



PUGET SOUND BUSINESS BAROMETER, 2011:

Challenges and opportunities in our local economy

Written and Developed by

Alison Peters, Alison Peters Consulting, in collaboration with
the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce

Designed and Published by

Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce

For more information or to order a copy of this report contact:

Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce at (206) 389-7200 or info@seattlechamber.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

3 Executive Summary

4 Comparison of 2010 to 2011

5 Snapshot of Respondents

6 [Map] Respondents by Zip Code

7-12 Survey Questions and Responses

13-25 Survey Results by Sector

i. Aerospace-Manufacturing

ii. Creative Arts-Culture

iii. Education

iv. Energy-Environment

v. Food-Beverage-Retail

viii. Government

vi Health Care

vii. Human Service

x. IT-Interactive Media

xii. Professional Services

xiii. Real Estate-Construction

xiv Tourism-Hospitality-Recreation

xv. Transportation

26 Survey Results by for Minority- and Woman-Owned Companies

27-29 Survey Results by Company Size

i. Small Companies (less than 10 employees)

ii. Mid-size Companies (10 to 100 employees)

iii. Large Companies (more than 100 employees)

30 Additional Information and Next Steps

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every day, it seems like there is a new statistic on the economy: housing starts, unemployment filings, personal income and spending, manufacturers' shipments, wholesale trade.

What all of the numbers mask is the voice of individual business operators and how they are coping with some of the most challenging economic conditions of their lifetime. To give voice to these businesses, the Seattle Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce partnered with King County elected officials, industry associations and chambers of commerce in 2010 to launch the first-ever Job Sector Survey. The survey, and the resulting "Regional Business Barometer" report, were the only comprehensive analysis of conditions for King County employers of all types and sizes.

In July 2011, the Chamber and its partner organizations fielded the second Job Sector Survey. This time, the survey was expanded to the four-county Puget Sound region, with special support from [King County](#), the [Prosperity Partnership](#), the [Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County](#), [enterpriseSeattle](#), the [Economic Alliance Snohomish County](#), the [Pierce County Economic Development Division](#), the [Kitsap Economic Development Alliance](#), [The Seattle Times](#) and the [City of Seattle's Office of Economic Development](#).

With 40 percent more responses than the 2010 report, this year's "Business Barometer" compares responses from the past year and is broken down by company size, sector and geographic location.

Here's what business operators are saying:

- **Small business is the engine of the economy:** Businesses with 6 to 100 employees are the most likely to hire.
- **Technology leads the way:** Sectors expecting to add head count include energy, aerospace and manufacturing, life sciences, information technology and interactive media. Sectors expecting to reduce head count include government, education and transportation.
- **The great disconnect:** Metrics from individual employers suggest stability—and even growth—but employers' perceptions of the overall economy are weak. Of the sectors expecting growth, only some say they will hire. Many others expect higher sales or new contracts but won't hire proportionately. This is especially true for sectors hurt badly by the decline in consumer spending in 2008 and 2009.
- **A quest for talent:** One in four employers say they have to recruit outside of the county to attract top talent.
- **A complex web:** There is universal appreciation for the high quality of life in the four-county region, but is less so than in 2010. Tangible items such as proximity to universities, networking and transportation infrastructure have risen in importance since last year.
- **Who you know AND what you know:** As the economy remains unpredictable, employers grow by peer networking and recruiting top talent.
- **Let's represent!** Women- and minority-owned businesses made up a low percentage of employers in high-growth sectors such as manufacturing, life sciences, energy and trade. On the other hand, women and minorities were well-represented in real estate, human services, education, retail, food and professional services.
- **Bottom line—education matters:** Seventy-nine percent of employers said specific degrees (BA, MBA) would make employees more valuable. Fifty-nine percent said vocational training.

COMPARISON OF 2010 TO 2011

SURVEY POPULATION

There are a few important distinctions between the sample population from last year's survey and the sample this year. This year's survey had:

- **A larger regional sample:** This year, our survey expanded to include employers in Kitsap, Snohomish and Pierce Counties. Seattle and King County still represent the majority of interviews, but our ability to make regional comparisons has enhanced significantly this year.
- **A larger sample size:** Our sample size increased by almost 40 percent this year (1,168 interviews last year compared to 1,688 this year).
- **More diversity:** Our 15 sectors were more balanced this year and we were more successful attracting participants from a variety of backgrounds.
- **More information about minority- and woman-owned businesses:** Women- and minority-owned businesses made up a low percentage of employers in high growth sectors, such as manufacturing, energy and environment and life sciences.
- **More information about our exporters:** We asked new questions this year about companies that export their products and services outside Washington state. We now know more about what sets this group apart and what they need to be successful.
- **More information about our hiring pool:** We gained greater insight into how employers approach hiring and why they might need to recruit workers outside their county.

SURVEY RESULTS

Comparing the results between 2010 and 2011 had other noticeable differences, including:

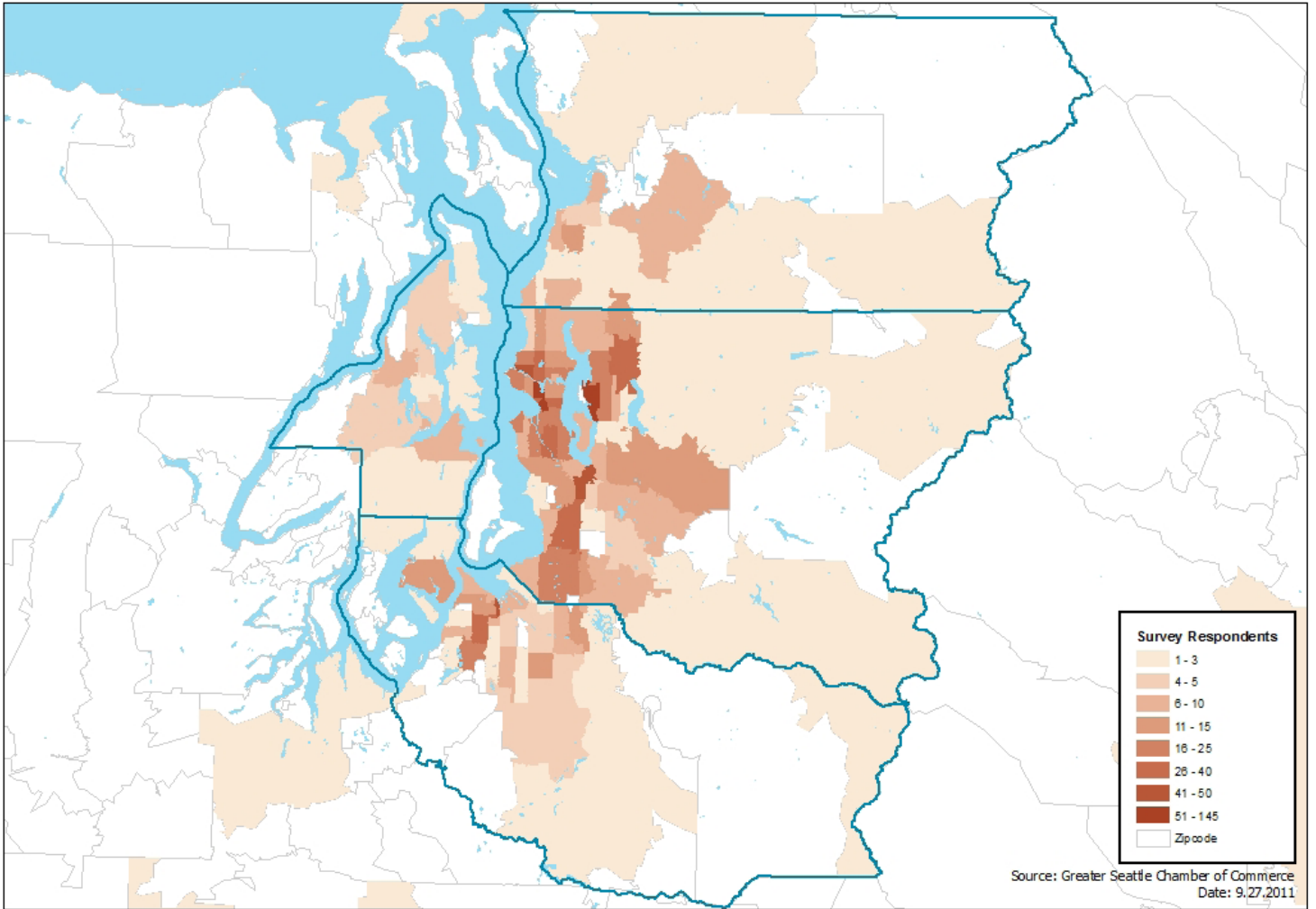
- Four point drop in number of businesses reporting layoffs
- Six point drop in number of businesses reporting they eliminated bonuses or raises
- Five point drop in businesses citing "government regulations" as a challenge to business growth
- Data on hiring, sales and expansion of products and services all the same

SNAPSHOT OF RESPONDENTS

Our sub-sample of 1,700 business include a wide range of regional employers. While many more companies responded to this survey, the following gave their express permission to use their name as part of this report:

