

Disaster Recovery and Resiliency Addendum to the 2022-2026 SIMPCO CEDS

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements & Contributions.....	2
Introduction.....	4
DRR Plan Purpose & Mission.....	4
Pandemic Beginning Background	4
Federal & National Response	4
Local & State Responses.....	6
Siouxland Impact Overview	8
SWOT Analysis:.....	14
Methods.....	14
SWOT Analysis Foundation	14
Pandemic Considerations – Updating the SWOT	15
Resiliency: Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, & Recovery	18
Mitigation	18
Preparedness	19
Response.....	19
Recovery.....	20
Moving Toward Resiliency.....	21
Conclusion.....	28
Appendix.....	29

Introduction

DRR Plan Purpose & Mission

The purpose of the Disaster Recovery & Resiliency (DRR) Plan is to provide an in-depth examination of the state of the SIMPCO Economic Development District's economy and its level of resiliency, especially as it pertains to the economic response and recovery during the 2020-2022 global pandemic. This plan considers both the immediate and ongoing challenges caused as well as the short- and long-term strategies and solutions to achieve economic recovery and resiliency.

The DRR Plan is an addendum to SIMPCO's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The CEDS is a plan used to guide economic development and build resiliency within an Economic Development District (EDD). As such, it shares a similar mission: the SIMPCO region is a preferred location for innovative businesses and entrepreneurs who desire a skilled workforce, quality infrastructure, high quality of life for residents, a positive business environment, and accessible resiliency tools and resources in order to contribute to continual regional resilient economic success.

The Disaster Recovery & Resiliency (DRR) Plan was created in coordination with the Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Council's (SIMPCO) Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) in response to the COVID-10 pandemic. It examines the economic impacts during the beginning phases of the pandemic and provides information on how the Siouxland Region responded as well as the resources used in its responses.

The DRR examines the components of resiliency (mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery) as well as offers recommendations to improve economic resiliency within the Siouxland Region at varying levels. This report expands upon the existing CEDS to focus on economic resilience. This report would not be possible without the support of the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), which provided funding through the 2020 CARES Act. EDA, which resides within the U.S. Department of Commerce, is the only federal government agency focused exclusively on economic development.

Pandemic Beginning Background

In 2020, the United States began facing an unprecedented public health crisis. The severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), known as COVID-19, quickly spread across the globe. This infectious disease is caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. The World Health Organization (WHO) first announced the presence of this disease on January 9, 2020. Over the next few months, countries around the world declared public health emergencies. While each country responded with different measures and restrictions, many enforced stay-at-home mandates and temporary non-essential business closures. In the United States, health measures and restrictions varied largely by each state and even by county or city taking different approaches.

One of the biggest challenges with COVID-19 is its novelty. WHO declared COVID-19 an official pandemic, which is defined as a worldwide spread of a new disease, on March 11, 2020. The public learned about the virus as scientists and health experts did. This includes how COVID-19 spread. Originally it was thought to spread via surfaces, but the CDC started recommending the use of cloth or other face coverings in early April 2020 to help prevent the spread of this airborne disease and subsequent variants.

Federal & National Response

The U.S. declared a national emergency for the coronavirus beginning March 1, 2020. This opened federal disaster funding to fight the disease's spread as well as assist state and local efforts to provide

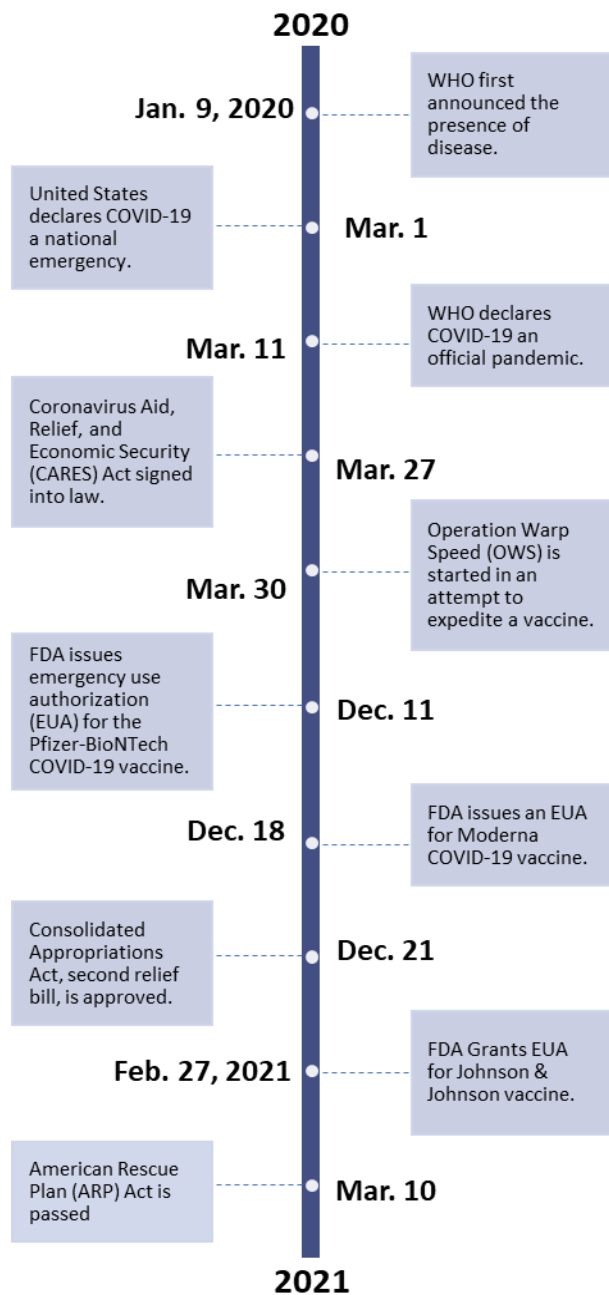


Figure 1: Initial COVID-19 Pandemic Timeline

emergency services. The federal government would later form Operation Warp Speed (OWS), a public-private partnership, to develop, manufacture, and distribute COVID-19 vaccines.

Over the course of the pandemic, the federal government dedicated a range of recovery and assistance funds to help at the individual, local, and state levels. Among the biggest of these (to date) came in the form of three relief packages. The first of these was the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Once the Senate and the House of Representative approved the CARES Act, former President Trump signed the stimulus bill into law on March 27, 2020. This \$2.2 trillion aid is the largest recovery package in United States history. The aid provided funding to hospitals, small businesses, and state and local governments as well as direct payments to Americans and additional support in unemployment insurance/benefits.

As the pandemic continued into the fall and winter of 2020, a second major stimulus was approved in late December. This \$900 billion package extended some parts of the CARES Act as well as modified and reduced other parts. It included: direct payments for individual adults; unemployment benefits; targeted aid for small businesses; funding for vaccines and nursing homes; support for climate measures; ban on surprise medical bills; rental protections; food security; and funding broadband infrastructure.

In March 2021, a third coronavirus relief bill as approved. The package is known as the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The \$1.9 trillion bill allocated funding for vaccine distribution, schools, small businesses, and anti-poverty programs. This included \$362 billion dollars in state and local fiscal recovery funds. It also included additional direct payments to individuals and families. It temporarily expanded the Child Tax Credit and

provided support opportunities for homeowners and renters. Under ARPA, the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) was allocated \$3 billion for economic development assistance programs. This supplemental funding was established to assist communities nationwide with their efforts to build back better by accelerating the economic recovery and building local economies that will be more resilient to future economic shocks.

Local & State Responses

SIMPCO's EDD is unique because it includes counties from two states: Iowa and Nebraska. However, the Sioux City Metro includes North Sioux City and Dakota Dunes in South Dakota. For this reason, this section will focus on Iowa and Nebraska but will also include some information on South Dakota's response. This section provides an overview of the local and state responses. It highlights the biggest economic focused initiatives but does not cover every element of the responses throughout the pandemic.

At the beginning of the pandemic the region, along with surrounding low-density Midwestern states, was at a lower risk for the spread of COVID-19 as the disease hit the west and east coasts the hardest first. However, no community was left untouched. The Siouxland Region had its first reported case in early April 2020 in Dakota County, NE.

Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota are among the seven states to never issue a stay-at-home order. On November 17, 2020, the Iowa Governor issued a mask mandate following a large increase in the hospitalization rate. This mandate was in place until February 6, 2021. Neither Nebraska nor South Dakota issued a statewide mask mandate and no counties, local cities or villages in the region issued local mask mandates.

Recovery & Mitigation

- Implementation of the recommendations of the Governor's Economic Recovery Advisory Board.
- Creation of immediately available financial resources for COVID and natural disaster relief.
- Continued support for businesses and organizations adversely impacted by the pandemic.

Workforce Recruitment & Retention

- Strongly support the continued funding of the Future Ready Iowa Initiative.
- Fully funding, and growing Iowa's jobs training and apprenticeship programs.
- Investment in a quality education system, from early childhood to post-secondary
- New programs and funds to address issues pertaining to childcare throughout the state.

Economic Development Environment

- Working with IEDA and other partners to ensure tax credits and economic development assistance tools and programs demonstrating a positive ROI are fully funded and supported.
- Renewing the Brownfield/Grayfield Program and setting it on a sustainable path for the future.
- Expanding and Workforce Housing Tax Credit Program
- Protecting tax increment financing (TIF) and other local development tools.
- Continued funding and support for all aspects of Empower Rural Iowa, especially the providing of adequate resources for broadband expansion throughout the state.
- Focus on financial support for creative placemaking and quality of life/place initiatives.
- Attract new residents to Iowa through student loan, childcare, and other forms of assistance.

Fair & Responsible Tax Reform

- Support for the Governor's Invest in Iowa Act to address quality of life/placemaking, water quality, income tax reform, and property tax reform through reformed mental health funding.
- Build off 2018 tax reform to make Iowa's corporate and individual income tax more competitive.
- Showcase the return on investment of Iowa's tax credits in any potential corporate tax reform.
- Emphasize making Iowa the most attractive state for the workforce of tomorrow.

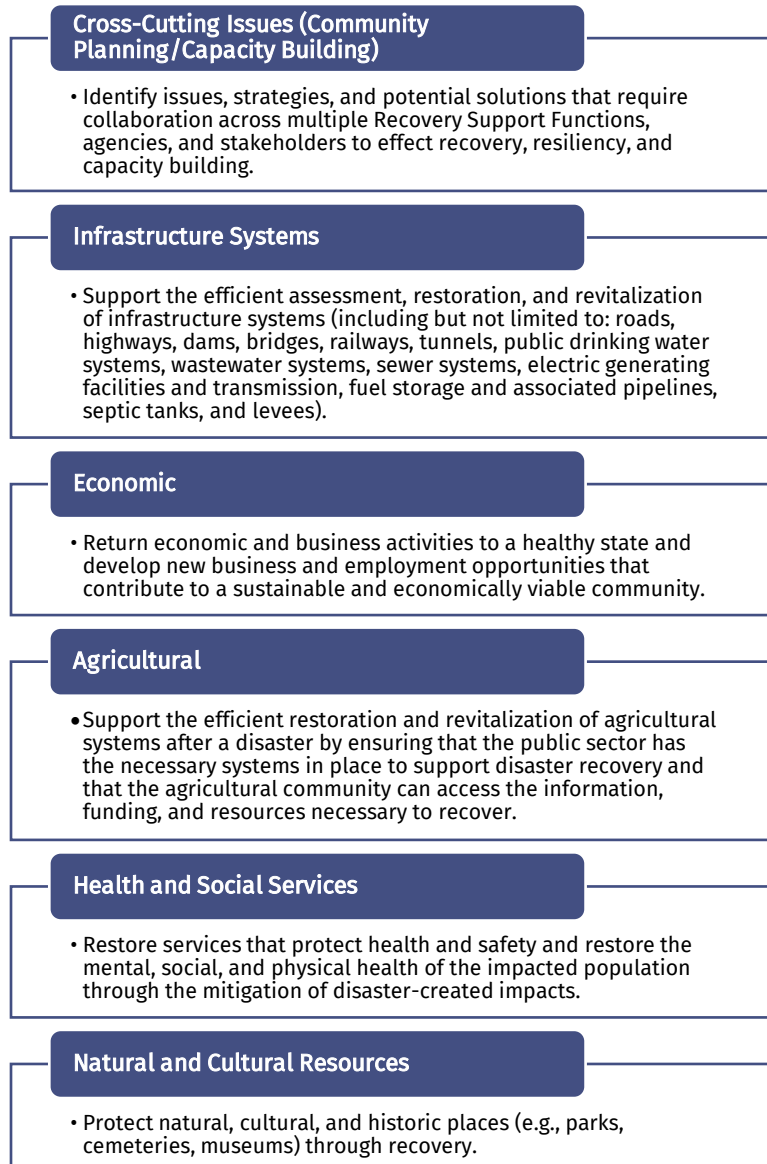
Invest in Iowa's Infrastructure

- Continued investment in Iowa's water quality and existing infrastructure.
- Innovative funding mechanisms for Iowa's transportation infrastructure.
- Investment in broadband expansion to meet the needs of businesses, remote workers, students, and telehealth alike.

Figure 2: 2021 Iowa Legislative Priorities

In June 2020, Governor Kim Reynolds formed the Governor’s Economic Recovery Advisory Board to learn from the challenges and innovations of Iowans in response to the pandemic and to focus on modernizing Iowa’s economy. The

Figure 3: 2021 Nebraska Recovery Roadmap Section Goals



Governor also challenged the Advisory Board to work across all areas of state government to deliver an effective and efficient plan for rebuilding the economy. The areas of focus included: agriculture, connectivity, economic growth, education, government, public health & health care, and expanding Iowa’s workforce. During the 2021 Iowa Legislative session, the priorities in Figure 2 were identified.

The State of Nebraska developed a Long-Term Recovery and Resilience Plan (published in July 2020, as a part of the Governor’s Task Force for Disaster Recovery. This planning effort was originally initiated in response to the devastating impacts from Winter Storm Ulmer and record-breaking flooding that summer. Due to the timing, this plan was able to incorporate information and lessons from the beginning of the pandemic in its recovery planning process, from intermediate to long-term recovery. The plan is divided into sections, one for each of the six Recovery Support Functions activated following the 2019 disasters shown in Figure 3.

Siouxland Impact Overview

For many parts of the U.S., the pandemic initially brought everyday life to a halt. Schools, non-essential businesses, and public spaces closed. Conferences, sport events, entertainment events, and other larger gatherings were postponed or canceled. While each community in the Siouxland Region was affected at different levels, each was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This plan was developed as the pandemic was unfolding; therefore, the full impact of COVID-19 cannot be quantified completely. However, just some notable consequences throughout 2020-2022 included:

- Limit on travel
- Closed schools resulting in virtual education
- Decrease in-person activity, virtual meetings and events, capacity limits
- Mask mandates
- Widespread viral testing and work restrictions if virus is present
- Businesses closings and job losses
- More people living paycheck to paycheck
- Less money going into savings
- More financial and food insecurity
- Supply chain interruptions and subsequent increased costs of some products

These impacts can be quantified in many ways. The region’s unemployment rate, shown in Figure 4, saw a clear spike in April 2020, a figure not seen in state records dating back 30 years. The unemployment rate moved to more typical figures in September 2020 and has fluctuated slightly but has recovered to more pre-pandemic rates in the region. Overall, the region has seen lower unemployment rates than the U.S. average.

Figure 4: SIMPCO COG Unemployment Rate 2018 – 2022 (as available)

Year	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Annual Average
2018	3.50%	3.10%	2.90%	2.30%	2.10%	2.40%	2.30%	2.20%	1.90%	1.80%	1.90%	2.70%	2.43%
2019	3.30%	2.90%	3.10%	2.20%	2.30%	2.60%	2.70%	2.60%	2.20%	2.30%	2.40%	2.80%	2.62%
2020	3.40%	3.10%	3.30%	9.70%	7.40%	6.60%	5.40%	4.30%	3.70%	3%	3.40%	3.80%	4.76%
2021	4.50%	4.50%	4.30%	3.80%	3.80%	4.40%	3.80%	3.70%	2.70%	3.10%	3.00%	3.40%	3.75%
2022	4.00%	3.20%	3.00%	2.00%	2.00%	2.60%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	TBD

Source: Iowa Workforce Development, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (<https://www.iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov/local-area-unemployment-statistics>)

Using the unemployment rate, StatsAmerica provides another way to assess the impact of the pandemic by measuring distress. The tool used to measure distress by looking at unemployment rates (24-Month Average BLS Unemployment Rate ending in September 2021, seen as 24 Month Unemployment). Per Capita Personal Income (2019 BEA PCPI), and Per Capita Money Income (2019 ACS 5-year PCMI). Figure 5 shows the breakdown of the economic distress criteria by county and how each compare to the U.S. average.

