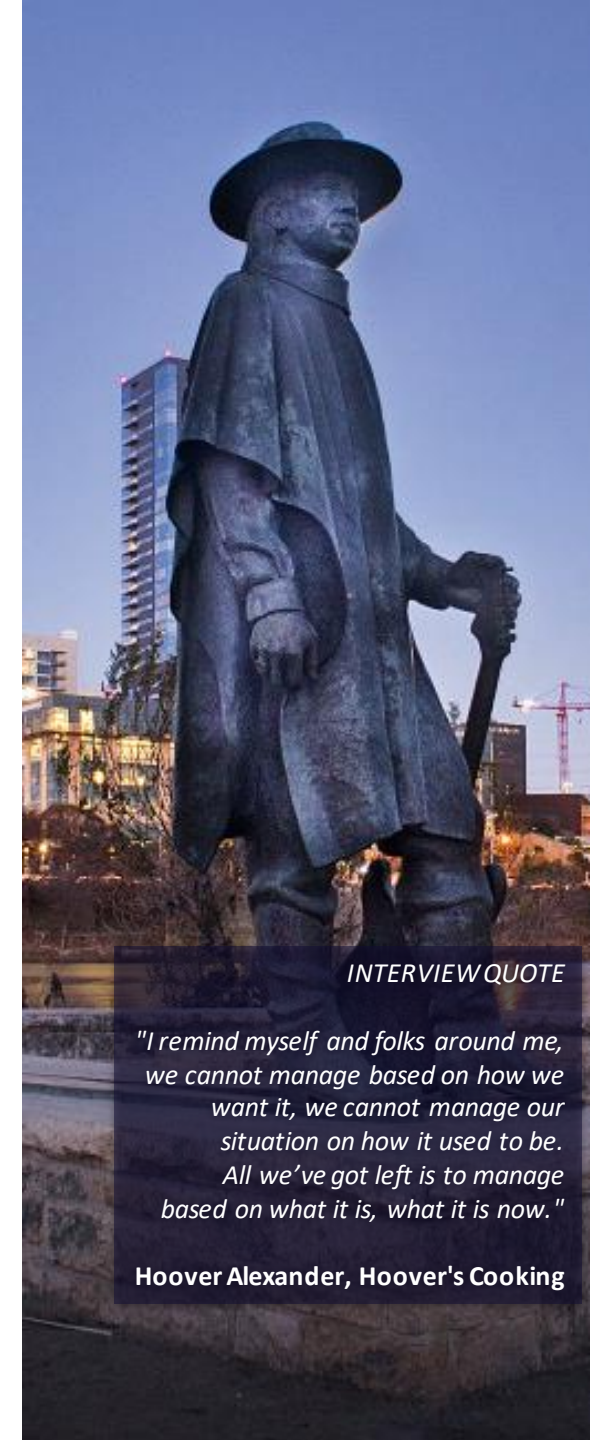
- Responses came from local business owners in Austin, representing a balanced group in terms of time in business, level of revenue, variety of industry, and level of education; including businesses located in all City Council districts
- **At least 48% of participants identified as women and at least 30% identified as belonging to one or more minority group**
- 52% of participating business owners self-identify as an "entrepreneur" while 25% prefer the term "employer"
- 7% of participants actually started their small business during the Covid shutdown
- 80% of the survey participants have 10 or fewer employees in their businesses, and 24% have no employees at all (before or after Covid)
 - Participants in need of staff report significant concerns with finding reliable, responsible workers and with affording the cost of salaries, benefits and recruiting costs



*Photo: Statue of Stevie Ray Vaughn, downtown Austin
Source: Getty*

General Findings (continued)

- A majority of survey participants said they like to learn with both virtual and in-person classes, depending on the topic and type of class they are taking
- Most also prefer a teacher or facilitator who is a local peer with proven experience in their own industry or on the topic to be taught
 - Musicians, Artists and Creatives are the most likely to attend classes provided by the City, as long as cost to participate is not significant
 - Focus group responses suggest that many Austin creatives would participate and appreciate the opportunity to learn from both industry experts and each other
 - Travel Industry professionals are the next most likely to attend classes offered by the City
 - 80% of survey respondents cited interest in topics specific to the travel and tourism industry
 - Food service businesses are the least likely to attend classes provided by the City
 - Survey responses showed interest in the specific topics listed
 - Focus group responses suggest that this group may feel too busy or worried to take time away from running the business to attend a business class
- Almost all participants prefer to learn about class offerings from the City by email and most will notice advertising on social media before radio, tv or print



INTERVIEW QUOTE

"I remind myself and folks around me, we cannot manage based on how we want it, we cannot manage our situation on how it used to be. All we've got left is to manage based on what it is, what it is now."