444 Journeys LLC, 911 Media Arts Center, A&R Solar, Abodian Inc, Access Fire Protection Services, Inc, Achilles USA INC, adaQuest Inc., Advantage Manufacturing Technologies, Inc, AESI, Aleutian Yachts, Alexis Hotel, Alison Peters Consulting, All Freight International Inc., Allegra Marketing, Allen Partners, Allstate Insurance, Alphagraphics, ALSCO, Alzheimer's Association, An Artful Touch LLC, Andelcare, Angie Roarty Insurance - State Farm, Annie's Nannies, Inc., Antioch University Seattle, ArchEcology, LLC, Argosy Cruises & Tillicum Village, Artitudes Design Inc., Asante Salon, Ash Brokerage of Seattle, Attunix, AXA Advisors, Ballard Brothers Seafood and Burgers, Ballard NW Senior Center, Bank & Office Interiors, Bastyr University, Baxter Manufacturing, BBBSPS, BCRQ, Bel Red Heating & Air Conditioning, Inc., Betty Hageman Graphic Design, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Puget Sound, Bill Acker Consulting Services, Biofourmil of America, BlueWater Wireless LLC, BNSF Railway, Boeing, Boys & Girls Clubs of Bellevue, Breakwater Insurance Group Inc., Bremerton Housing Authority, Briere & Associates, Inc., BRITTON AND ASSOCIATE PLLC, Broadstripe, Brooks Brothers, Builders Hardware and Supply, Burien Natural Gas Service Inc., BW Construction, C.D. Stimson Co., C.I.R. Construction LLC, Callison, LLC, Camelion Design, CAMPS, Cancer Lifeline, Cartridge World, Cascadia Community College, CAST for Kids Foundation, Cathouse Pizza Sports and Spirits, Ceis Bayne East Strategic, CentralBanc Mortgage Corporation, Chameleon Technologies, Inc., CHE, Chemithon, Chipman & Martin LLC, Choice Carpentry, Christian Brotherhood Academy, Christmas House, City of Arlington, City of Bellevue, City of Bothell, City of Covington, City of Duvall, City of Everett Planning Department, City of Federal Way, City of Lake Forest Park, City of Lakewood, City of Mill Creek, City of Mukilteo, City of Port Orchard, City of Renton, City of Seattle, City of Shoreline, City of Tacoma, City University of Seattle, City Year, Clark County Budget Office, Classic Consignment, Clearpoint Credit Counseling Services, Clearwater Mortgage Bankers, Clinton's Music House, Inc., Cloud City Coffee, Clover Park School District, Coastal Hotels, Cocker Fennessy, Coldwell Banker Bain, Colehour+Cohen, Columbia West Properties Inc., Communities In Schools of Renton, Community Attributes Inc., Constructive Consulting, Continental Travel, Contour Countertops, Contour Engineering LLC, Costco, Country Kennels, Coventry LLC, Cowart-Gagnon, Inc, CRAB, Craig L. Michalak, Inc, Crew Leadership, Crisis Clinic, Crow's Wing Studio, Cugini Florists, Curtz meridian, Czهد Media, D L Anderson Insurance LLC, Damask Tattoo, D'Amelio, Dana M Myers, PsyD PLLC, Davis Wright Tremaine, DBE ELECTRIC, INC., DeepIntel Solutions, Dennis R Craig Construction Inc, Deontology LLC, Derby Distilling Company, Donald G Watts CPA, Doyle Printing Company, dvaDataStorage, Dynamic Language, EarthCorps, Economic Opportunity Institute, Edge Appraisal, Edoceo, Edward Jones & Co, EF Recovery/ ECS, El Centro de la Raza, EMP Museum, Employment Security Dept, Endicott Consulting Group, Inc., EnviroIssues, ERD Collections, Esterline Control Systems - Korry, Evergreen Public Affairs, Evluma, Exceed Martial Arts, Expedia CruiseShipCenters, F5 Networks, Fair Building Technology, FareStart, Farmers insurance, Fazzari, Inc., Fennec Consulting, Fife Sand & Gravel, Fingo Consulting, First Rate Mortgage, Floy Tag, Foster Wellness, Foundation for Early Learning, Fountain of Life Center, Fred Meyer/Kroger, Frederickson CloverCreek Community Council, Freehold, Fremont Community School, Fremont Dock Company, FSi consulting engineers, Furlong Communications, Inc., Geeks@Site, GeoResources, LLC, Getting Personal Imprinting LLC, Glassworks, Inc, Global Health Nexus, Global Resource Group, Globe Machine Manufacturing Company, Goldenview AFH, GPK Associates, Inc., GraceLeeArts.com, Gray Lumber, Great American Gaming Corporation, Greater Redmond TMA, Greater University Chamber of Commerce, Green River Community College, Greenwood Clean Energy, Greenwood Ohlund, Greer Steel, Inc., Greylock Consulting LLC, Griffin, Hill & Associates, Group Health Cooperative, Gryffin Solutions, GTM Transformations LLC, Habitat for Humanity of East King County, Hansen Belyea, Harbor Design Services, Harbor Properties, Hardware Northwest Co, Hardwick Research, Harmony Massage, Hazen Boosters Club, Health Insurance Team, Hearing, Speech & Deafness Center, Heinkel Financial Services, Hempstead, Hesik Real Estate, Highline Historical Society, Highline Technical Services, Inc., Hitachi Consulting, HNTB Corporation, Hollander Hotel Group, Home Makeovers Made Simple, Honeywell International, Hope Counseling & Consulting Services, Hot Mix Pavers, Inc., Hughes Group LLC, Human Resource Services Northwest, Humphrey Consulting, Hymer Electric, LLC, IASP, ID Integration, IllusionsHair Design, Inc., In The Wings Speaker Management Agency, INCA Engineers, Incentives By Design, Inter Harbor Trucking, InterIm Community Development Association, ITC, Ivar's Restaurants, J & W Marketing, Inc., d/b/a Bedrooms & More, J&K Associates, J. Keiser & Associates, J.Marsh Studios, Janet Wainwright Public Relations, Inc, Japan America Society of the State of Washington, Jeanne Anderson Consulting, Jewish Family Service, Jim Sullivan Insurance, Jodi Strohm Insurance Agency Inc, Joe Gates Construction, Inc, John L Scott, JTS, Kalani Packaging, Kauri Inv Ltd., KCTS 9, Keller Williams Commercial Real Estate, KEXP, KeyBank, King and Bunny's Appliances, King County Government, King County Library System, King County Wastewater Treatment Division, King County Water District number one11, King County Water District #90, Kitsap Mental Health Services, Kitsap Peninsula VCB, Kitsap Transit, Kollmar Sheet Metal, KPFF Consulting Engineers, KW media, Lakeside Professional Services, Landry Consulting DBA Landry Consultants, Laserfab, Law Office of Todd P. Kimball, Law Offices of Beth A. McDaniel, LB Hammond and associates, Leajak Concrete Const.inc, Lee Hecht Harrison, Lee Johnson Chevrolet, LexBlog, Libby Wagner & Associates, Link Staffing Services, Lions Bay Properties LLC, Literacy Source, Local Source Logos, Luby & Thomson, Lynnwood Bowl & Skate, MacDonald-Miller, MacMillan-Piper, Inc., MadeWithBacon, Magnolia Chamber of Commerce, Magnolia Garden Center, Magnum Print Solutions, MappaMundiGIS LLC, Marine View Florist, Market Leader, Inc., MarketFitz, Inc., Markey Machinery Company, Marsha Rivkin Center for Ovarian Cancer Research, Massey Counseling, Master's Touch Kitchen, Mattress Makers, Inc, MBDA Seattle Business Center at Community Capital Development, McSweeney Steel Co, Medallion Foods Inc., Media Footprint Group LLC, Medical Facility, Merrill Gardens at Renton Centre, Metal Benders, Inc., Metcalf, Metro Painting LLC, Metropolitan Improvement District, Metzler Realty Advisors, Inc., MFM Sensors Inc., MHT Insurance, Michaelson & Asso., Michele Savelle GIS & Graphic Design, Micro Cam Systems, Miles Sand and Gravel Co., MindSeekers, Inc, Miro Tea, Mithun, Mobile Electrical Distributors, Mobius Industries USA, Inc., Morgan Sound, Inc., Morley Machine Tool Alignment, Inc., Mortenson, MPSCRC/ Contractor for WA National Guard, MSG FACTORS LLC, Multi-Service Center, Mundiali, Mutual Materials Co., mynetworkcompany.com, N I Painting & Construction Co, National Concrete Cutting Inc., Nautilusnet, NBBJ, Nelson Legacy Group, Ness Consulting, NetMotion Wireless, Newland Real Estate Group, NewWood, Nora Carria and Passion Parties by Nora, North Star Insurance Services, LLC, NorthLight Power, Northwest Folklife, Northwest Grating Products, Inc., Northwest Minority Supplier Development Council, Northwest Recovery Centers, NorthWest Stone Fabricators, Not A Number Cards & Gifts, Novo Nordisk, NW Business Training Center, Nyhus Communications LLC, o 2 joy, O.M.Michael Quality Painting, LLC, Olegaard Distributing, LLC, Oly. Work. Devel Coun. & WorkSource, Olympan Precast, Inc, Olympic Printer Resources, Inc., Umbrella Inc. & Umbrella Consulting, Orion, Osborn Pacific Group Inc., Ostgard, otoki, Outsourced Information Systems, P&M, PACCAR Inc, Pacific Communications Consultants Inc., Pacific Continental Bank, Pacific Crest Industries, Pacific Fishermen Shipyard and Electric, Pacific Lawn & Home, Pacific Northwest Conference, United Methodist Church, Pacific Rim Energy Inc., Pacific Science Center, Page Ahead Children's Literacy Program, Paine Field, Parametrix, Parsons Brinckerhoff, Patricia & Co, Paul Goldberg & Associates, PAVCO Flight Center, PAWS, Payjunction, Peak Internet Inc, Pedersen Construction, Performance Dimensions Group, Perteet, Inc., Philips Publishing Group, Piazza Renton, Pierce County, Pierce County Clerk's Office, Pierce County Juvenile Court, Pierce Transit, Pierini, Pitney Bowes, Platinum Quality Contracting, Inc., PLS, Inc., PM Tech Consulting, PMT Solutins, Polyform US, Port of Seattle, Poulos Inn & Suites Hotel, Premera Blue Cross, Printrex Press, Professional Credit Service, Proto-Design, Inc., Providence Mount St. Vincent, Prudential NW Realty, Assoc, Puget Sound Coach Lines, Puget Sound Health Alliance, PwC, Quardev, Inc, RainCity CPA, RE/MAX Select R.E., ReadWagner, Rebecca Lane (sole proprietor), REI, Reid Middleton, Renton History Museum, Resource Stewards, LLC, Restructure Builders, Retrofit Home, Revolving Books, RFESD, RGIA, Rice Fergus Miller, Richmond Public Relations, Rite-Line Tax Service, Inc, RK Hall Homes, Inc, Rockin' Horse Dance Barn, LLC, Roland Resources Inc, Rowley Properties, Inc., Rule Seven, Sabotage & Dialogue Productions, Sage Advisors, Salmon Bay Community Lending, Salvin Manufacturing Company, Scarff Ford Auburn, Schippers & Crew, Inc., Schwabe, Williamson & Wyatt, PC, Screamer, Screen Actors Guild, SCS Consulting, Seaburg Construction, Seattle Central Community College, Seattle Children's, Seattle Community College, Seattle Divorce Services, Seattle Girls' School, Seattle International Foundation and Global Partnerships, Seattle Lighting, Seattle Scientific Corp, Seattle Theatre Group, Seattle Tile Company Inc., Seattle University, SeaWest Construction, Inc., Seidelhuber Iron Works, Seneca Group, Senior Aerospace, Service Paper Company, Sev Shoon, Shana Hormann Consulting, Shelley Clark Makeup, SHJ Electric, Shoreline Community College, SILVERMARK, Simply Seattle/Chocolate Box, SIR Construction, Skills Inc., Ski's painting Inc., Sky River Brewing, Skylark Carfe & Club, Skyway Luggage Co, Sleeping Bulldog Bed and Breakfast, Smash Hit Displays, Smith & Stark, Social Solutions Com Inc., SoCoCulture, Somali Youth and Family Club, Sound & Sea Technology, Inc., Sound Transit, Southeast Youth and Family Services, Spectrum Sign Co., Inc., SPEEA/IFPTE, SSRBI, STAC Inc., Stacy Plog Sup Co, Star Rentals, Steven J Crawford, DDS, FAGS, PS, Stevens Pass Winter Resort, Stina's Cellars, Stone Turtle Health, Strange Transmissions & Kustoms LLC, Strategies 360, Stuffed Cakes, LLC, Superior Linen Service, Supportive Housing Association, Sustainable Business Consulting, Sutter Paving Inc, Swanson & Seepersad Chiropractic, P.S., Sweatman-Young, Inc, Sweeney Conrad, Syntrix Biosystems, T - Max Inc, T.D. Wang Advertising Group, Tacoma Goodwill, TECT Aerospace, Teri DeGroot, Terra Organics, Terwedo Financial Services, LLC, Tetra Tech INCA, The AndoverCompany, The Art Studio, The Cas Companies, The Christensen Firm PLLC, The Cicerone Group, The Cleaning Authority, The Diversity Collaborative, The File Box, Inc., The Frause Group, The Godwin Group PLLC, The Gurus, The Herbfarm, The Law Offices of Matthew R. King, PLLC, The Lucks Company, The Rushing Company, LLC, The Salvation Army, the Service Board, The Unique Company, The Watermill, Inc., Theimer Insurance, Three Cups Of Tea, Thrifty Janitorial Service Inc., Thunderbird Logistics Group, TITAN Earthwork, Tool Gauge & Machine Works Inc, Torklift International, Tosca Ltd., Total Home Improvement Inc, Touchstone EcoServices, Towers Watson, Transformational Art, TRCVB, Trees 'n Bees, Inc., Trophy Cupcakes and Party, True North Land Surveying, Inc, TSC Incorporated, Twin Lakes Golf and Country Club, TwinStar Credit Union, United Systems Mechanical, LLC, University District Food Bank, University of WA Bothell, University of Washington, Urban Ecology, Urbia Fresh Cafe, URS, URS Corporation, US GSA, V8 Media, VA Puget Sound Health Care System, Valley Cities Counseling, Valley Medical Center, Vandeventer + Carlander Architects, Veritables Inc, VisiCorp, LLC, VTL Consulting LLC, WACAP, Waddell & Reed Financial Advisors, Wakerobin LLC, Wallace Properties, Inc., Wal-mart Stores Inc., Warmoth Guitar Products Inc., Warmoth Guitar Products, Inc., Washington Clean Technology Alliance, Washington Federa, Washington Federal Savings and Loan, Washington Marble Works, Washington State Arts Alliance, Washington State Bar Association, Washington State Department of Commerce, Washington Toxics Coalition, Washington Youth Soccer, Washington, State of, Watch Your BAC, Watershed Science and Engineering, Inc., WDC Seattle-King County, We Are Golden, We Shoot, Web Collective, Wells Fargo Advisors, LLC, Wellspring Family Services, Wesley Homes, Wesley Homes Foundation, Wesmar Company Inc., West 5, West Coast Printing Inc, Western Towboat Company, Westside School, Wet Appole media, Weyerhaeuser, Wille Inc., Windermere Professional Partners, Windermere Real Estate / Snohomish, Windermere Real Estate/Lake Tapps, Winter Heavy Industries, LLC, Wizard International, Woodland Park Zoo, WormWood SEO, WTIA, YMCA of Greater Seattle, Zvara Custom Wood Floors

