



Resilience and Recovery Strategy

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The Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce has a central role in the county's economic recovery - it supports businesses starting up and growing. In partnership with the Mitchell County Economic Development Commission, the Chamber helps build the community's capacity to attract new businesses, promotes local businesses, and makes business-to-business connections. This project, donated by Creative Economic Development Consulting, is designed to bolster the Chamber's work in recovery and build long-term resilience.

Organizational Resilience

Closer collaboration among community, tourism, and economic development organizations can significantly strengthen local impact. By reducing duplication, pooling limited resources, and aligning strategies, organizations can devote more resources to providing services and carrying out programs. Co-location and shared services encourage day-to-day coordination, faster decision-making, and a clearer "front door" for entrepreneurs, employers, visitors, and partners seeking assistance. One resilience strategy recommended in this study is closer collaboration between community, economic, and tourism organizations.



Phase 1: Form the "Mitchell County Collaborative" to bring together all of the organizations involved in community, tourism, and economic development. Establish priorities for the Collaborative by sharing strategic plans, programs of work, annual event plans, and major initiatives planned and underway.



Phase 2: Unify and align the programs of work, marketing calendars, and events of Collaborative members. Complete a gaps analysis, identify joint funding opportunities, align funding requests, and identify a joint project or initiative.



Phase 3: Explore opportunities for co-location and shared staff resources where value can be added to organizations and the work they do.

Resilience and Recovery Strategies

The strategies focus on attracting more people to visit and experience Mitchell County, supporting business stability and growth, and building capacity for future economic resilience.

Promote "Open for Business"

Business Retention and Expansion

Infrastructure and Access

Recovery Finance and Project Readiness

Stabilization and Scaling Small Businesses

Housing Recovery and Workforce Stability

Workforce and Contractor Capacity

Space for Growth

Fill Market Gaps

Support Alternative Business Models

Recovery and Resilience

Mitchell County was among the hardest hit communities when Hurricane Helene unleashed historic flooding across western North Carolina in September 2024. Downtown Spruce Pine and surrounding areas saw rivers swell, shops and homes destroyed, infrastructure damaged, and hundreds of housing units condemned in the storm's immediate aftermath. The scale of destruction contributed to widespread economic loss as businesses were displaced, property values were disrupted, and local employment and services were strained. However, the resilience of the community soon became evident through coordinated recovery efforts, philanthropic support, and targeted economic programs. Grants from the Mitchell County Development Foundation's Small Business Resiliency Fund, totaling over \$1.27 million, helped dozens of local businesses repair and reopen. More than half are fully or partially operational again and many are planning to complete repairs by the end of 2025. This remarkable recovery reflects both the determination of residents and the power of community-led support to restore the economy after one of the most devastating natural disasters.

The Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce has a central role in the county's economic recovery. It promotes and connects local businesses. It also supports businesses starting up and growing. In partnership with the EDC, the Chamber helps build the community's capacity to attract new businesses. This project, donated by Creative Economic Development Consulting, is designed to bolster the Chamber's work in recovery and build long-term resilience.

Promoting Business - Shop and Spend Local

The number one recovery strategy is to attract more people and businesses to shop local. Businesses need confidence to rebuild, expand, and new businesses need confidence to start up. The messages to shop and spend local need to be promoted not only by local organizations, but also by regional and state organizations.

- Leveraging Collaborative members (see next section), develop a combined 2026 marketing calendar for all organizations that includes messages to drive more business activity. See some examples in Appendix A.
 - Use consistent marketing themes, messaging, and hashtags across all organizations.
 - Develop monthly marketing campaigns based on events and seasonal activities and assign a lead organization for each month.
 - Commit to a color palette and theme templates.
 - Share a common photo library to use consistent images. (see next section)
 - Share distribution channels to eliminate gaps in coverage and reduce duplicative efforts.
 - Use an app like Social Toaster to easily amplify social media messages of Collaborative members.
- Engage with businesses and the community to support marketing campaigns.
 - Encourage businesses to update their websites to direct people to places that are open or have more capacity if they are closed or operating below original capacity. Example – “we only have two cabins open now so if they are booked, please visit ABC.”
 - Integrate stories of people in marketing. Profile entrepreneurs, volunteers, and community leaders in social media, newsletters, and other media with blog-style articles. This would be a takeoff from the famous “Humans of New York” series calling it something like “Main Street Stories” or “People of the Peaks.” Collaborative members can divide the year by profiling one or two people a year. Use a standard template so the end product is consistent.
 - Encourage photo and story submissions from businesses using common hashtags.
- Form a coalition of surrounding counties to

- Lobby the state for special marketing campaigns in 2026 to support increased economic activity for disaster-declared counties. A focus on shop and spend local, business-to-business sales, and travelers for the shoulder seasons will help businesses with cash flow.
- Create business ‘trails’ to encourage people to stay, shop, and experience Mitchell County longer. Examples are Main Street trail, art gallery trail, antique businesses trail, restaurants of the high country, etc.

Infrastructure and Access for Business

In partnership with Collaborative partners, think long-term about the infrastructure investments Mitchell County will need for economic resilience.

- Build an infrastructure project pipeline designed for grant funding, organized by readiness. Prioritize downtown access points that directly support business reopening and visitor circulation as well as traditional infrastructure such as water and sewer, storm-damaged public facilities.
- Aggressively pursue Helene Local Government Capital Grants for the highest-impact repairs and replacements. Use a scoring rubric that ties each project to jobs retained, businesses served, and visitor access restored. (osbm.nc.gov)
- Treat private access as a business continuity issue. Promote and coordinate the NC Private Road and Bridge Program as part of the county’s recovery toolset, since many homes, short-term rentals, and outdoor assets depend on private roads and bridges.

Recovery Finance and Project Readiness

In addition to local finance programs, the Chamber and EDC can raise awareness about finance tools other communities have used to recover from disaster.

- Explore formation of a recovery finance tool focused on bridging. Many rural governments and small communities face timing gaps between spending and reimbursement. Set up a local bridge loan or cashflow facility concept with partners and align it with state technical assistance.
- Position Mitchell County to compete for the state’s CDBG-DR resources by preparing “shovel-ready” housing, infrastructure, and economic revitalization projects that match eligible uses.
- Expand beyond grants. Recruit CDFIs and regional lenders to offer recovery microloans and working capital, backed by a small loan-loss reserve funded by philanthropy and local contributions.

Business Retention and Expansion (BRE)

The Chamber regularly meets with businesses and conducts surveys to learn how it can better serve the needs for growth and sustainability. A formal BRE program, aligned with the EDC, can elevate the work that is already being done.

- Align the BRE efforts of the Chamber and EDC by assigning some of the larger companies to the EDC while the Chamber focuses on smaller businesses. Consider including organizations like downtown development to share in the BRE program. A common CRM (even if it is “sheets” in Google) can help each organization add notes and follow ups.
- Conduct an annual business survey that gathers information for the BRE program such as obstacles to growth, support services needed, and future space needs. After a few years, trends can be analyzed.
- Hold “office hours” where staff promote one afternoon a month as a drop-in time for existing businesses, entrepreneurs, and people with just the bud of an idea to stop in for information.
- Continue to partner with ally organizations to host regular networking events. Lunch-and-learns are one example.

- Organize events to celebrate business contributions around designated weeks such as Small Business Week, Manufacturing Week, Veterans Small Business Week, etc. Collaborative members can ‘adopt’ specific weeks and lead planning efforts for that week. Include business tours, social media campaigns, networking lunch with keynote on a current topic, profile the stories of business owners, have an awards event, etc.
- Create a “build-back-better” playbook for small property owners and downtown buildings. Include floodproofing details, mechanical and electrical elevation guidance, and model scopes of work that local contractors can price consistently.
- Add a business continuity clinic to the BRE program. Focus on backup power, cloud-based records, supply chain alternatives, insurance re-evaluations, and continuity of payroll and point-of-sale systems.

Stabilizing and Scaling Small Businesses

While some businesses are struggling to re-open, others are putting renewed energy into not only building back but building back stronger and bigger. DTs Blue Ridge Java is one example, profiled later in this report. Employment has doubled from pre-Helene levels.

- In partnership with the Small Business Center, develop an online toolkit to scale a small business. Some of the information on the Chamber’s “Resources” page should be induced, such as agency resources and financing. Expand to include connections to regional groups like Mountain BizWorks who has a “Growth Initiatives” section on its website.
- Launch a resilience retrofit mini-grant specifically for risk reduction, not repairs. Examples include flood vents, critical equipment elevation, sump systems, and water intrusion controls.
- Connect businesses to resources that can help expand beyond the local market through e-commerce.
- Explore models for job sharing because one of the hurdles to recovery and scaling is workforce, as noted in the business survey. Connect small businesses who need specific skill sets but may only need a few hours a week of the skill. Examples of jobs that can be shared include bookkeeping, graphic design, communications, human resources, IT, etc. Agriculture enterprises have long had shared workforce models and can be tapped for their best practices.

Housing Recovery and Workforce Stability

The housing recovery work may be led by another organization, but the Chamber can advocate for these recovery strategies.

- Stand up a local “housing recovery concierge” function. One point of contact that helps residents complete Renew NC applications, scan documents, and navigate contractor estimates and title issues. Pair this with pop-up intake days at libraries, town halls, and churches. ([WUNC](#))
- Treat housing as an economic development constraint. Inventory condemned and uninhabitable units, map where displaced workers used to live, and set a target number of units to bring back online by quarter.
- Add a parallel track for affordable rentals. Engage owners and property managers early so the county does not lose long-term rental supply during repairs.

Workforce and Contractor Capacity

Building contractor capacity is not only a recovery strategy, it will help businesses of all sizes grow and expand post-recovery. Chambers are well-suited to develop referral networks and registries for business services.

- Address contractor bottleneck as an economic development project. Build a vetted contractor registry, promote reciprocal licensing pathways where applicable, and partner with community colleges on short-cycle credentials for carpentry, electrical, HVAC, heavy equipment, and CDL.

- Use procurement to build local capacity. When public projects bid, include incentives for apprenticeships, local hiring, and documented workforce training partnerships.

Space for Growth

One of the challenges for businesses to re-establish, start up, and/or grow in Mitchell County is finding affordable space. This issue was present pre-Helene; however, it was amplified as businesses searched for temporary space and new locations. Some absentee property owners leave storefronts vacant with no plans for redevelopment. Some owners cannot afford to redevelop their properties. With very small footprints, the municipalities in Mitchell County must make the highest and best use of downtown and commercial corridors.

- Go beyond code enforcement. Create a small “downtown deal team” that packages 3 to 5 priority buildings for redevelopment, identifies ownership barriers, and assembles a financing path for each property. The Development Finance Initiative with UNC Chapel Hill can assist with this type of planning.
- Explore funding a pre-development fund. Even \$10,000 to \$50,000 in flexible money for environmental reviews, architecture, and pro formas can unlock private redevelopment in small markets. Some communities have matching grant programs for due diligence and redevelopment planning.
- Advocate for local governments to
 - Conduct a review of policies, ordinances, and regulations to ensure they are business-friendly for redevelopment and new development. They can consider a “one-stop recovery concierge” for permits and plan review.
 - Take a firm stance on code enforcement targeting dilapidated buildings.
 - Enact active storefront ordinance to encourage pedestrian-oriented uses.
 - Enact a vacant building registry to inventory vacant buildings and raise awareness of the levels of vacancy.
 - Engage with UNC’s Development Finance Initiative to support development and redevelopment planning.
- Consider locating the Chamber and EDC (and other Collaborative partners) in a larger facility that has space for coworking, incubation, and makers. This could be a joint venture with Mitchell County whereby the county owns the building and programming/activities (incubation, cowork, maker) are operated by Collaborative members. There could be office space for agencies to hold office hours such as EDPNC, NC Works, Small Business Center, etc.
- Benchmark Mitchell County’s business grant and incentive programs with other areas of the state. The [City of Hickory](#) has a great toolkit of incentives and grants. Check out their Community Appearance Grants which could be helpful to businesses working on appearance post-Helene.

Fill Market Gaps

Maintain up-to-date market information and share with businesses to help them take advantage of market opportunities.

- This can be done using a paid data services such as Placer.ai, which is made available through the NC Main Street Program. Collaborative members can pool their resources and leverage their networks to develop and maintain a common market profile.
- Add a targeted strategy around the high-purity quartz supply chain. The storm underscored that Spruce Pine plays an outsized role in semiconductors and advanced manufacturing supply chains. Convert that visibility into infrastructure priorities, site readiness, and supplier recruitment. ([AP News](#))

- Convene a “materials and advanced manufacturing roundtable” with the major employers, utilities, NC DOT, and state partners. Focus on transportation resilience, power reliability, and workforce housing to protect operations and future expansion.
- Visit similar communities in the region and identify businesses (retail, restaurants) that could support a second location in Mitchell County and market the expansion opportunity.

