

SURVEY RESULTS SUMMARY

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION & CEDS SURVEY

Survey Conducted

December 2024 – January 2025

279 Responses

RICHLAND COUNTY
ECONOMIC
STRATEGY

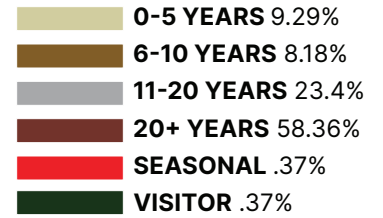
GROWTH. OUR WAY.

richland
redc.
economic development corp

QUESTION 1

How long have you resided in Richland County?

Over 50% of survey respondents have lived in Richland County for **20+ years**.



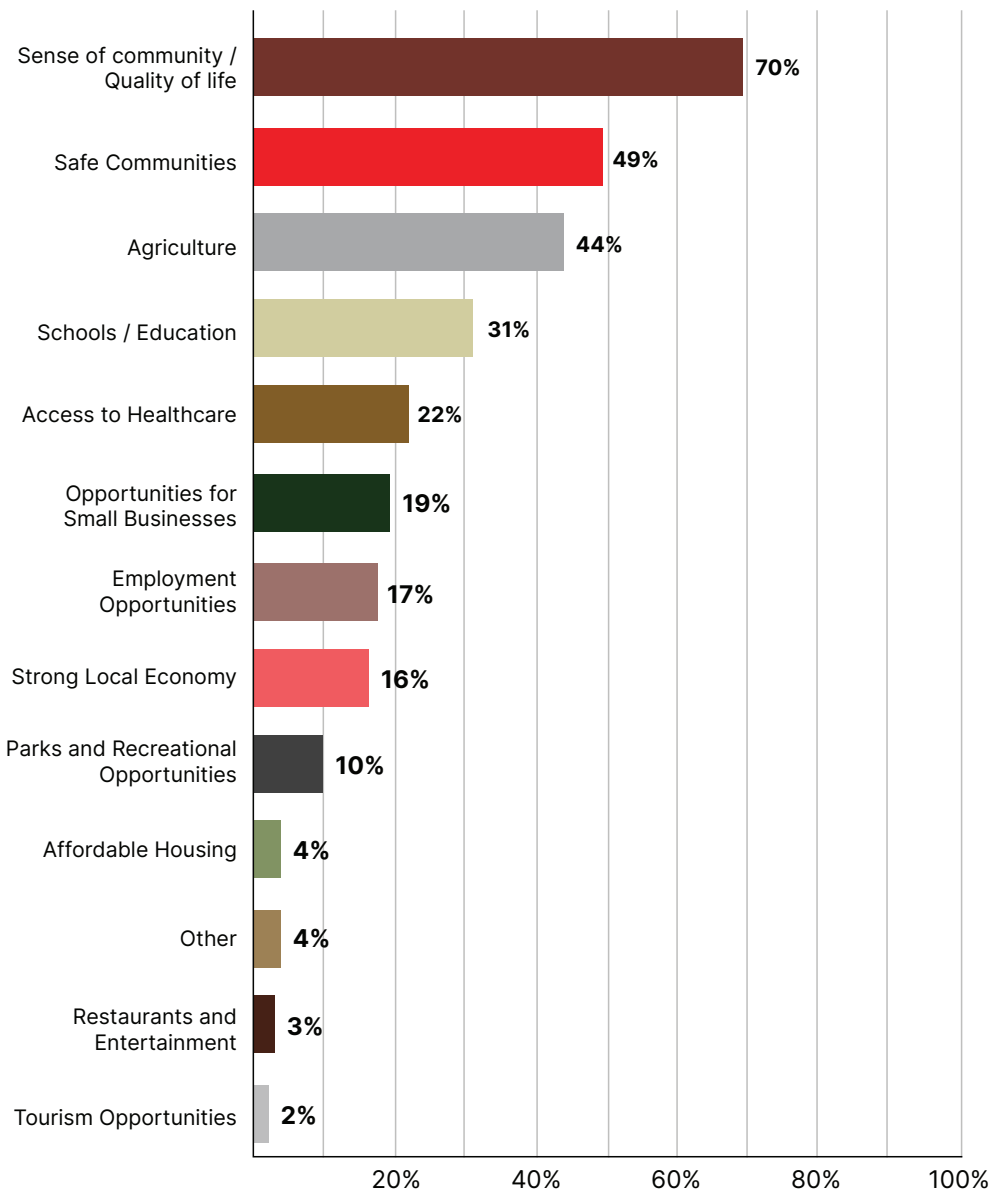
53%

QUESTION 2

What do you see as Richland County's **greatest assets**, or what makes it stand out? List your top 3.