RESPONDENTS BY ZIP CODE



SURVEY QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Q1
How would you classify your company?

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
For-profit	69.1%	1,160
Nonprofit	18.9%	317
Government	12.0%	202

Answered questions: 1,679
Skipped questions: 9

Q2
Do you consider your company to be a minority- or woman-owned business?

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	26.4%	441
No	73.6%	1,232

Answered questions: 1,673
Skipped questions: 15

Q3
What is the city and zip code for your company's primary employment location in WA State?

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
See map on page 6	99.8%	1,668
	99.1%	1,657

Answered questions: 1,672
Skipped questions: 16

Q4
What is your total number of employees in the four-county region (King, Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish)?

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Sole Proprietor	11.1%	185
1-5	21.0%	351
6-10	9.2%	154
11-50	18.6%	310
51-100	8.1%	135
101-500	16.0%	268
501-1,000	4.7%	78
1,001 or more	11.4%	190

Answered questions: 1,671
Skipped questions: 17

Q5
How many years has your company been in business?

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than three years	8.9%	149
Four to eight years	13.0%	218
Nine to 15 years	14.4%	241
More than 15 years	63.7%	1,067

Answered questions: 1,675
Skipped questions: 13

SURVEY QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Q6
What percentage of your workforce is unionized?

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
0%	79.2%	1,315
1-10%	3.0%	49
11-50%	7.7%	128
51-100%	10.2%	169
Answered questions: 1,661		
Skipped questions: 27		

Q7
What is your company's primary industry sector? (Please select one option)

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Aerospace	2.1%	35
Creative Arts and Culture (including Music/Entertainment)	4.0%	67
Information Technology	3.3%	55
Real Estate and Development	4.6%	77
Construction	7.0%	116
Energy (including Renewable and Clean Technology)	0.9%	15
Restaurants and Food and Beverage	3.0%	49
Government	11.3%	188
Healthcare	5.2%	86
Human Services (including Social and Faith services)	5.4%	90
Interactive Media (including Gaming Industry)	0.9%	15
International Trade	0.5%	8
Life Sciences	0.8%	14
Manufacturing	5.3%	88
Services (including Finance, Engineering, Legal, Insurance, Architecture and Communications)	28.0%	465
Retail	6.0%	99
Tourism, Hospitality and Recreation	3.9%	65
Transportation	2.3%	39
Education	5.1%	84
Military	0.3%	5
Answered questions: 1,660		
Skipped questions: 28		

Q8
What is your primary NAICS code?

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Contact George Allen at georgea@seattlechamber.com for detailed results		
Answered questions: 367		
Skipped questions: 1,321		

SURVEY QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Q9

What percentage of positions/jobs are unfilled in your organization?

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
None	51.5%	767
Less than 2%	19.7%	293
2-4%	8.8%	131
5-7%	5.8%	87
8-10%	3.5%	52
11-24%	2.8%	42
25-49%	1.2%	18
More than 50%	1.3%	19
Not sure	5.4%	80

Answered questions: 1,489

Skipped questions: 199

Q10

What specific areas of study, training or expertise would you recommend an employee have to make him/her more valuable and promotable?

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
1. Higher education (degrees, areas of study, etc.)	79.1%	1,043
2. Training (vocational, apprentice, intern, etc.)	59.4%	783
3. Other expertise	47.2%	623

Answered questions: 1,319

Skipped questions: 369

Q11

If you recruit employees from outside of the United States...

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Primary country for recruitment	47.6%	169
Secondary country for recruitment	32.7%	116

Contact George Allen at georgea@seattlechamber.com for detailed results

Answered questions: 335

Skipped questions: 1,333

Q12

If you recruit employees from outside the State of Washington (but within the US)...

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Primary country for recruitment	52.6%	267
Secondary country for recruitment	34.1%	173

Contact George Allen at georgea@seattlechamber.com for detailed results

Answered questions: 508

Skipped questions: 1,180

Q13

If you recruit employees from outside your primary county (but within Washington State)...

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Primary country for recruitment	53.2%	269
Secondary country for recruitment	42.3%	214

Contact George Allen at georgea@seattlechamber.com for detailed results

Answered questions: 506

Skipped questions: 1,182

SURVEY QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Q14 **Does your company do business of any kind with the military bases in the four-county region?**

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	22.5%	335
No	69.0%	1,030
Not sure	8.5%	127

Answered questions: 1,492
Skipped questions: 196

Q15 **In the past 12 months, do you think the overall business climate is...**

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Improving	28.7%	425
About the same	42.8%	633
Getting worse	25.4%	375
Not sure	3.1%	46

Answered questions: 1,479
Skipped questions: 209

Q16 **Do you expect your company's prospects to change during the next year?**

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Better than it is currently	43.2%	637
The same as today	28.5%	421
Worse than it is currently	14.8%	219
Not sure	13.5%	199

Answered questions: 1,476
Skipped questions: 212

Q17 **Do you expect to change number of employees the next year?**

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Increase number of employees	33.8%	499
Decrease number of employees	12.2%	181
No change	37.6%	555
Not sure	16.4%	243

Answered questions: 1,478
Skipped questions: 210

Q18 **What primary countries or states do you export to?**

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Countries	83.2%	479
States	78.3%	451
<i>Contact George Allen at georgea@seattlechamber.com for detailed results</i>		

Answered questions: 576
Skipped questions: 1,112

SURVEY QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Q19

What percentage of your products do you export domestically?