Alternative Business Models

Sometimes the best way to get a business off the ground, or to help stabilize a struggling business, is to let go of the traditional business model. Dispersing risk among multiple owners is one way to raise patient capital. Employee ownership models are another approach to dispersing risk and raising capital. [Burlington Beerworks](#) is a good example of a cooperative business model. Some 1,500+ people invested in the brewery in Burlington, NC. The Industrial Commons, located in Morganton, NC, is a very successful nonprofit that founds and scales employee-owned social enterprises and industrial cooperatives.

- Partner with organizations such as the NC Employee Ownership Center to host seminars and workshops on alternative ownership models.
- Profile success stories of alternative business models and the people behind them in social media and at events.
- Compile content on how to launch employee-owned and cooperative businesses and how alternative models can help launch an idea.

Structure Organizations for Resilience

In a small, rural community, closer collaboration among community, tourism, and economic development organizations can significantly strengthen local impact. By reducing duplication, pooling limited resources, and aligning strategies, organizations can spend less time competing for funding or getting their individual message out and more time providing their services and carrying out their programs. Co-location and shared services encourage day-to-day coordination, faster decision-making, and a clearer “front door” for entrepreneurs, employers, visitors, and partners seeking assistance. Over time, deeper operational alignment can improve organizational sustainability, increase professional capacity, and present a more unified vision to stakeholders, investors, and the community. Ultimately, stronger partnerships can help rural communities punch above their weight in attracting investment, supporting local businesses, welcoming tourists, and advancing long-term community vitality. During this project, the consulting team explored the opportunities to closer align community, tourism, and economic development organizations and recommends a phased approach to ultimately share space and staff and leverage resources.

Organizational Structure

The Chamber of Commerce and EDC developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in June 2025 to advance their partnership. The purpose of the MOU is to formalize an agreement that “establish(es) a new leadership and collaboration structure that enhances strategic alignment, optimizes resource sharing, and strengthens economic development and community growth efforts across Mitchell County.” The agreement merges the roles of Executive Director of the EDC and the Executive Director of the Chamber into one position. While the Chamber and EDC remain independent entities, their boards saw the opportunity to more closely align the activities and operations of the two organizations. Similar affiliations among related organizations in Mitchell County could produce a similar level of effectiveness and efficiency.

There are several organizations involved in community, tourism, and economic development in Mitchell County. Below are the core organizations involved in business support and development and marketing that were considered in this study for a higher level of partnership. Representatives from most of these organizations served on the steering committee for this project. Funding agencies such as Mitchell County and the Town of Spruce Pine were also engaged.

Chamber	EDC	Small Business Center	Discover Mitchell	Downtown Spruce Pine	Bakersville Area Merchants Assoc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Business Support •Marketing •Events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Business Development •External Marketing •Capacity Building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Business Support •Training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Marketing •Asset Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Downtown Development •Events •Marketing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Business Support •Marketing

There are several approaches to strengthening the partnerships between these organizations. We outline some examples; however, deepening working relationships often start small and grow over time.

- **Collaborate** – Collaboration has tremendous value. Organizations can reduce duplication and leverage resources through collaboration. However, collaboration takes work and resource-strapped organizations sometimes have a hard time investing the energy collaborations take. There are simple collaborations like support an ally organization’s event, and there are complex collaborations such as making aligned requests for funding.

- **Unified Program of Work** – Organizations can unify their program of work to eliminate duplication and leverage each other’s activities. Examples:
 - Joint marketing calendar to schedule advertising (traditional and digital), social media, etc.
 - Collaborative events planning
 - Breaking a year of activities down by assigning tasks to various partners (e.g., profiling a Mitchell County personality in a monthly blog)
 - Aligned funding requests
 - Co-applicants on grants
- **Co-location** – When organizations co-locate, they can share overhead and administrative resources and collaborate more efficiently. Often, tourism and economic development offices co-locate because their programs of work are synergistic, especially in marketing. Gaston County established this model of co-location at a visitor center at an exit off I-85 in Belmont, NC.
- **Shared Staff** – Organizations that co-locate will often share administrative and marketing staff, jointly operate a visitor center, and in some cases like the Chamber and EDC, share an executive director or CEO.
- **Common Visioning** – A joint planning retreat of the various boards can bring consensus to a shared vision. Joint leadership planning often breaks down barriers and opens communication.
- **Operational Agreements** – Organizations can formalize an operational structure similar to what the Chamber and EDC have done.
- **Umbrella Organizations** – In some cases, organizations will operate under an umbrella organization. For example, the EDC may be an overarching organization with a ‘department-like’ structure for Chamber, tourism, downtown, etc. The [Sanford Area Growth Alliance](#) is one example of an umbrella organization in North Carolina.

The consulting team recommends a phased approach to reach a higher level of collaboration among the many organizations that are leaders in community, tourism, and economic development.

Phase 1: The Collaborative

- Form the Mitchell County Collaborative to bring together all of the organizations involved in community, tourism, and economic development.
 - The EDC may be the ideal organization to facilitate the Collaborative.
 - Include EDC, Chamber, tourism, downtown, small business center, merchants’ association, and other organizations.
- Hold a planning retreat of the boards of the Collaborative organizations to develop a vision, mission, and points of alignment for the Collaborative.
- Develop a purpose statement or charter.
- Socialize the concept to the Collaborative in the community.
- Establish priorities for Year 1 by sharing of strategic plans, program of work, annual activities plan, etc. An example priority is to develop an annual calendar for marketing and communications.

Phase 2: Unified Programs of Work

Beginning at the staff level, work toward a unified program of work that aligns the activities of the Collaborative organizations.

- Align annual marketing calendar.
 - Identify roles in marketing– who will take the lead in messaging and expectations of others who will amplify the message.

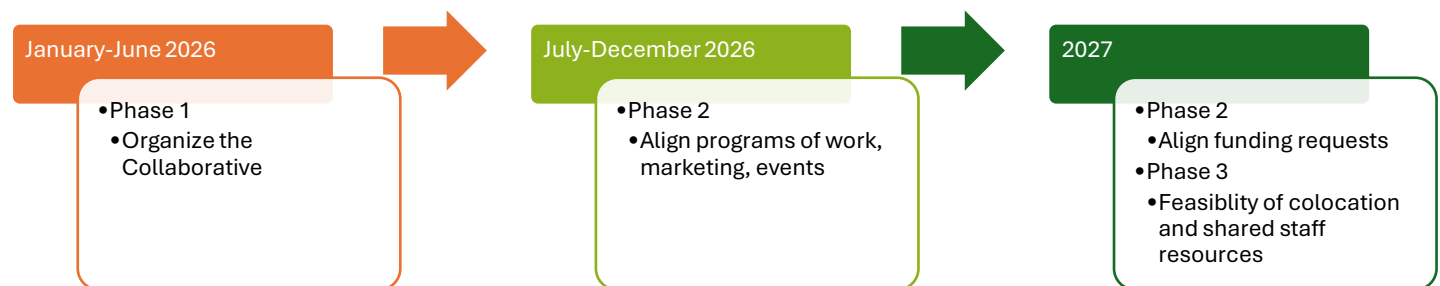
- Jointly fund the development of a photo library in which members of the Collaborative have access via a user agreement.
- Align annual events calendar. Identify who will be the leader, team player, supporter, etc.
- Complete a gaps analysis to learn how Collaborative members can fill gaps in marketing, events, community capacity development, etc.
- Identify joint funding opportunities – who will be the grant applicant and who will provide letters of support.
- Align funding requests to agencies like the county and municipalities.
- Identify a significant project that Collaborative members can use as a pilot for team building. This could be an existing event where roles and duties are assigned, marketing messages are aligned, and there is agreement on measures of success.

Phase 3: Sharing Space and People Resources

Conduct a facility/site search for an opportunity to co-locate and share staff resources where it can add value to organizations. The EDC and Chamber have already taken this step. Other organizations that often co-locate are tourism, downtown development, workforce development, and small business assistance. Often these organizations co-locate in visitor centers, cowork facilities, incubators, and entrepreneurship hubs. A shared staff model can also be explored during this phase.

- Inventory the space of Collaborative members – square footage, lease terms, projected future space needs.
- Explore the potential of co-locating with Collaborative members through a transparent feasibility analysis. Include the feasibility study for space for entrepreneurs and businesses such as incubation, maker, cowork, etc. to determine if there are gaps that could be met with a new ‘innovation center’.
- Identify potential buildings that could meet the needs of Collaborative members as well as the future vision to support business.
- Explore sharing staff resources. For example, a part-time position could be expanded and the additional capacity used to fill a gap of one of the Collaborative partners.
- Advance the concept with organizational leadership and stakeholders such as county and town.

Next Steps



Economic Impact of Recovery



DTs Blue Ridge Java Coffee Shop & Café is an anchor business in Mitchell County. It is a thriving center of economic activity, community gathering, and a stop for tourists visiting the area. In September 2024, DTs employed eight people in its downtown Spruce Pine location. When Hurricane Helene hit Western North Carolina that month, it devastated DTs. The coffee shop and café were a total loss. Over the last year, their story of rebuilding has been a beacon of hope for the community.

After Hurricane Helene, DTs found a temporary home in the L&L Furniture Store on Oak Avenue serving the community with a staff of five. While operating out of the furniture store, DTs started rebuilding.

The business was supported with grants from Mitchell County Development Foundation, NC Works, Dogwood Health Trust, and other grants and loan programs. More important than funding, the owners cite the people that helped them rebuild. The community pulled together and helped with “boots on the ground” work like shoveling mud and removing debris. Working side by side with neighbors made DTs connection to the community even stronger.

In less than a year, in August 2025, DTs re-opened with a larger café area, new grill, and 17 employees. The company’s annual payroll of an estimated \$600,000 has a projected \$813,000 labor income impact. The ongoing operations of DTs increase output in Mitchell County by \$3.1 million. The economic activity at DTs creates another 4.6 jobs in Mitchell County.

The construction investment generated another eight one-time jobs during the construction phase. The \$1 million in construction investment generated another \$348,000 in output in the county. Construction is a one-time economic activity, so those impacts are not ongoing like the operations of the coffee shop and café.

The total economic impact of DTs rebuild and ongoing operations in Mitchell County is 30 jobs, \$1.2 million in labor income, and \$4.5 million in output.

Construction Investment

\$1 million

Employment

17

Total Economic Impact

30 jobs

\$1.2 million in Labor
Income

\$4.5 million in Output

Appendix A: Example Messaging

**GOOD THINGS ARE HAPPENING HERE**

*Mitchell County Strong:
Year of Renewal!*



**GOOD THINGS ARE COMING TO MITCHELL COUNTY!**
A Fresh Start Begins Now

Investing in Each Other and Working Together



**STRENGTH IN UNITY**

*Building Things Together:
Unity is Our Strength!*



**LET'S INVEST IN US, TOGETHER**


*Mitchell County Strong:
Good Things Are Happening!*



**FRESH STARTS AND NEW BEGINNINGS**


Mitchell County Strong!



**REFLECTING, RESPECTING, AND REBUILDING**

Respecting the Past, Rebuilding the Future.

*Strength and Resilience:
From Helene to Hope*



Appendix B: Economic Impact Analysis

This report estimates the economic impact of DTs Blue Ridge Java, a coffee shop and cafe in Mitchell County, NC. The coffee shop is an anchor business in Spruce Pine. It is a gathering spot for the community and welcomes tourists visiting the area. The owners are business leaders in the community with a commitment to pay a living wage, support community organizations, and invest in downtown. There was an estimated \$1 million in renovations and new construction to re-open the facility after the impact of Hurricane Helene. Before the hurricane, DTs Blue Ridge Java employed eight people. Immediately following the hurricane, the coffee shop moved into a small space in a furniture store and employed five people. Today, employment at the coffee shop is 17. DTs expanded the square footage of the coffee shop with the renovation and added a grill.

Creative EDC modeled the economic impact of DTs to show how a business reinvesting in Mitchell County can ripple through the economy. This is just one example of the many businesses rebuilding post-Helene.

The economic impact analysis was performed using IMPLAN software for economic impact modeling. IMPLAN develops local level input-output models to estimate the economic impact of companies moving into an area, business closures, and ongoing economic activities. This model is widely used by local, state, and federal government agencies as well as private industry and universities. The following table summarizes data and assumptions used in developing the economic impact model for this project.