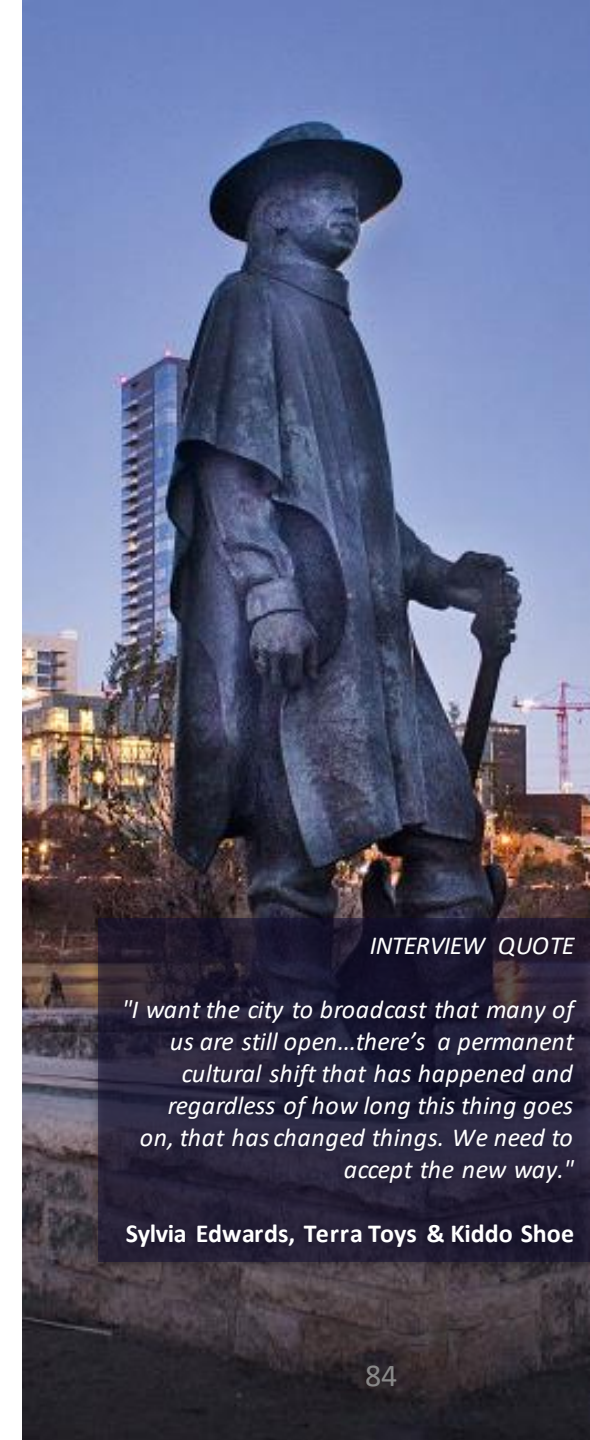
Hoover Alexander, Hoover's Cooking

Photo: Statue of Stevie Ray Vaughan, downtown Austin
Source: Getty

General Findings (continued)

- A large majority of all participating businesses are at least somewhat engaged in green or eco-friendly operations
 - 18% of participating businesses are primarily focused on "green" or eco-friendly products and services
 - 36% are partially focused on "green" with some products and services that are eco-friendly or focused
 - 66% committed to consistent recycling
 - 56% try to reduce energy consumption
 - 59% report using sustainable materials when possible
- Almost half of the participating businesses were faced with a decision to close temporarily during Covid, while half were able to stay open the whole time
 - 3% of participating businesses closed permanently because of Covid but plan to start another business in the near future
 - Only 1% closed their doors because of Covid with no plans to open another business in the near future
- More than 50% were successful in securing helpful recovery funds from a local, state, or federal organizations to help manage through Covid; most participating businesses obtained recovery funding from multiple sources
- **Overall, 82% of survey respondents responded as either "very hopeful" or "somewhat hopeful" for the future of their business, but it is important to note that the 17% responding they "don't feel confident about the future" represents a significant number of local businesses**