TOP 3 RESPONSES

- Sense of community / quality of life
- Safe Communities
- Agriculture



QUESTION 3

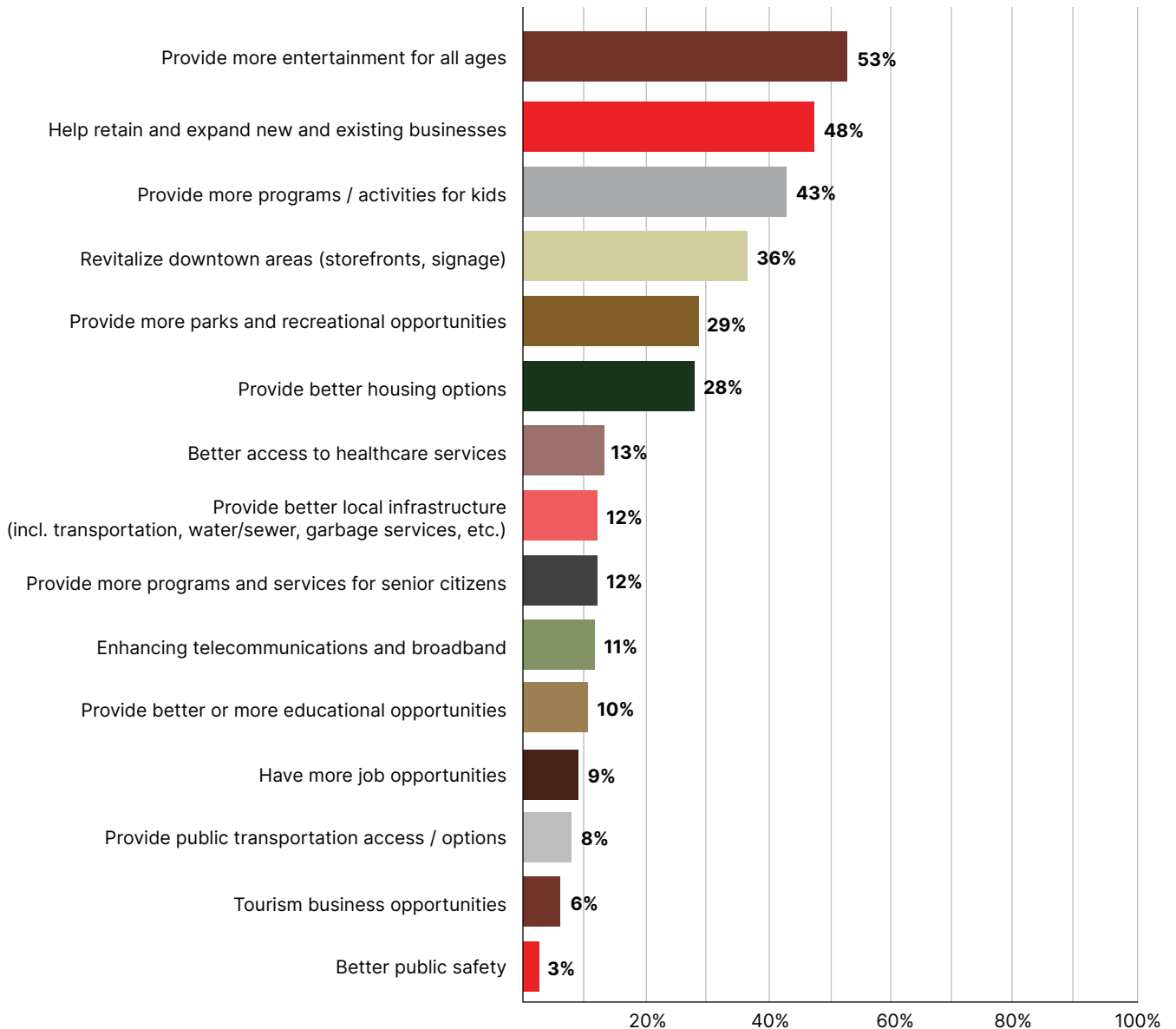
What areas do you see as Richland County's **biggest needs** or areas that Richland County can improve? Pick your top 3.

