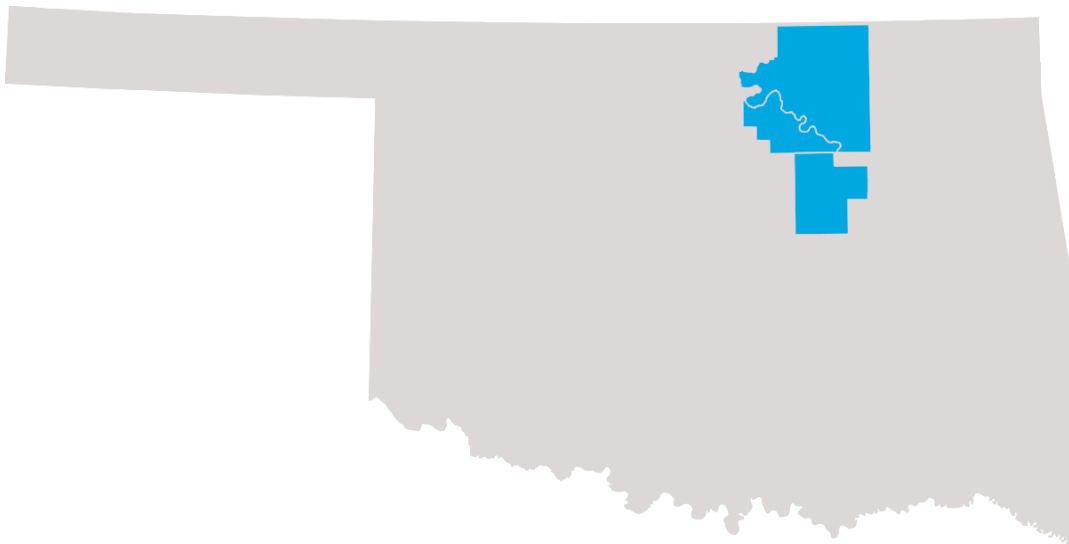

Key Findings: CREATE BRIDGES Survey Responses from Sandstone Hills

Compiled March 2020



Survey Participants

The focus of this Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) was businesses in the retail, accommodations, tourism, and entertainment sectors in Creek, Osage and Pawnee Counties.

- 70 BRE surveys were conducted in Summer and Fall of 2019.
- Size of participating businesses ranged from 1 to 160 employees.
- Of those responding: 80 % were full-time employees, 18% were part-time, 1% seasonal and 1% temporary.

Employment Trends

- 27% of respondents reported the number of employees increasing over the last 3 years.
- 10% reported stable employment and 12% experiencing a decrease in number of employees.
- 60% of average starting wage or salary was in the range of \$7.25 - \$10/hr.

Rate of turnover was a barrier for 30% of employers surveyed.

Leading barriers to finding employees:

1. Pay
2. Substance abuse
3. Dependability
4. Location

Positions difficult to fill include: cooks, cashiers, and restaurant servers.

Employee Benefits: 49% of employers surveyed indicated they provide some level of benefits to employees. Benefits provided to employees included no-cost meals, access to internet for personal use, dental, health, vision and retirement benefits.

Ranked factors affecting employees' ability to work:

1. Transportation
2. Child/elder care
3. Housing availability

Skills and Training

Skills:

When asked what skills employers prefer their employees have to execute their job responsibilities, preferred skills included:

1. Face-to-face communication skills
2. Customer service skills
3. Teamwork

When asked what technical skills employers look for in an ideal employee, preferred technical skills included:

1. Cash management
2. Inventory control
3. Basic accounting

Training:

64% of employers surveyed responded that they provide a formal employee orientation or onboarding process. Most indicated this was on-the-job training with a supervisor or co-worker and included written handbook or instructions.

49% reported they offer training beyond orientation to address changes in technology and policy.

21% reported they provide opportunities for cross-training, leadership or career advancement.

Customers and Advertising

Employers were asked to estimate the percentage of gross sales generated from the following locations:

Within the region- 60%

Outside the region- 40%

Outside the United States- 9%

- 51% of employers reported they *do not* currently sell products and goods online.
- 34% of employers reported they *do* currently sell products and goods online.

Barriers to selling online included: difficulty finding a site to use and exposure to new customers.

