

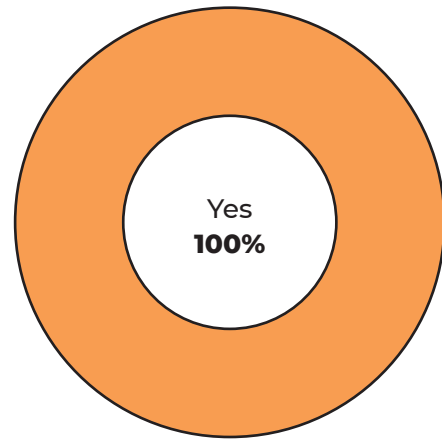
# Small Business & Entrepreneurship Focus Group Results

Hosted in partnership with the **North Central Pennsylvania Launchbox** on October 13, 2021.



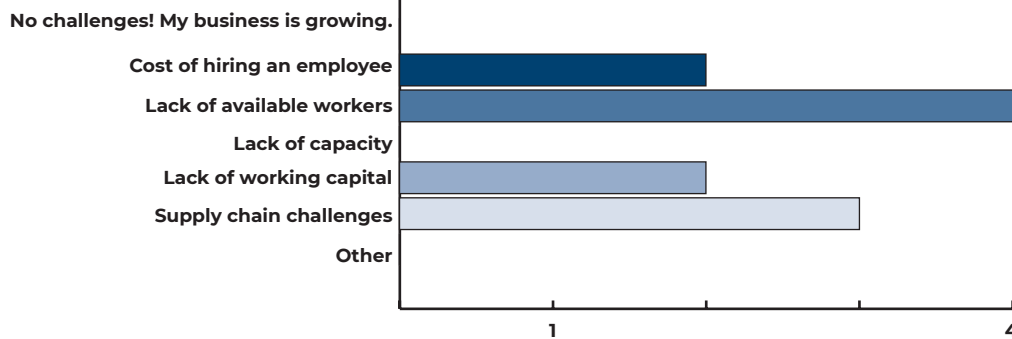
# 1.

For the business owners/entrepreneurs in the room, **are you aware of business development resource providers in your area?**



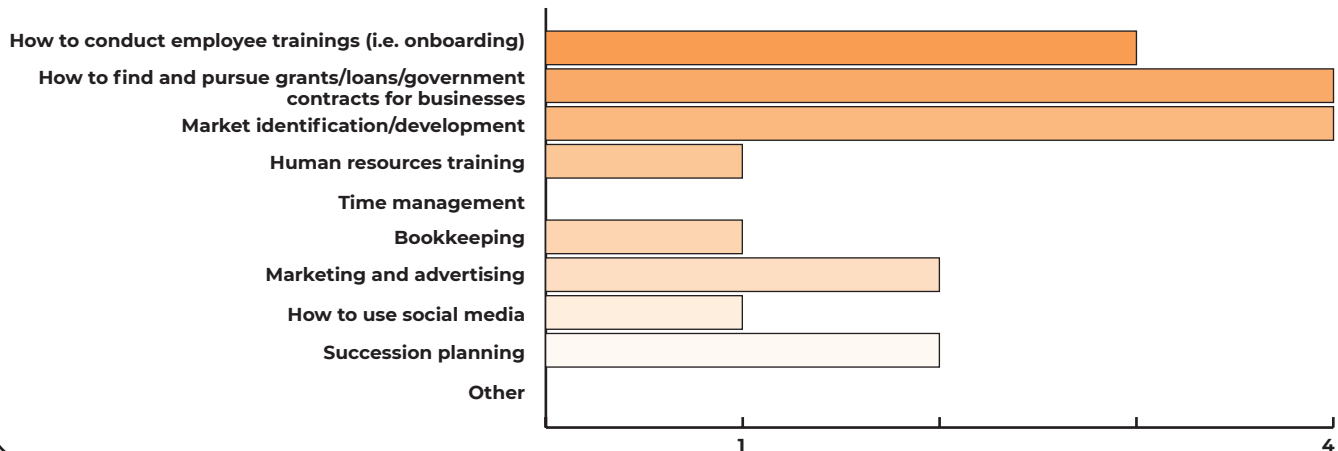
# 2.

Do you want to **grow your business** but are unable to do so? Mark all challenges that apply.



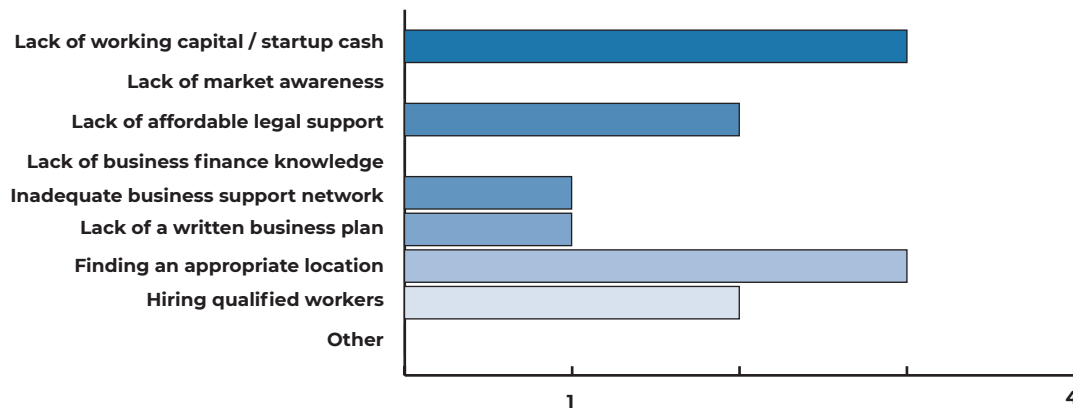
# 3.