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
0%	69.0%	787
1-10%	8.2%	94
11-25%	4.1%	47
26-50%	5.4%	62
51-75%	2.9%	33
Greater than 76%	10.3%	117
Answered questions: 1,140		
Skipped questions: 548		

Q20

What percentage of your products do you export internationally?

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
0%	81.1%	924
1-10%	10.4%	118
11-25%	3.2%	36
26-50%	2.8%	32
51-75%	1.8%	20
Greater than 76%	0.9%	10
Answered questions: 1,140		
Skipped questions: 548		

Q21

What are the primary benefits of doing business in the four-county region? (Please select top three) employment location in Washington State?

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Access to Venture Capital	3.5%	40
Creative Energy	25.2%	291
Economy	39.1%	451
Entrepreneurial Spirit	23.0%	265
Labor/Management Relations	5.6%	64
Networking Opportunities	44.8%	517
Proximity to Universities/Training Programs	22.7%	262
Public Safety	5.7%	66
Skilled Labor Force	32.0%	369
Technology Focus	15.9%	183
Transportation Infrastructure	14.8%	171
Environmental Surroundings/Quality of Life	49.7%	573
Answered questions: 1,153		
Skipped questions: 535		

Q22

Which of the following are the most important for the success of your business? (Please select top three)

Answer options	Response%	Response Count
Ability to recruit to the Pacific Northwest	10.8%	144
Close proximity to customers	49.4%	656
Good lending environment	12.9%	171
Good transportation system and freight mobility	19.0%	252
Affordable employee health care programs/benefits	26.1%	347
Predictable and stable tax environment	24.9%	331
Reduced or predictable government regulations	20.9%	278
Support from government and community leaders	33.6%	446
Well-educated and trained workforce	45.1%	599
Be part of a vibrant and growing economy	57.4%	762
Answered questions: 1,328		
Skipped questions: 360		

SURVEY QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Q23

What changes have occurred during the past year? (Please select top three)

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Increased contracts and customer base	29.7%	400
Hired more employees	25.4%	342
Expanded products and services offered	29.8%	401
Postponed technology and capital investments	23.5%	317
Reduced product offerings	5.5%	74
Reduced inventory	7.3%	98
Reduced hours of operation	9.0%	121
Downsized workforce	26.2%	353
Eliminated bonuses or merit pay	16.3%	219
Reduced health and employee benefits	16.1%	217
Reduced pay for existing employees	9.9%	134
Reduced hours for existing employees	14.5%	195
No action has been taken	12.5%	169
Not sure	4.6%	62
Other	11.4%	153

Answered questions: 1,347

Skipped questions: 341

Q24

In the FUTURE, if your company moved jobs out of the four-county area, what would be the MOST important reasons? (Please select top three)

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Better government incentives	17.8%	170
Better labor/management relations	4.8%	46
Better transportation system	14.1%	135
Fewer regulations	24.2%	231
Lower land/infrastructure costs	21.2%	202
Lower taxes	34.7%	331
More affordable housing	13.2%	126
More available and trained workforce	11.9%	114
More convenient supply chain	5.1%	49
Reduced labor costs	17.3%	165
Closer to primary markets	28.3%	270
Closer to key labor sources	5.4%	52
Other (please specify)	29.1%	278

Answered questions: 955

Skipped questions: 733

Q25-26

What are major challenges to growing your business? (Please select top three)

Answer options	Response Percent	Response Count
Availability of financing	26.9%	340
Lack of industry clustering/partnering opportunities	7.7%	97
Cost of business real estate	15.2%	192
Lack of skilled employees	13.4%	169
Lack of market intelligence on opportunities	12.6%	159
Unfamiliar with workforce training programs	0.8%	10
Lack of space	6.2%	79
Too much competition	23.5%	297
Too few customers	34.1%	431
Low profit margin	27.8%	352
Government regulations, State, local and County	23.2%	293
Cost of labor	26.3%	333
Housing costs	7.0%	89
Too rapid of growth	2.1%	27
Other (please specify)	17.9%	227

Contact George Allen at georgea@seattlechamber.com for verbatim responses collected in Q26

Answered questions: 1,265

Skipped questions: 423

AEROSPACE-MANUFACTURING

“We will likely have to pay top dollar for the highly skilled employees we need to expand. Very few skilled employees are available.”



THE SAMPLE

The 115 companies from the aerospace and manufacturing sector are mostly small (54 percent have less than 50 employees) and the rest are either mid-size companies with up to 500 employees or large. Almost every company is for-profit, with six exceptions. Five percent of respondents work at Boeing. Many other aerospace and manufacturing suppliers also responded such as Senior Aerospace, Weyerhaeuser, Champion Metal, Markey Machinery Company and Polyform US. This is a high-export sector. More than 30 percent said they export at least half of their products within the United States and 13 percent said they export at least half of their products internationally.

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF DOING BUSINESS IN THE REGION

Sixty percent of the aerospace and manufacturing sector believes the primary benefit of doing business in the four-county Puget Sound Region is the area’s “environmental surroundings/quality of life” (up from 49 percent last year), followed by local “skilled labor force” (45 percent) and our “economy” (30 percent). These items were all mentioned in the 2010 survey as well, but the importance of skilled workers increased this year, likely due to growth within the sector.

WHAT WOULD MAKE EMPLOYEES MORE VALUABLE

Seventy percent of employers value vocational training for their employees. This is the only sector where respondents said both higher education and vocational training are equally important. Within the trades there is a need for employees with experience in welding, metals and woodworking, equipment repair and maintenance, assembly mechanics, and quality inspection. Companies also mentioned the need for employees with computer science skills, design skills and experience with lean principles. Like last year, there was very little mention of soft skills such as customer service or problem solving.

BUSINESS CHANGES AND PROSPECTS

More than half (51 percent) of businesses believe 2012 will be better than 2011, and 51 percent of all companies plan to hire in 2012, compared to 38 percent from last year’s survey. In contrast to last year’s survey, larger companies were generally more optimistic than small and mid-size employers. Employers with at least 500 people were more likely to say that their company’s business is up and they plan to add more staff in the coming year (61 percent plan to hire versus 51 percent overall).

BUSINESS CLIMATE

Among companies in this sector, 35 percent said business was improving. Among all sectors, 29 percent said the business climate is improving. Along these lines, we asked companies about what drives their business forward. The number one answer for this sector in 2011 wasn’t among the top three responses from last year—“well-educated and trained workforce” (49 percent). Other responses included in the top three choices were “good transportation system” (42 percent) and “proximity to customers (41 percent). However, companies admit “lower taxes” (48 percent), “lower land/infrastructure costs” (39 percent) and “fewer regulations” (34 percent) might cause them to consider moving jobs out of the region.

KEY TAKEAWAYS THIS YEAR

This sector had a good year: business increased, staffing increased and employers are optimistic about 2012. As a result, finding quality employees has soared in importance for this sector. Businesses can’t keep up with demand and grow their export business if they are spending too much time and money recruiting top talent.

CREATIVE ARTS-CULTURE

“This recession has been a game-changer, and like all small nonprofits we are struggling to develop a new model for business.”



THE SAMPLE

Our sub-sample of 54 businesses from the arts and culture sector include representation from Northwest Folklife, KCTS, Seattle Children’s Theater, the Washington State Arts Alliance, Renton History Museum and Evergreen City Ballet. We also heard from smaller arts companies, such as studios and theater production suppliers. Half of the organizations in this sector are nonprofit while half are for-profit. This sector is small (63 percent of the businesses have less than 10 employees) and anchored in Seattle (59 percent of businesses are based in Seattle while the remaining handful operate in the suburbs).

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF DOING BUSINESS IN THE REGION

Arts and culture businesses said three things make the Puget Sound region a good place for them to do business: “creative energy” (78 percent), “quality of life” (60 percent) and “networking opportunities” (54 percent). The importance of the economy was only mentioned by 22 percent of respondents this year and none of the other items tested—such as transportation improvements or access to venture capital—registered with more than 30 percent of respondents. Like last year, this finding suggests businesses in this sector may not be as interested or engaged with regional issues.

WHAT WOULD MAKE EMPLOYEES MORE VALUABLE

Ninety percent of arts and culture organizations said higher education makes employees more valuable (up from 75 percent last year). The need is not for students to simply learn the fundamentals of theater, film and art history, but to integrate contemporary skills such as events and facility management, arts marketing, fundraising and board development. New mentions this year were the importance of engaging with youth and the community. This is possibly a reaction to many organizations feeling like their central challenge is finding and securing loyal customers.

BUSINESS CHANGES AND PROSPECTS

In last year’s survey, 57 percent of arts and culture organizations predicted 2011 would be better for them than 2010. Instead, 33 percent downsized their staffs (compared to 26 percent among all employers). Moreover, 35 percent of employers say the business climate is “getting worse,” compared to 25 percent among all employers.

BUSINESS CLIMATE

Concern is high in this sector because 76 percent of organizations believe their success is most closely tied to “being a part of a growing and vibrant economy” (76 percent). “Support from government and community leaders” (67 percent) and “proximity to customers” (57 percent) is also key. This sector can’t grow, or even remain stable, with cuts in government support and consumer spending.

This year there were more complaints about taxes and government regulation. In addition, “too few customers” (mentioned by 44 percent), “low profit margins” (32 percent) and “scarce financing” (20 percent) remain major challenges.

KEY TAKEAWAYS THIS YEAR

This sector had a tremendously difficult year: sales were down, prompting layoffs and program cuts. Many organizations facing economic challenges need savvy and enthusiastic leaders to bring in new customers.