Project Overview

Project Location	Mitchell County, NC
IMPLAN Sectors	IMPLAN Sector 492 - Limited-service restaurants IMPLAN Sector 50 - Construction of new commercial structures, including farm structures
Employment	17 jobs
Investment in Construction	\$1,000,000

The following analysis considers the economic impacts of the renovation and construction of DTs Blue Ridge Java in Mitchell County, NC, and its ongoing operations. The construction value is modeled separately from the coffee shop operations. Once construction is complete, the economic impacts of the construction activities will cease. The coffee shop operations will continue to provide economic impacts as long as it is in operation. For simplicity of this analysis, all of the construction was modeled in the same year.

Operations Employment Impact

Operations impacts are generated by the expenditures and employment at the facility. In Mitchell County, approximately 21.6 jobs will result from operations at the coffee shop, with 17 jobs directly employed there. There will be an additional 3 jobs in the supply chain of the coffee shop's operations, and 1.6 additional jobs will be supported by the personal expenditures of employees in these firms.

The jobs associated with activities at the coffee shop are permanent and continuous jobs, therefore these impacts will continue on an annual basis.

Operations Financial Impact

The coffee shop operations will create a total of \$813,075 in additional labor income in Mitchell County and increase local output by \$3.1 million annually. Labor Income is the sum of employee compensation (wages and benefits) and proprietor income.

Impact Type	Employment	Labor Income	Value Added	Output
Direct Effect	17.0	\$629,701	\$1,115,945	\$2,400,000
Indirect Effect	3.0	\$114,971	\$203,735	\$452,560
Induced Effect	1.6	\$68,403	\$148,620	\$258,828
Total Effect	21.6	\$813,075	\$1,468,300	\$3,111,388

Construction Employment Impact

The impact of new construction at Blue Ridge Coffee will support a total of 8 jobs in Mitchell County, with 6 jobs directly needed for the construction. It is important to recognize the jobs associated with construction are not permanent and continuous jobs; rather, when the construction project is completed the employment demands created by the construction activities will cease.

Construction Financial Impact

These construction activities are estimated to increase output in Mitchell County by \$1.35 million and result in an additional \$391,414 in labor income.

Impact Type	Employment	Labor Income (\$)	Value Added	Output (\$)
Direct Effect	6	\$304,419	\$370,275	\$1,000,000
Indirect Effect	1	\$50,358	\$98,870	\$209,357
Induced Effect	1	\$36,637	\$79,702	\$138,762
Total Effect	8	\$391,414	\$548,847	\$1,348,119

Total Economic Impact

Total Economic Impact is the sum of the temporary impacts of building construction and one year of coffee shop operations impacts. The total economic impact of the coffee shop and its construction activity in Mitchell County is 30 jobs and \$4.5 million in output.

Impact Type	Employment	Labor Income (\$)	Value Added	Output (\$)
Direct Effect	23	934,120	1,486,220	3,400,000
Indirect Effect	4	165,329	302,606	661,917
Induced Effect	2	105,040	228,322	397,590
Total Effect	30	1,204,489	2,017,147	4,459,506

About IMPLAN

This project consists of two analysis components: 1) impacts associated with constructing the manufacturing facilities and 2) impacts associated with operations at the facilities: All impacts are presented in 2025 dollars.

Key Economic Impact Definitions

- Direct Impacts: The known or predicted change in the economy that is being studied.
- Indirect Impact: Secondary impact caused to industries in the supply chain of the direct impact.
- Induced Impact: Direct and indirect employment (and increases in labor income) creates additional household spending on goods and services.
- Employment: The number of full-time and part-time jobs; measured by place of employment. Employees, sole proprietors, and active partners are included, but unpaid family workers and volunteers are not.
- Job-Years: IMPLAN measures employment impacts in job-years with each unit of employment equivalent to one job for one year. This is important when IMPLAN is used to measure construction or other non-permanent operations. For example, IMPLAN does not distinguish between ten units of employment (workers) employed over five years, and fifty workers employed in one year. Therefore, one construction worker may account for multiple units of employment if that person is employed over multiple years. Unlike construction impacts, operation employment and economic activity are illustrated as yearly impact estimates. That is, the impacts shown can be expected to occur in every year.
- Output: The amount of production, including all intermediate goods purchased, as well as value added (compensation and profit). Output is equal to sales in service industries; to sales plus the change in inventory for manufacturing; and to gross margin for retail and wholesaler trade.
- Labor Income: Labor Income is the sum of Employee Compensation (wages and benefits) and Proprietor Income.
- This analysis was produced using IMPLAN and model year 2024.

Source: www.implan.com

History

IMPLAN was founded in the early 1970's when the US Government developed a new functional model of economic statistics for 'impact analysis planning' inside of the US Forestry Service. The intricate 'input/output' modeling at a variety of geographies became widely used and requested by other branches of government and local governments. In 1985, the responsibility for developing the IMPLAN datasets was shifted to the University of Minnesota. As demand continued to grow, including from the private sector, the Minnesota IMPLAN Group (MIG) was established as an independent corporation to develop and sell all future iterations of the IMPLAN database and software. As desktop software proliferated in the 1990s through the 2000s, the ability for other universities, agencies and consulting firms to use the IMPLAN models grew. In 2013, MIG formally changed its name to IMPLAN and relocated its headquarters to Huntersville, NC.

What is IMPLAN?

IMPLAN is a platform that combines a set of extensive databases, economic factors, multipliers, and demographic statistics with a highly refined, customizable modeling system. The foundation upon which economic impact analyses are built is the input-output (I-O) model. Understanding I-O analysis and the assumptions they employ are crucial to properly performing and reporting an IMPLAN analysis.

What datasets does it include?

In order to build regional economic models, IMPLAN knits together more than 90 sources of data from the US Bureau of Economic Analysis, the US Department of Agriculture, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics and the US Census Bureau. A comprehensive listing of data sources and functions can be found here: <https://implan.com/wp-content/uploads/IMPLAN-Data-Overview-and-Sources.pdf>

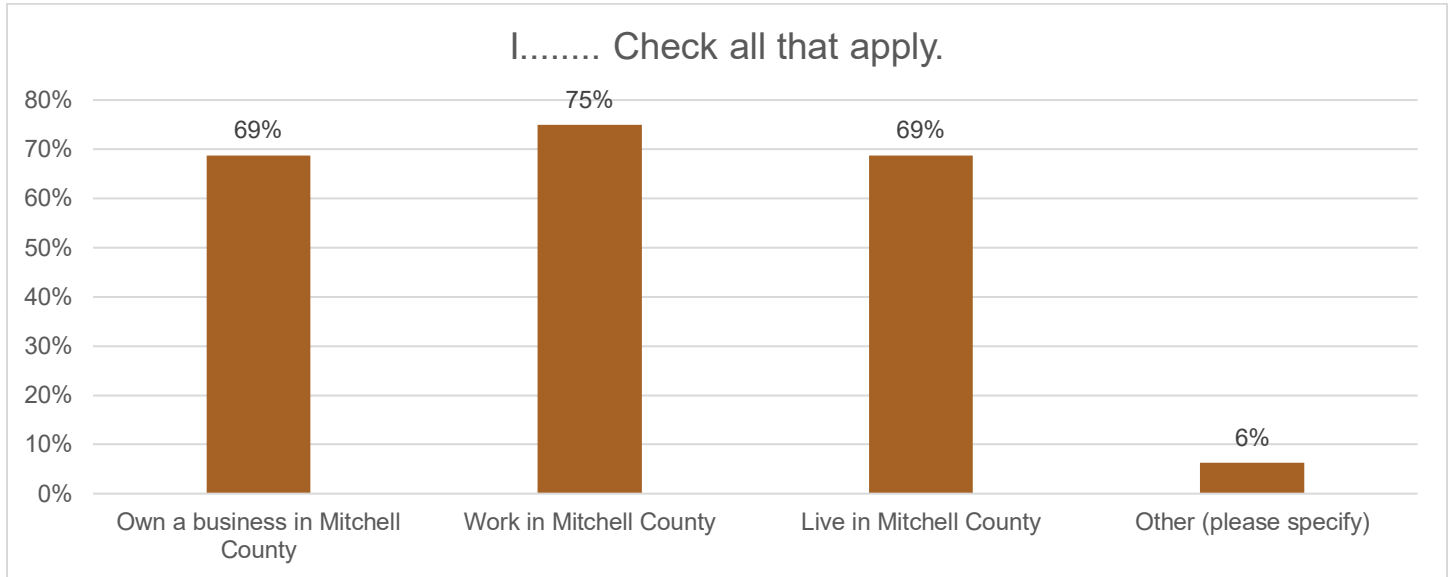
Who uses IMPLAN?

IMPLAN is one of the leading input/output modeling systems in the US and is widely used by higher education, the U.S. government, state government, local, and regional organizations to track economic performance and change in regional economies.

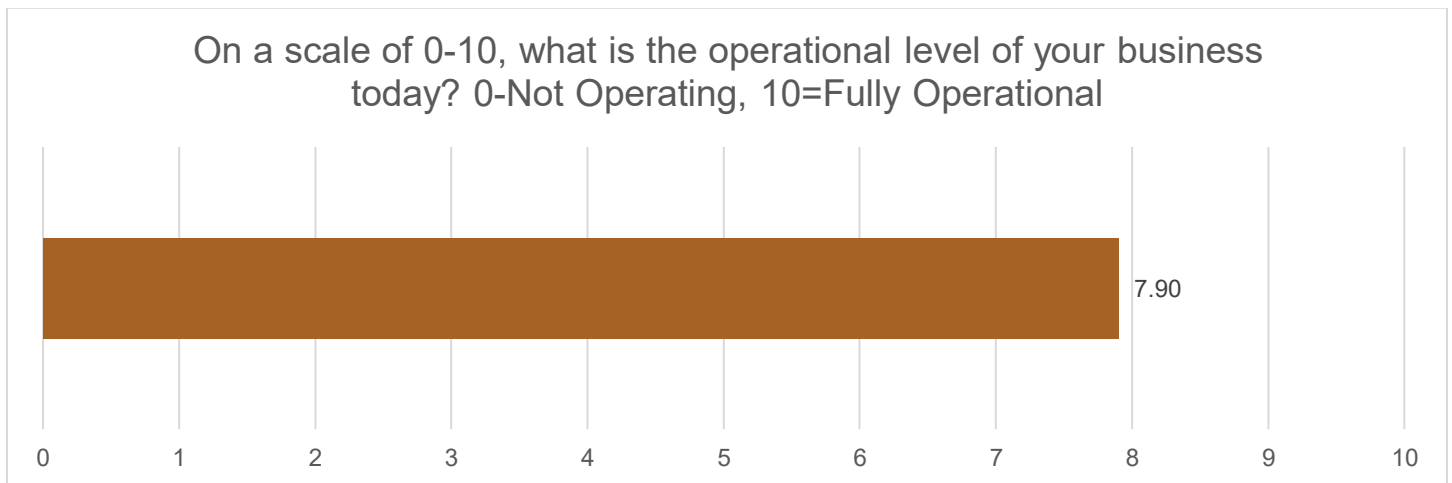
Disclaimer: Economic modeling provides general impact estimates for economic development projects. However, future results will be affected by political, social, and economic conditions. Economic modeling is most informative when used in conjunction with other forms of analysis, such as cost-benefit analysis and fiscal impact analysis, to estimate the overall impact of a project. The analysis is based on information provided by the company. If that information were to change for any reason, it would change the results of the analysis.

Appendix C: Business Survey

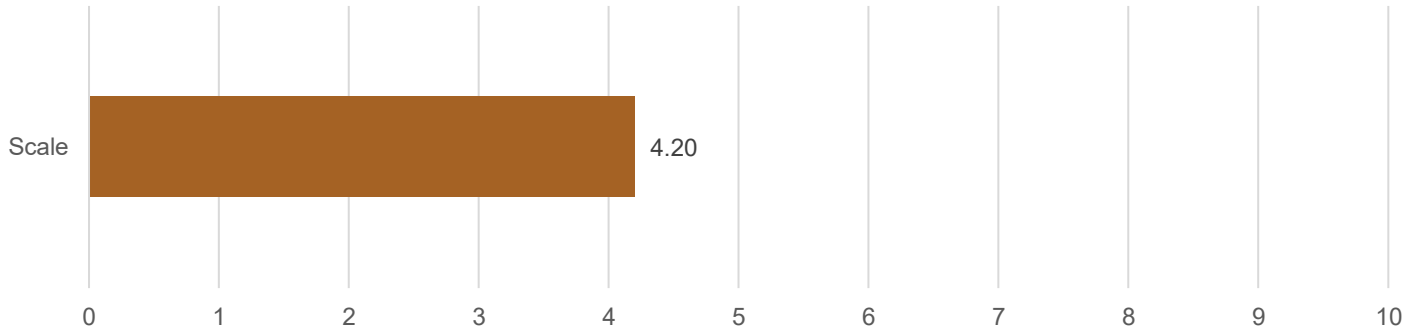
The Chamber distributed an online survey to its membership database in July 2025. There were 16 responses from a wide range of business sectors including professional services, retail, entertainment, and manufacturing.