Within the table are three threshold calculations, one for each of the economic distress criteria. Each threshold calculation shows the difference between the identified area and the U.S. average. For example, the threshold calculation for unemployment reflects the percentage point difference

Figure 5: Measuring Economic Distress

	24 Month Unemployment	Threshold Calculation	BEA PCPI	Threshold Calculation	ACS 5-Year PCMI	Threshold Calculation
Cherokee County	3.4%	-3.2%	\$65,727	116.4%	\$32,999	96.8%
Ida County	3.2%	-3.4%	\$56,128	99.4%	\$33,789	99.1%
Monona County	4.4%	-2.3%	\$50,103	88.7%	\$29,591	86.8%
Plymouth County	3.2%	-3.4%	\$60,040	106.3%	\$33,982	99.6%
Woodbury County	4.6%	-2.1%	\$45,132	79.9%	\$28,688	84.1%
Dakota County	3.9%	-2.7%	\$43,872	77.7%	\$25,269	74.1%
Union County	4.2%	-2.4%	\$117,055	207.2%	\$42,411	124.4%
Siouxland Region	4.1%	-2.5%	\$54,797	97%	\$30,616	89.8%
U.S.	6.6%	0	\$56,490	100%	\$34,103	100%

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Census, Labor Statistics, and Economic Analysis; Calculations generated by StatsAmerica.

between the unemployment rate for the county (or the Siouxland Region) and the U.S. The threshold calculation for income is the selected area’s per capita value divided by U.S. per capita income and shown as a percentage share of the U.S. figure.

The current data available for the BEA PCPI and ACS 5-Year PCMI are both from 2019. As more data becomes available (e.g. complete 2020 Census data), this tool can be used on an ongoing basis. Until then, this data provides a baseline for the Region.

Area businesses were hit hardest during the late spring and summer of 2020, starting with the meat processing and food production sector. Production lines are not designed for social distancing and the number of employees coupled with workspace proximity quickened the spread of COVID-19 and worker illnesses hampered production for a short time. Thousands of small businesses across the country were forced to close during the beginning of the pandemic. Some of these partially or temporarily and many others permanently.

The Sioux City metro, which includes Woodbury and Plymouth counties, plus Dakota and Dixon counties in Nebraska and Union County, South Dakota, lost 7,700 jobs. The leisure and hospitality industries were among the hardest hit and suffered major losses with roughly 3,500 jobs shed.

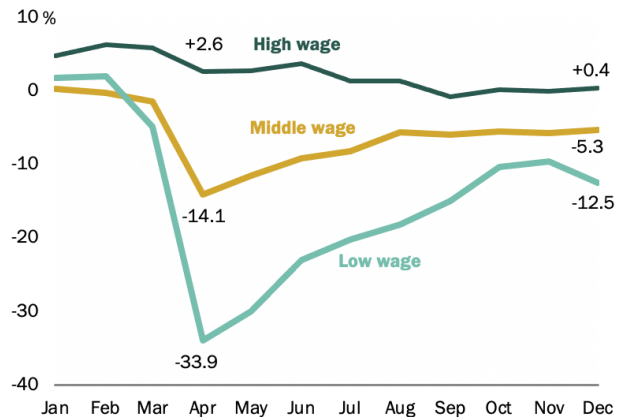
Throughout the pandemic, job losses have hit workers in low-wage occupations harder. This is something that distinguishes the pandemic’s economic downturn from the

Great Recession, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of government data. This same analysis found that the rise in unemployment during the pandemic has been more pronounced for Hispanic and Black workers, younger workers, and those without a college degree. Much of the data available does not factor in workers who kept their jobs but had to reduce their hours and/or take a pay cut.

In the state of Iowa, the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) oversaw a survey on the COVID-19 impact on Iowa businesses. The survey was conducted for the IEDA from February 23 through March 24, 2021. UNI provided SIMPCO with local summaries to help the Siouxland Region better understand the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 crisis on local businesses and assist efforts to implement recovery strategies. The survey received 293 responses from businesses and nonprofits in SIMPCO’s Iowa service area (Cherokee, Plymouth, Ida, Monona, and Woodbury counties). While this survey does not include responses from Dakota County or Union County, it still provides important insight from businesses within the Region.

Low-wage occupations have seen the steepest job losses during the pandemic

Employment by month in 2020 compared with the same month in 2019 (% change)



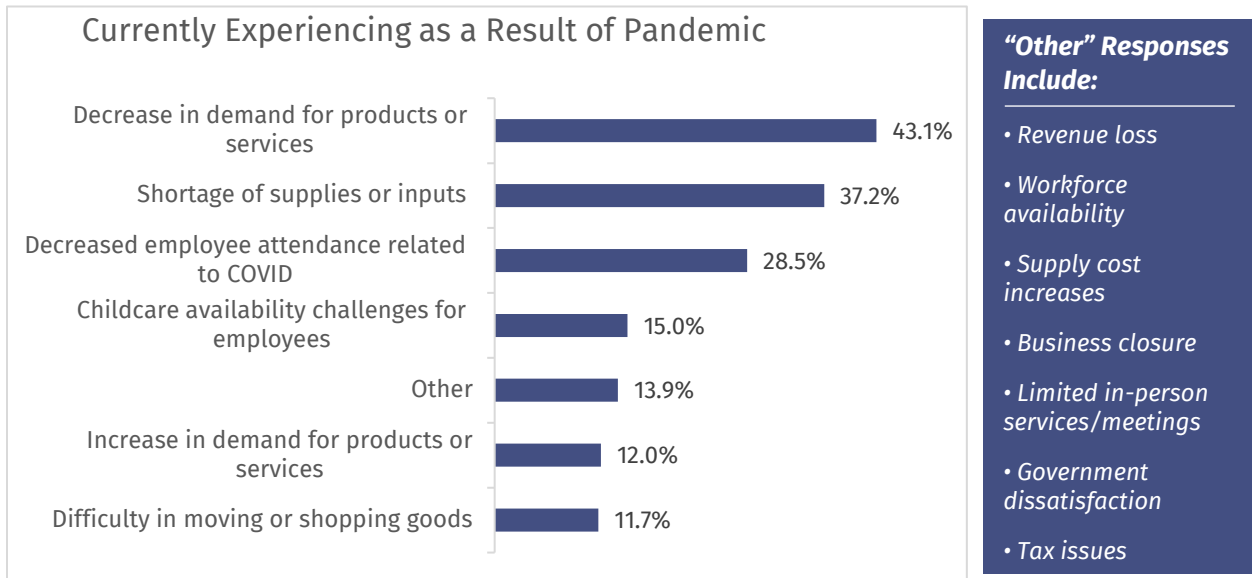
Note: Estimates refer to workers ages 16 and older, nonseasonally adjusted. Low-wage occupations paid less than \$15 per hour on average, middle-wage occupations paid \$15 to \$45, high-wage occupations paid more than \$45.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2019 OES National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates and 2020 Current Population Survey monthly files (IPUMS).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

The top identified pandemic impacts on businesses and organizations in the SIMPCO Iowa service area are shown in Figure 6. The top three identified were: decrease in demand for products or services; shortage of supplies or inputs; and decreased employee attendance related to covid. Survey respondents were also asked to identify their organization’s top three concerns in regard to the pandemic. These are listed in Figure 7.