What, if any, of the following **training opportunities and/or resources** could you benefit from?



# 4.

What was your **greatest challenge when starting your business?** Mark all that apply.



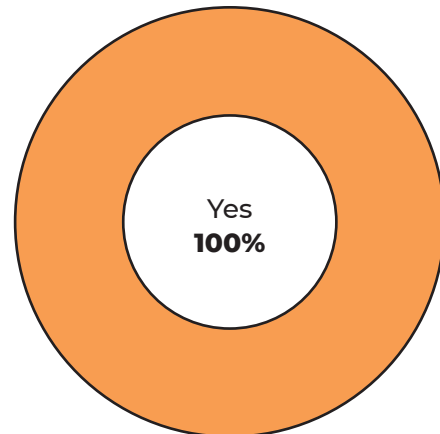
# 5.

What is your **greatest business challenge today?**

- Broadband availability for remote workers
- Covid issues like workers staying home, supply chain issues. Harder to enforce sick leave issues. Uncertain workforce makes it hard to stay on production plans.
- Paying legal fees
- Difficult to win larger contracts when you don't have a portfolio of prior work since we just opened.
- Having enough capital
- Supply chain and employee hiring. Government overreach

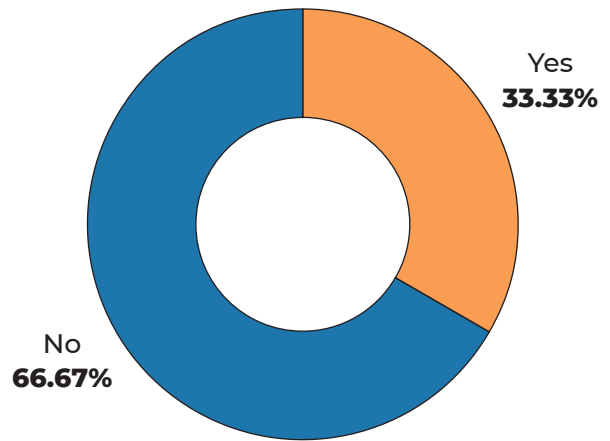
# 6.

Have you needed funds for your business and been **unable to find anyone to lend to you** in the last four years?



# 7.

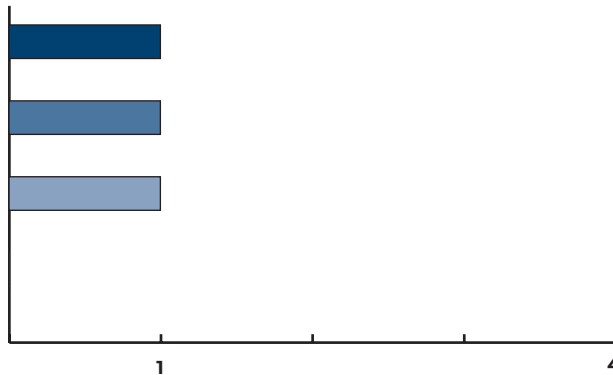
Do you **anticipate an unmet financing need** in the next 6 to 12 months for your business?



# 8.

If you have been **turned down for a loan or line of credit** in the last two years, what were the reasons given? Mark all that apply.

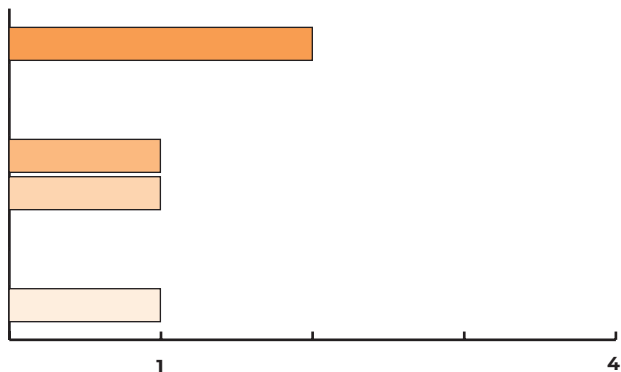
- I applied for financing and was approved
- I have not applied for any financing
- I didn't have enough collateral
- My credit score was too low
- My business concept was too new / unproven
- They didn't lend to my industry
- I didn't have time to complete or didn't understand the loan package
- I have no idea



# 9.

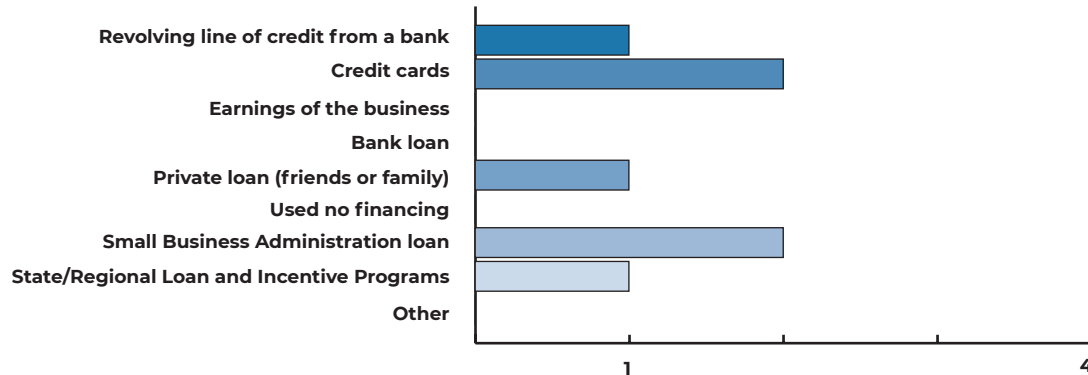
If capital availability is a problem for your business, **what is the effect on your operations?** Mark all that apply.

