



Disaster Zone

# COVID-19: Washington State Survey of Businesses

Results of a Washington State Governor's Advisory Group

By Eric Holdeman | June 5, 2020

You can read the results of the survey below. More anecdotal in my opinion – for what is shared below.

## RESULTS: Survey for Governor's Advisory Group

Thanks to you for the excellent response to our survey to assist the Governor's SAFE WORK & ECONOMIC RECOVERY advisory group.

This survey was taken before the recent surge of social activism which has swept the nation and beyond. A “safe start and economic recovery” doesn't mean the same thing to all people, in particular for our fellow Washingtonians in the Black Community. We are listening, learning, and confronting the fact that the burdens of the COVID crisis and the injustices that have existed long before it, and continue to exist, do not fall equally upon all of us.

We'd like to know, has this moment caused you to rethink the type of leadership you'd like to see from state government? We welcome you to [share additional thoughts](#) on this point which we will incorporate into our message back to the committee and to the Governor. Thank you for participating.

Summary of Results

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**Top priorities** – The initial concern and focus on saving lives has melded with a deep concern for livelihoods, particularly for small businesses. Reopening the economy and economic insecurity were the most urgent issues. Top priorities were:

- Adequate supply of PPE
- Practical guidelines for safety
- Adequate testing and contact tracing

**Direct experience with state government** was somewhat polarized:

- *“Mostly Commerce and ESD – they are doing a heroic job in an impossible situation. Kudos to the Gov for his leadership and common sense.”*
- *“Frustration – large retail chains (Home Depot, Walmart, etc.) have been allowed to operate and small business owners – that can easily follow COVID-19 protocols have not been allowed to open.”*
- *“ESD – very problematic. Many business owners have not received any funding support and they can not correct their answers that caused their application to be disqualified.”*
- *“Other than the Unemployment fraud issue, the state has done a solid job throughout of addressing the issues. The huge challenge will be how to help businesses create jobs, as there are many businesses that provide hourly/lower paying jobs that have disappeared forever. We likely face a severe increase in homelessness in our region without jobs creation programs/incentives.”*

**Childcare** – Ideas to improve the flexibility and availability of childcare were creative and

evidence-based. Adjusting rules and regulations, retraining, and incentivizing more neighborhood-based/informal options were top of mind:

- *“Rules and regs are very restrictive especially to smaller providers. Critical workers need a safe place for their kid and most places are closed. Maybe offering the \$600/week unemployment bonus to folks who are working and earn lower wages as an incentive to work.”*
- *“There's a pool of available hospitality workers who are good with people (and presumably) children. Government could provide subsidies to offset the cost or supplement incomes.”*

**Public Transportation** – Primary concerns were increased sanitation and mask requirements, staggered work start times, and encouraging a higher percentage of remote working as the norm.

- *“I wish I knew. Certainly telecommuting has beneficial impacts on traffic and pollution reduction. Broadband to the people!”*
- *“Mass transportation is critical to the vibrancy of our region and its economy. Availability of adequate PPE is required for safe commuting.”*
- *“Continue to support Mass Transit, with gold standard cleaning and sanitizing”*

**Silver lining** – We asked a question about what positives had come out of the experience to help people step back and appreciate what they have even in the midst of real challenges. Those still employed were appreciating the benefits of remote working, others mentioned increased family time and enhanced community spirit.

- *“Our workforce seem more appreciative of their job. Also, we have learned how to work remotely and that may be a continuing opportunity for some of our people.”*
- *“We now recognize how easy and efficient virtual meetings are.”*
- *“The 3 hours I am saving on my 25 mile commute is life-changing. I love the additional time with my family, and appreciate that my schedule isn't so crazy. It has also showed how adept my work team can be- all working from home.”*

**Additional comments** recapped the lives vs livelihoods debate. Some felt we needed to reopen the economy as soon as possible and trust the public to follow guidelines. Others were concerned that this would just result in new surges of infection. We are seeing some of this play out as counties begin to reopen.

- *“Please resist the pressure to open everything for business. Human life matters more. It would help to be clear that the four phases are a minimum level of caution, not the final word.”*
- *“Open up the economy by asking people to observe explicit behaviors. There will be plenty of peer pressure put on those that don't comply.”*
- *“Assuming a next wave of this virus, some more measured approach needs to be taken to avoid devastating this region. Seems we could easily wind up with depression bread*

*lines in the next couple of years, as those jobs that fed those families will be forever lost, if we are not a bit risk tolerant and focused.”*

- *“1. A science based approach has been most successful in slowing the spread. It should be continued. 2. However, a balance must be found between health and the economy, which has a large impact on the health of entire families and communities. The balance can be enhanced by continuing to ask the vulnerable people to remain home, and those who move about to be considerate in using PPE, sanitizing, and good hygiene. 3. Reopening will allow our children to socialize and our younger children to develop important social skills.”*

*Beyond lives & livelihoods:*

- *“I’m concerned about the state’s budget and the regressivity of the sales tax. In WWII there were “war bonds” people could purchase to support the war effort. Is there something like this that the State could issue to allow people to invest in the recovery effort. I would probably buy some.”*
- *“From an economic standpoint this state administration has used metrics to assess their success by a total number of jobs and revenue. They do very little to assess where there is a need. Many industry sectors flourish without state involvement (software, aerospace). From a geographic standpoint there are areas that have thrived and areas that have not. Its equivalent to having a dozen children and providing more time and attention on those who are excelling and only providing limited support to those who struggle...”*

## Economic Forecast

The Washington State Economic and Revenue Forecast Council has released a [slide deck](#) discussing its preliminary economic forecast for both the U.S. and WA incorporating COVID-19 impacts on employment through April and on 2020 Q1 GDP. Some highlights

- *Washington’s unemployment rate soared to 15.4% in April from 5.1% in March and 3.8% in February.*
- *Washington car and truck sales plummeted to the lowest level in the history of the series which dates back to July 1970.*
- *After big drops in March and April, consumer confidence showed slight improvement in May.*
- *GDP is expected to decline 5.8% in 2020 before gradually increasing.*
- *Revenue collections since the February forecast are \$429 million (8.7%) below expectations; approximately \$200 million are deferred payments.*

The next monthly revenue collection report will be available on June 15th and the revenue forecast will be presented on June 17th.