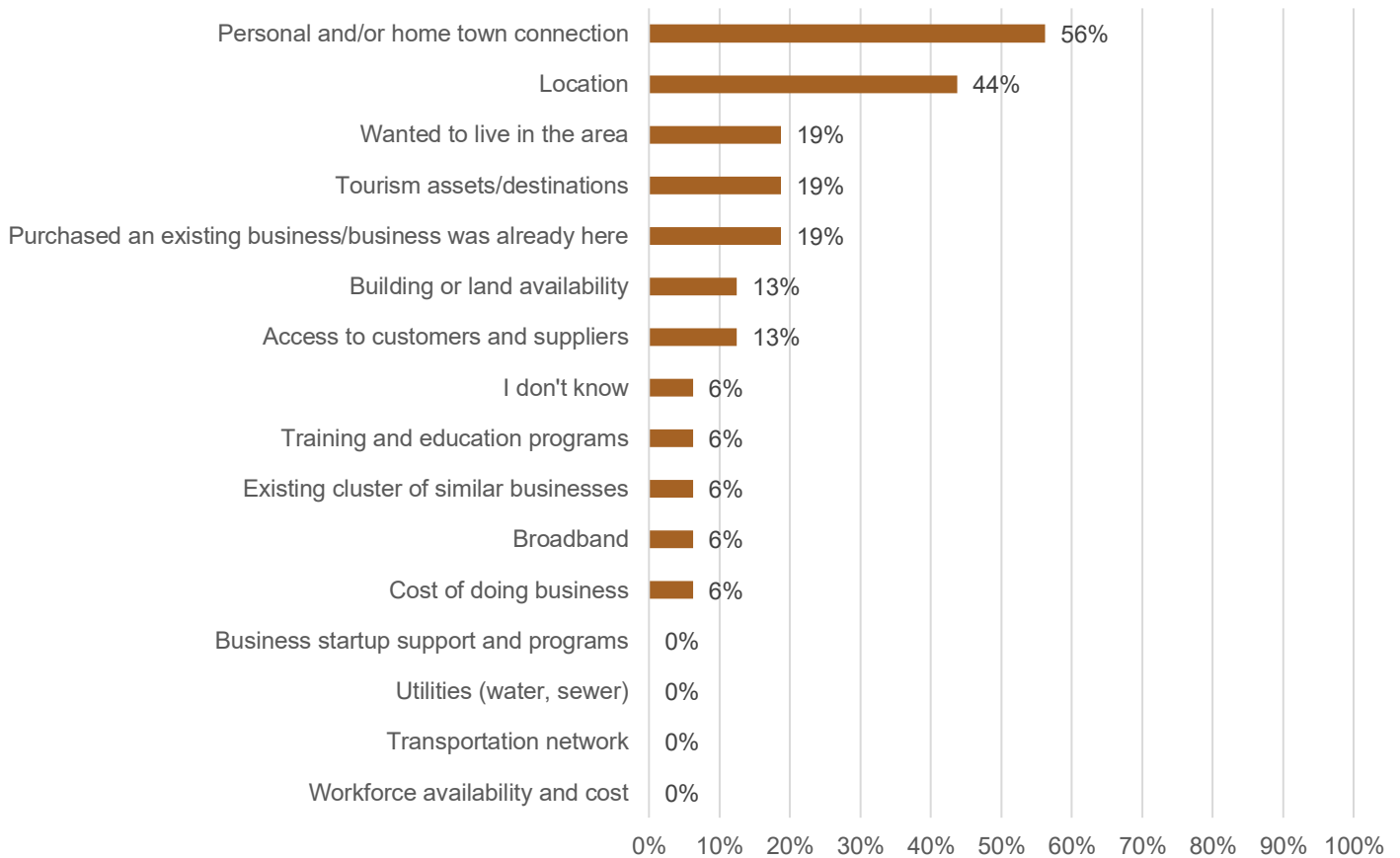
Other (please specify)
Manage a business



On a scale of 0 - 10, how impacted was your business by Hurricane Helene? 0=No Impact, 10=Highest Level of Impact



Why did your business locate in Mitchell County? Choose all that apply.



Other (please specify)

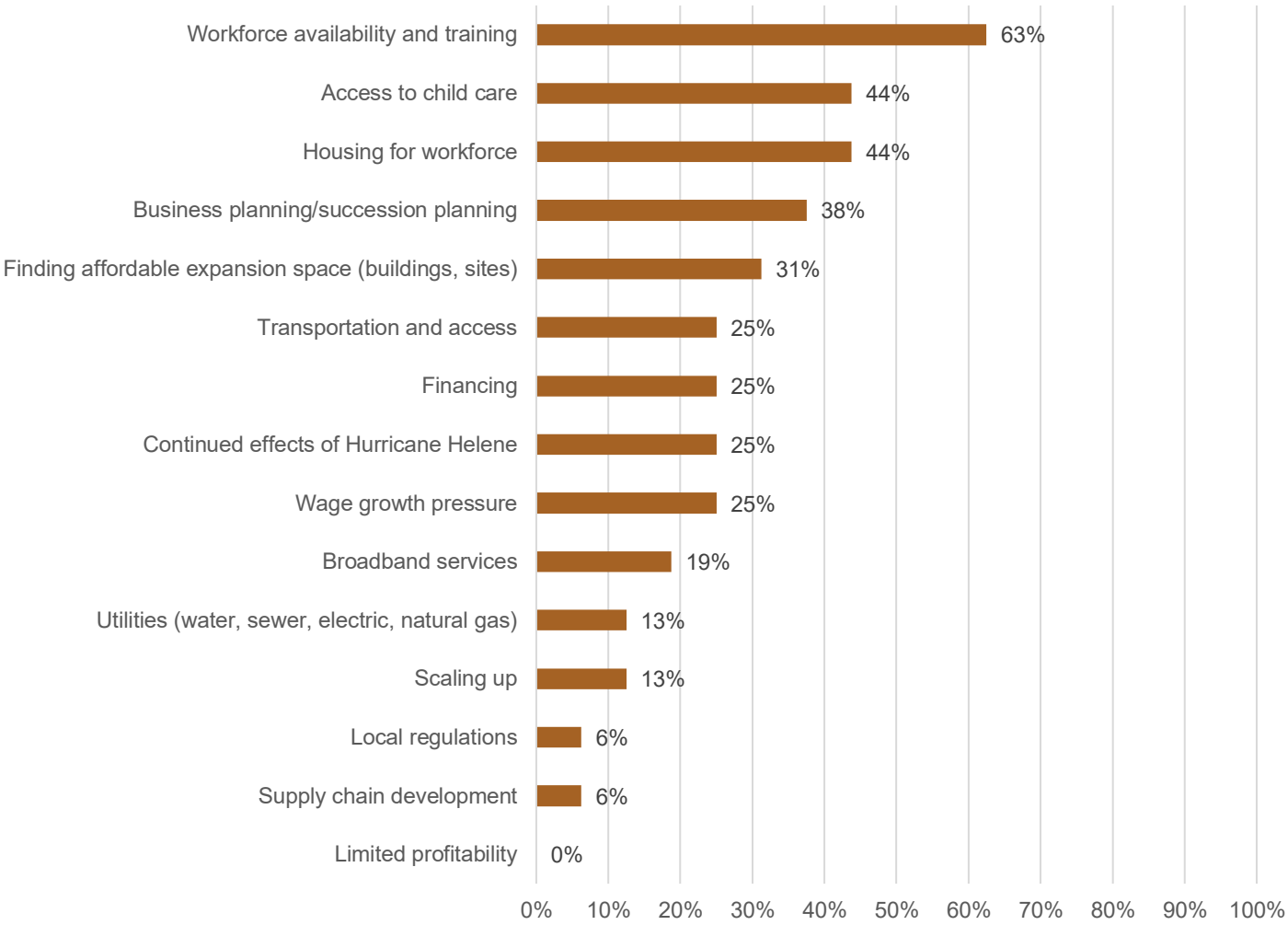
Filling a need for this type of business in our area

My hometown

The hospital was built in 1954 and opened in 1955. I am not certain what the key drivers were to opening it at that time.

Business was started nearly 100 years ago

What are your main challenges to sustaining and growing your business? Choose all that apply.



Other (please specify)

Other Healthcare Organizations wanting to build a hospital and the expansion of an existing healthcare entity.

Population decline

Lack of local regulations, not because of them

If changes in federal spending and/or policies are impacting your business - positive or negative - let us know how.

Positive

Also, the One Big Beautiful Bill will have negative impacts on healthcare related to coverage, enhance premium tax credits and Medicaid expansion.

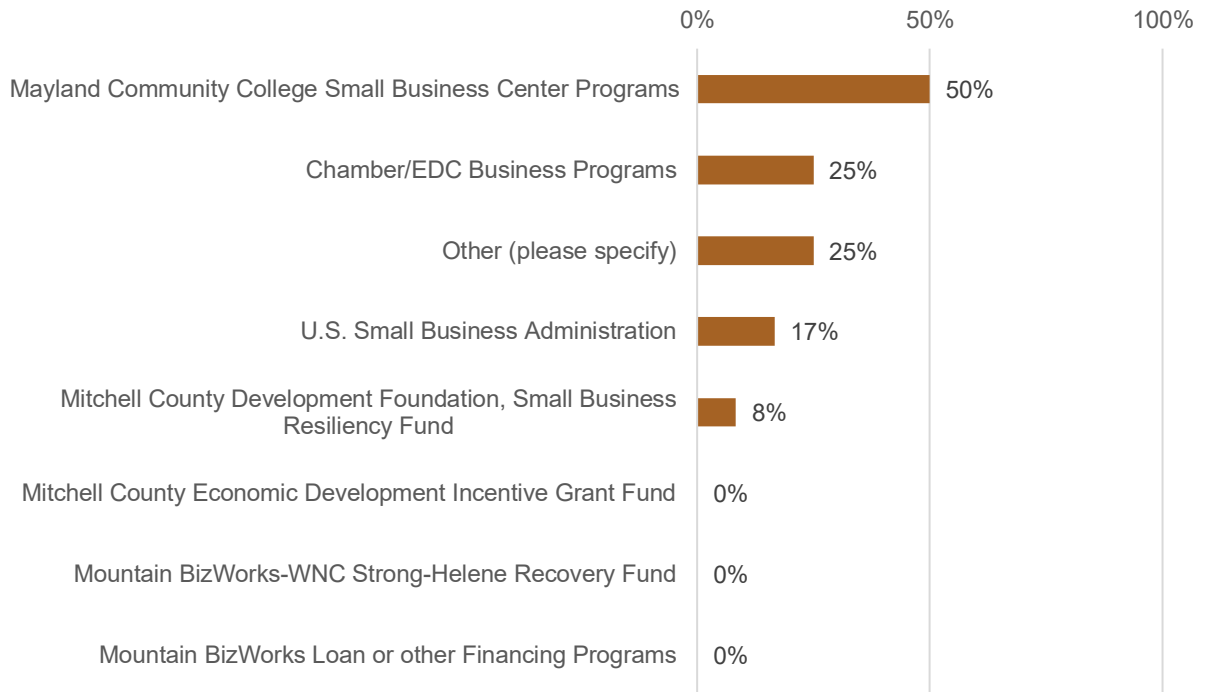
The One Big Beautiful Bill will have a negative impact on our revenue.

negative

Tariffs could increase the cost of our parts

Negative, our organization is in the healthcare sector and numerous recent federal and state policies are having an impact on the cost and delivery of healthcare services.