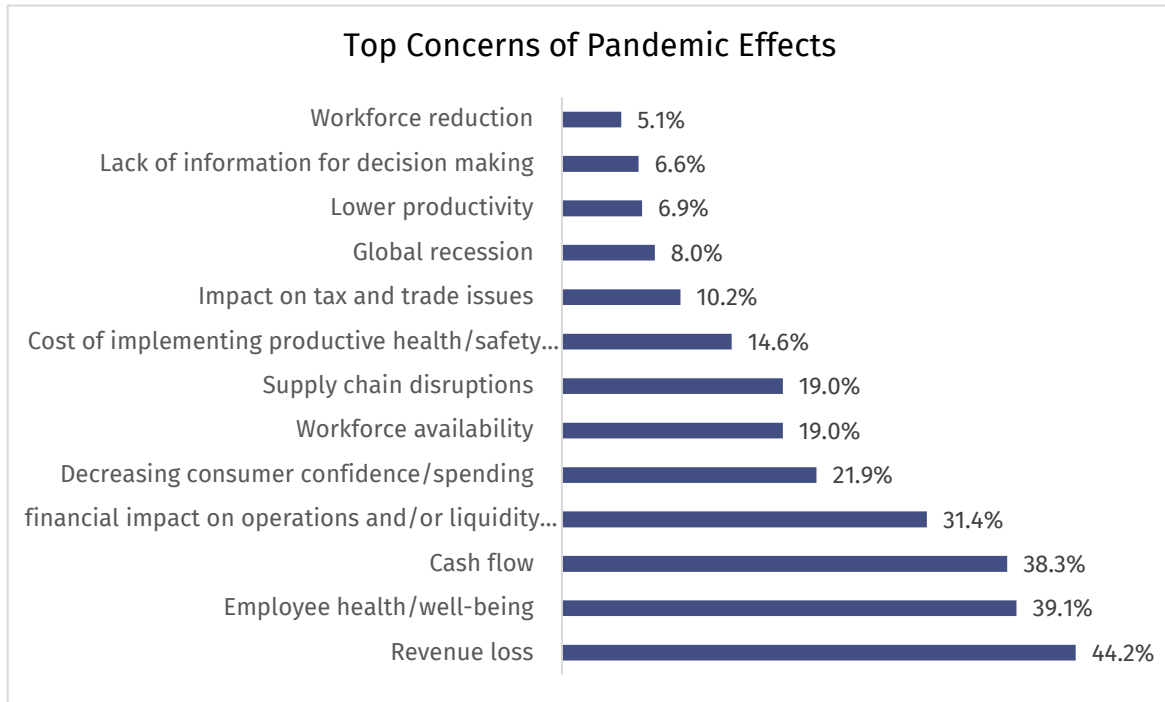
Figure 6: UNI Survey Results on “Impact of COVID Pandemic on Organizations & Businesses”



Source: University of Northern Iowa (UNI) Business & Community Services, Institute for Decision Making, Strategic Marketing services, U.S. EDA

The study also identified top adjustments that businesses had made to their businesses and/or business models due to impacts of the pandemic. The top adjustments included: started delivering products or services differently (29.0%); implemented new systems or technology to allow for remote collaboration (29.0%); added or transitioned to digital/online operations (25.6%); and started offering new products and services to adapt to changing customer needs (20.1%). Figure 8 shows planned adjustments in the following 6 months and includes identifying and hiring new employees (32.1%), adjusting business model (27.6%), and obtaining financial assistance or additional capital (26.6%). The full survey report provided by UNI is available in the Appendix.

Figure 7: UNI Survey Results on “Effects of the Pandemic on Organizations & Businesses”



Source: University of Northern Iowa (UNI) Business & Community Services, Institute for Decision Making, Strategic Marketing services, U.S. EDA

Figure 8: UNI Survey Results on Planned Business Adjustments Due to Pandemic

Question: In the next 6 months, will your organization need to do any of the following?	
Identify and hire new employees	32.1%
Adjust our business model	27.6%
Obtain financial assistance or additional capital	26.6%
Increase or pivot marketing or sales efforts	26.3%
Identify new supply chain options	22.2%
Offer new/additional training for employees	18.1%
Learn how to better provide for the safety of customers and employees	16.0%
Evaluate work arrangements for employees	14.7%
Develop online sales or websites	11.3%
Permanently close this business	4.1%
None of these	18.1%

Source: University of Northern Iowa (UNI) Business & Community Services, Institute for Decision Making, Strategic Marketing services, U.S. EDA

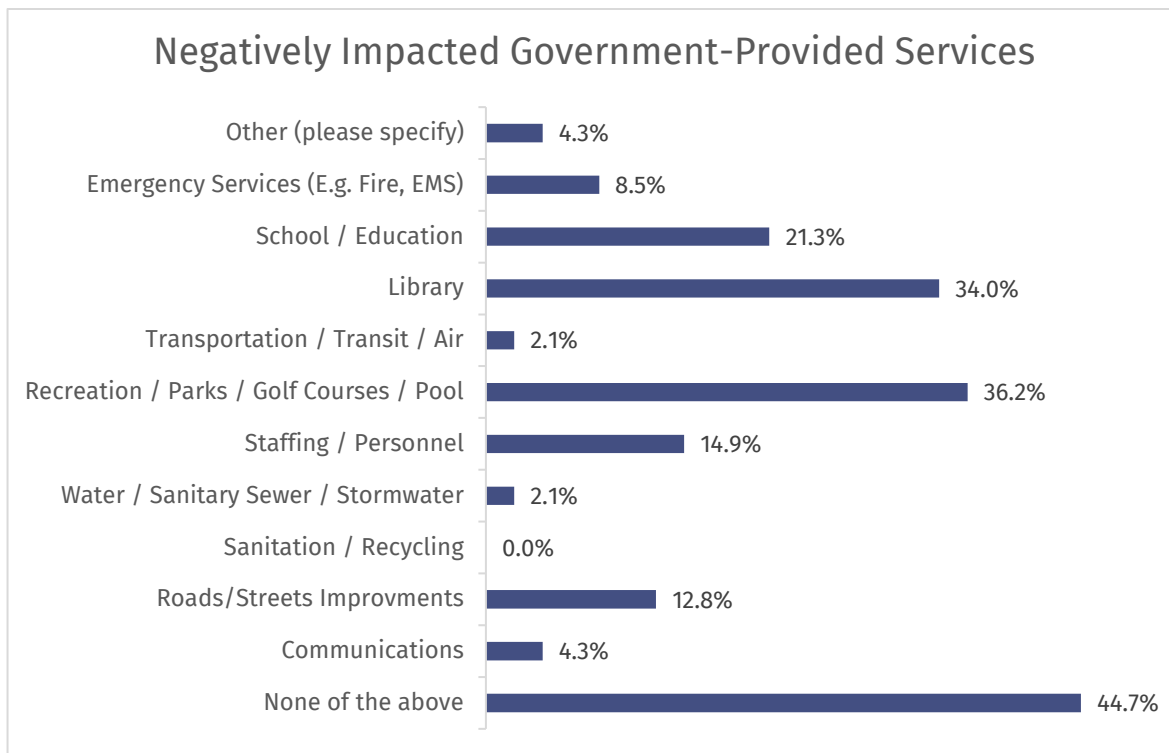
During the summer of 2021, SIMPCO also completed a regional survey. Member Village, City, and County governments were asked to answer questions about their community's response and recovery throughout the 2020-2021 pandemic thus far. Among the 47 survey responders, 81% represented Village, City, or County governments, and the remaining 19% included representation from Chambers of Commerce, Economic Development focused groups, and local colleges.

One of the biggest takeaways from this survey was that almost half (47.8%) of communities and organizations did not identify applying for COVID relief funds. For those that did apply, 34.8% applied for both state and funds; 8.4% only applied for state funds and another 8.4% only applied for federal funds.

Other Key Takeaways

- 54.5% of participants' organizations have an Emergency Operations or Resiliency Plan
- Top ranked legislative issues: **economic development, workforce, and housing.**
- When asked what types of projects and/or government operations are the top priorities for any current or upcoming COVID funds, over half (53.6%) identified infrastructure (including water/sewer, broadband, and streets) as a top priority.