Over half of respondents see a need for **more entertainment for all ages**.

Programming for kids is specifically requested.

Respondents also identified a need to **support businesses** and downtown areas.

Tourism and public safety are seen as needing the **least improvement**.



QUESTION 4

Which business industries have the most **“growth potential”** in Richland County? Pick your top 3.

TOP 5 RESPONSES

Retail

Value Added
Agriculture

Recreation

Energy

Services Industries

“OTHER” RESPONSES INCLUDED

“Grain and commodities storage and transport”

“Plumbing, Electrical, Construction jobs, provide apprentice program for youth training or retraining - Job Work center or Job Corps center”

“Rental/event businesses”

“Mental health services and counseling, **Education”**

“Big Box Retail”

“Daycare”

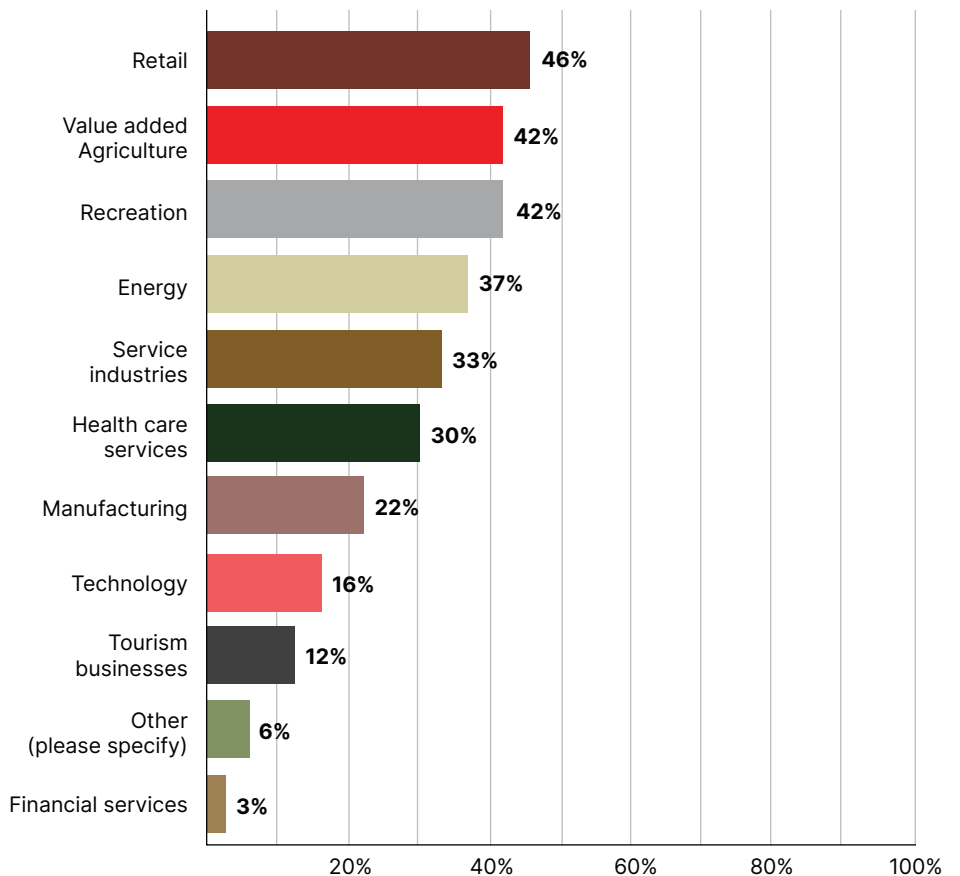
“businesses outside of the direct downtown area”



WHAT IS VALUE ADDED AGRICULTURE?

“Value-added agriculture opportunities... allow producers to capture more of the value they create.”

Montana Department of Agriculture



QUESTION 5

Based on your top choices from question (#4) above, what **TYPES of business** would you like to see in Richland County? Pick your top 3.

The top three answers were consistent with the previous question, although in a different order.

Respondents would most like to see Entertainment and Activities businesses.