Photo: Statue of Stevie Ray Vaughn, downtown Austin
Source: Getty



INTERVIEW QUOTE

"I want the city to broadcast that many of us are still open...there's a permanent cultural shift that has happened and regardless of how long this thing goes on, that has changed things. We need to accept the new way."

Sylvia Edwards, Terra Toys & Kiddo Shoe

Interview Notes

15 local business owners participated in private, one-on-one interview for this study. Highlights from those conversations are provided on the following pages.

- Most of the businesses we interviewed were able to access financial assistance through the 1st and 2nd PPP loan programs, and told us those funds were critical to their survival
- When asked about business classes that would be most helpful, those that have been in business for a while mentioned having the impression that classes offered by the city are more for start-up or new businesses and that they did not think there was content available that would be suitable to their needs as a more mature business
- Some business owners offered suggestions for ways that the city might be helpful during a crisis like the one brought about by the Covid pandemic, including:
 - Providing masks and hand sanitizer very early in the process
 - Providing group discounts on common signage printing as many will need the same kinds of signs made at the same time
 - Many asked that they City please continue to offer small business grants
 - They asked that processes for various City programs like permitting and health inspections to be more streamlined
 - They also asked that the City take part in helping to find ways to market local businesses to the public, as an important part of the city's economic development

INTERVIEW QUOTE

"As a small grocer, we didn't have the same run that the larger grocers like HEB or state or national chains had because they sell in volume. Smaller grocers felt the brunt of the pandemic. I'm very hopeful for Wheatsville. I think that we're finding our footing between old Austin and New Austin and we're going to be able to offer something to pretty much everybody. I have a really good outlook for Wheatsville."

Nick Conn, Wheatsville Food Co-op



Photo: Food Trucks in Austin
Source: Getty

Interview Notes (continued)

- Overall, most of the business owners we talked with expressed a desire to be acknowledged, to have their value as a locally owned business acknowledged
- Several people mentioned changing regulations, permitting struggles and challenges with keeping up with covid-related changes and offers/opportunities during their interviews
- Some people shared difficulties with struggling to pay their business lease, having trouble with their landlords and the overall state of commercial real estate in Austin today
- The business owners expressed hope for the future, but it should be noted that the kind of people who take on the challenge of managing their own business are often very positive and hopeful people, by nature
- While they expressed considerable hopefulness, they also cited multiple and understandable reasons that the future still feels uncertain

INTERVIEW QUOTE

"While our heart will always be in the center of Austin, we had no choice but during the pandemic to pivot 100% online. The challenges never stop. We have employees in every state now, we have teachers even in Spain. Our instructors are everywhere but so are our learners. From Canada, Austria, Australia, Europe, Southeast Asia, India so while we had always intended to reach a wider network of lifelong learners, yeah it [the pandemic] forced our hand."