Figure 9: SIMPCO Governments DRR Survey Results for Identified Government Provided Services that were Negatively Impacted by Pandemic



Source: SIMPCO, 2021

In 2021, the U.S. began to see historic levels of people quitting their jobs. Thus far, a peak of 4.3 million Americans (approximately 2.9% of the workforce) quit their jobs in August 2021 alone. As of June 2022, there are an estimated 10.7 million jobs in the U.S. that remain unfilled. This peaked at 11.1 million in July 2021. The people leaving their jobs range from food service to healthcare to education, showing a large variety in the sectors being affected.

This phenomenon has been coined as “the Great Resignation.” A portion of this mass exodus can be attributed to people retiring early. Regardless of the reasoning, it is creating a record number of job openings, which in turn is creating leverage for workers in the new economy. For the Siouxland Region, where labor shortages were present for several years prior to the pandemic, this will remain extremely challenging moving forward.

SWOT Analysis:

A SWOT analysis is in-depth exercise used to identify and reflect on communities’ or region’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The U.S. EDA defines the SWOT components in the following way:

- **Strengths** are a region’s relative competitive advantages (e.g., industry supply chains and clusters, extensive port, rail, and broadband assets, specialized workforce skills, higher education levels, collaboration among stakeholders) and are often internal in nature.
- **Weaknesses** are a region’s relative competitive disadvantages (e.g., a risk-averse or change-resistant regional culture); these are also generally internal in nature.
- **Opportunities** are chances or occasions for regional improvement or progress (e.g., expansion of a biosciences research lab in the region) and are often external in nature.
- **Threats** are chances or occasions for negative impacts on the region or regional decline (e.g., several companies in the region considering moving to lower-cost areas of the state), also often are external in nature.

Methods

To complete this plan’s SWOT Analysis, SIMPCO staff began by looking at the results of the SWOT Analysis completed in 2019 for the CEDS 2020-2024 Plan, which was submitted in spring 2020, and in 2021 for the CEDS 2022-2026 Plan, which was submitted in fall 2022. This analysis provided a foundation from which to complete this update. SIMPCO staff and the CEDS Committee looked at each item within the four categories. The items were evaluated for current relevancy and those that were amplified by the pandemic were highlighted.

SWOT Analysis Foundation

The following lists the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as they are outlined in the most recent CEDS 2022-2026 plan.

Strengths

Strong agricultural economy • Interconnected transportation network (rail, interstate, river, air) • Tradition of strong work ethic • Low energy costs; dependable energy • Leadership committed to economic growth • Strong educational system and resources (including public, private, and non-degree programs) • Strong technical education for trade skills • Workforce development agency • Readily available water • High air quality • Low commute time • Low cost of living for a high quality of life • Low housing costs • Cultural diversity • Proximity to markets due to central location • Legacy of manufacturing and embracing latest manufacturing technology • Recent growth of skilled workforce with apprenticeships, internships, and career development center • Career Academy developed with local school districts

Weaknesses

Lack of housing (both in terms of quantity and variety); shortage of affordable housing • Decline in working-age population • Limited entrepreneurial opportunities • Limited ability to attract and retain young workers, especially college graduates, skilled workers, and local talent (brain drain) • Shortage of skilled labor • Aging infrastructure (pipes, sewers, electrical, housing) • Limited apprenticeship opportunities • Lack of adequate air transportation service • Lack of distance learning plan (in regards to consolidated school districts) • Lack of a land grant university • Inadequate broadband coverage and access, especially in rural areas • Lack of childcare facilities (both in terms of quantity and distribution) • Presence of food deserts

Opportunities

Aggressive workforce development • Regional business retention • Infrastructure Improvements (roads, bridges, broadband, rail, airport, etc.) • Promote low cost of living • Attract art and entertainment options • Promote the consolidated, high-quality job website • Market our regional successes more aggressively • Build upon family amenities • Attract new residents, while also retaining current population • Embrace technological advances such as automation, particularly in the manufacturing industry • Attract young workers and former residents (Return to roots campaign) • Immigrants and international workers can bolster economic outputs • Diversification of Siouxland employers • Grow healthcare systems & providers • Investment in downtowns • Ag/tech job growth • Build upon housing growth & rehabilitation • Upskilling untapped workforce • Airport & Aviation School/Industry • Embrace recently invested in and growing industries, such as barge and freight carrier • Innovating and expanding public transportation

Threats

Worker retention • Effective training in local colleges and trade schools to keep up with industry needs and demands • Lack of business succession planning • Loss of available funds as population declines • Adverse natural and environmental impacts • Lack of qualified and eligible workers; labor shortage • Young people moving out of region • Cost of construction; lack of contractors • Lack of elderly/senior care & housing • Declining population can result in loss of available funds

Pandemic Considerations – Updating the SWOT

The CEDS Committee identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, or threats listed in the 2020-2024 and 2022-2026 CEDS Plans that intensified during the pandemic, changed, or if any additional items should be added on the SWOT list.

Amongst those identified by the committee included: ongoing increases in housing costs; steady building permits for new housing; low population density; needed broadband expansion and opportunities; childcare limitations and needs; entrepreneurial opportunities, and use of social media/online tools.

Highlighted Strengths

In times of crises, capitalizing on a region's strengths is key to recovery. Throughout the pandemic, communities had to rethink how we interact online. This was especially true at the beginning of the pandemic when in-person activities were limited and even prohibited for a time. Online resources quickly became essential for most businesses, schools, and governments to function. Options like social media, teleconferencing programs, apps, and other online resources helped businesses to stay connected and communicate with consumers, business owners, and employees to expand their

workspace options. These resources even allowed some new entrepreneurs and small businesses to launch for the first time. The SIMPCO region was remarkably fast to adapt to online learning and commerce when face-to-face interaction was limited. While the turn to online services exposed weaknesses in broadband in some areas, the framework for learning and commerce was implemented quickly and with relative success.

A strength identified before the pandemic and through the beginning of the pandemic was the region's low employment rate. Committee members viewed this as one of the top contributing factors to the region's ability to bounce back quickly from the initiative pandemic crisis. However, at the later stages of the pandemic, the low unemployment rate is now identified as a threat. The U.S. now faces a labor shortage across many employment sectors and many businesses continue to struggle to find and hire employees.

The region's food and agriculture-based economy provided a relatively stable basis for recovery, as demand for products produced in that sector did not decrease. While the supply chain was interrupted sporadically and workforce issues persist, the recovery in our region's #1 economic driver has been relatively swift.

Highlighted Weaknesses

One of the region's recognized weaknesses is its lack of childcare facilities, both in terms of quantity and distribution. The challenges with affordable and accessible childcare were present long before the COVID-19 crisis. The childcare industry was hit hard during the pandemic as many childcare providers were required to close or could not operate at full capacity. Six months into the pandemic, 27% of childcare facilities (day cares, childcare centers, preschools, enrichment programs in-home day cares, and before/after school care programs) remained closed across the country despite most stay-at-home orders ending, according to research conducted by Procure Solutions. This created great hardship on parents and caregivers, especially those households where both parents work and on single-parent households.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, all three of the region's states have taken steps to address childcare challenges.

- Iowa Governor signed executive order to launch Child Care Task Force on March 10, 2021. This Task Force strives "to develop a comprehensive strategy to address the childcare shortage and barrier to work in Iowa. The governor also announced awardees of two childcare grant programs totaling \$13,053,372 and contributing to the creation of more than 4,000 new childcare slots across Iowa."
- Iowa Department of Human Services (IDHS) – The Investing in Iowa's Child Care (IICC) Program was created to increase the availability of and access to childcare throughout the state of Iowa. The program offers support through start-up funding, expansion funding, and urgent regulatory funding for childcare centers and child development homes that are licensed or registered by DHS or are seeking to be licensed or registered by DHS.
- Future Ready Iowa Child Care Challenges Grants - support community projects to establish local child care facilities (map available here: <https://www.futurereadyiowa.gov/childcare-taskforce>)
- Nebraska Child Care and Development Fund State Plan (FY 2022-2024)
- South Dakota Child Care and Development Fund State Plan (FY 2022-2024)

Highlighted Opportunities

Throughout the pandemic, the importance of access to broadband as a part of the modern economy and economic development became increasingly evident. The pandemic caused a higher need for access to reliable and affordable broadband internet with the increasing reliance on virtual/online communications and processes. The States of Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota as well as the Federal Government have all taken steps over the course of the pandemic to make investments in needed broadband infrastructure.