“OTHER” RESPONSES INCLUDED

Retail, including:

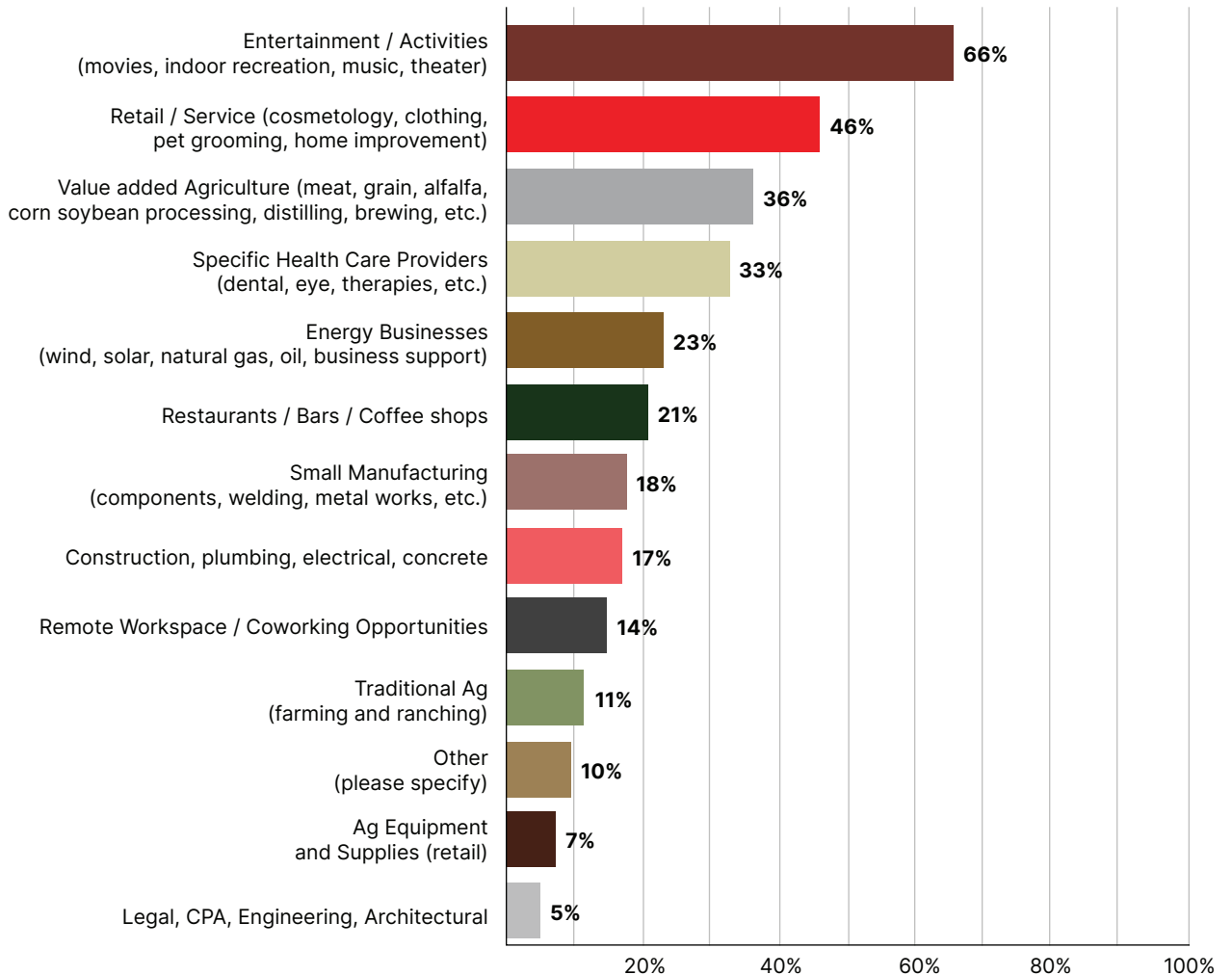
*Affordable Clothing
Big Box or Chain Retailers
Everyday Items/Basics*

Recreation, including:

*Pickleball Courts
Indoor Basketball
Rec Center*

“Jobs corps center in partnership with the High School”

“Restaurants with healthier options/ stores with healthy foods”



QUESTION 6

What do you see as some of the **obstacles for new businesses** to open in Richland County?