Elizabeth Mack, Freestyle Languages



Photo: Food Trucks in Austin
Source: Getty

Focus Group Notes

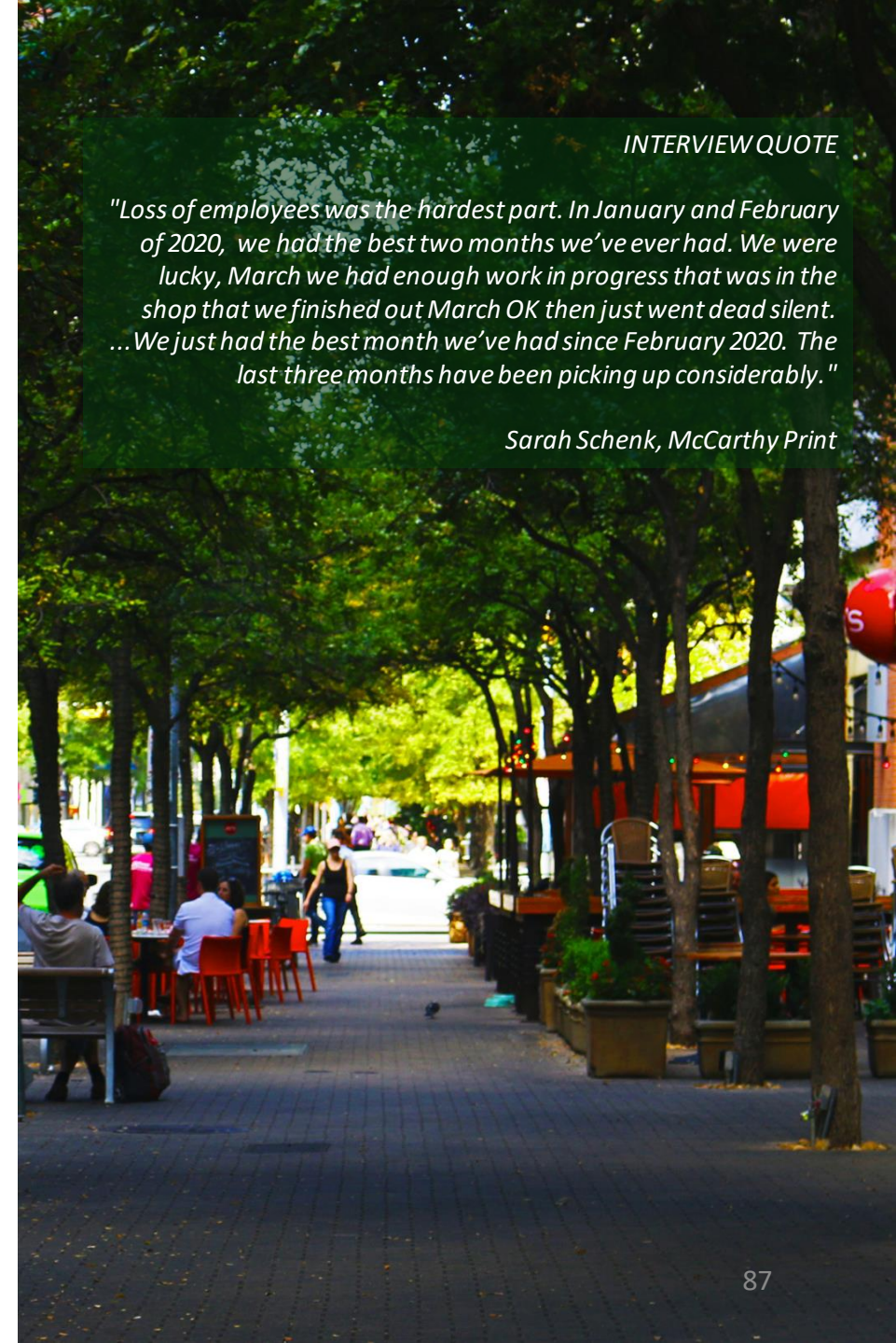
Below are general notes from the focus group sessions that were part of this study.

- At the beginning of each session, participants cited challenges, problems and worries for their business and recovery post-Covid
- Overall, focus group participants attended by computer though some did log in to the virtual sessions using a cell phone
 - Many of the participants expressed gratitude for being able to attend virtually
 - While many said they like or appreciate in person classes, they almost all cited a new appreciation for virtual meetings, events, classes and the ability to attend from anywhere
 - There was also mention of "zoom fatigue" regarding classes and meetings, where people can become overwhelmed or tired of participating virtually, but the benefits of meeting virtually outweighed the concerns of fatigue
 - Most people said they thought the fatigue was a passing thing because remote meetings were so new and sometimes overused during the pandemic

INTERVIEW QUOTE

"Loss of employees was the hardest part. In January and February of 2020, we had the best two months we've ever had. We were lucky, March we had enough work in progress that was in the shop that we finished out March OK then just went dead silent. ... We just had the best month we've had since February 2020. The last three months have been picking up considerably."