- Unable to grow business or expand operations
- Reduced the number of employees
- Unable to finance increased sales
- Reduced benefits to employees
- Unable to increase inventory to meet demand
- Closed stores or branches
- Not a problem / No effects
- Other



# 10.

What **types of financing** has your company used within the last 12 twelve months to meet your capital needs? Mark all that apply.



# 11.

Rank the following lending institutions in terms of which you think **best serves the small-business community**.

- Small community banks ★★★★★
- Credit unions ★★★★★
- Large banks ★★★
- Non-traditional lenders ★★
- Credit cards ★

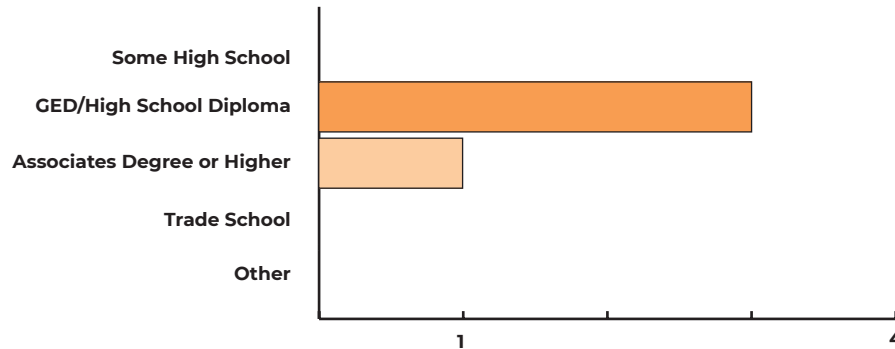
# 12.

How many **employees does your business employ**, including yourself? (include part-time and/or seasonal)

- 4
- 4
- 2

# 13.

What **level of training** is appropriate for an entry-level position in your industry? Mark all that apply.



# 14.

What are the **greatest challenges to hiring** qualified employees that meet the needs of your business?

- Having a higher wage to pay qualified
- Difficult to find those with requisite experience willing to relocate to the area.

# Tourism Focus Group Results

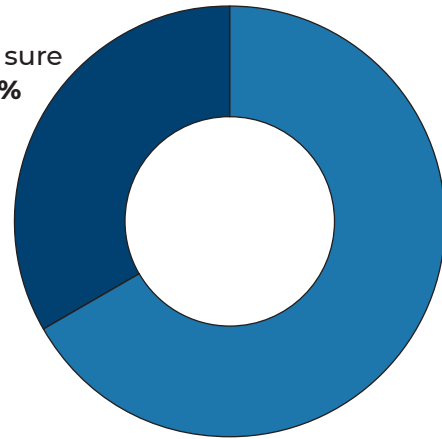
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# 1.

Overall, I am **satisfied with the direction the tourism industry** is headed in our region.

I am not sure  
**33.33%**

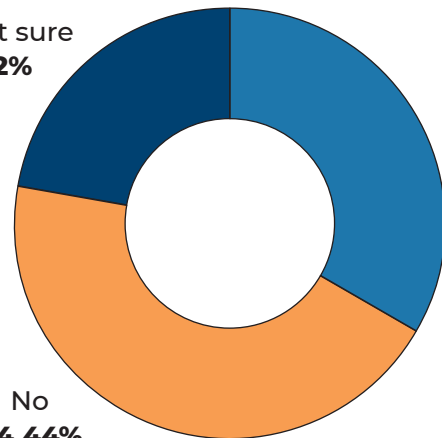


Yes  
**66.67%**

# 2.

My community understands the **value of tourism.**

I am not sure  
**22.22%**

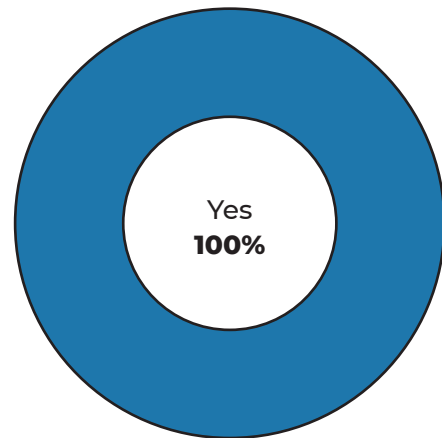


Yes  
**33.33%**

No  
**44.44%**

# 3.

Overall, tourism in the region **positively impacts the community.**



Yes  
**100%**



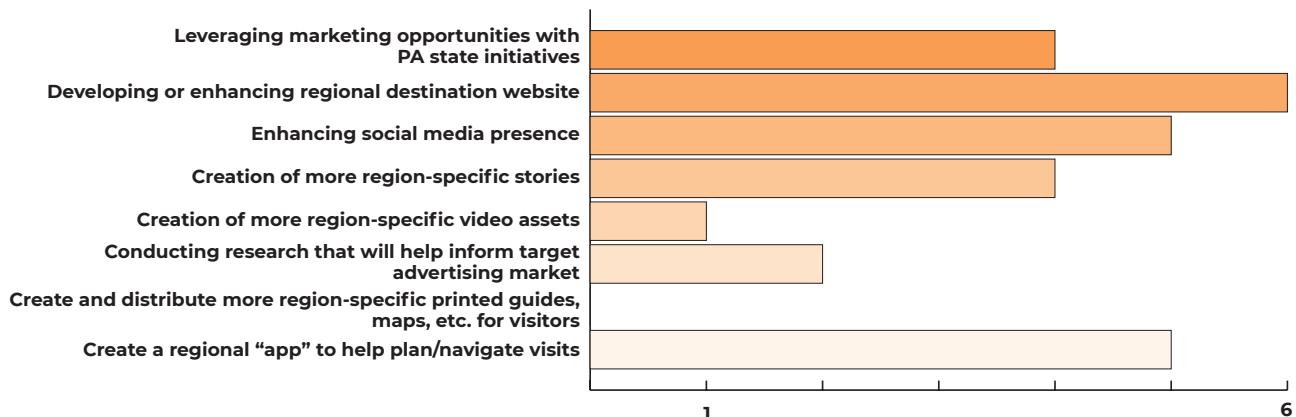
# 4.

