SURVEY BRIEF:
THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON EMPLOYER SUPPORT SERVICES

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Survey Sample and Method

The current COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted housing vulnerability and its interdependence with employment. To understand this issue, the USC Price Center for Social Innovation and LeadersUp partnered to examine how employers adjusted their practices during the COVID-19 pandemic through a survey distributed to employers in the CA region. The survey yielded a total of 1,037 respondents from across the LeadersUp and Price Center networks. In the questionnaire, employers were asked about their company's employee support practices both before and during the pandemic.
The most represented employer industries in our sample were construction (17%), education (10%), health services (12%), finances (17%), and food manufacturing (12%). Other employers in our sample included nursing, science, maintenance, telecommunications, food service, storage, and administrative. Our survey also included companies of varying sizes: small (11%), medium-sized (29%), and large (10%).

**Figure 1: Most Represented Industries**

![Pie chart showing the most represented industries](image)

**Figure 2: Company Size**

![Bar chart showing company size](image)

Participants were recruited online through email newsletters and social media. Responses were gathered between February 16th and February 26th, 2021. The survey was generated through Qualtrics, and multiple response and closed-ended questions were coded and analyzed in Stata.
The survey revealed that before the pandemic, many businesses were already facing challenges in hiring. Namely, over a third of companies struggled to attract talent (37%). Other common challenges included hiring in a virtual setting (28%) and high staff turnover (23%).

Additionally, the survey found that many businesses were also providing some resources intended to support the ongoing success of employees facing housing precarity. Prior to the pandemic, companies in this sample provided resources like housing assistance, one-on-one coaching or mentoring, transportation vouchers, and emergency funding. After the onset of the pandemic, the challenges faced by these employers shifted in important ways, as did the resources that they provided.

**Figure 3: Employer Responses to Employee Support Provided**

(1) Prior to COVID-19, did your company provide any of the following for employees? (2) Did your company provide any of the following for employees as a response to COVID-19?
Small businesses acutely experienced greater challenges hiring in a virtual setting, with 61% of small businesses represented in our survey expressing hiring challenges, compared to 38% and 45% for medium and large companies, respectively.

More than a quarter of the large companies in this sample faced challenges with high staff turnover (27%).

Across the entire sample, employers experienced decreased retention rates, particularly noted by medium (72%) and large (66%) companies, compared to 59% of small companies.

In light of the availability of vaccines, a strong majority (~65%) of employers believed that they would seek to increase hiring. However, when separately asked about how the vaccine could impact recruitment and retention, a similar majority expressed doubts about the vaccine’s impact on increased recruitment and retention. This seems to align with broad trends in the labor market, as companies begin to increase hiring but positions are not easily or quickly filled.
Employers of all sizes provided additional resources

In response to the pandemic, most businesses in this sample began providing additional or expanded aid to support the needs of all employees.

Construction (92%) and education (89%) employers reported the highest rates of providing unique resources such as emergency funding, counseling and flexible hours as a result of the pandemic.

Among size categories, small companies reported new forms of aid such as emergency funding, transportation vouchers, one-on-one coaching/mentoring, housing-related assistance, counseling, flexible work hours, and hygienic spaces at the highest rate: 92% compared to 88% and 72% for medium and large companies, respectively.

Most commonly, employers cited new resources in the form of emergency funding (68%), transportation vouchers (75%), one-on-one coaching/mentoring (70%), housing-related assistance, such as rental or mortgage assistance (56%), counseling (66%), among others.
Conclusion

Many of the employers in the survey reported facing difficult hiring challenges even before the pandemic’s onset. However, during the pandemic, a significant portion of employers redirected resources and strategies to address new sets of barriers around outreach, recruitment, and technology. Employers were forced to quickly integrate virtual recruitment and hiring, and immediately identify skill sets to meet their demand. This underlying shift in resources by employers will likely be felt and experienced as employers transition toward a post-pandemic work setting.