



NARRATIVE
RESEARCH

Business Confidence and Economic Issues Report

August 2020

Prepared for:





NARRATIVE
RESEARCH

Summary of Findings



Brampton Board of Trade

Business Confidence and Economic Issues

Key Highlights

Methodology:



Online surveys

111 business people completed surveys from June 10th to July 3rd, 2020.



23.1 years

Average length of time business has operated in Brampton

Business Profile

38%

Located in Brampton only

37%

Also elsewhere in Canada

Industry

Mfg/B2B 58%

Service 29%

Retail 5%

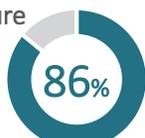
Other 8%

Economic Confidence

Confidence in economic future



Brampton



Organization



Top 3 Issues Facing Brampton Businesses Today (Key Unaided Mentions)

- 33% Transportation infrastructure
- 23% Pandemic/COVID-19 impact
- 20% Access to talent/skilled labour



Suggestions for Board of Trade to Alleviate Issues (Key Unaided Mentions)

- 14% Work with government
- 11% Promote small/local businesses
- 8% Engage business community

Economic Outlook Over The Next 12 Months

32%



Expect the # of staff within their organization to increase

Confidence in organization's...

76% Environmental sustainability



73% Economic sustainability



72% Ability to generate revenue



Civic Leadership

Only 1 in 2 agree



agree

... that the municipal government... displays a positive external brand image... shares priorities that align with business needs

40%

Believe Brampton's business community is doing enough to foster a positive business environment



Only 1 in 2 are confident in...



are confident in...

... Brampton City Council's ability to make good decisions... the senior levels of government



Advice for City Hall to Increase Business Competitiveness (Key Unaided Mentions)

- #1 Support small/local businesses
- #2 Focus on business growth/Attract new businesses
- #3 Improve infrastructure

Transportation

64% agree

Brampton is easily accessible from other regions

28% agree it's easy to get around within Brampton



Ways to Improve Transportation and Accessibility Both Into and Within Brampton (Key Unaided Mentions)

- | #1 | #2 | #3 |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Better public transit | All day GO Train service | Improve highway capability/Build new highway |

Trade and Investment

Top 3 Issues Impacting Trade

21%

Import goods for resale in Brampton

28%

Export goods

Transportation costs 56% Tariffs 41% Protectionism 35%

Technology and Innovation

New Technologies for Business

64% Know how to find the personnel to implement them

55% Aware of the best financing options

55% Knowledgeable about what is available to optimize operations

Talent



66%

Prefer to advertise online for recruiting

45%

Find it difficult to find new talent for their organization

66%

Organization offers internships or co-op opportunities

79%

Pay those completing internships/co-ops

78%

Believe the City should support the three existing post-secondary institutions and their proposal to expand university offerings...

... to attract/develop local talent/skilled labour

#1

... for economic growth/benefits local businesses

#2

... because they are established/credible

#3



Findings from the **2020 Business Confidence and Economic Issues Surveys** suggest economic confidence in Brampton is strong. Nearly eight in ten business leaders report feeling confident about the City's economic future in general. Indeed, these results suggest Brampton business leaders are more confident about Brampton's long-term economy than Ontario business leaders are more generally about Ontario's economy.¹ And while confidence going forward is strong, opinions towards Brampton's current overall state of economy are somewhat unfavourable, with just over one-half of believing it is worse now than it was 12 months ago. This finding is unsurprising given the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although participants were encouraged to consider the last 12 months, as a whole, when responding to questions (as opposed to just the last few months), it is impossible to completely disregard such a monumental event and the effect that is having on businesses. On a positive note, business owners display a more optimistic outlook for the coming year, with one-half projecting that the Brampton economy will improve over the shorter term (i.e. the next 12 months).

With regards to business leaders' own organizations, economic confidence is strong, and the projected economic outlook for the next 12 months is positive. Furthermore, leaders express confidence in their organization's environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, and their ability to generate revenue over the next year. Stability or growth of staffing is also expected within the same timeframe. That said, nearly one-half of business leaders indicate it is difficult to find new talent for their organization, so growth may be a challenge in that regard. In terms of recruiting, online advertisement of employment opportunities is preferred, primarily through Indeed.com.