What specific outcome would you like your region to achieve in the next three to five years that **would increase the economic impact of tourism or enhance the vitality of the region** as a destination?

- Wifi
- Sup stand up paddleboard too
- More small businesses centered around recreational/tourism hubs. Support activities related to site locations (hiking, kayaking, etc)
- Better wifi
- Yes to housing!!!
- Affordable housing for middle income families
- Collaboration in the region to target marketing for multiple places to visit. To make it more than one destination
- Multistate
- Work on completing the PA Wilds loop of the Industrial Heritage multistage trail system.
- Potential for guided tours throughout the region to visit the various sites. Trains perhaps?
- Motorized vehicle trails

# 5.

Thinking from the perspective of your regional tourism marketing/management organization, please indicate how you would **prioritize the following marketing tactics to advance the economic impact of tourism** in your area?



# 6.

How would you **prioritize planning and management tactics** to advance the economic impact of tourism?

- First** Develop transportation alternatives for visitors in the region
- Second** Increase visitation to the region during off-peak seasons
- Third** Manage tourism growth in order to preserve local assets (natural & cultural)
- Fourth** Alleviate congestion during peak tourism season in areas of high visitation

# 7.

How would you **prioritize investments in training and capacity building**?

- First** Increase local capacity for grant writing and fund development to fund tourism related projects
- Second** Improve quality and professionalism of customer service at tourism-related businesses
- Third** Develop skills, knowledge, and networks to build local capacity for development and managing tourism
- Fourth** Increase local capacity for tourism marketing

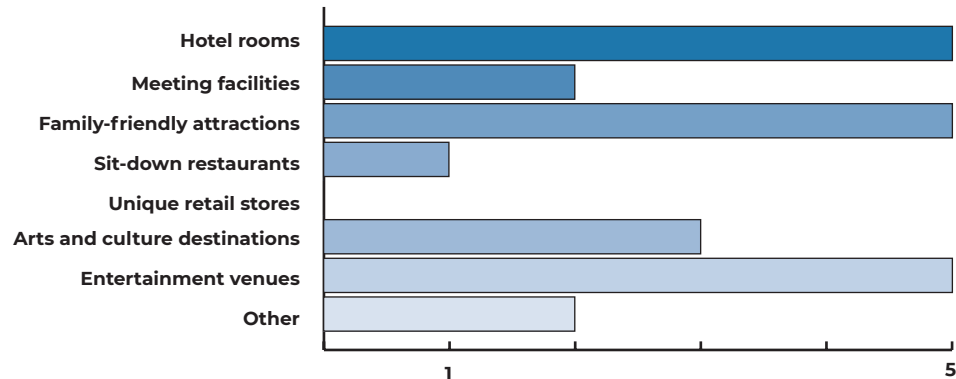
# 8.

How would you **prioritize development** within your communities? Choose top THREE.



# 9.

What **tourism amenities** are most needed in your community? Select your top three.



# 10.

Do you **survey your patrons to ask them how they heard about your business or community**? If so, what are some common answers?

- Social media
- Grew up here or had family here at one point
- Facebook
- Chamber of commerce, word of mouth
- Family roots
- An event
- Word of mouth

# 11.

What could local, regional, or state tourism organizations do to **help you grow your business or increase visitation**?

- Recorded stories scan on qr code on the trails
- Facade grants
- Wayfinding
- Program grants help fund events
- Reasonable and fair priced advertising or promotional opportunities
- Larger tourism budgets
- Grant money
- Better communication about events so we don't overlap with a neighboring area

# 12.

Are there any **“undiscovered gems”** in your community from a tourism standpoint? If so, what are they?

- Hops Farms
- Covered Bridge
- community days, corn mazes
- Local farms have events that are not well attended but very family friendly & amazing to experience

# 13.

If you could narrow down your **community’s allure for tourism** in one phrase or sentence, what would it be?

- Friendly faces helping people enjoy the beauty and tranquility that is our rural lifestyle and landscape.
- outdoors
- Bilgers Rocks - a 300Million year old rock structure that houses a unique fern that grows no where else in PA
- Perfect spot to go on vacation and relax rather than being stressed and running spot to spot.
- Sportsmens Paradise
- Peaceful
- Dark Skies