SIMPCO is currently assisting the State of Nebraska as part of the Nebraska Regional Officials Council (NROC) Digital Equity Access Plan. The aim of this initiative is to give the public, elected officials, and businesses accurate data on broadband speeds and formulate strategies to ensure digital equity across the state. Information will support future broadband expansion grants and projects across the state of Nebraska. As part of the CARES Act funding, SIMPCO worked with NROC to inventory broadband speeds in Dakota County, Nebraska in order to gather benchmark data on broadband speeds by individual addresses across the state.

An additional opportunity identified is building upon the current housing development momentum occurring, especially in the Sioux City Metro. Housing is a critical component to attract and retain a quality workforce as well as employers. In 2020 alone, the City of Sioux City issued 521 total housing permits (includes single family, duplex, and multi-family units). Three of the EDD's six counties saw population growth, and the Region saw a 3.1% growth per the 2020 Census. A focus on housing will help support and advance this growth.

Highlighted Threats

A major threat to the Siouxland Region is the “brain drain” effect, where the young adults in the area move away, typically for education and career opportunities. The Region, along with much of the Midwest, struggles to attract and retain young adult workers, especially two- and four-year college and technical school graduates. This threat is proving to be especially problematic as the entire country faces labor shortages in many sectors.

In the past, the Region's low unemployment rate has been considered a strength. However, in tandem with the country's labor shortage, it has become a threat. The labor shortage has caused businesses in the Region and across the country to struggle to find workers, causing reductions in operational hours, business recruitment challenges due to low workforce, and closures in some cases.

Another threat recognized by the CEDS Committee is the “Amazon effect” across the Region and the country. This refers to the powerful disruption that eCommerce (or shopping online) has had on the traditional retail market. The pandemic quickly furthered this effect as more people used online marketplaces out of necessity, safety, and to seek supplies that might have been temporarily unavailable locally. As a result, people became more comfortable purchasing a larger share of items online rather than going into brick-and-mortar stores.

Finally, the group identified challenges to the Region's entrepreneurs. These include difficulties to connect with other entrepreneurs and limited spaces to pool resources and work together to solve problems. There are also more general challenges related to accessing needed equipment and resources to continue operating or to scale their operations to be sustainable. The complexity of finding and applying for grants and loans is also a threat to entrepreneurial advancement. Limited assistance in this area is available, but ongoing technical support is a challenge to maintain without networks of support. The tristate location contributes to this complexity, as some monetary resources are limited by state lines due to individual state funding mechanisms and goals.

Resiliency: Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, & Recovery

The Economic Development Administration (EDA) defines resiliency as the ability to prepare for and adapt to changing conditions as well as to withstand and recover rapidly from disruptions. This includes anything from deliberate attacks, accidents, or naturally occurring threats or incidents.

The pandemic has shown a light on the importance of resiliency planning in individual industries and businesses, and more generally in economic development efforts and community safety. As is the case for natural disasters, communities with plans are better prepared to respond to and withstand disruptions. This includes being more ready to apply for disaster related funding and better placed to protect assets.

This section will break down resiliency into four components (mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery), which provide a base future resiliency planning. These four components are considered the four phases of emergency management by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). They are not exclusive; they can and should often happen in tandem.

Mitigation

Mitigation is the step(s) to reduce or eliminate the threat of a risk and/or its severity. As outlined by FEMA, the purpose of mitigation planning is, “to identify policies and actions that will permanently reduce the risk of damage and loss; to improve the welfare of people and their communities; to enhance the ability to communities to recover from disasters; to establish partnerships for community resilience.”

Hazard mitigation planning is considered the foundation of community resilience because it promotes long-term strategies and solutions. By thinking ahead, communities can address risks and vulnerabilities and develop mitigation actions and projects before a disaster takes place. This puts the community in a stronger position and makes the response and recovery to unavoidable future events easier and quicker. It also helps save communities money in the long-term. For example, in 2021 the National Institute of Building Sciences (NIBS) released a finding that disaster mitigation and resiliency planning saves \$13 per \$1 invested. As the intensity, frequency, and variety of natural disasters continues to increase, communities see time and time again that these investments can have large payoffs in the long run.

Typically, mitigation planning is used to address the risks posed by natural hazards, such as tornadoes and floods. But the list of hazards considered by the region and has expanded to include human-caused and biological incidents. For the purposes of this report, mitigation should be considered for any disruptions to regional economic health.

Hazard mitigation planning can be done at the local, county, regional, and state levels. Communities in the Siouxland region utilize local, regional, and state hazard mitigation plans (HMP). Identified

Figure 10: HMP Identified Hazards of Concern by Iowa, Nebraska, and SIMPCO



hazards from the 2018 Iowa State HMP, 2020 Regional HMP, and 2021 Nebraska State HMP are outlined in Figure 10. The three HMP's include mitigation policies and actions to address the identified relevant hazards.

Preparedness

Preparedness here refers to the plans or preparations in place to address an emergency. As with mitigation, preparedness requires a community to look at its strengths and weaknesses as well as the potential risks, both natural and manmade. From here, plans can be formed to address these. The three key components of preparedness are plans, identified roles, and ongoing communication. Once risks have been identified in tandem with the community's strengths and weaknesses, plans should be formed. But for these plans to be successful, everyone involved must have a clear understanding of their role. Finally, a system of communication must be established.

Plans and other preparedness resources and tools can take any range of shapes, sizes, and focuses. During the pandemic, SIMPCO collaborated with the other COGS in Iowa and the EDA to develop a preparedness resource, the Resilience Toolkit. This disaster preparedness toolkit provides small businesses, community leaders, development organizations, economic developers, and chamber executives a framework for disaster preparation that looks beyond immediate steps to long-lasting recovery as well as prevention efforts. The Toolkit also includes a downloadable assessment, inventory, and plan worksheets.



RESILIENCE TOOLKIT For Small Business

MODEL 

MANAGEMENT

MONEY

MARKETING 

This toolkit would not be possible without the support of the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), which provided funding through the 2020 CARES Act. EDA, which resides within the U.S. Department of Commerce, is the only federal government agency focused exclusively on economic development. The Resilience Toolkit is available on [SIMPCO's website](#).

Response

The response component is on the surface straightforward; it is the immediate action(s) taken as a reaction to a crisis. This ties directly into the preparedness component. Having plans and procedures in place helps outline how a community or organization will respond when a crisis occurs.

However, the covid pandemic offers a stark example of how not every disaster can be prepared for as well as the importance of having enough resources and communication mechanisms in place to be able to build an immediate response. The pandemic has been especially unique as it has required ongoing as well as changing responses. Unlike typical one-time event disasters, the coronavirus has been a fluid, continuous event. It has impacted everyday life and required communities, businesses,

and individuals to constantly adjust and adhere to changing best practices as new information is learned. This has made a single response impossible and has required flexibility above all.

The pandemic and other natural disasters like the 2020 derecho showed us how critical it is for more communities to prepare for and to be ready to adapt to disasters and related challenges. Emergency response and management play an important role in any disaster. A community's initial response can bring calm to a situation or exacerbate the situation or even lengthen the recovery period.

For this reason, it is critical for communities and businesses to have emergency response plans in place. Emergency response systems refers to a tiered system approach that builds upon and unifies existing assets across an organization or even an entire region. An emergency response plan should focus on prevention, outline needed first steps, and work to build flexibility into an organization's overall systems.

While preventing a system-wide disaster is not necessarily realistic in most cases, preparedness planning like communication plans, local supply source management, and upkeep of infrastructure can give a community a "leg up" to a fast recovery from disaster events.

Recovery

Recovery is the process that follows the immediate response to an emergency. The goal of the recovery process is a return to normalcy. However, the recovery process can also be used to go beyond this to both reduce future vulnerabilities as well as to achieve multiple, farther-reaching objectives.

As part of recovery from the immediate stressors of the covid pandemic, the Siouxland Region needs to address underlying challenges and threats in the community in addition to specific problems caused by and/or amplified by the pandemic.