**What resources have you tapped into to support your business?
Check all that apply.**



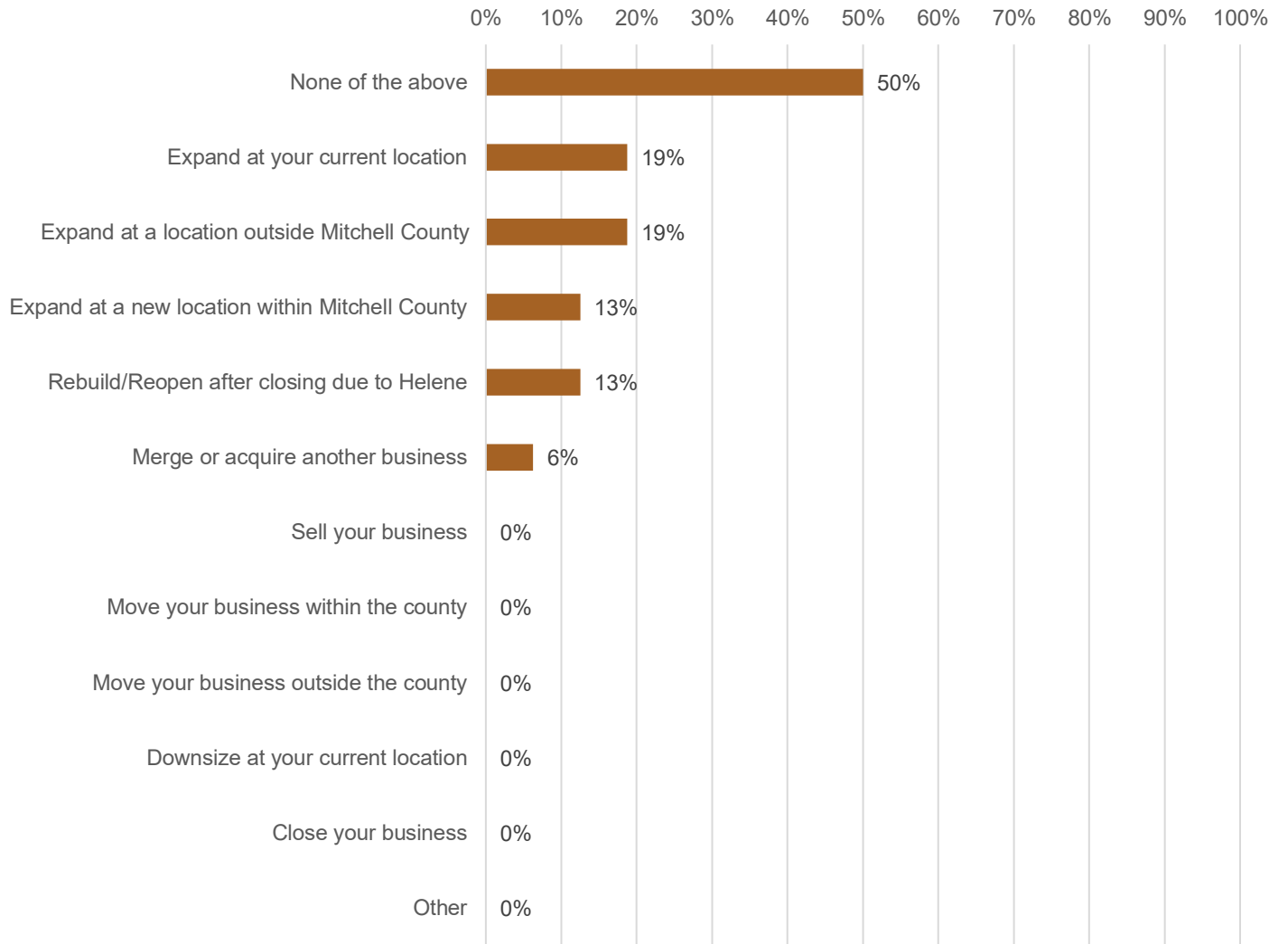
Other (please specify)

MAY Coalition

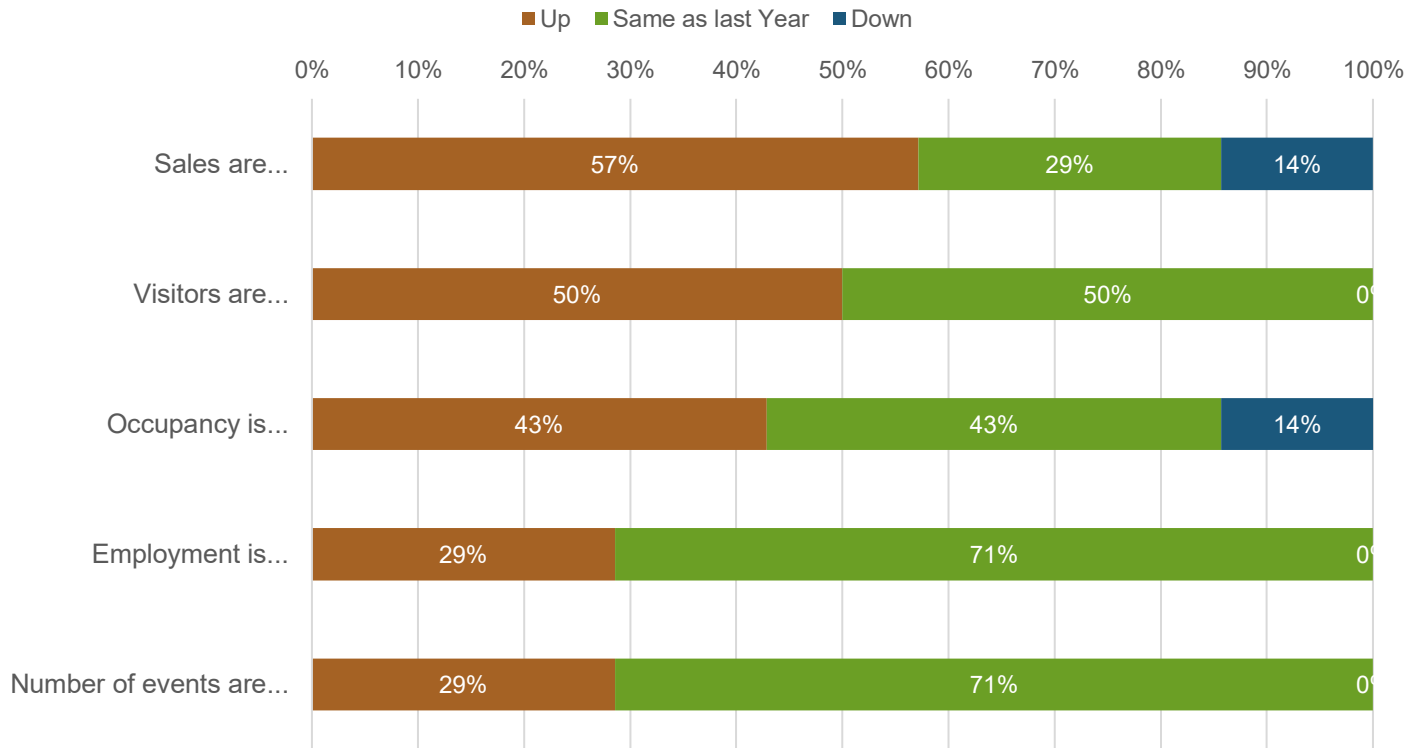
We are a part of a large hospital system and rely on them to help support our business.

Various grants from private, state, and federal entities

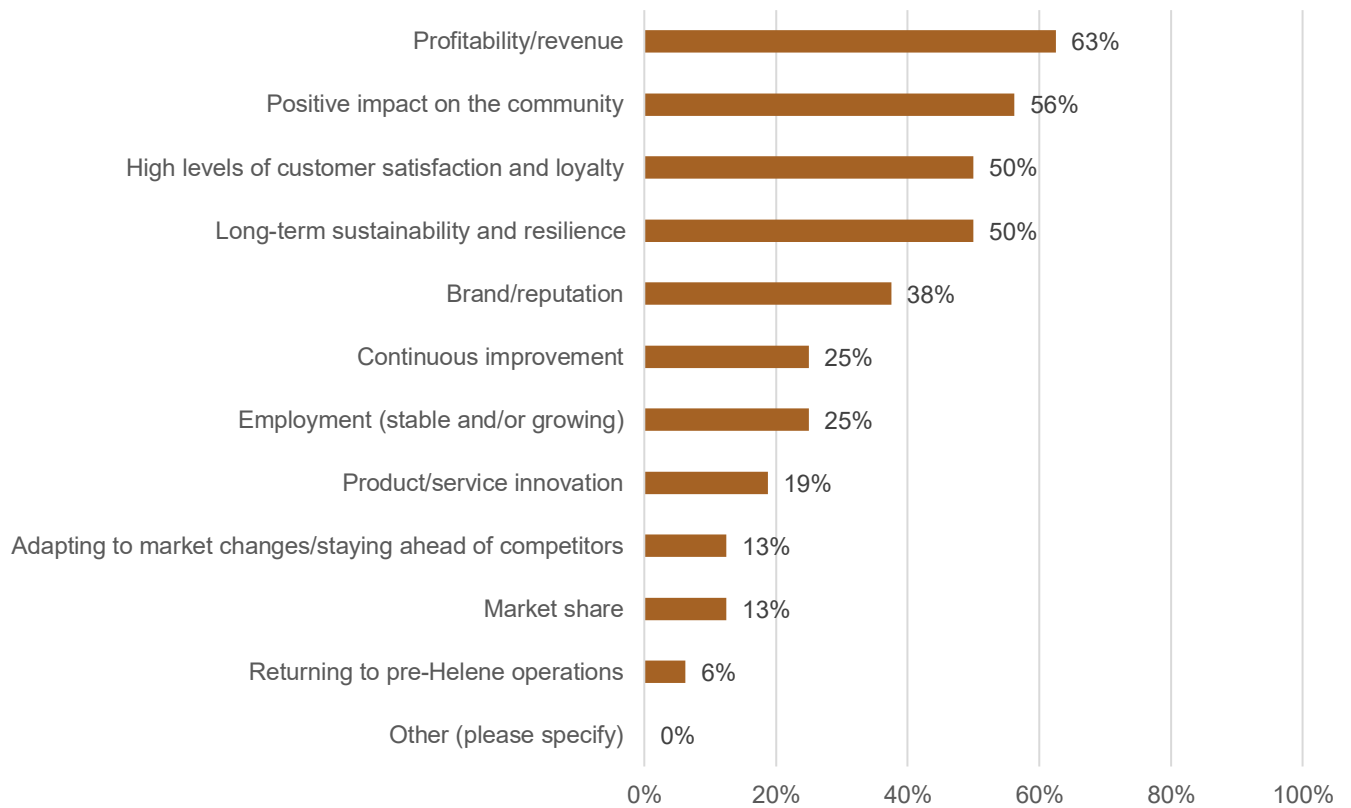
Are you currently planning to... Choose all that apply.



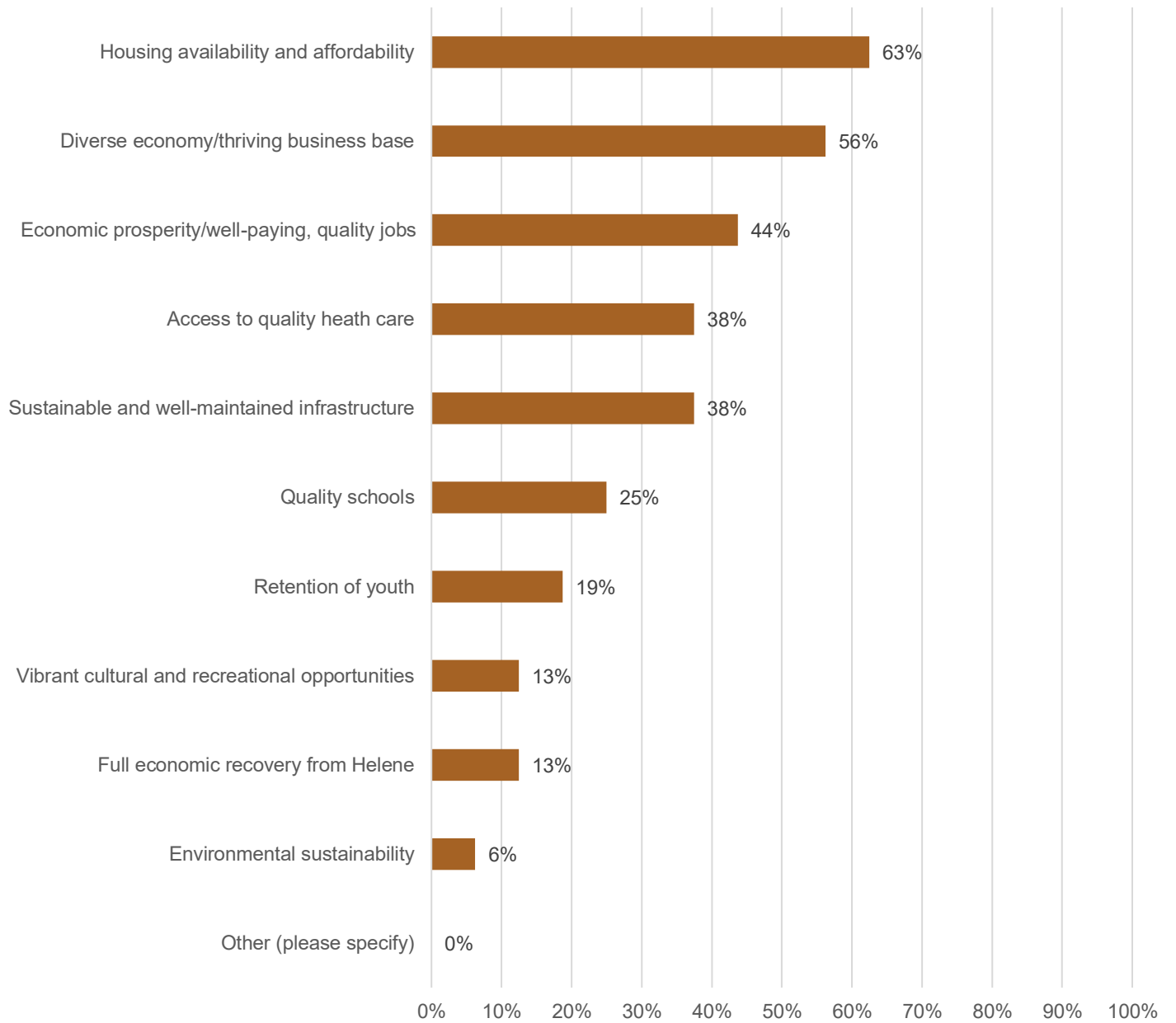
If your business is related to tourism.....