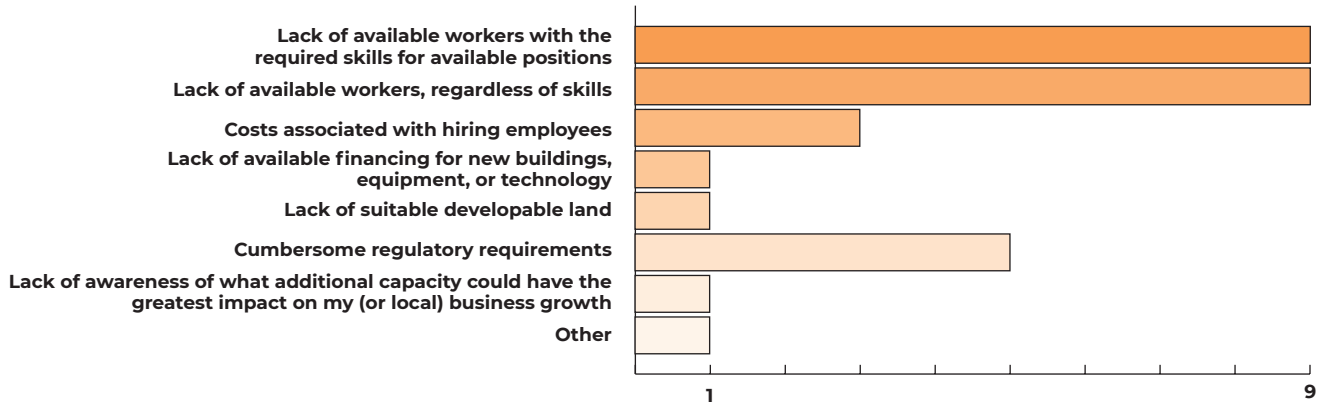
# Employers & Utilities Focus Group Results

Hosted in partnership with the  
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# 1.

What are some of the **key challenges affecting the growth of local companies** (or your company)? Please select the **THREE** highest priority challenges:



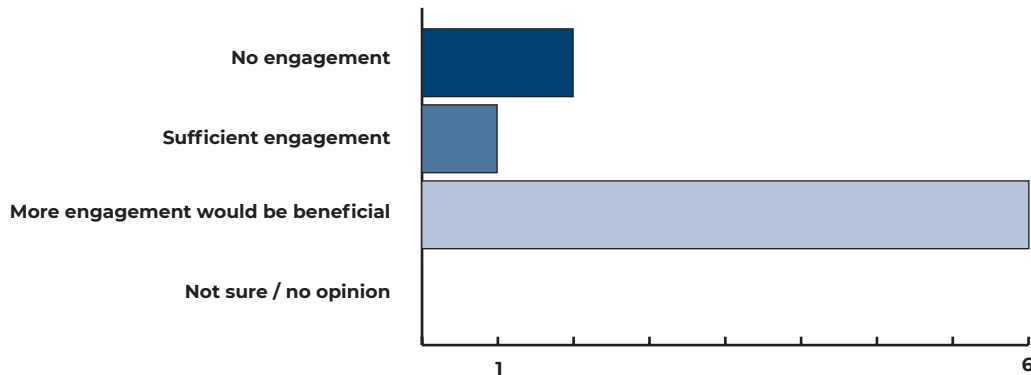
# 2.

What are some of the **major challenges to hiring qualified employees** that meet the needs of your business (or local businesses)?

- Benefits and flexible hours. It was sheetz has no problem hiring people
- Technology related positions computer, database management etc
- Paying for healthcare
- Available child care is a real issue and keeps many people out of the workforce
- Some highly skilled positions can be difficult to fill because those with qualifications are not interested in rural living
- Pending hours per patient day increase from 2.7 to 4.1
- Pay, may employers have differing thoughts on what a family sustaining wage is. Especially in non profit employment. You want good talent you need to pay for it Especially in this competitive market
- Finding entry level employees with soft skills and motivation to learn.
- Simply having people respond to job advertisements and/or then showing up for an interview.
- COVID 19 and not wanting to start in Healthcare because of it, CDC mask requirements, pending vaccine requirements.
- Getting them to apply and interview.
- Lack of skilled employees, higher wage structure, employees market.
- Pay scale

### 3.

Please describe the **level of engagement of your business (or local businesses) with K-12 districts and post-secondary institutions:**



### 4.

What are some **key challenges your company (or local companies) has when trying to recruit talent?**

- It used to be that we had challenges in training hired talent. NOW, our industry simply cannot find quality applicants to work in manufacturing (production floor).
- Drug testing
- Rural location, lack of shopping options, housing issues, transportation issues
- Transportation
- Potential workers requesting relocation assistance
- Housing shortage
- Afraid to be trained to do something new, fear of the unknown

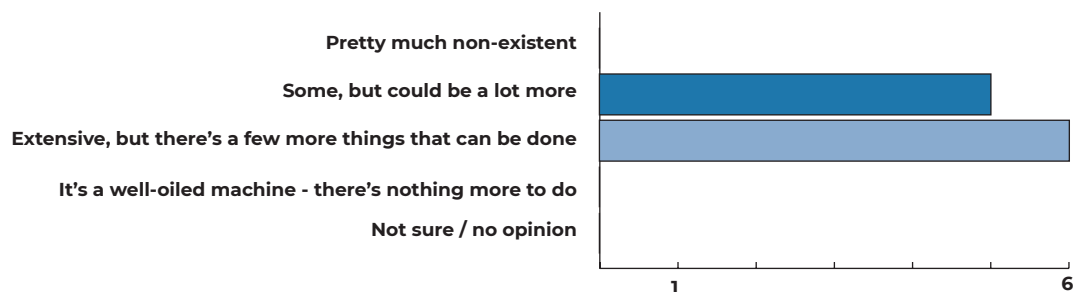
# 5.

If you were marketing the North Central PA region, what are some **selling points** you would make sure were included in the messaging?