Recovery activities and efforts for the pandemic have been far from straight forward and have required ongoing adjustments. The Siouxland Region's recovery, along with the nation's, has happened in tandem with the ongoing pandemic crisis. This recovery has involved three primary areas: health, community, and economic development. All three have seen recovery efforts, including funding at the local, state, and federal levels.

Moving Toward Resiliency

The COVID-19 pandemic ebbed and flowed throughout the last couple of years and continues to impact the country. This section will consider the largest and most consequential impacts from the pandemic on the CEDS core topics and focus on plan elements that create a more resilient region.

Building economic resilience will look different at the organizational, local, county, and regional levels. Regardless of the community level, it is important to use a two-pronged approach to address short-term and long-term outcomes. The EDA recognizes these as “steady-state” and “responsive” initiatives.

Steady-state initiatives implement specific goals or actions to bolster the long-term economic durability of the region.

Responsive initiatives establishing capabilities, such as information networks among various stakeholders in the region to facilitate and regulate communications, to enhance the community’s ability to respond and recovery following an incident.

Examples of Steady-State Initiatives

- Engaging in comprehensive planning efforts that involve extensive involvement from the community to define and implement a collective vision for resilience that includes the integration and/or alignment of other planning efforts (e.g., hazard mitigation plans) and funding sources
- Undertaking efforts to broaden the industrial base with diversification initiatives, such as targeting the development of emerging clusters or industries that (a) build on the region’s unique assets and competitive strengths; and (b) provide stability during downturns that disproportionately impact any single cluster or industry
- Adapting business retention and expansion programs (e.g., economic gardening or other enterprise supports) to assist firms with economic recovery post-disruption
- Building a resilient workforce that can better shift between jobs or industries when their core employment is threatened through job-driven skills strategies and support organizations
- Maintaining geographic information systems (GIS) that link with municipal business licenses, tax information, and other business establishment data bases to track local and regional “churn” and available development sites. GIS can also be integrated with hazard information to make rapid post-incident impact assessments
- Ensuring redundancy in telecommunications and broadband networks to protect commerce and public safety in the event of natural or manmade disasters
- Promoting business continuity and preparedness (i.e., ensuring businesses understand their vulnerabilities—including supply chains—in the face of disruptions and are prepared to take actions to resume operations after an event)
- Employing safe development practices in business districts and surrounding communities. Strategies may include locating structures outside of floodplains, preserving natural lands that act as buffers from storms, and protecting downtowns and other existing development from the impacts of extreme weather

- Conducting pre-disaster recovery planning to define key stakeholders, roles, responsibilities, and key actions
- Establishing a process for regular communication, monitoring, and updating of business community needs and issues (which can then be used after an incident)
- Establishing/using a capability to rapidly contact key local, regional, state, and federal officials to communicate business sector needs and coordinate impact assessment efforts
- Establishing/using coordination mechanisms and leadership succession plans for short, intermediate, and long-term recovery needs.

Examples of Responsive Initiatives

Goals and Objectives

The 2022-2026 CEDS goals and objectives, based upon the work completed in the prior 2020-2026 CEDS, outlines a primary goal for each of the core topics accompanied by objectives, actions, and projects to support achieving said goal. These goals and their objectives are provided below.

- **Economic Development Goal:** To create high-skill, higher-wage jobs within innovative clusters as a means to diversify the regional economy and improve economic conditions in the area for years to come.
 - Develop a diverse industrial and commercial base that is competitive in the global economy.
 - Support the creation of a successful and equitable business climate for local business creation and business retention.
 - Target innovation clusters, such as “green” technology and value-added agriculture industries.
 - Foster the growth of the job support network necessary to maintain the high-skill positions and cluster developments.
- **Workforce Goal:** To develop, retain, and attract a highly trained, competitive, and entrepreneurial workforce that addresses and compliments the growing needs of the regional business community.
 - Facilitate collaboration among economic development stakeholders to address the current and future employment and skill needs of the regional business community.
 - Improve workforce retention for local businesses.
 - Foster a workforce that can identify and execute on entrepreneurial opportunities.
 - Support and increase accessibility to further education opportunities for current and potential workers.
 - Encourage local businesses to offer internship and apprenticeship opportunities.

- **Infrastructure Improvement Goal:** To invest in infrastructure improvements such as roads, bridges, sewers, water facilities, broadband, and multi-modal transportation systems that will strengthen and diversify the regional economy.
 - Maintain and expand the Region’s infrastructure to address the needs of existing businesses and residences, as well as accommodate the needs of new and expanding businesses.
 - Target infrastructure improvements to areas in the Region with the greatest need.
 - Pursue the development and maintenance of regional multi-modal transportation networks as a critical resource for economic growth.
- **Housing Goal:** To develop diverse housing options for all income levels to ensure the availability of housing supply for all workers, including those brought in by expanding businesses and new firms in the Region.
 - Work with employers, state, and local housing and development agencies, banks, and private developers to encourage the development of affordable housing on a regional basis.
 - Support diverse housing types in the Region to meet the housing needs of the workforce throughout changing life events.
- **Quality of Life Goal:** To encourage resident retention and to develop cost-effective, regional solutions to local problems that better serve residents while providing a high quality of life.
 - Encourage the development of a vibrant consumer environment including amenities such as personal services, eateries, childcare, grocery stores and co-ops.
 - Support projects that enhance and sustain the quality of life in the Region, such as smart growth, walkable communities, and mixed-use development.
 - Increase awareness among the Region of the recreational and cultural resources, public services, and consumer alternatives available in every county of the Region.
- **Economic Resilience Goal:** To build and strengthen partnerships, resources, and communities in the region to better avoid, withstand, and recover from economic shifts, natural disasters, impacts of climate change, and other major disruptions.
 - Encourage the development of a resilient economic environment for businesses, workforce, and communities.
 - Support projects and programs that enhance and diversify the Region’s economy and workforce.

The highlighted strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that came forth from the examination of SWOT results as related to disaster response, recovery, and resiliency provided supplemental goals to consider as part of the adopted 2022-2026 CEDS document. This resiliency report calls to add the following three disaster response, recovery and resiliency goals to enhance the existing 2022-2026 CEDS goals.

Disaster Response, Recovery and Resiliency:

- **Goal 1:** Take steps to address most critical challenges and weaknesses within region.
 - Discuss at the regular CEDS Committee meetings the most pressing critical issues in the region, how they have changed since the last update, and response.
- **Goal 2:** Measure and evaluate regional resiliency on an ongoing basis.

- Collect and monitor available data to capture early signs of threats to regional resiliency
- **Goal 3:** Establish and Maintain Region-wide, Cross-sectional Information Networks
 - Ensure organizations are working together to create a central informational hub, including economic development, public health and safety, civic organizations, and social services organizations.

Building Resilience

One of the first steps for building resilience is identifying persistent economic challenges and/or deficiencies. The SWOT analysis completed for the CEDS as well as for this report provides a great foundation to do just this. The weaknesses and threats outlined in the SWOT provide a clear outline for current and potential challenges that should be focused on.

During the pandemic, efforts to address some of these weaknesses and threats were expanded or enhanced due to increased funding, which allowed planning and other agencies to assess current conditions and plan adjustments to respond and recover from the pandemic. The CARES Act provided SIMPCO and the region an opportunity to focus on challenges caused or exacerbated by the pandemic. The funded projects are initial steps that can be built upon moving forward. The 17 SIMPCO CARES studies and projects are briefly described below.