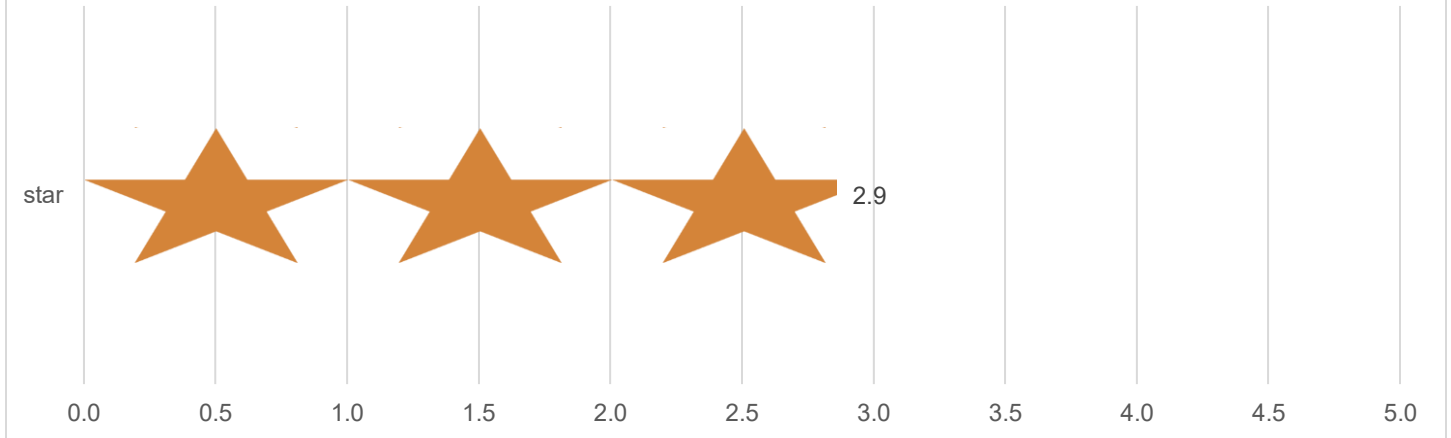
What does success look like for your business? Choose Three.



What does success look like for Mitchell County? Choose Three.



What is your perspective on how the county is doing in terms of economic recovery?



What types of businesses are missing from Mitchell County's business mix?

Bakery

Grocery store

Local hangout

Children's clothing/toys

Books and novelties

Specialty shops

Nothing for children or teens to do that's not expensive. Our teens are bored

Not sure really

Everything we have no general stores that are reasonable for locals, lack of grocery spots, lack of resources for teens

retail

Retail

Restaurants, Grocery store, Industry,

Food service, retail and grocery

Grocery store

Restaurants

grocery stores

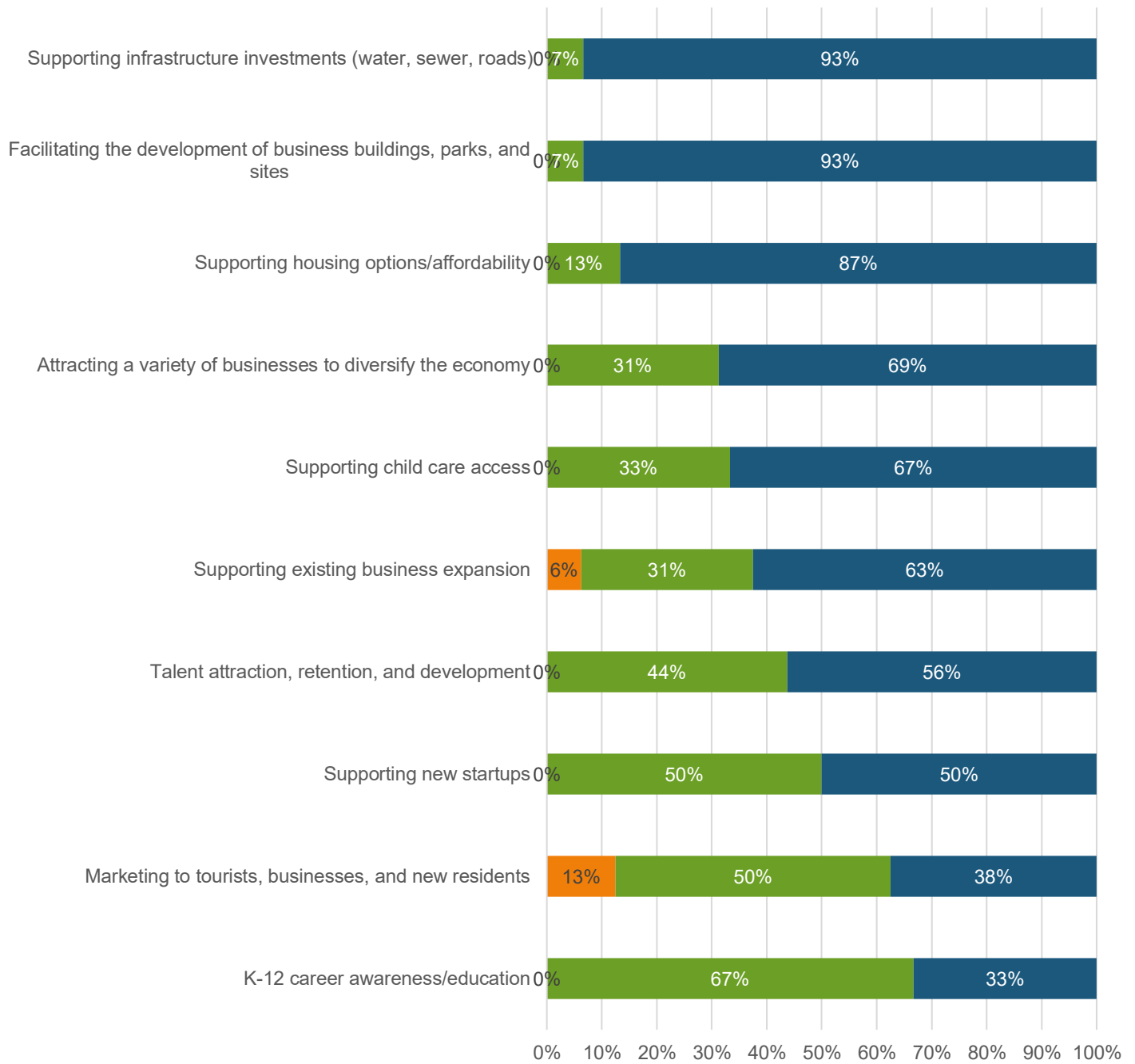
mid level to high end dining

butchery

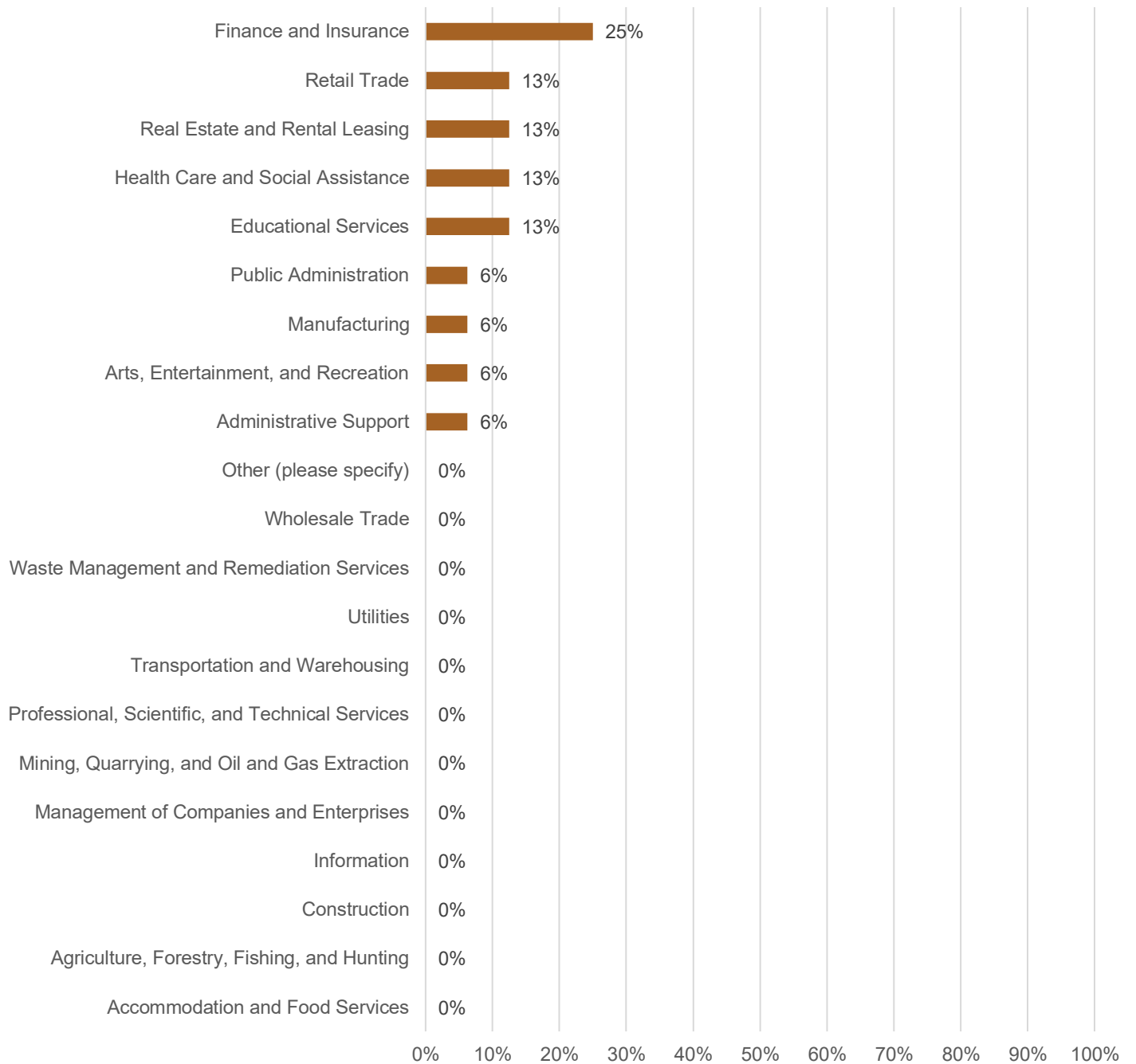
grocery options

I would like to see Mitchell County invest more/less resources in these economic development strategies.