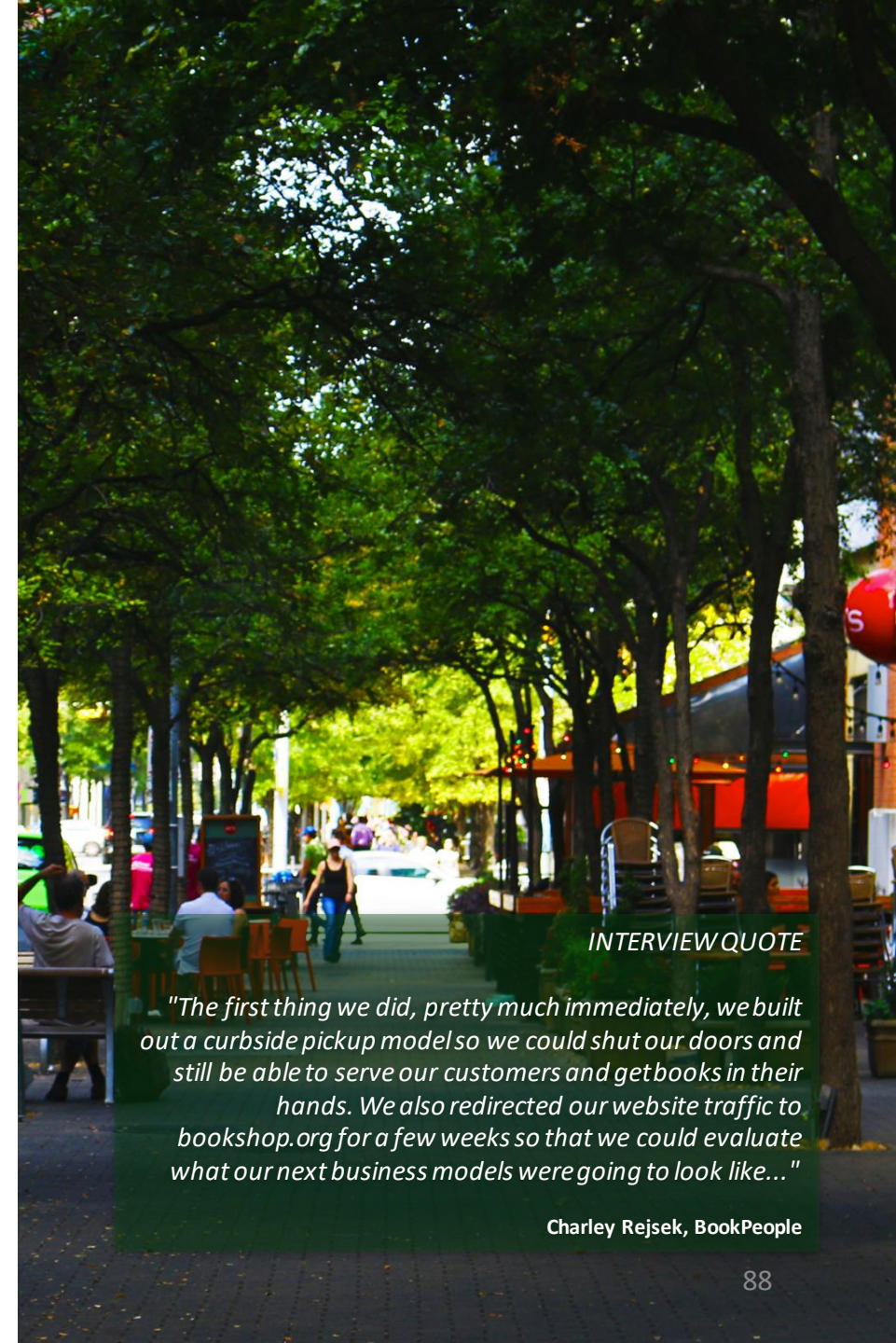
Sarah Schenk, McCarthy Print



*Photo: Shops on 2nd Street, downtown Austin
Source: Getty*

Focus Group Notes (continued)