TOP 3 RESPONSES

Workforce Challenges

Population and/or Location

Lack of community support

“OTHER” RESPONSES INCLUDED

“Housing/Rental Cost”

“Affordable housing for potential employees”

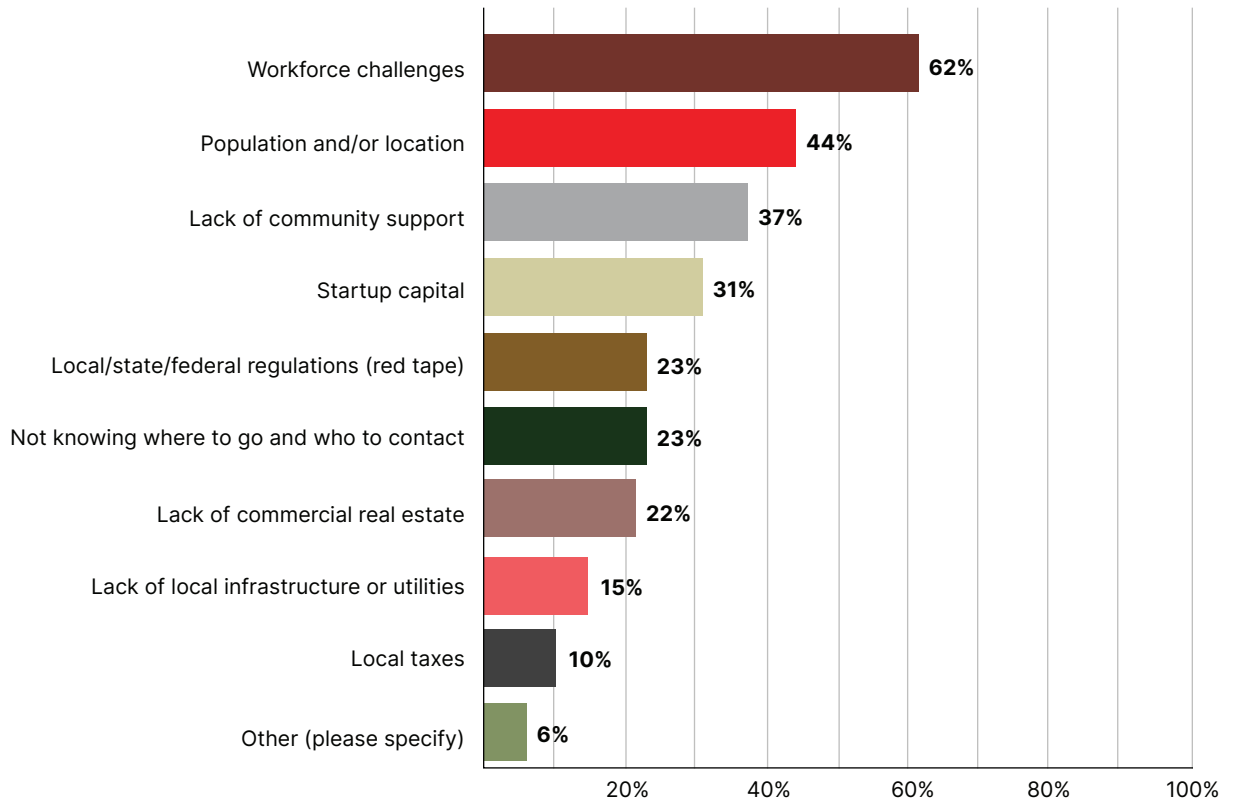
“Cost of overhead”

“Area “cliques” impede growth or obstruct other businesses”

“Lack of local governmental support. Lack of state governmental support.”

“The Montana permitting process is difficult and slow.”

“...employees want M-TH work schedule like their school kids which makes it difficult for businesses that are open M-Sunday”



QUESTION 7

What **changes** would you like to see in Richland County?

THEMES

Rec Center

About 43 responses were specifically asking for a rec center.

About 90 responses total mentioned more recreational opportunities of some kind, for people of all ages.

Retail

About 30 responses mentioned retail shopping.

Respondents generally wanted local access to basics such as food and clothing. Some expressed interest in chain stores such as Walmart, while some expressed support for more local businesses, but understood challenges with pricing

Community

About 10 respondents voiced the importance of needing community support for economic progress.