- Lack of diversity especially with national changes to demographics is a hindrance to this region.
- Rowland Theater- 2nd largest screen in the state.
- Open to free public access year round, the ANF is approximately 517,000 acres and includes land within McKean, Elk, Warren and Forest counties.
- Rich in history !
- Dark skies - Cherry Springs
- Older workforce, more opportunities for advancement
- Tourism aspects - elk herd
- We do have post high school education options that are not often touted or known to those outside the region
- The Susquehanna has been featured in National Geographic!
- PA Wilds/outdoor recreation
- Relatively low cost of living, slower pace of life, good place to raise a family, stable jobs
- 5 hour drive to major markets
- Low energy cost
- Transportation network
- Good public schools
- Quality Healthcare
- Low cost of living. Low crime. Recreational opportunities.
- Central location
- Low cost of living

# 6.

How would you describe the **level of coordination and cooperation among individuals and organizations** working to grow North Central PA's economy?





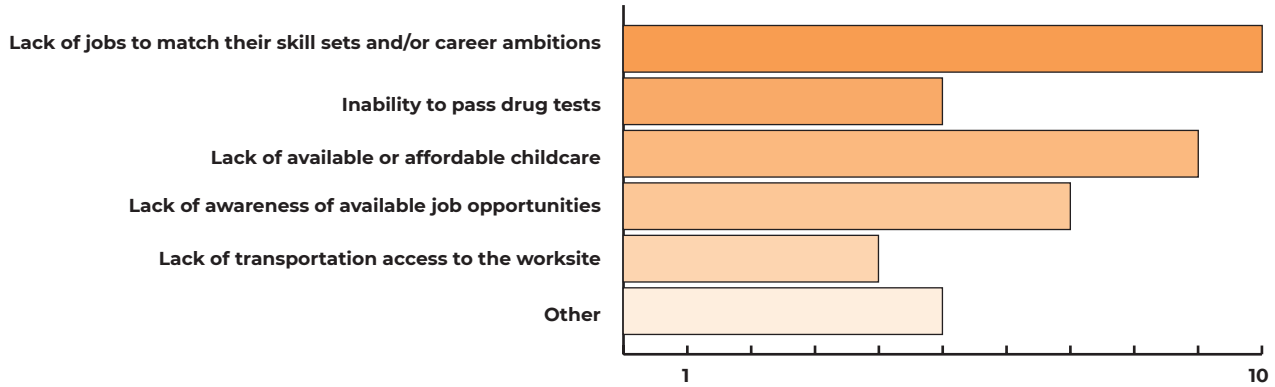
# Workforce Development Focus Group Results

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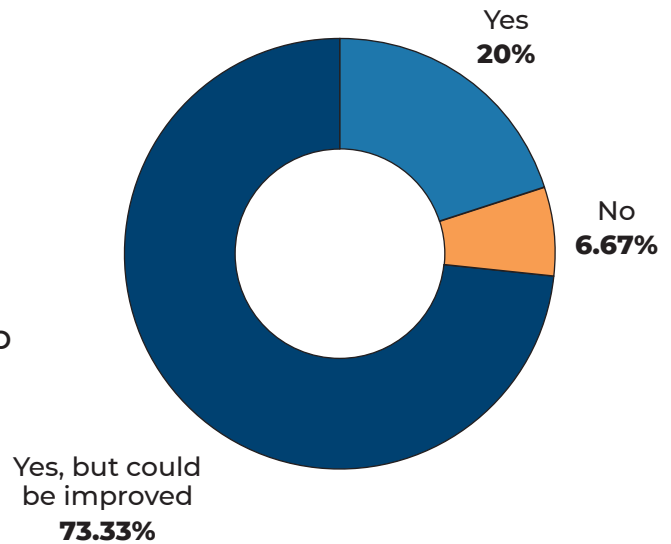
# 1.

If your community is experiencing challenges with workers not participating in the labor force, what are some of the **most common issues keeping people on the sidelines**? Select the top THREE.



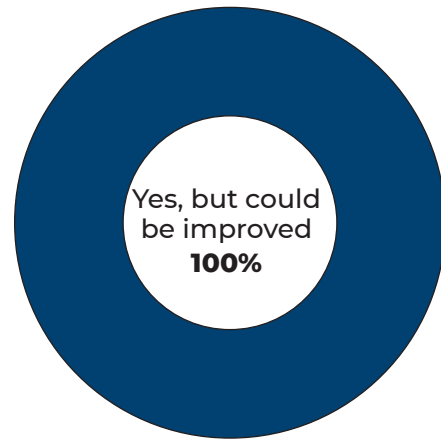
# 2.

Do your community's employers **partner with education and training organizations to communicate their hiring needs and challenges**, and/or help develop programming to address required worker skills?



# 3.

Do local employers offer **internships, apprenticeships, or job shadowing opportunities** to high school, post-secondary students, and/or other job seekers?



# 4.

How do you think local students and/or job seekers can **become more familiar with the career opportunities available** in the local economy?

- A region-wide summit to bring all partners together could be an idea to help connect the dots!
- Teacher in the workplace program was a great way to educate teacher / guidance counselors on career opportunities available.
- We need to hire more people to Carol's point!
- Increase awareness of BEP and work being done by the project leaders in the realm.
- Increase awareness of of Business Education Partnership
- Keep talking about it!
- Increase in active Business Education Partnership to provide more staff time to implement activities
- Career days
- Career Link is very engaged in our communities. I also think that WFS has school programs that allow students of all ages to see what job opportunities are available. The CTE schools are also great at getting students knowledge on career paths in their shop areas. Our colleges are obvious choices for those students wishing to enter higher education. There is no lack of information out there for those who seek it.
- A central website that consolidates all available local jobs in one format.
- For students earlier education on regional career opportunities that includes number of job openings, pay/salaries etc. For not just students but their parents
- Field trips in person or virtual, exposure to already available local content such as manufacturing videos, job shadows
- ask professors, teachers, career counselors, guidance offer career fairs where the students and job seekers are

# 5.

Are there efforts to **help adults who have completed some college but didn't graduate to come back and earn their degree**? If so, what are they?