EDUCATION

“Much of our work is targeted at under-served audiences, requiring philanthropic support to do it.”



THE SAMPLE

Our sub-sample of 84 educational organizations includes representation from University of Washington, Seattle University, Seattle Public Schools, Shoreline Community College, Bastyr University, Tacoma Community College and nonprofit organizations such as Foundation for Early Learning. Sixty-seven percent of the survey respondents work for a nonprofit school or organization, 11 percent are for-profit, and 22 percent are state-funded government institutions. Within the sample of 84 organizations, small, mid-size and large groups were all well-represented.

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF DOING BUSINESS IN THE REGION

Educators say “quality of life/environmental surroundings” is the top benefit of this region (54 percent) followed by our “creative energy” (45 percent) and “proximity to universities/colleges” (also 45 percent).

WHAT WOULD MAKE EMPLOYEES MORE VALUABLE

More than 90 percent of educators believe their employees will be more valuable with higher education degrees (92 percent). One big difference between 2010 and 2011 is that the percentage of educators wanting employees with vocational training shot up from 35 percent to 54 percent this year. On educators’ wish lists: employees with training in counseling, financial aid, business, marketing, and experience with special populations (i.e. refugees, special needs, adolescent girls).

BUSINESS CHANGES AND PROSPECTS

Last year, we reported that educators were “cautiously optimistic.” This year, however, the mood is much more negative. Educators believe more cuts and layoffs are coming in the next 12 months, and only 25 percent of organizations predict 2012 will be better for them than 2011 (down from 45 percent last year). What’s more, more than 40 percent said layoffs occurred at their workplace last year, 15 percentage points higher than the survey average, and another 26 percent said they did not invest in technology purchases. These numbers are all significantly outside the norm.

BUSINESS CLIMATE

In relation to the overall business climate, educators also provided a gloomy outlook: 17 percent think the economy is improving, while 28 percent feel that it’s getting worse. An explanation for this prevailing attitude is that the driving factors for success within this sector seem to be in jeopardy: “a well-educated, trained workforce” (58 percent) and “support from government and community leaders” (54 percent). While most organizations do not expect to move jobs out of the region, 37 percent indicate they would like to be closer to their primary markets.

Nonprofit and government-funded educational organizations named several specific concerns. Their workforce often earns the median income or less, so the cost of housing remains a top concern in this region. Furthermore, many respondents highlighted a frustration with increasing demands on resources and funding drops. One of the consequences of these ongoing challenges is worry about “labor costs,” which more than a third of educators said are the biggest hurdle to growth, followed by “too much competition” (33 percent) and “availability of financing” (29 percent).

KEY TAKEAWAYS THIS YEAR

The education sector was one of the hardest-hit industries last year. While it didn’t lose as many jobs as the government sector, there is an overwhelming sense among respondents that the work environment will not improve in the coming year.

ENERGY-ENVIRONMENT

“The solar industry relies on government incentives to grow, but right now our incentive structure hinders our velocity of growth because commercial and nonprofit clients receive no benefit for adopting our technology. We also have to provide health care benefits to our workers to retain quality employees. There is no credit, break, or other incentive for us because we have too many well-paid employees, but not enough employees to benefit from group buy-in plans.”



THE SAMPLE

This year, we heard from 15 companies in the energy and environment market. Most of the participants come from the private sector (Pacific Rim Energy, A&R Solar, Seattle Scientific Corporation) but we also captured the opinions of utilities such as Puget Sound Energy and Seattle City Light. Twenty-seven percent of the businesses are large (more than 500 employees) but the rest are small (under 50).

DOING BUSINESS IN THE REGION

Seventy-five percent of the energy and environment sector believes the primary benefits of doing business here are the region’s “environmental surroundings/quality of life” (75 percent) and “skilled labor force” (75 percent), followed by “proximity to universities/training” (42 percent). These last two items—related to workforce training—have grown in importance in the past 12 months as this sector has continued to grow and invest in research.

WHAT WOULD MAKE EMPLOYEES MORE VALUABLE

Valuable employees from this sector have a considerable amount of education and training. Eighty-five percent of employers in this sector think higher education makes employees more valuable. Like last year, most survey takers prefer job candidates and employees with masters-level education. The most relevant degree programs within this sector include engineering, business and political science. In addition, 77 percent of respondents said vocational training was important in skills such as welding, fluid mechanics and electrical generation.

BUSINESS CHANGES AND PROSPECTS

Optimism in this sector continues to climb. Fifty-four percent of the energy and environment sector thinks 2012 will be a better year than 2011 (up from 46 percent last year) and a whopping 70 percent plan to hire in the coming year (also up from 43 percent who expected to hire last year). Sales figures from last year are also impressive—39 percent said they grew their customer base, 10 points higher than the survey average.

So what drives success within the energy and environment sector? Energy leaders point to two things: “being part of a vibrant, growing economy” (54 percent) and also “support from government and community leaders” (also 54 percent). This year, private sector companies noted the value in support from government leaders (i.e. tax incentives from the state of Washington), whereas last year, only public-sector utilities recognized this as something that drives their success.

BUSINESS CLIMATE

Energy companies have a sunny perspective on the regional economy (46 percent say things are getting better). However, there is concern about the impact of government regulations (69 percent cited this their biggest challenge to growth) and access to financing (46 percent).

KEY TAKEAWAYS THIS YEAR

Overall optimism, company sales figures and the potential for job growth are very strong in this sector. Once again, this sector is a top performer and one to keep watching.

FOOD-BEVERAGE-RETAIL

“The state and counties HAVE to do something about sales tax equity between local brick and mortar stores and out-of-state/internet stores. Ten percent off the top is impossible to compete with. Brick and mortar storefronts “sell” the product but non-sales tax vendors reap the benefit.”



THE SAMPLE

Almost 150 businesses from this sector completed the survey, including restaurants such as Rovers, John Howie Steakhouse, Trophy Cupcakes and Wild Ginger. A mix of both small and mid-size retailers also responded, such as REI, Swanson’s Nursery, Greenbaum Home Furnishings and Ballard Hardware. Almost 40 percent of respondents say their business is minority or woman-owned, which is higher than the survey’s average of 26 percent.

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF DOING BUSINESS IN THE REGION

The food, beverage and retail sector believes the primary benefit of doing business in the region is our “environmental surroundings/ quality of life” (59 percent), followed by our “economy” (45 percent) and “networking opportunities” (39 percent).

WHAT WOULD MAKE EMPLOYEES MORE VALUABLE

Like last year, employers from this sector were more likely to think vocational training would make employees more valuable compared with higher education (64 percent versus 52 percent). Sixty-three percent of employers also value “other” skills, often defined as leadership experience, a strong work ethic, foreign language skills and knowledge of specific industries such as gaming/ casinos, brewing or coffee. Depending on whether the business was a retail store or in the food/beverage subgroup, the specific vocational skills employers look for vary widely. Within the restaurant industry, employers want staff with experience in a variety of food preparation (i.e. baking, pastry) as well as food service. Sommeliers and wine technicians are also a growing need. Employees with management skills and sales and marketing experience are also valuable because this is a sector challenged by competition and low-profit margins. On the retail side, employers said they want their staff trained in IT, merchandising, import/export, distribution and warehousing, accounting and HR.

BUSINESS CHANGES AND PROSPECTS

Restaurants and retailers may approach 2012 quite differently depending on how the rest of 2011 turns out. What we know is that our respondents from the restaurant and food subgroup were much more aggressive about cost cutting in 2010 compared to the retail subgroup. For example, 31 percent of restaurants downsized staff and 29 percent reduced hours for their employees. Among retailers, only 15 percent downsized staff and 17 percent reduced staff hours. Looking forward, 53 percent of restaurant employers told us they feel 2012 will be a better year for them, while only 40 percent of retailers feel the same.

BUSINESS CLIMATE

Seventy-one percent of businesses in this sector say their success is driven by “close proximity to customers.” In addition, 62 percent say “being part of a vibrant, growing economy” is important, followed by a “predictable and stable tax environment” (31 percent). These items were all mentioned last year as driving success for this sector.

KEY TAKEAWAYS THIS YEAR

This sector would be motivated to move jobs outside the region if they could pay lower taxes somewhere else and increase their profit margins. Addressing taxes and low profits were more important in this year’s survey and will remain constant challenges until the economy improves.

GOVERNMENT

“Government lags behind the rest of the economy. We assist developing the economy, but also offer the safety net. Streamlining is difficult and divisive. There is no good time or easy way to set priorities and to offer less. There is too much discussion in generalities, not specifics, and little stomach to make choices.”



THE SAMPLE

This year, almost 200 leaders from regional government participated in the Job Sector Survey, representing 12 percent of the total sample. Last year, only four percent of responses came from this sector. This year's responses reflected a unique and challenging 12-month period. Participants included city and county staff from various departments, as well as executive or management staff. Sound Transit, the Port of Seattle, the Downtown Seattle Association, and some small consulting firms that work almost exclusively within the government sector also placed themselves in this category.

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF DOING BUSINESS IN THE REGION

Our “environmental surroundings/quality of life” (50 percent) was identified as the top benefit of the four-county region, followed by a “skilled labor force” (34 percent) and “networking opportunities” (30 percent). All of these assets, however, were mentioned with far less intensity than private and nonprofit sector respondents.

WHAT WOULD MAKE EMPLOYEES MORE VALUABLE

More than 90 percent want employees with four-year degrees, well above the survey average of 80 percent. The degrees or experience most often mentioned as valuable included public administration, law enforcement, engineering, regional planning, finance (MBAs), economics and public policy. Sixty-four percent of respondents also said vocational skills were valuable.

BUSINESS CHANGES AND PROSPECTS

The government sector shed more jobs than any other sector from our survey in the past 12 months. Program and service cuts were also implemented at the local level. Some people commented that government employment grew too rapidly during the 2000s and now we may be overreacting by cutting too much. Sixty-one percent of respondents said there were jobs lost at their workplace, compared to the average of 26 percent. In addition, 36 percent postponed technology purchases and 34 percent reduced health benefits. Hiring is not anticipated (only 13 percent expect to add head count) and prospects for 2012 are mostly negative (36 percent say next year will be “worse” than 2011, 33 percent say “the same,” and 19 percent say “better”).