Commercial Spaces

About 9 responses mentioned commercial spaces.

Comments included beautifying downtown areas, concerns about high rent, and utilizing existing spaces creatively.

We have enough of...

Respondents mentioned the area has enough bars and coffee shops, and has invested enough in fairgrounds. Other investment areas are desired.

SELECTED RESPONSES

"A community and agencies that work together for a common cause."

"A local change in the focus of local government and businesses toward a **more diverse economy** rather than simply being focused on agriculture and oilfield services."

"A full and **vibrant downtown!**"

"More opportunities for **youth to stay in their home town.**"

"More activities for all but mostly children. An indoor recreational center would be amazing!"

"Being able to **attract young families** with more quality in our community infrastructure(parks/recreation beyond our excellent hunting and fishing) because we will grow better with young families."

"Broader **communications about activities, services, events**"

"More **engagement opportunities for young professionals** moving to the area"

"An **organized Volunteer group** ready to help the community when needed."

"More arts/music culture. More opportunities for kids in areas other than sports (i.e. arts, music, outdoor activities)."

"Provide the **resources residents need.** If we didn't have to go elsewhere for services,healthcare, shopping, etc. there might be more buy-in to our community, and together we can work towards adding value."

"I would love to have a community **rec center, affordable groceries,** and/or more opportunities to buy **affordable clothing.**"

"Another **ag processing facility,** like Wheat Montana, or some kind of regional food hub. More opportunities for entertainment that doesn't revolve around a bar. Someplace that isn't a dollar store."

"Improved **shopping for daily items** and restaurants. Attractions to draw people in. Us locals ALL need to be more optimistic and welcoming to new possibilities."

"More money spent on the **overall population of Richland county** instead of spending so much money on the fairgrounds for a 4 day event."

"Tackling the challenge of **traditional lifestyle** of a small community while **still showing progress.**"

"Can we **open the library on the weekends?**"

"I would love to see an actual **rec center** for the kids to be used during all seasons."

"A tech services store. Someplace I could take a computer or an iPad to help trouble shoot and get it working again."

"More people **supporting local stores** so we have some. Less on line. With that being said it needs to be affordable so you don't have to go on line"

QUESTION 8

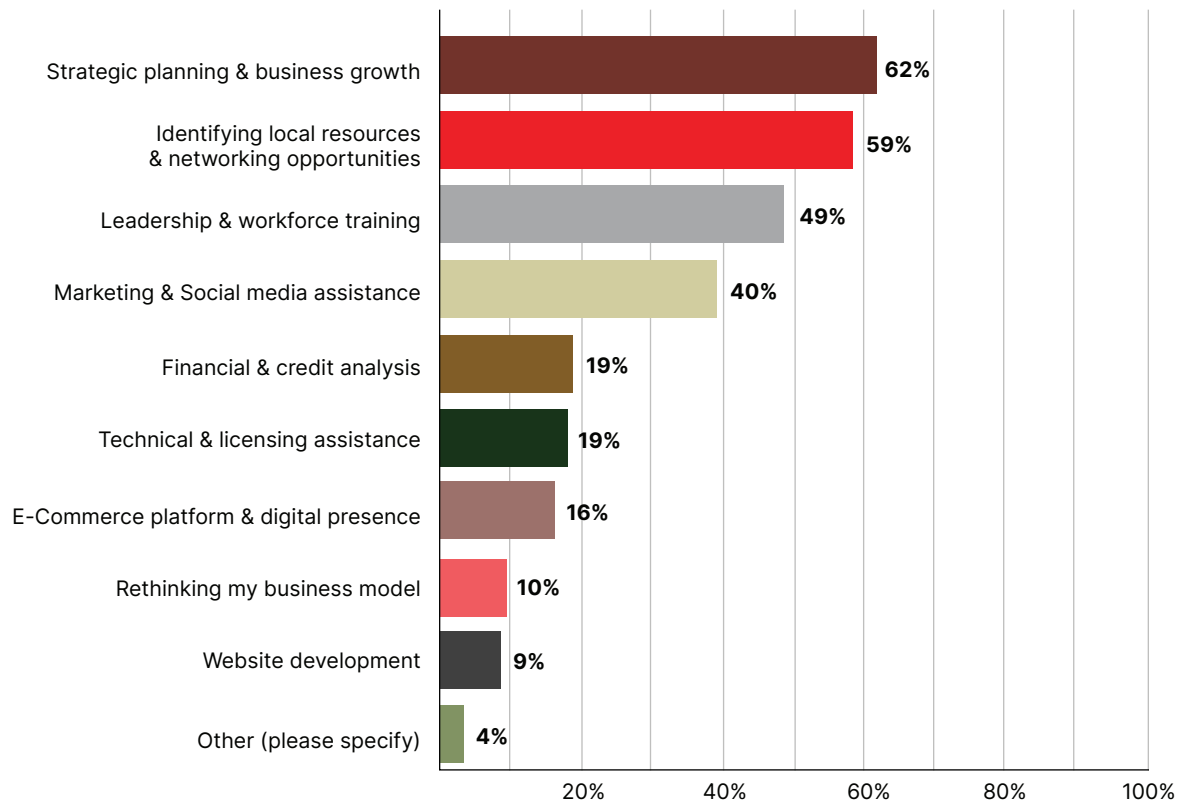
What type of economic **development services** do you believe would help businesses be more successful? Pick your top 3.