- The PACareerLink locations have great programs and are familiar with multiple training providers and resources to help adults re-enter the workforce. the Northern Regional College is making some headway as well.
- BC3 promoted this years ago when they came to the region but I haven't heard much lately.
- Direct phone and email outreach. Asking what there current goals are and looking to paste past credits into new plan
- This would be very beneficial, but I'm not aware of anything like this.
- NPRC is trying to bridge that gap, I think

# 6.

If funding was not an issue, what would be some of the **workforce training programs you'd like to see developed** in the community?

- Funding for HS meaningful career based work study program
- \*better promotion of resources that exist/cross organization communication
- Robotics and Science, Technology, engineering, and mathematics training for workforce
- Taking the McDowell HS (Erie) model for career education training
- A robust transportation system that works for our area- one that is customized!!!!
- Tech support
- Childcare training
- Buying the equipment/ machinery necessary for business needed for hands on training
- More staff hired for agencies that do economic development and workforce development work. Specifically for marketing our area and helping bridge connections.
- emergency management/firefighter/etc
- Supported employment/coaching.
- "Got Milk" campaign to provide broad marketing of educational pathways and skill development for everyone
- A robust 2-year CNC machining program, similar to the one previously offered in Elk County.
- Starting and succeeding with your own business

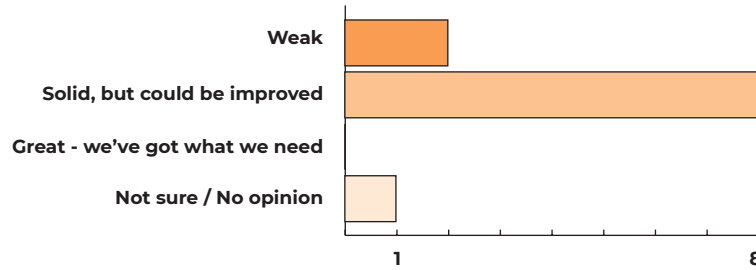
# K-12 Education Focus Group Results

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# 1.

How would you **rate the early childhood/Pre-K offerings** in your district / community?



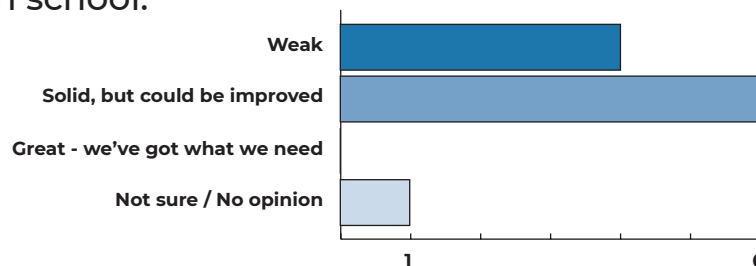
# 2.

If they exist, describe any **pressing issues related to school facilities, infrastructure, funding, or technology** that are limiting successful student outcomes in your district / community.

- Ventilation in older buildings...
- Limited internet connections in our rural area, older buildings needing updated and repairs without needed funding, continued technology support.
- Funding wifi not in remote area
- Dependable community internet access needs to be addressed. Our district is close to 300 square miles. All areas need to have reliable internet access.
- Reliable broadband.
- Better staffing, more mental health resources
- Access to broadband for students working remotely
- Sustained funding for mandates

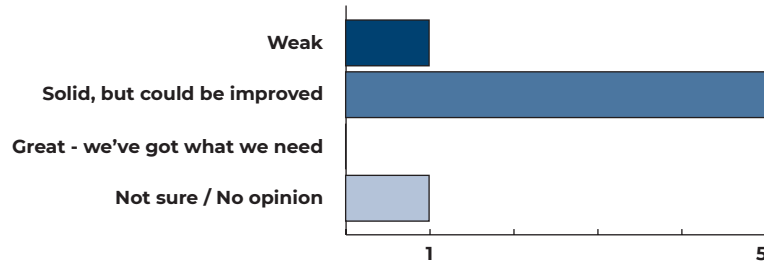
# 3.

Rate the **opportunities for students to be exposed to local occupations and career paths** before their senior year in high school:



# 4.

Rate the **local opportunities for students to receive post-secondary training** while still in high school:



# 5.

What are some **issues your students are struggling with outside of the classroom?**

- Time mgt how to study alone
- A lot of anxiety about uncertainty of a COVID world
- mental health
- Homelessness, Lack of Food, Drugs, Transportation
- Mental health
- Unstable family life