BUSINESS CLIMATE

In comparison to the private and nonprofit sectors, government employers and leaders were the most pessimistic about the regional business climate. (Only 18 percent say it's improving and 45 percent say things are “getting worse”). Many individual comments that were woven into survey answers also suggested an overall negative impression of the economy. That being said, moving jobs out of the area is not typically an option for government. Incentives from another city, a better transportation system, or the opportunity to hire cheaper workers might spur some relocation, but not much overall.

KEY TAKEAWAYS THIS YEAR

Local government offices are still in the middle of working through deep cuts in staff and programs. With no relief in sight, existing staff face the double-whammy of low office morale and backlash in their community.

HEALTH CARE

“Our business is fed by employees of employers in our area. When their benefits are cut for healthcare, dentistry is less affordable and becomes needs based rather than wants based. Emergent care is up and preventive care is down.”



THE SAMPLE

Almost 90 health care companies participated in this survey. Fifty-eight percent of survey takers from this sector are for-profit and 41 percent are nonprofit. We heard from insurers, research organizations, clinic staff from many specialties, nursing and assisted living centers, and nonprofits such as PATH, the American Cancer Society, and several local hospitals.

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF DOING BUSINESS IN THE REGION

Forty-five percent of employers believe the primary benefit of doing business in the region is the region’s “environmental surroundings/quality of life,” followed by “proximity to universities/training programs” (43 percent) and then “networking opportunities” (42 percent). Networking was not mentioned as a primary benefit in last year’s survey.

WHAT WOULD MAKE EMPLOYEES MORE VALUABLE

Eighty-five percent of employers in this sector think higher education makes employees more valuable in their jobs and 65 percent of employers need staff with vocational training. Both of these figures are higher than the survey’s overall average, which illustrates the reality of how much education is required to be successful in this sector. Health care is undeniably a competitive field. Feedback on this question was short and to the point, in that desired degrees were simply listed out: RN, MSW, LPN and so on. Some of the more insightful answers noted that employees who know and understand new changes to Medicaid and Medicare laws will be valuable, in addition to staff with experience in care giving, health care administration, billing/insurance and informatics.

BUSINESS CHANGES AND PROSPECTS

There are big changes coming to the health care sector in the coming two years as federal health care reform rolls in and Washington’s health care exchange begins. The anticipation of change (and fewer uninsured families) breeds optimism within this sector. Fifty-one percent say their business will be better next year and only 11 percent think it will be worse. Forty-one percent say they plan to increase head-count.

Looking ahead, health care companies said their biggest challenge right now is “too few customers” (39 percent) and then “government regulations” (27 percent). The challenge of not having enough customers was not mentioned last year at all, which points to more uninsured and how even those with insurance have cut back on their unnecessary health care spending.

BUSINESS CLIMATE

“Success” for the health care sector is defined by “close proximity to customers” (57 percent), “being part of a vibrant, growing economy” (53 percent) and a “well-educated and trained workforce” (48 percent).

KEY TAKEAWAYS THIS YEAR

Health care was a top-performing sector in 2010 and it lost that position this year (the sector is now in the middle of the pack) mostly due to cutbacks in consumer spending, which have caused a slowdown in job growth.

HUMAN SERVICES

“The continued poor economy, coupled with a dramatic increase in need, continue to place inordinate stress on nonprofits particularly when faced with the instability of pretty much all our major funding sources. Add in the continued high cost of health care, housing, and the need for our work force to be highly-skilled, experienced and credentialed.”



THE SAMPLE

This year, participation from this sector increased two and a half times, from 35 to 90 respondents. The nonprofits responding include large organizations such as the Boys & Girls Club (various locations) and the United Way of King County, as well as smaller organizations such as University District Food Bank and Kitsap Mental Health Services.

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF DOING BUSINESS IN THE REGION

“Networking opportunities” (62 percent) soared to the top of the list of benefits of doing business in the four-county region (up from 47 percent in 2010). Also important to this sector is “environmental surroundings/quality of life” (39 percent) and “economy” (39 percent).

WHAT WOULD MAKE EMPLOYEES MORE VALUABLE

For the human services community, the past 12 months have been a roller coaster of ride of wild ups and downs. This sector is facing both the challenges of growth amidst uncertain funding, and huge increases in need at food banks, health clinics, and child care centers. This may be why human services reported a growing demand for employees with four-year degrees (83 percent in 2010 to 96 percent this year). The majority of respondents also want employees with masters-level schooling in fields such as social work, nursing, counseling, public health, education and nonprofit management. Vocational training is also important to 50 percent of human services nonprofits. This year, the experience most valuable within this sector includes fundraising, media production, youth experience, call center management and social media expertise. Many people say internships are an important way for entry-level staff to gain these skills.

BUSINESS CHANGES AND PROSPECTS

Compared to last year, human services leaders have a more conservative perspective on next year’s projections (34 percent say next year will be “better,” compared to last year, when 70 percent said the same). It’s possible that worries about private fundraising and government cuts are the reason for scaling back projections. In fact, when asked about the biggest challenge to their growth, “Financing” was the top answer (26 percent) this year, but not nearly as big a worry in last years’ survey (14 percent).

BUSINESS CLIMATE

Human services nonprofits are divided about the health of the regional economy: 51 percent say the economy is “the same” while the remaining respondents either say things are “improving” (23 percent) or “getting worse.” (also 23 percent). Like the government sector, this group of business leaders is unlikely to leave the area, even though low profit margins, housing costs and increasingly expensive workers are a challenge. The fact that more than 90 percent of local agencies have been in business for more than 15 years tie many of them to their communities.

KEY TAKEAWAYS THIS YEAR

Human services nonprofits are serving a growing client population with fewer resources than ever before. This new paradigm requires an increasingly talented and local employee pool to help organizations navigate creative fundraising strategies and business management, while still providing quality service.

IT-INTERACTIVE MEDIA

“Software developers and designers are scarce and expensive. Our primary challenge is not having the right product/market fit and marketing it well enough. Some of that is impacted by terrible time-consuming regulations, some by lack of local investment capital.”



THE SAMPLE

The 67 companies from the information technology and interactive media sector include large firms like Accenture and F5 Networks, as well as dozens of small and mid-size start-up technology companies such as FiberCloud (high speed internet co-location services), Attunix (software solutions) and Chameleon Technologies (IT staffing).

Ninety-four percent of companies in this sector are for-profit. Seventy percent have less than 50 employees.

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF DOING BUSINESS IN THE REGION

Sixty-four percent of employers believe the primary benefit of doing business here is the region’s “technology focus,” followed by “networking opportunities” (49 percent) and “economy” (36 percent). This sector’s emphasis on technology is not surprising, but it is four times higher than it is among all employers in the survey. Within this sector, our “quality of life/environmental surroundings” (usually the number one benefit for all sectors) was not perceived to be a top benefit of the region.

WHAT WOULD MAKE EMPLOYEES MORE VALUABLE

Eighty-three percent of survey respondents want their employees to have higher education. Both graduate and undergraduate degrees are essential, depending on the position. Survey takers mentioned the need for students with degrees in physics, math, software development and computer science, as well as relevant software certifications. The Project Management Professional (PMP) certification was mentioned often. This sector also values “vocational training” (58 percent) and “other” experience (52 percent) including: consulting experience, customer support experience, and knowledge of data storage, web design, networking technology, social media, online tools and game development.

BUSINESS CHANGES AND PROSPECTS

Optimism is strong within this sector. Sixty percent of the IT and interactive media sector think 2012 will be a better year than 2011, and 55 percent are poised to add employees next year. Fifty-eight percent of companies expanded their product lines last year (compared to 49 percent last year) and 60 percent saw an increase in their customer base (compared to 39 percent last year). These are huge increases from last year’s survey and some of the best numbers from any sector in this survey. In addition, 46 percent of companies hired staff in 2010 (compared to 33 percent last year) while only 17 percent laid off workers.

BUSINESS CLIMATE

Thirty-nine percent of IT and interactive media companies say they would move jobs from the region to an area with lower taxes. Lower land costs and government incentives are also attractive benefits for this sector because wages and benefits remain competitive.

KEY TAKEAWAYS THIS YEAR

While this has been a good year for the sector overall, leaders know many consumers and business customers have cut back on non-essential technology purchases. This sector needs to stay relevant and affordable to grow. New companies need start-up financing.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

“It’s a foggy trail ahead and very hard to plan. The financing restrictions for our customers and our company is significantly limiting demand and our ability to finance growth.”



THE SAMPLE

Like last year, this subgroup of respondents represents the largest sector in the Job Sector Survey (465). Hundreds of mostly small business owners (71 percent are under 50 employees) gave us feedback on their challenges, described their 2010 success stories and contributed ideas to improve the business climate in the region. This sector includes professionals from the financial services industry (planning, accounting), architecture and design, sales and marketing, and law.

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF DOING BUSINESS IN THE REGION

This year, there is an increase of approximately 20 points in the value of “Networking opportunities” within the professional services sector (39 percent in 2010 to 58 percent this year). Networking was identified as beneficial last year, but one of the biggest headlines from this year’s survey is the overall trend of networking increasing in importance. Our “environmental surroundings/quality of life” and “economy” remain top benefits of the region at 52 percent and 42 percent, respectively. Business owners in this sector also place high importance on being physically close to their customers (56 percent say this helps them be successful).

WHAT WOULD MAKE EMPLOYEES MORE VALUABLE

Many employers in professional services need employees with at least an undergraduate education, and master’s degrees are important too (86 percent). In addition, 50 percent of employers identified vocational skills and experience. Business owners also named several “other” skills that are often learned on the job or in an internship. These included writing skills, an entrepreneurial sense, analytic and technical experience, specific client experience (i.e. “not just working in a vacuum”), and general interpersonal skills.