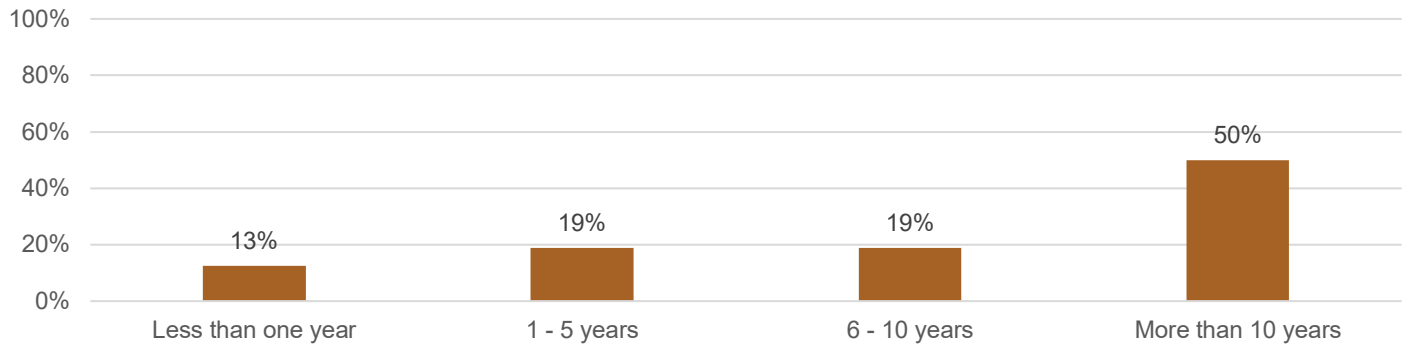
■ Less resources
 ■ About the same
 ■ More resources



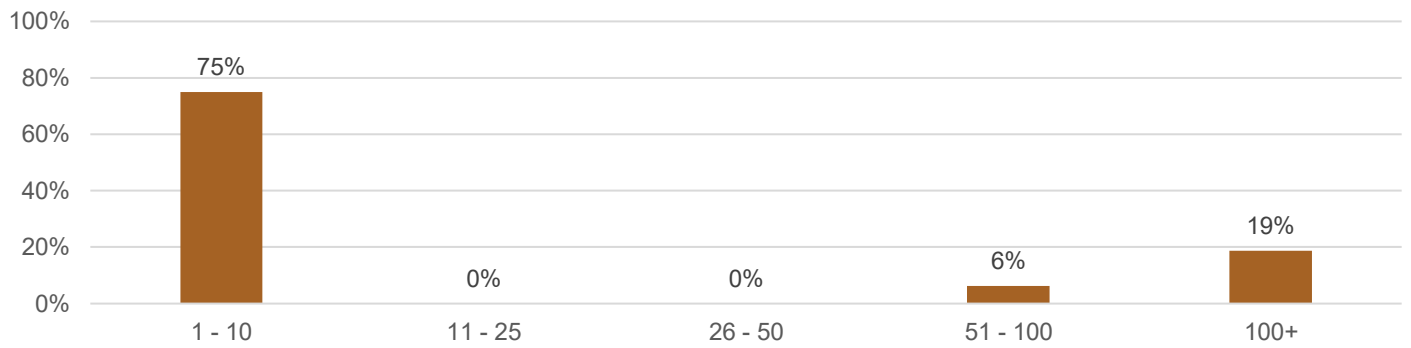
What business sector most closely matches your business?



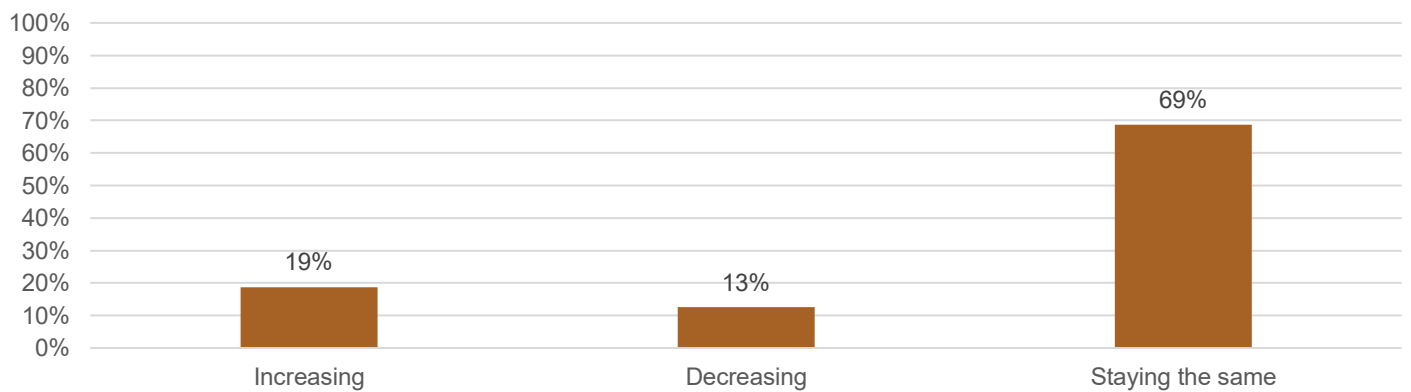
How many years has your business been operating in Mitchell County?



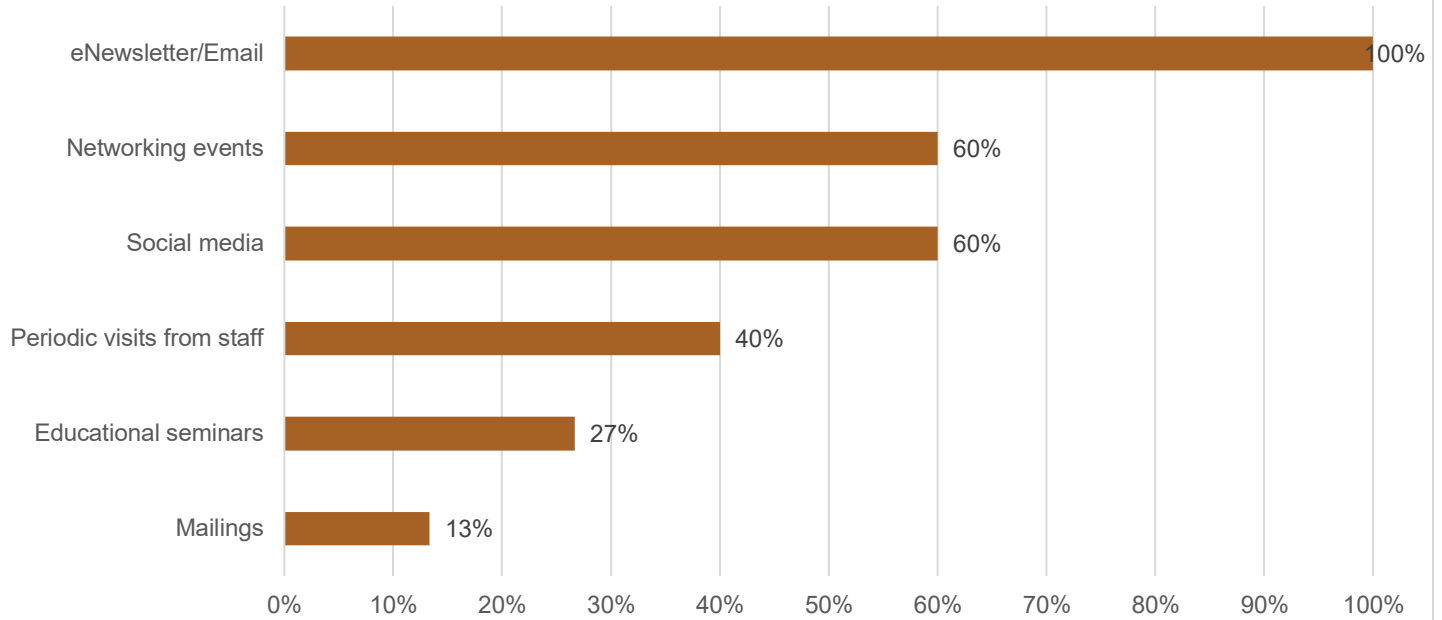
How many employees, full-time equivalents, are employed in your business?



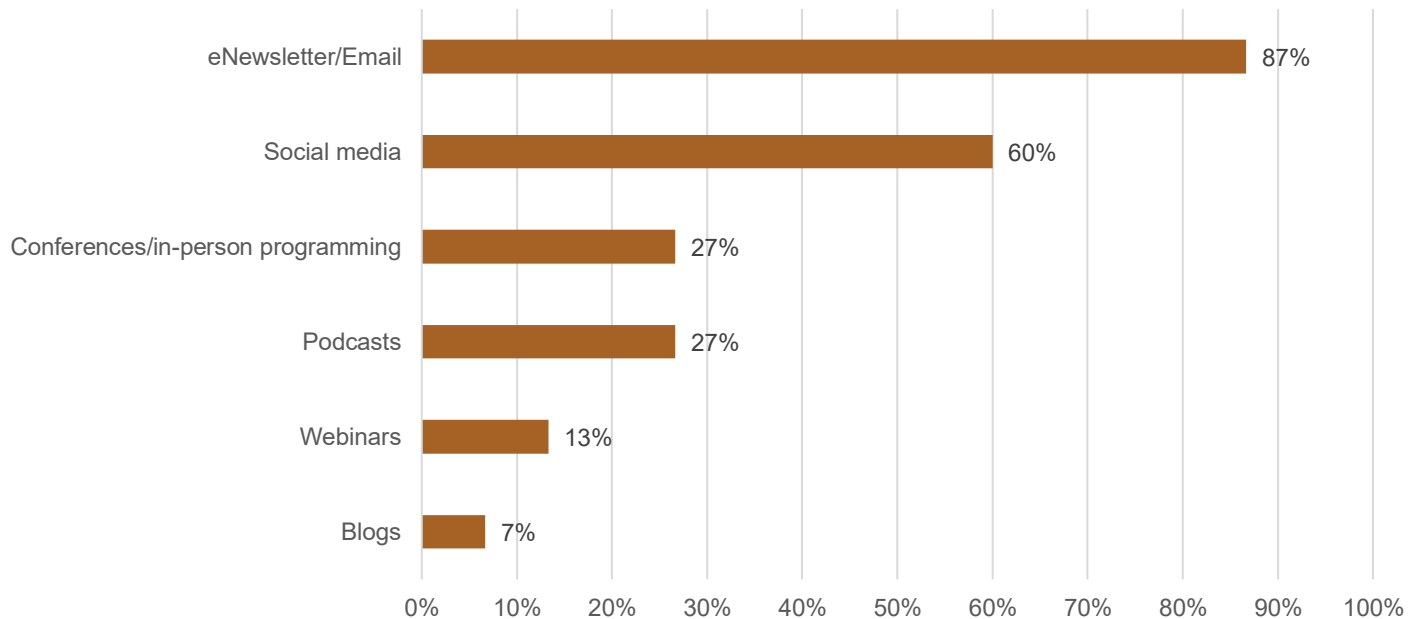
Our number of workers is...



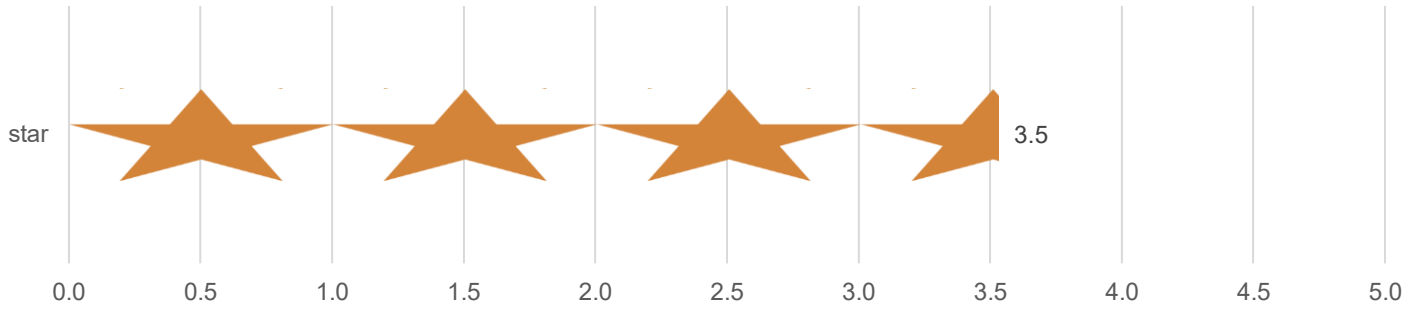
How would you like to be contacted with information from the Chamber? Choose all that apply.