The most common methods of advertising reported:

1. Facebook/Social media
2. Word of Mouth
3. Newspaper
4. Radio
5. Television

Technology and Business Changes

When asked how existing or emerging technology affect businesses, key phrases or terms included: *difficulty keeping up with fast-paced changes and processes/expensive.*

When asked how they see business changing over the next three years, key phrases or terms included: *growing, expanding locations, adding new technology, adapting to industry changes and plans to reach new customers.*

Business owners were asked which of the following they would like to know more about to help position their business for success:

- a. Creating/updating my business plan – 30%
- b. Selling my business or transitioning it to new ownership – 19%
- c. Market research to identify existing or new customer bases – 48%
- d. Available economic incentives – 46%
- e. Energy efficiency upgrades – 30%
- f. Support in hiring employees – 25%
- g. Identifying financing options – 34%
- h. Disaster relief support – 4%*

*survey taken prior to COVID-19 events

Business transition: 66% of business reported they *did not* have a transition plan for new ownership, leadership or both.

Community Factors

Business owners were asked how the region's business climate for retail, accommodations, tourism and entertainment has changed in the past three years. Responses ranged from: growing exponentially, to stagnant and declining. This indicates the business environment is very divergent, even for similar sectors in close proximity. Business owners in the same region are having very different experiences in terms of growth and sustainability.

Business owners indicated a need for easier access to credit and banking options; as well as improved infrastructure such as sidewalks, signage and wayfinding.

67% of respondents surveyed said internet access and reliability was a barrier for business.

Business owners were asked to indicate the impact of local business support:

- Local elected leadership
 - Positive impact – 23/67, 34%
 - Negative impact – 18/67, 27%
 - Neutral – 4/67, 6%
 - No Response – 22/67, 33%

- Chamber of Commerce
 - Positive impact – 20/67, 30%
 - Negative impact – 20/67, 30%
 - Neutral – 7/67 total, 10%
 - No Response – 20/67, 30%

- Other economic development organizations
 - 13/67, 19%

- Main Street Program
 - 5/67, 7%

Specific ways the community can be more supportive of CREATE sector businesses (responses):

- Make initiative to engage local leadership, increase visibility, tie into local goals and vision for the area
- Let businesses know how they can provide better service
- Push tourism
 - If people would travel into town to visit tourism sites, it would draw more businesses to the area as a whole
- Make purchases

Tourism and Travel

- 73% of businesses surveyed said they could benefit from regional branding or promotion.
- 59% responded they see their business as part of the tourism economy or actively promoting tourism in your region.

Outcomes of the Create Bridges project that would benefit their businesses:

- More educational opportunities, financial support for business sectors, information
- Sharing data results to use for funding/grants and planning, showcase the relevance of historic sites
- Resources for customer service training, addiction recovery resources, facility that works with workforce
- Broadband and electric costs
- Promote tourism
- Regional branding and promotion
- Facelift on Main Street in the town
- Businesses seeing benefit of each promoting others
- Help with how to advertise or cash in on tourism
- More promotion for business and exposure, problems with cancellations, happens too often. More real time changes and updates to website, problems/help with screening tenants
- A city government that is progressive in thinking and encourages growth, update codes, remove city official that can't think "growth"
- Increase business financing, museums as economic development
- Increased signage, advertising in the paper
- Develop improved community relations, more authenticity, healthy cultural exchange
- Better internet connections
- Strengthen the retail community through advertising for small businesses on Main Street
- Connecting resources
 - Awareness of resources.
- Ability to discuss these issues and think about the questions asked in this survey allows them to help solve challenges they face as a business owner.
- Grant writing assistance
- How to build a website for marketing, would like to use Facebook for the business (education), concerns about not knowing how social media can help the business without compromising personal privacy, would like drone footage, budget for running accommodations, what personal affects can/should be left out (Airbnb)
- Provide some data to assist our marketing programs
- Bridge gap between city and our businesses
- Bridge the communication gap between the tribe and the city.
- Identify as tourism "identity" and develop a plan.
- Employee recruitment
- Decrease barriers to promotion, more qualified workforce
- City-tribal working together for growth, state-tribal working together for growth and development from turnpike
- Provide programs/training to help individuals who seek data and skills to

- negotiate with other communities
- Improve our ability to communicate with the tribe, city, county, state, public. Grow tourism
 - Help getting traffic flow from 412
 - Decreasing barriers with turnpike and local government bonding
 - Help building a regional picture of our communities. This will help us identify potential employees and patrons. They can also provide us with information on what areas would be good to expand into.
 - Would love to purchase/rehab a building on Main to improve exposure. Wanting to expand product lines and offer greater services.
 - Educational classes