BUSINESS CHANGES AND PROSPECTS

Overall, 52 percent of professional services providers think 2012 will be a better year than 2011. Optimism is slightly higher among firms with less than five employees (about 56 percent) and slightly lower among very large companies with more than 100 employees (49 percent). The trend first observed last year still holds today: most sole proprietors do not plan to hire (63 percent plan no increase in head count), but about 45 percent of firms between 6 and 50 employees do plan to hire next year.

BUSINESS CLIMATE

Overall, the rate of job loss within professional services was lower than the average for the entire sample population: 17 percent compared to 26 percent. However, among firms with 51 to 100 employees, it was a very volatile year and 38 percent downsized in the last 12 months. Fewer sales and product or service line expansions were reported, and the biggest challenge mentioned by businesses of this size was “too much competition.” Smaller and larger businesses did not mention this challenge with the same level of intensity. Their challenges were “too few customers” or “lack of market intelligence on opportunities.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS THIS YEAR

Mid-size service firms grew rapidly during strong economic times, and invested time and resources training their employees. But today, there is more competition and fewer government contracts ready to start. These factors have hurt this subgroup’s ability to add jobs this year.

REAL ESTATE-CONSTRUCTION

“Our bottom line is shrinking as revenue from the collapsed housing market has unfolded. This has forced difficult expense reducing measures as opposed to growth initiatives.”



THE SAMPLE

The second largest sub-sample from this survey included 193 businesses from the real estate and construction industry. Realtors, large and small home improvement stores, engineering firms, and developers and firms within the trades (asphalt, painting, roofing), were all represented in the survey. The vast majority of businesses in this category are small (under 50 employees) or mid-size. About 15 percent of the companies have some union members.

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF DOING BUSINESS IN THE REGION

Fifty-six percent of the real estate and construction sector believe the primary benefit of doing business in this area is the region’s “economy” (56 percent), followed by our “environmental surroundings/quality of life” (43 percent) and “networking opportunities” (37 percent).

WHAT WOULD MAKE EMPLOYEES MORE VALUABLE

A higher percentage of respondents (67 percent) favor vocational training and skills more than higher education (62 percent). Last year, we posted different priorities: 68 percent of business leaders thought higher education was important, compared to 59 percent who mentioned vocational training. While undergraduate and graduate degrees are still important (especially business, construction management, law, planning, engineering, development and English), there is growing interest in employees with two-year degrees or certificates in all trades, real estate, property management, LEED design and architecture. Forty-six percent of employers also mentioned other valuable skills and experience, such as financial literacy (including basic accounting, cash flow, payroll), communication skills, sales and customer service.

BUSINESS CHANGES AND PROSPECTS

Forty-three percent of businesses from this sector believe 2012 will be better than 2011, 29 percent think business next year will be the same as in 2011, and 13 percent fear business will be worse. In comparison to other industries tied directly to consumer spending—such as health care or arts and culture—real estate and construction employers are relatively positive about their business prospects. Only seven percent of employers anticipate layoffs, but plans to hire are conservative (30 percent plan to add staff in the next year).

BUSINESS CLIMATE

Sixty-seven percent of businesses in this sector say their success is driven by “being part of a vibrant and growing economy” (63 percent). Almost half (48 percent) also say “close proximity to customers” and a “predictable tax environment” (42 percent) help drive success. Being close to customers is much more important in this year’s survey than last year (48 percent versus 35 percent). Comments and complaints about excessive regulation, fees and small business taxes are more prevalent in this sector than others. For example, when asked what would cause companies to relocate jobs, 50 percent said “fewer government regulations” (up 16 points from last year), followed by “lower taxes” (46 percent). Looking ahead, access to financing is critical in order to grow (50 percent), but increasingly difficult to find.

KEY TAKEAWAYS THIS YEAR

The sector is still a low-performing sector, but this year was better than prior years in many regards: layoffs slowed down (33 percent downsized versus 43 percent in last year) and sales figures are up (23 percent increased sales compared to 18 percent from the prior year).

TOURISM-HOSPITALITY-RECREATION

“The local government doesn’t support tourism and hospitality like other markets. We cannot compete with other markets our size, therefore, visitors go elsewhere and all associated businesses (restaurants, attractions, service industry) suffers from it. We need an allocation that would help promote Washington and Seattle as a destination to become competitive.”



THE SAMPLE

The 65 companies in the tourism sector include mostly mid-size and large hotels, golf resorts and several local recreation programs (i.e. bowling, soccer, martial arts). More than 80 percent of the companies from this sector have been in business eight years or more, so they have experience with the ups and downs of market cycles.

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF DOING BUSINESS IN THE REGION

Companies in the tourism sector say the top three primary benefits of doing business in Puget Sound are the region’s “economy” (57 percent) followed by our “environmental surroundings/quality of life” (48 percent) and “networking opportunities” (45 percent). Like many sectors, the importance of networking has increased in the last year (from 38 percent to 45 percent in one year). Because this is a well-connected industry, business relationships, repeat business and referrals are critical to sustainability and growth.

WHAT WOULD MAKE EMPLOYEES MORE VALUABLE

This year, 75 percent of companies said vocational training was valuable and 71 percent mentioned higher education. In last year’s survey, only 55 percent mentioned vocational training for their staff—an increase of 20-percentage points in one year. Employers may be seeing fewer employees able to afford or finish a four-year college degree, so vocational training could be trending more valuable. Most employers want to see job candidates with training in customer service, culinary arts, landscaping, event planning, public relations, franchise operations and general office management. Foreign language skills were also cited as particularly valuable.

BUSINESS CHANGES AND PROSPECTS

Fifty-one percent of tourism businesses believe 2012 will be better than 2011 and 25 percent think business next year will be similar to 2011. These figures represent a significant reduction in optimism in the last 12 months (61 percent were optimistic last year). Some businesses will be hiring (32 percent) but another 32 percent do not plan to increase staff. This is a sector trying hard to be cautious and thoughtful about its spending; for example, in the last year, almost 40 percent of tourism companies tried to hold down costs by postponing major technology purchases rather than lay off workers, eliminate bonuses, or cut health care insurance. The three biggest challenges last year and this year remain the same: “too few customers” (45 percent), “too much competition” (41 percent) and “cost of labor” (37 percent).

BUSINESS CLIMATE

This sector interfaces with the public on a daily basis. Perhaps as a result, business leaders from this sector have a more positive perception of the overall business climate in the region compared to other business leaders (39 percent of respondents in this sector say the economy is “improving” versus 29 percent overall). That being said, this sector has seen cuts to the state tourism program, competition for conventions from other states and understands how fragile its profit margins can be when consumer confidence is low.

KEY TAKEAWAYS THIS YEAR

The results from this sector tell an important story: businesses see economic improvement but not enough for them to spend money hiring new staff. In addition, employers have seen the impact of the ongoing recession on their employees’ ability to get training and education.

TRANSPORTATION

“In this industry, other states are much more small business friendly. They offer tax incentives, lower leases in large cities, lower property taxes and better small business representation with fewer regulations.”



THE SAMPLE

Nearly 40 businesses from the transportation sector participated in the survey this year. Participants included employees of car dealerships, trucking companies, BNSF Railway, cargo carriers, public transit providers, and a smattering of engineering and transportation consultants. Almost a third of employers export their products outside of Washington. This sector has a relatively high percentage of union workers (about 30 percent).

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF DOING BUSINESS IN THE REGION

There is consensus within the transportation sector that “transportation infrastructure” (83 percent) and our “economy” (35 percent) make this region a desirable place to do business. Being close to customers is also an important factor for successful transportation companies (42 percent). It’s notable that only 13 percent of transportation businesses feel the “Quality of life/environmental surroundings” creates a positive impact for their sector.

WHAT WOULD MAKE EMPLOYEES MORE VALUABLE

What’s interesting about the transportation sector is that employers place an equally strong value on both higher education (73 percent) and vocational training (73 percent) for current and future employees. Employers in this sector seek degrees in engineering, planning or general business, and value vocational skills, such as mechanics, project management, customer service, and warehouse experience.

BUSINESS CHANGES AND PROSPECTS

Businesses in this sector are unsure what 2012 will look like for them. Only 28 percent think next year’s prospects are promising, while 19 percent are unsure (quite high compared to other sectors) and 42 percent think sales and hiring will be the same as this year. Employers know much depends on federal funding, state funding and taxpayer revenues, all of which have been up and down throughout year.

BUSINESS CLIMATE

There were fewer layoffs this year (13 percent) compared to 2009, when 50 percent of transportation businesses downsized and 47 percent eliminated bonuses or merit pay. The past 12 months were also more productive. For example, 31 percent of companies increased sales and 28 percent hired more employees. These numbers are very much in line with the survey average.

The two biggest challenges for this sector are “government regulations” (cited by 48 percent), followed by “cost of business real estate” (26 percent). If businesses were to leave the area, 36 percent would leave in search of a better transportation system and 36 percent would search for a more favorable regulatory environment.

KEY TAKEAWAYS THIS YEAR

The transportation sector was one of the worst performing sectors last year. The past 12 months have brought more stability, but employers are very cautious about how 2012 will play out.

MINORITY- AND WOMAN-OWNED COMPANIES

“My business is generally unaffected by the economy, but I am worried about the capital costs of growing too quickly. Where, in prior years, I might quickly buy the new technology I think I need, this year I will hold off until my equipment or technology is obsolete.”

THE SAMPLE

This year’s Job Sector Survey helped identify minority and women-owned businesses. We received 441 responses in this category (62 percent from companies with under five employees). The businesses represent a wealth of knowledge about the issues facing their sector (80 percent have been in business since 2007—surviving very difficult years for small business owners). Overall, there are fewer minority and women-owned businesses from aerospace, energy and environment, and life sciences, and slightly more representation within arts and culture, construction, restaurants, professional services, and retail.