# Transportation & Infrastructure Focus Group Results

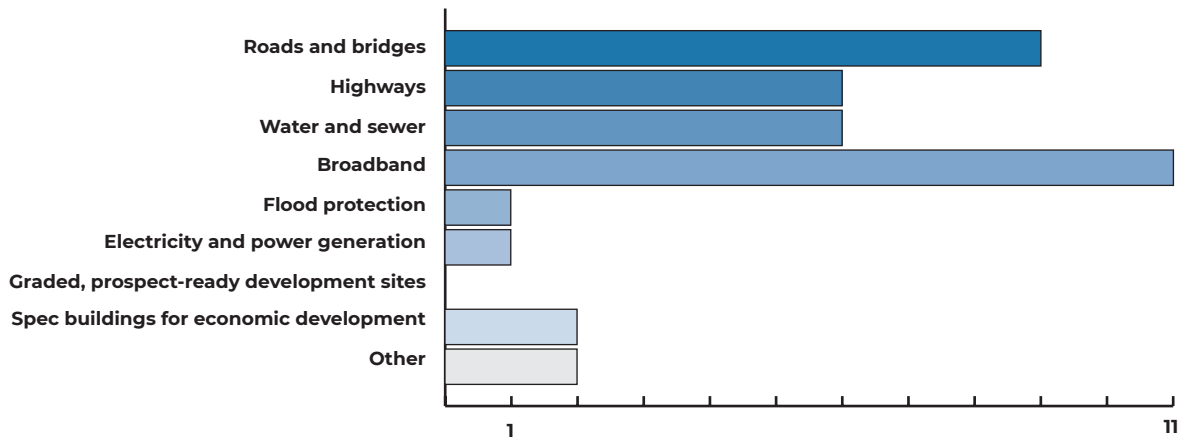
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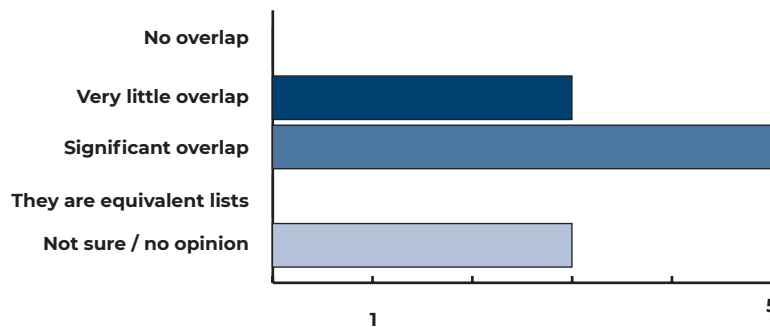
1.

What do you envision will be the **priority spending categories** for current and future American Rescue Plan and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act federal funding?



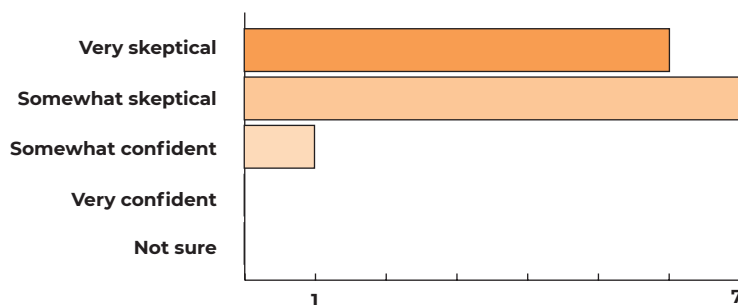
2.

**How much overlap** do you anticipate between projects positioned for federal stimulus money and those you would like included in the NCPA CEDS?



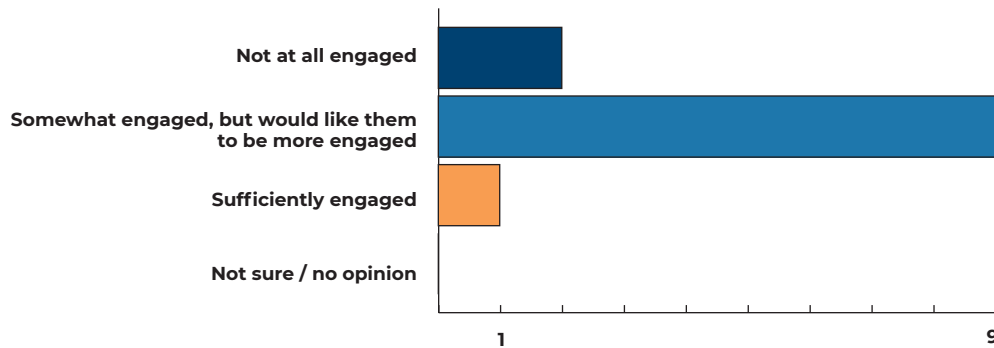
3.

Broadband connectivity is an issue that has come up often in stakeholder input. **How confident are you that current and future federal funding will address the community's most pressing capacity needs?**



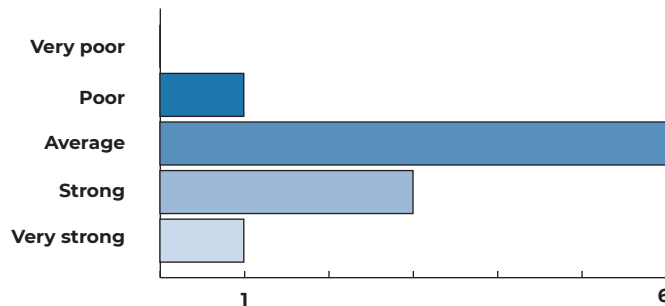
# 4.

**How engaged** are local employers in discussions around current and future transportation and infrastructure needs?



# 5.

How would you rate the **level of cooperation and coordination between local governments** in NCPA around transportation and infrastructure issues?



# 6.

How could **intra-regional cooperation** be improved in NCPA?

- Yes to municipal consolidation and school districts
- Consolidation of multiple entities for a stronger area
- By looking at more ways to share costs and have “win-wins” .. especially with large projects that cross county / municipal lines
- Local match is a challenge but the 6 counties has a reputation for not putting any money on the table and relying on state and federal government to pay for 100 %
- All have same project types but no answer on how to solve
- Aggregate local projects into a regional application for federal funding.
- Communication of projects and needs in region. No way of knowing if we are doing the same thing as our next door “neighbor”.
- Get over turf battles