As a means to increase business competitiveness within Brampton, leaders advise City Hall to support small or local businesses, and to advise the provincial and federal governments to invest in infrastructure. The advice offered to provincial and federal governments is unsurprising considering leaders perceive transportation infrastructure as the top issue facing Brampton businesses today. It is also suggested that improving transportation infrastructure will improve trade conditions as well as result in improvements to the City's downtown core. Meanwhile, transportation costs are identified as the top issue impacting trade in Brampton, followed by tariffs. Of note, tariffs are of greater concern among those who engage in the import of goods for resale. That said, the import of goods for resale purposes is limited among Brampton organizations, as mentioned by only two in ten. At the same time, three in ten report to export goods. When asked about investment in locally-purchased goods and services for business use, nearly one-half project the value of these goods and services to increase over the next 12 months.

Business leaders hold moderate opinions in terms of Brampton's investment attractiveness and are generally unsure of how the City's investment attractiveness or trade and culture missions can be improved. Moreover, few are satisfied in terms of Brampton's commercial property tax rate, various fees (storm water and user fees), and development approval times.

Across departments, satisfaction is highest with the quality of services offered by Brampton Fire and Emergency Services. Meanwhile, business leaders are least likely to be satisfied with the legislative services operating department, the corporate support services department, and the chief administration officer's office. It is, however, positive to note that reported dissatisfaction is minimal across all departments. Moreover, while opinions toward the municipal government are divided, business leaders are unlikely to provide any detailed feedback, suggesting a lack of experience to evaluate departments, rather than any specific issues. It is important to note that only one in two respondents agree that the municipal government displays a positive external

¹ Ontario Chamber of Commerce. 2020. *Ontario Economic Report 2020*.



Executive Summary (continued)

brand image. Similarly, only one in two express confidence in Brampton city council's ability to make good decisions, agree that the municipal government is trustworthy, or that its priorities align with their business needs. Altogether, these findings suggest there are opportunities for city council to collaborate and work more closely with businesses in order to improve opinions.

In terms of COVID-19 response, most business leaders are satisfied with how Brampton's City Council responded to the pandemic. Interestingly, business leaders whose organizations are located in Brampton and elsewhere are more likely to express *complete satisfaction* (scores of 9 or 10) than those whose organizations only operation within the City. This suggests that owners operating in multiple locations see Brampton's COVID-19 response as comparing favourably.

Only a small majority consider Brampton to be easily accessible from other regions, and don't generally consider it to be easy to get around within the City itself. It is most often perceived that better public transit is needed in order to improve accessibility both into and within the City. With this in mind, it is also unsurprising that only a minority express satisfaction with the Brampton Transit system (though a third also were unfamiliar enough to evaluate it). That said, few give suggestions on how to improve the public transportation system. Satisfaction regarding local and surrounding transportation assets is mixed, with leaders being most satisfied with the Toronto Pearson Airport and Highway 407. Furthermore, a notable minority express dissatisfaction with Highways 410 and 401. When considering opinions regarding the investment in proposed transportation initiatives, leaders are generally very supportive.

While awareness and perceived knowledge of technological business solutions is moderate among business leaders, budget is considered the top innovation barrier by far for Brampton organizations. Few report any suggestions in order to improve innovation among Brampton's business community, however.

Two-thirds of those surveyed mention offering internship or co-op opportunities for students, with the majority noting these positions are paid. That said, opinions on the matter suggest there are insufficient employment opportunities for students. Specifically, only one-quarter agree that organizations within Brampton offer excellent internship or co-op placements, while three in ten believe there are sufficient opportunities available for students who can earn while learning. Business leaders largely approve of the City supporting Ryerson University, Algoma University, and Sheridan College's plans to expand offerings within Brampton, most commonly attributing their approval to the potential for new business attraction and development among current businesses.

In terms of profile of **Brampton Board of Trade** businesses who took part in this research, it is clear that businesses tend to have a relatively long tenure in the City. Indeed, on average, businesses have been operating within the City for 23 years, with three-quarters of organizations having opened their doors in Brampton at least ten years ago. Results show that businesses are somewhat more likely to also have locations outside of Brampton, while four in ten businesses are located solely within the City. The industrial profile of Brampton's businesses is highly diverse, though operations in business and professional services and manufacturing are reported most often.