- A significant majority of the focus group participants expressed gratitude for City programs, and for the chance to be part of these discussions, there was a prevalent sense of connection and real community from all of the groups
- Many focus group participants expressed sincere desire for more opportunities to network, both within their own industry but also crisscrossing industries so that they could meet other business owners that might be a good fit for partnering on special projects or to offer each other's services
- Many participants shared contact info in the chat window to connect with other participants following the session, some even sent thank you notes
- Most participants talked about changes they made in their business model, to successfully adapt and survive the Covid19 shutdown
- Most participants were very open and honest with their peers in the group about struggles and successes and freely shared ideas, resources and solutions
- By the end of each session, almost all expressed a sincere hope for the future - it is important to note that all businesses that participated in the focus group discussions have survived, and are still open / operational



INTERVIEW QUOTE

"The first thing we did, pretty much immediately, we built out a curbside pickup model so we could shut our doors and still be able to serve our customers and get books in their hands. We also redirected our website traffic to bookshop.org for a few weeks so that we could evaluate what our next business models were going to look like..."

Charley Rejsek, BookPeople

Focus Group Notes (continued)

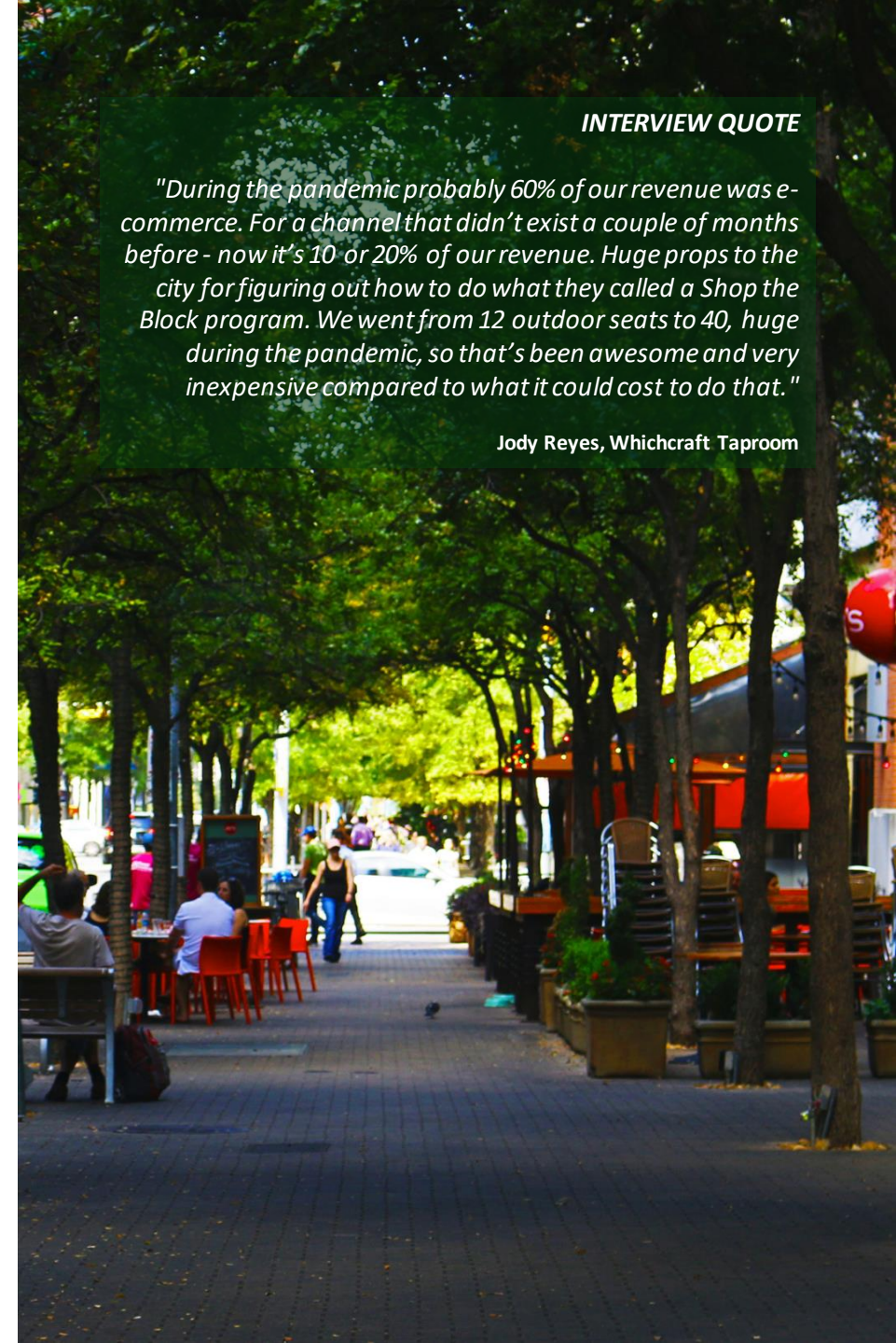
Regarding education opportunities or classes offered by the City:

- Many participants noted their challenges with taking time away from their place of business, especially during business hours
- Some participants mentioned that City classes were always held at one specific location and asked about having classes at other locations
 - They did say good things about the current facility, noting ample parking and fairly easy access from most parts of Austin
- Most focus group participants cited cost as a concern for attending classes
 - Those who had attended classes offered by the City relayed to others that the cost was very low and that the value or quality was very high
 - Participants that had never attended a City class expressed surprise on learning that City classes are not very expensive
 - Many participants shared their perception that free classes offer lesser or lower-value information than classes with at least a small fee to participate
 - While some also shared that there are sometimes high-value free classes available, for most the impression of free as low-value or quality was prevalent and compelling

INTERVIEW QUOTE

"During the pandemic probably 60% of our revenue was e-commerce. For a channel that didn't exist a couple of months before - now it's 10 or 20% of our revenue. Huge props to the city for figuring out how to do what they called a Shop the Block program. We went from 12 outdoor seats to 40, huge during the pandemic, so that's been awesome and very inexpensive compared to what it could cost to do that."

Jody Reyes, Whichcraft Taproom





Recommendations

The following three pages include a summary of recommendations for changes to small business education and classes offered by the City of Austin, based on data gathered through this study.

On Topics of Interest for Small Business Classes

Across the board, from all industry segments, there was consistent interest in many of the topics that are already offered by the city, including topics like Online Marketing & Social Media, Writing a Business Plan and Accounting for Small Business.

- *Continue to offer a variety of courses on already popular topics like Online Marketing, How to Write A Business Plan and Basic Accounting for Small Business – interest in these popular topics remain high among local business owners*

For those participants with employees, staffing was repeatedly raised as a big and ongoing challenge; many business owners are not confident about their own ability to recruit and hire well.

- *Consider offering some classes with topics around hiring and recruiting; including how to write a job description, interview strategies, how to identify the right employees for your business, etc.*

Photo: Austin City Hall and Frost Tower
Source: Getty

Recommendations (continued)

Although the City does provide some training on how to do business with the city, most of the business owners who participated in this study did not understand how procurement works, had no knowledge of the Vendor Connection website and expressed interest in bidding on city projects.

- *Offer more learning opportunities around procurement and doing business with the city, including how to create a vendor profile, how to get regular updates about relevant opportunities and a general overview of the kind of paperwork required to submit a proposal or bid*
- *This topic might be better covered as an add-on segment added into other courses , along with hand-out materials that provide instructions on participating in the RFP process*

Many participants cited concerns with the challenge of keeping up with changes in city regulations, permitting or codes. While these changes are not made or managed by the Small Business Division, the small business owners do experience significant impact from this ongoing challenge.

- *Provide educational materials around how to stay informed when there are code or permit changes and/or regulations that impact small business owners; include instructions on how to be notified when there is a change that will impact their business*
- *Like procurement, this probably does not need to be a full class on the topic, rather a handout or free download provided with all class materials might be sufficient to get people in the loop*

Photo: Austin City Hall and Frost Tower
Source: Getty



Recommendations (continued)

Accommodations for Time-Challenged Entrepreneurs

Most of the business owners who participated in this study cited lack of time and/or concerns about leaving during business hours as a reason they might not take a class offered by the city or any other organization. The following recommendations concern ways to accommodate their schedules and/or make classes available in a way that better enables them to manage their business and gain new skills.

In the past, many of the in-person classes offered by the City are full-day sessions, six hours long. During the Covid shutdown, the City started offering virtual learning and businesses have been able to complete coursework at their own pace, within a limited window of time, over a period of weeks.