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF DOING BUSINESS IN THE REGION

Fifty-nine percent of minority and women-owned businesses say the top benefit of doing business in this region is “networking opportunities” (14 points higher than other business owners). This finding also correlates to business size: small businesses report that “networking” is more important than large companies. Minority and women-owned businesses did not place as much emphasis on the region’s “entrepreneurial spirit” (seven points lower than the average), but were twice as likely to mention the importance of “public safety” as a benefit to being here.

WHAT WOULD MAKE EMPLOYEES MORE VALUABLE

Minority owners and women owners gave similar answers to the other business owners in their sector when it comes to the skills and educational background needed to succeed. For example, employers said they want young staff with common sense, internship experience, foreign language skills, writing ability and good client service instincts. These are all skills any employer would value—regardless of whether the business is minority or women-owned.

BUSINESS CHANGES AND PROSPECTS

This group expressed a higher level of optimism about their individual business prospects than non-minority businesses and companies owned by men (48 percent think next year will be better for them, versus 43 percent among non-minority businesses and companies owned by men). It is doubly inspiring considering that the fields most minority and women-owners work in have been hard-hit last year (i.e. services, retail, arts and culture). In spite of this optimism, job growth within this group is unremarkable (only 33 percent say they will hire next year), largely due to the size of most businesses in this sector.

BUSINESS CLIMATE

Compared to survey respondents as a whole, minority and women-owned companies have similar perceptions of the overall business climate, 40 percent say there’s been no change in a year and others are divided on whether the economy is better or worse. Like many other types of businesses – especially professional service providers, being part of “a vibrant and growing economy” is critical (64 percent), as is being close to their customer base (56 percent).

KEY TAKEAWAYS THIS YEAR

The absence of minority and women-owned businesses in key technical sectors is worth addressing through formal leadership training and mentoring programs since these sectors are the most likely to add jobs in the coming years.

SMALL COMPANIES (LESS THAN TEN EMPLOYEES)

“There are too many agencies with overlapping regulations. Regulation is necessary, but needs to be streamlined. The tendency to treat all business the same regardless of industry or size is frustrating. I’d like to see better coordination of services for businesses in early start-up phase (years 1-5).”

THE SAMPLE

Our sample of small businesses includes almost 700 interviews. Almost half (46 percent) are minority-or woman-owned. The three largest sectors represented in this group include professional services (37 percent), real estate and construction (16 percent) and retail (8 percent). About 20 percent of the group exports their services and products outside Washington state.

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF DOING BUSINESS IN THE REGION

More than half of businesses this size (56 percent) acknowledge networking as a key asset of doing business in the Puget Sound area. In our survey the past year, “networking opportunities” was mentioned by only 38 percent of respondents. “quality of life/environmental surroundings” was another top asset (50 percent), followed by “economy” (35 percent). In comparison to other subgroups and larger businesses, employers with fewer than 10 workers are much more likely to name factors such as “Networking opportunities” and “Proximity to customers” as important elements to their success.

BUSINESS CHANGES AND PROSPECTS

Small businesses are more optimistic about the coming year than business leaders from larger companies. Almost half (47 percent) believe next year will be a better year than 2011 and only 14 percent think their business will be worse off. That being said, small businesses with less than 10 employees are typically slow to add staff or make major changes to their workplace (add or eliminate benefits, raise salaries) unless their sales ramp up quickly and can be sustainable. In both this survey and last year’s survey, the percentage of owners planning to hire was fairly low (about 15 percent). While layoffs are infrequent as well, this subgroup is not a massive engine for job growth.

BUSINESS CLIMATE

Small business owners aren’t sure what to make of the regional economy. Opinion is split right down the middle (42 percent say the economy hasn’t changed, 26 percent think it’s getting better and 28 percent say it’s getting worse). This kind of mix in public opinion reinforces the roller coaster ride that impacts small businesses. Most are challenged with access to capital and dangerously low profit margins. After “too few customers,” (46 percent) these issues were the second and third most popular answers when we asked about what prevents business growth (31 percent and 28 percent, respectively).

KEY TAKEAWAYS THIS YEAR

High taxes and local and federal regulatory mandates remain a key challenge for small businesses to survive and grow. What’s more, employers in this category have voiced frustration that the trend is getting worse (pending the implementation of paid sick leave in Seattle). These challenges can reduce profitability and drain the time of top executives who must manage growing amounts of paperwork tied to these regulations.

LARGE COMPANIES (MORE THAN 100 EMPLOYEES)

“The state piles on additional costs and regulations on top of a gradually failing transportation infrastructure. New regulations for sick time (Seattle) and crane regulations (state) cost us more without providing any benefit. Our employees already are well covered, and now we’ll have to spend even more.”

THE SAMPLE

Two hundred forty private sector business leaders in large companies took the survey. Under 10 percent of respondents work at minority- or woman-owned businesses. The top three sectors represented in this category are professional services (mostly law firms and financial services companies), aerospace, and tourism and hospitality (hotels, resorts). More than 80 percent of businesses in this category were founded more than 15 years ago. Among large businesses, 35 percent export at least 10 percent of their products and services. Compared to small and mid-size businesses, larger companies clearly capture a more significant export business.

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF DOING BUSINESS IN THE REGION

Large companies most frequently named the Puget Sound region’s “quality of life/environmental surroundings (50 percent), “economy” (47 percent) and “skilled labor force” (44 percent) when asked about the area’s assets. All three were top responses in last year’s survey as well.

There was a great deal of consensus on what helps large companies succeed. “skilled workforce” was the number one answer (60 percent), followed by “being part of a growing and vibrant economy” (56 percent) and “close proximity to customers” (55 percent). No other subgroup from this survey had as many survey participants agree on the top three factors in their success. After the top tier, most remaining answer options were only selected by 20 to 25 percent of respondents.

BUSINESS CHANGES AND PROSPECTS

Last year, 56 percent of large companies from the private sector predicted a stronger year than the previous one and 40 percent said they planned to hire (a gap of 16 points between these two metrics). This time around, optimism has dampened a bit (down to 48 percent), but hiring seems to be more in line with perceptions about business volume (42 percent). This alignment of optimism and hiring is important in our region’s ability to create jobs on a regular basis.

So, what is causing large businesses to be so optimistic? The positive attitudes expressed by our survey takers are based on how things went at each company. As a whole, large businesses in the private sector had a very positive 2010. More than 40 percent of companies hired new staff, well above the average, and 37 percent of companies reported higher sales volume (also above average).

BUSINESS CLIMATE

Eighty percent of business leaders from large companies think the regional business climate is either steady/not changing (41 percent) or improving (42 percent). A small percentage believe things are getting worse for business (14 percent) or are unsure (3 percent).

KEY TAKEAWAYS THIS YEAR

Many new tactics are working (i.e. reinventing product lines, increasing exports) and networking has played an increasingly important role in helping workers and executives troubleshoot challenges that emerged after many large businesses reorganized in 2009.

MID-SIZE COMPANIES (11 TO 100 EMPLOYEES)

“We are in a competitive field. We need top-notch engineers with good personal skills, which are harder to come by. The poor transportation system and long commute times make us less competitive than firms farther from the center of Puget Sound area.”

THE SAMPLE

Our sub-sample of 445 mid-size businesses includes more established companies (almost 70 percent have been in business more than 15 years) and represents a diversity of business sectors. (Manufacturing and human services were particularly well-represented.) This group also has a notably lower percentage of minority- and woman-owned businesses (six points lower than the survey average of 26 percent). Almost a third of businesses in this group export at least 10 percent of their products outside of Washington.

PRIMARY BENEFITS OF DOING BUSINESS IN THE REGION

Mid-size businesses are interesting in that they are managing an active workforce and growing portfolio of work. “Quality of life/environmental surroundings” becomes a valuable asset to attract and retain top staff. Networking may be less important as mid-size businesses tend to have staff members focused on sales and business development. The sales team requires a “Vibrant economy” to be successful (57 percent mention this), as well as “Proximity to customers” (47 percent). These two items were the top two answers given to our question about what drives success for companies this size.

BUSINESS CHANGES AND PROSPECTS

Mid-size businesses are very dynamic places. This is clear in analyzing what has happened in some of these companies during the previous 12 months. For all three of our metrics that measure growth (sales, hiring and investments in new products/services), mid-size businesses exceed our top line average for the entire survey. For example, close to 35 percent of companies increased sales, hired or expanded their pipeline, which is at least five to six points higher than average. What’s also exciting is that almost half of mid-size businesses feel encouraged by their potential workload in 2012 (46 percent say business should improve next year during this year) while only 12 percent indicate that their business will be worse off. This group is also fairly likely to hire (40 percent say they plan to add staff next year).

BUSINESS CLIMATE

This sector worries about increasing health care costs and dwindling support from government and community organizations. In spite of these challenges, mid-size businesses are pretty optimistic about the regional economy. A third of employers think the regional economy is improving (slightly higher than the survey average of 29 percent), 42 percent say things haven’t changed and 21 percent think the economy is getting worse.

KEY TAKEAWAYS THIS YEAR

This sector is challenged by dozens of little things, not one or two major things. We know this because at least 15 percent of business leaders mentioned eight separate answers to the following question: “what is your biggest challenge to growth?” This result again illustrates the instability of the marketplace for mid-size businesses. Wages and benefits are expensive, financing is important and harder and harder to come by, and larger office space is often needed at this level. Businesses say they need tax breaks or growth initiatives. In fact, this is the number one reason a mid-size business would move out of the area. Access to capital and reasonable rent is also a critical need.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND NEXT STEPS

For more in-depth and targeted data, including:

- Detailed questions results not included in the report
- Breakdown by county or city
- Breakdown by employment sector or size
- Details about what skills are needed by specific types of employers
- Insights into prominent trading partners and goods
- Examples of obstacles to success by type and size of business
- Opportunities for further information from survey respondents via open discussions, forums, discussion groups etc.
- Details on how to schedule your own tailored presentation on Job Sector Survey results

Contact: George Allen at georgea@seattlechamber.com or (206) 389-7268