Marketing and Social Media assistance was ranked higher than other types of digital presence, such as e-commerce and website development.

“OTHER” RESPONSES INCLUDED

“Help for getting past the first year. Too many things open and close too fast without a financial plan.”

“How and where to find the knowledge regarding the paperwork side of business. Who can help and what do they need? What is a good strategy based on this region’s unique economy.”



QUESTION 9

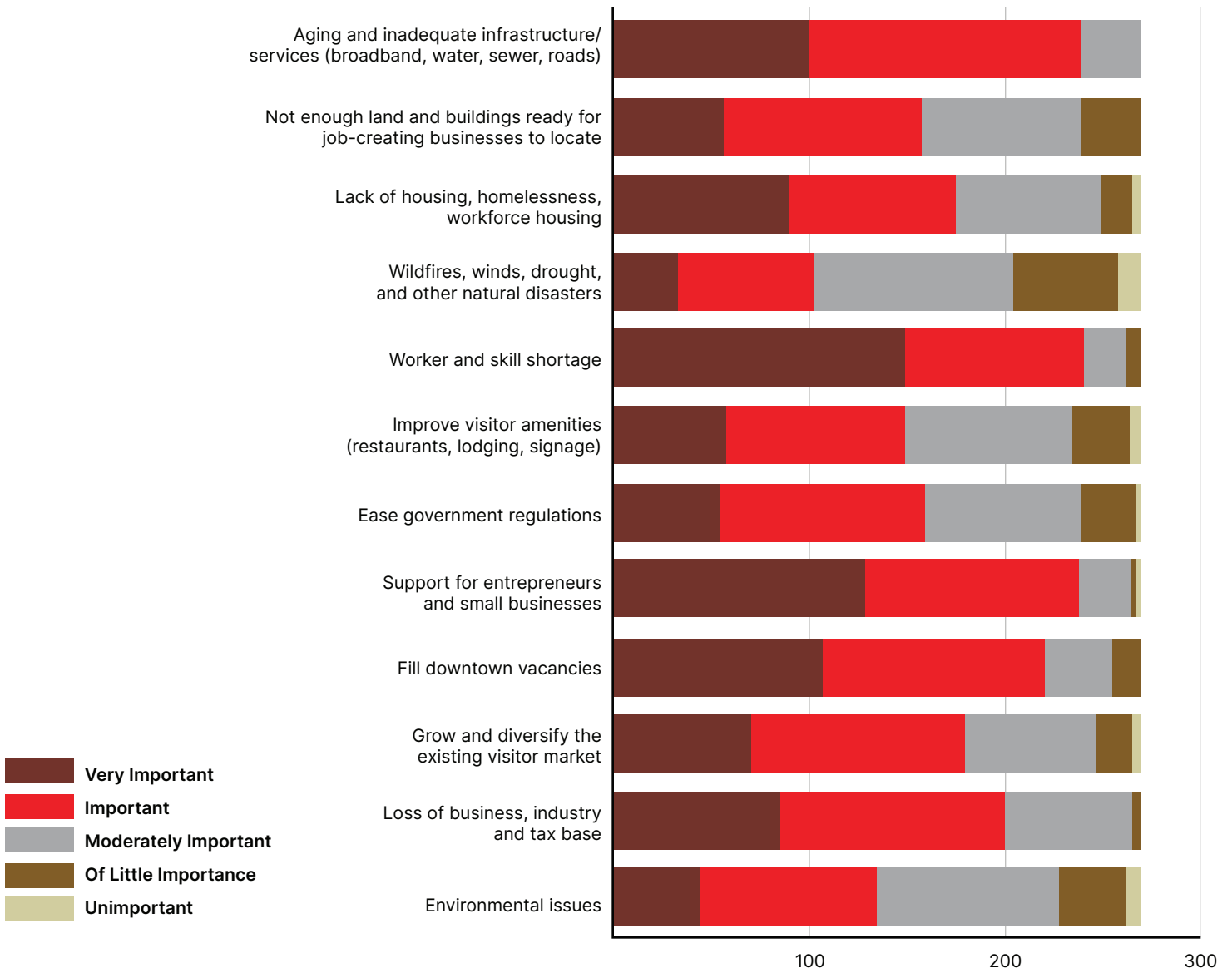
In order to achieve long-term economic stability and increase economic resilience, please rate the importance of the following challenges:

TOP 3 CHALLENGES RANKED “VERY IMPORTANT” OR “IMPORTANT”

89%
Worker and skill shortage

89%
Aging and inadequate infrastructure/services

89%
Support for entrepreneurs and small businesses



QUESTION 10

Please provide any additional comments regarding growth/development in Richland County/your community.

SELECTED RESPONSES

"The county needs a recreational center! Being active and healthy is not going to go out of style. We are long, long over due. In the years I've lived here I've completed too many surveys....build and they will come."

"New businesses are struggling and need additional guidance before opening doors"

"Continued work to educate and reinforce the need to **transition businesses**, specifically agriculture operations to the next generation."

"Change is inevitable in a community. **Community resilience** needs to be supported with solid bases of infrastructure, economic development, supporting families/youth, housing and job opportunities. All of this leads to a better quality of life for people wanting to move and live here."

"A community center with an indoor pool would benefit everyone. Curbs and sidewalks need redone. Most are not accessible via wheelchair"

"We need any type of **AG processing plants** to utilize our irrigation farming to high value profitable crops. The loss of Sidney Sugars has extremely hurt our farming community."

"It seems there's an ever present cycle of small businesses, failing due to lack of community support, but this community can't support because **local businesses have to charge so much to be profitable**. Wish there was a way to balance that out."

"Workforce challenges are impacting growth and sustainability"

"Housing and shopping are comments/concerns that come up when people are considering a move to our community for a job opportunity. Typically, they want to know where the nearest super store is... such as WalMart."

"Just **more things for everyone to do. More affordable housing** and more housing options."

"A recreational center is necessary. It would bring jobs, growth, and boost tourism. A boon for the community."

"Attracting younger community members will be important for the future growth of the community. Additionally community participation and involvement from a larger sector of the community is also important."

"Update the downtown area!"

"I appreciate the Chambers recent movement to **plan and grow local events.**"

"Thank you to REDC for the survey. I believe this survey, getting feedback from the community, is a great step in the right direction!"

"We need to find a way to **bring in people to fill out the shortage in workers** in every single industry in our communities. Skilled and unskilled."

"Be more **welcoming and inviting** to outsiders trying to come in."

"We really need a rec center! Jobs! Keep youth out of trouble. Income from surrounding areas would pour in as people spend dollars everywhere else when they come to the rec center. Our youth would be more competitive in sports year-round. Senior citizens would also utilize this. Keep people home from Williston and Watford. High school kids would be great employees here too. Work study? Opportunities for all."

"I believe that our community would benefit having a **rec center** of some sort for the children in our community. It would benefit all ages from the kiddos going to play or hang out to adults working there or even older kids. We have nothing to really enjoy in our community right now during the winter (which is over half the year in our area)."

"The existing local companies are not highly projected at job service, it is word of mouth. In order to **increase employment**, all avenues such as social media, local job fairs, and a "social worker" type position needs to be in place. To sustain small businesses, we need employees, and it needs to be "blasted" when a position needs to be filled, not JUST job service or JUST Facebook."

"We in Fairview has seen most of Richland county money go to sidney..need to **bring it to more of outlining communities**"

"More affordable housing and more restaurants."