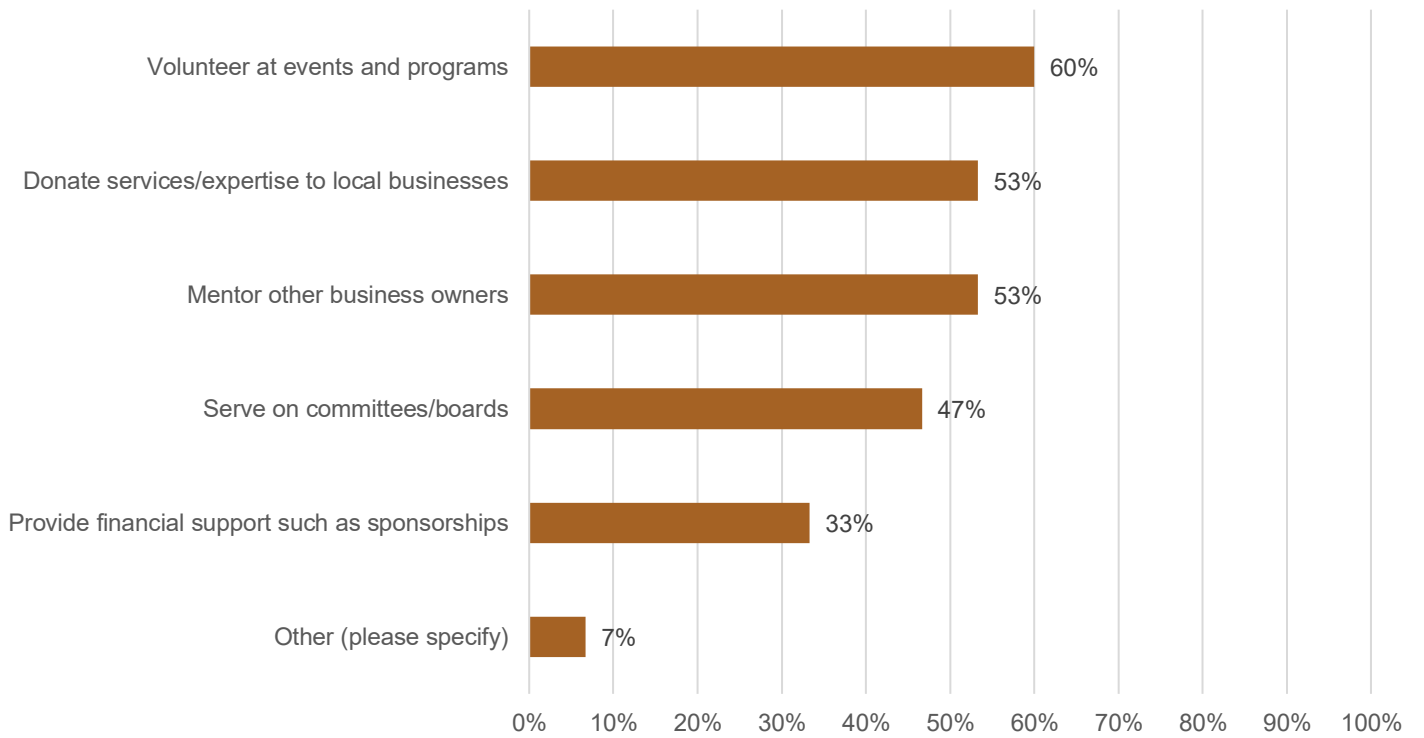
What is your preferred method to consume information that can help you grow your business? Check all that apply.



On a scale of 1-5, do you get the information, services, and support you need from the Chamber?



I am willing to support the Chamber and economic development efforts by... Check all that apply.



Other (please specify)

I would need to see more benefit from the Chamber before I would be willing to do more support.

Appendix D: Economic Profile

This study included updating a few economic data points that the county has been following. Retail sales plummeted following Hurricane Helene. There was a surge in December and January, likely supplies for rebuilding, then another dip in February. Since April, sales have been close to pre-Helene levels but likely still include rebuilding rather than being driven by tourism.

Mitchell County Monthly Taxable Retail Sales

	2022	2023	2024	2025
January	\$18,312,658	\$20,033,719	\$21,773,044	\$24,321,685
February	\$13,259,830	\$16,250,772	\$19,445,296	\$19,253,863
March	\$13,460,359	\$14,957,167	\$17,786,535	\$18,934,535
April	\$15,798,984	\$17,378,824	\$20,493,243	\$24,139,656
May	\$17,053,328	\$19,008,684	\$20,210,279	\$22,266,810
June	\$16,051,267	\$18,829,190	\$20,904,753	\$23,202,470
July	\$17,550,303	\$20,679,489	\$20,499,503	\$22,625,437
August	\$17,419,096	\$23,180,070	\$20,973,724	\$21,741,362
September	\$17,809,156	\$22,142,844	\$22,845,102	\$19,663,300
October	\$18,077,563	\$21,732,455	\$15,235,311	\$19,693,222
November	\$18,527,516	\$21,150,668	\$18,122,091	\$31,314,391
December	\$17,008,121	\$20,276,178	\$20,977,461	

Source: NC Department of Revenue

The chart of initial unemployment claims tells the story of how impacted Mitchell County was by Helene. Historically, initial claims are very low. The spike in October coincides with the impacts of the hurricane.

Mitchell County Initial Monthly Unemployment Claims

	2024	2025
January	5	0
February	*	5
March	*	0
April	6	*
May	6	0
June	*	*
July	5	0
August	*	0
September	5	*
October	390	5
November	62	5
December	42	5

Source: NC Department of Commerce

*Data Suppressed

Employment shows growth until the hurricane but has struggled to recover. Overall, employment is down by about 300. Employment represents the number of people working in Mitchell County; thus, it includes residents who work in the county and in-commuters.

Mitchell County Employment by Industry July 2024 – June 2025

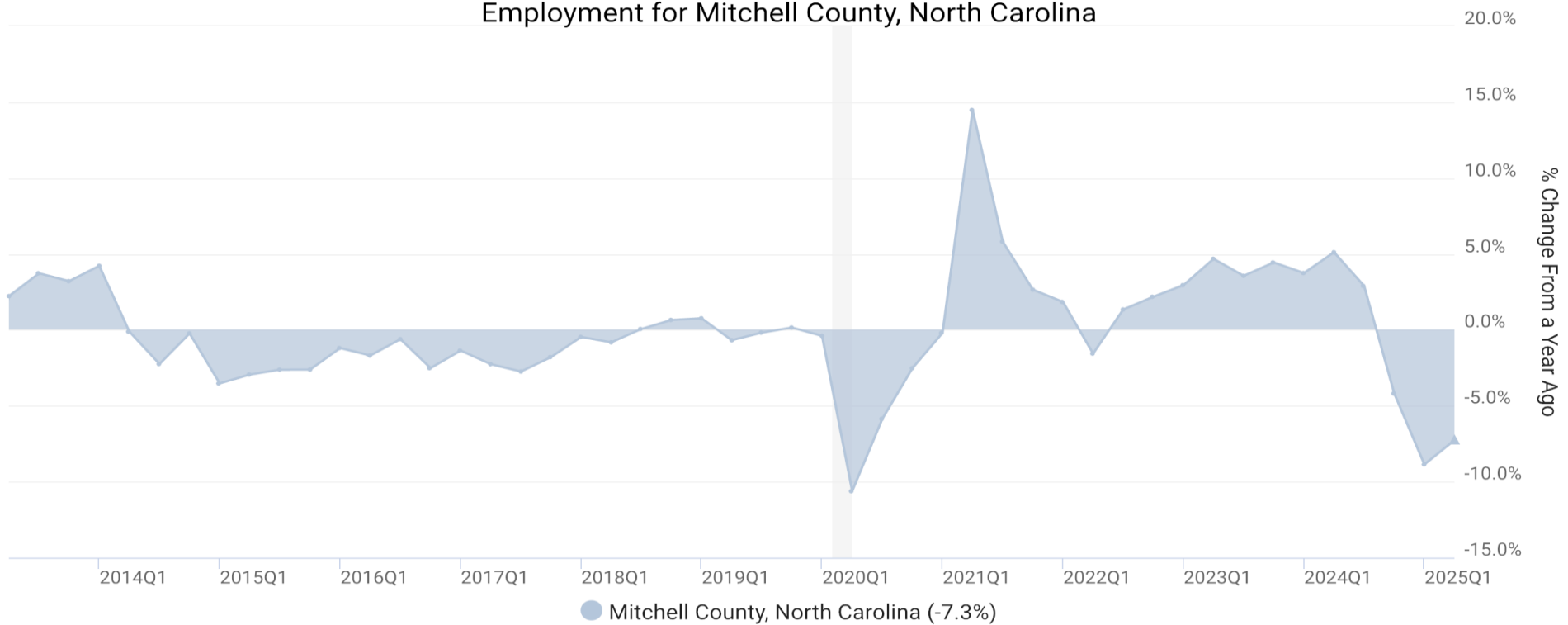
	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	6	6	6	3	2	4	3	3	3	3	3	3
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	599	607	620	642	655	656	475	486	485	488	480	486
Utilities	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13	13
Construction	233	228	225	183	242	241	261	260	266	233	216	252
Manufacturing	139	132	125	120	106	120	115	114	125	123	124	131
Wholesale Trade	191	197	175	181	143	146	150	151	150	157	164	169
Retail Trade	780	766	774	712	751	746	680	668	631	578	576	588
Transportation and Warehousing	207	190	190	186	188	182	246	261	262	264	259	263
Information	*	*	*	9	9	9	*	*	*	*	*	*
Finance and Insurance	90	97	94	96	96	93	86	90	93	100	84	96
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	22	22	21	23	24	18	20	19	20	19	19	20
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	102	93	96	97	96	97	89	93	95	96	99	104
Management of Companies and Enterprises	*	*	*	7	7	12	8	8	8	*	*	*
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	191	199	194	235	201	176	119	134	150	184	219	244
Educational Services	397	628	649	625	606	632	464	471	505	514	508	329
Health Care and Social Assistance	869	873	875	815	824	864	848	870	887	872	886	864
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	*	*	*	25	28	45	*	*	*	70	77	85

Accommodation and Food Services	441	402	394	236	277	372	322	315	348	361	347	356
Other Services (except Public Administration)	302	292	300	281	297	299	254	257	263	247	237	245
Public Administration	327	332	320	321	334	325	322	312	318	327	331	340
Unclassified	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Total All Industries	4,903	5,071	5,065	4,807	4,897	5,046	4,475	4,525	4,622	4,649	4,642	4,588

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Mitchell County Employment Change

Employment for Mitchell County, North Carolina



Source: JobsEQ®. Data as of 2025Q2. The shaded areas of the graph represent national recessions.

Source: JobsEQ

Creative Give Back

The Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce was selected as the 2025 Creative Give Back winner. The Creative Give Back is Creative Economic Development Consulting's way to give back to the field of economic development. Starting in 2014, Creative EDC began awarding one consulting project a year through a competitive application process. Previous winners have included the Nikwasi Initiative, Lancaster, SC, Waynesboro, VA, Cabarrus County EDC, NC, Wayne County Development Alliance, NC, City of Graham, NC, and the Blacksburg Partnership, VA.



To be considered for The Creative Give Back, the project must:

- BE CREATIVE
- Challenge us to think outside the box
- Have the ability to significantly impact the local economy
- Have a true, demonstrated consulting need
- Be consistent with sustainable economic development practices
- Give us the opportunity to work with a great community and great people

Creative EDC's scope for the Chamber's project was to develop strategies for recovery and resilience. Project steps included:

- Update and expand previously developed economic data to monitor the current state of the local economy.
- Conduct an economic impact analysis on the impacts of Hurricane Helene.
- Develop a strategy for recovery and resilience:
 - Engage with business owners and community leaders for input into the resilience strategy through input sessions and surveys.
 - Interview leaders of key ally organizations.
 - Incorporate best practices in disaster recovery.
- Conduct an organizational analysis to include organizational structure, leadership development, staffing model, and funding model.
- Develop a social media campaign to accompany this project.

This report was delivered to the Chamber, Economic Development Commission and its public and private partner. It is also posted on the Creative Give Back webpage to share what was learned in this project. The strategies and key findings developed as part of this project will hopefully support other communities who are working to make their economy stronger.

Study Partner and Consultant



The Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce is an active membership organization that serves the needs of businesses, non-profits and government agencies of all sizes in and around Mitchell County. The Chamber focuses on excellent customer service, building strong partnerships, being a knowledgeable resource, and aims for excellence in all of its activities.

<https://mitchellcountychamber.org/>



Creative Economic Development Consulting, LLC, provides strategic planning, product development, organizational development, and economic impact analysis services to communities. Creative EDC launched the Creative Give Bank in 2014 and has awarded 12 projects to communities across North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. www.creativeedc.com