- *If possible, continue to offer some virtual options for businesses interested in remote learning*
- *Consider shortening the 6-hour class requirement or offer the same topics with varied schedules, with some that are 6 hours in a single day and others that are 2 or 3 separate sessions*
- *It might also be a good idea to offer hybrid remote-live learning, so that businesses can complete some of the exercises or reading before attending an in-person or live, remote class*
- *These flexible options would allow some of the coursework to be completed before the classes begin, with pre-work assigned at registration so the instructor can review and provide meaningful feedback during the class*
- *this would also allow for people who are in the process of moving to Austin to begin planning their new local business ahead of time; particularly helpful for veterans and their spouses transferring to central Texas to begin civilian life after service with a new business*



Recommendations (continued)

Now more than ever, business owners are wearing multiple hats and are extremely focused on managing their day-to-day operations with a close eye on costs; attending a business class is lower on the list than usual right now, but they do recognize the value proposition.

- *Actively encourage business owners to send staff members for the training sessions in their place; it will allow them to delegate that time and effort while also expanding the employee's skills set*
- *When an employee attends a class on behalf of the business, their attendance should count toward the City's small business certificate program*

Most study participants were not aware of the business certificate program offered by the City but when they heard about it, they expressed interest in attending

- *If the City allows this accommodation, to send employees to classes and count that participation toward their employer's certificate, the businesses are more likely to take more classes, and would also be more likely to bring employees to the certificate luncheon, to celebrate their accomplishment as a team*
- *Continue to promote all classes individually, but also start to bundle several together as a set; most of the participants who did attend a City class in the past were not looking beyond one specific topic; many people said they would take more classes if they were offered in a "bundle"*

Photo: Austin City Hall and Frost Tower
Source: Getty

A photograph of the Austin City Hall and Frost Tower. The Frost Tower is a tall, modern skyscraper with a distinctive, multi-faceted glass facade that reflects the sky. It stands behind the Austin City Hall, which is a large, modern building with a mix of glass and stone. In the foreground, there are two flagpoles with the Texas state flag and the American flag. The sky is clear and blue.

Recommendations (continued)

On Providing and Promoting Value in Small Business Classes

Business owners in this study consistently requested peer discussion, time for Q&A with an instructor, and having time slated during classes or events to mingle or network with other business owners; they did not want it to interfere with instruction but see both as very valuable

- *Set aside a short amount of time during both in-person and virtual classes to allow for peer-to-peer discussion; this can be done during a learning session or added as an optional segment after instruction has been completed; with a good instructor or facilitator, this will make the session even more valuable*
- *On this same point, many business owners also cited their interest in improving their own networking skills and negotiation skills, so it might be a good idea to include a course, or a course module, on both Networking and on Negotiation Skills as part of the city's class offerings*

Most of the participants who had attended a city business class in the past were very complimentary of the experience. Those expressing lower satisfaction most often reported that the class ended up not covering the material or content they thought it would cover.

- *Provide a very short pre-course survey for registered attendees to give information about their business (this helps the instructor prepare), set clear expectations about what the class will cover and allow the learner to ask some questions ahead of time, ensuring the course meets their needs*

Photo: Austin City Hall and Frost Tower
Source: Getty

Recommendations (continued)

Many participants related that they would be more likely to attend a class if they knew it was specifically for their industry or that others in their industry would be there; Other participants related the misconception that city classes are only for new businesses that are just getting started.

- *Promote classes to and for specific industries like music and the arts, nonprofits, etc.*
- *These can be separate classes with the content created specifically for each group or using the same core content, with some customization and promoted to specific groups, so people will want to attend with their peers and discussion will be more valuable and engaging*
- *Feature and promote local guest speakers known for their success or expertise, for Q&A and special add-on topics, to make the classes more relevant to specific groups, include speakers with industry-specific experience in music, the arts, travel & tourism or restaurants*
- *Promote some classes or add-on modules that are suited for more established businesses – these would not have to be completely new or separate topics, but might include more advanced discussion topics for more experienced business owners who would like to participate in the classes but feel some of their questions and issues are outside of the target for most of the other participants*

Photo: Austin City Hall and Frost Tower
Source: Getty



Questions?

For questions or comments concerning this report, please call the City of Austin Economic Development Department's Small Business Program at (512) 974-7800.