- CEDS Regional Disaster Response, Recovery and Resiliency Addendum: The Addendum to the 2022-2026 CEDS analyzed the regional response to the COVID-19 pandemic thus far and identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to enhance goals and objectives developed as part of the 2022-2026 CEDS update.
- Regional Online Marketplace: Provide online and in-person training and workshops related to the sudden vital need to convert to or enhance online sales.
- City of Dakota City, NE: Digitize forms and records to place online for safe access by residents to do city business without physical contact.
- Woodbury County Comprehensive Plan: Develop a 20-year comprehensive plan that addresses policies and actions that are consistent with the post-pandemic world and changing practices.
- City of Sergeant Bluff Senior Services Study: Address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the senior population, including technology limitations, senior center programming, transportation/public transportation ridership, needs assistance and social opportunities and connections.
- City of Holstein Planning and Zoning Code Update: Address any updates needed to assist businesses in their altered practices as a result of the pandemic, including updates to allow for commercial and residential flexibility measures.
- City of Whiting Recodification of City Ordinances: Address needed updates to public safety, business, and emergency information related to the pandemic.
- Iowa's West Coast Initiative Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Development Plan & Entrepreneurial Center Feasibility Study: The Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Development Plan identifies the entrepreneurial ecosystem throughout the region, its strengths and weaknesses, needs and challenges, and current and emerging economic clusters. The Entrepreneurial Feasibility Study explores the construct of an Innovation Center which would provide physical location to engage, educate and encourage entrepreneurship and business-startups in the region.

- Dakota County Broadband Study: Nebraska statewide effort to measure broadband speeds at individual address to measure gaps in the system and provide information for a statewide plan to address potential improvements.
- Regional Resiliency Toolkit: Iowa statewide effort to develop a guidebook for businesses to navigate through uncertain times, identifying resources and providing resources for business planning, funding options, and disruptions.
- Grant Writing 101 Workshop: Workshop offered to provide hands-on training in seeking and writing successful grant applications.
- Market Study for Rural Grocery Store: City of Remsen market study to determine long-term sustainability of a potential new grocery store in the town.
- Experience Downtown Sioux City: Series of videos meant to educate the public on how downtown businesses and organizations managed social distancing and user experiences in light of the pandemic and highlight safety measures to help the public feel safe in their visits.
- Le Mars Child Care Study: Assess the demand for and access to childcare in Le Mars, including recommendations for creative solutions to better provide for working families.
- Local Tourism Marketing Study: Develops an inventory of local attractions, base of visitor origins, and strategies to capture local tourism.
- Siouxland Economic Development Financing Gap Study: Studies gaps in financing, specifically for traditionally underserved populations in obtaining financial resources as they navigate the small business environment.

Short-Term: Response and Recovery

Each disaster calls for its own short-term response and recovery efforts. These can include physical and systemic changes. The pandemic called for the prioritization of safety, especially in the workplace and indoor spaces attracting large crowds. Employers, service industry, government and education agencies were forced to be creative in quickly improving safety in ways not seen before. For this type of disaster with an airborne disease, that included supplying Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (equipment worn to minimize exposure to hazards that cause serious injuries and illnesses) like masks, face shields, and plastic dividers. It also called for limiting the number of people permitted within spaces and/or creating social distance requirements for a myriad of spaces. Significant challenges were experienced in the food production and other industrial workplaces with large numbers of employees working closely together because of the nature of the work involved. Local meat processing plants in particular were stricken with mass numbers of workers infected with COVID-19 especially early in the pandemic and were very responsive by adding workplace dividers and vaccination campaigns once available.

Teleworking, e-education, and e-commerce became very prevalent in the early stages of the pandemic when it was unclear exactly how the virus spread and when testing and treatment options were not available. For example, many employers that were able to allow employees to work from home rather than require them to come to the office often made those allowances and technology adjustments to do so. Schools also made use of virtual options for classes or e-education. Many retail and food establishments turned to e-commerce as a primary means to keep operating during the pandemic. Online shops and contact-free pickup options prevailed and continue to be a part of daily life in most areas and consumers appreciated the convenience of online consumerism. Many entrepreneurs capitalized on the popularity of food trucks and were readily available at different locations on a daily basis to provide an alternative to indoor restaurants. Social media groups were developed to share menus, specials, and take-out options for regional eateries, which helped those businesses sustain or

even expand their customer base at a very tenuous time. While some parts of the country were slower to return to classroom learning for various reasons, the SIMPCO region returned to in-person classrooms as soon as possible, and some did not employ e-education and rather took greater in-person precautions throughout. It was recognized that a digital divide and lack of reliable childcare options hampered our youth's classroom learning, even with successful online learning implemented.

The government supported communities and their residents and businesses was by providing direct financial support. Direct business loans and grants to help shore up revenue losses during the pandemic were distributed to help keep small businesses operational and direct payments to qualifying U.S. residents to help stimulate the economy were just two tools used to help keep the economy from collapsing as job losses/operational interruptions and slowing commerce in some sectors were prevalent. Many of the short-term actions implemented came at great financial cost. Trillions of dollars in federal and state aid were distributed, roughly \$4.1 trillion from the CARES Act, American Rescue Plan, and Inflation Reduction Act alone, to aid in response and recovery actions helped offset costs to local governments and private entities as they employed public health safety measures.

Most important to response and recovery was, and will continue to be, clear, comprehensive, and cohesive communication. The first stages of the outbreak of COVID-19 were somewhat chaotic in terms of communication as leaders grappled with the scale of the public health emergency. Scientists were learning about the virus, its symptoms, and how it spread virtually at the same time as the public. Public directives shifted as more was learned about the spread, symptoms, and vaccines, creating frustration and confusion. Daily press conferences at the local, state, and federal level and many joint communications campaigns helped create a more consistent release of information that can be used in the event of a large disaster in the future.

These few examples and many other creative reactions employed in short order during the height of the pandemic leave this region better poised to respond faster and more effectively in the future if another disaster occurs.

Long-Term: Resiliency

Short-term responses and recovery efforts can tie directly into long-term resiliency efforts, or they can come about after a disaster has settled. Due to the ongoing nature of pandemic crisis, communities are finding ways to address resiliency while also responding to immediate needs. Long-term resiliency involves considering how a framework for economic resilience can be developed to address future economic disruptions.

Local government zoning code and ordinances govern the physical environment and layout of the city, and how businesses may operate within city rules. Some changes to address the pandemic in particular include allowances for store pop-ups, temporary stores, outdoor events, food truck and temporary licenses, kiosks, and outdoor café seating options. Constantly adapting rules and regulations to allow for commerce to proceed as normally as possible is a simple way to support business continuity and options for residents to enjoy normal activities as circumstances change.

Investments in infrastructure, especially in broadband, are essential to long-term resiliency locally and across the nation. As virtual work and school options were implemented, the digital divide was very apparent. Schools quickly realized that, in some areas, internet wasn't reliable, available, or affordable for some students, and needed to provide wi-fi spaces for students to come and attend

virtual classes. This wasn't always possible due to transportation limitations or parental enforcement. The same challenge in broadband availability existed in some remote working situations, hampering some employees' ability to work at home. Additionally, the pandemic was an eye-opening experience for some large urban cities that remained in lockdown for long periods of time and workers were remote working. Many residents of those large urban areas realized that, with the widespread remote work options, they could live in areas that felt safer, were more affordable, and less restrictive due to less population density. Rural areas were in a position to capitalize on residents moving away from large cities, but in some cases the lack of high-speed, reliable internet restricted where they were willing to relocate. Strengthening broadband not only allows the region to capitalize on urban residents wanting to leave big cities, but also in recruiting large businesses and industries who depend on strong broadband for their businesses.

Housing availability and quality of life amenities tie directly to the long-term resiliency of the SIMPCO region. During the beginning phases of the pandemic, housing quickly became an immediate crisis around the country. For many who either temporarily or permanently lost their jobs, it became impossible to pay rent or mortgages and many faced eviction. The Federal government imposed a temporary moratorium on evictions to help stem widespread evictions in the short-term, but the long term solution is a greater inventory of attainable housing and greater housing choice for all consumers. The SIMPCO region has continued to add housing in the area, but there is still a shortage of all types of housing choices. Quality of life amenities such as parks and trails, cultural events, varied nightlife and family-friendly activities, walkable neighborhoods, and multimodal transportation investments both attract new residents and businesses to the area and offers various activities in the event of another public health emergency that requires careful consideration of public interaction.

Strengthening and diversifying the regional workforce and economy is essential to the long-term resilience of the region. Communication of needs between businesses/industries and local community colleges and universities, and the provision of training that corresponds with regional workforce needs is a big step in ensuring gaps in workforce area addressed. Local training and apprenticeships in partnership with recruiting businesses can help retain young adults in the SIMPCO region instead of those workers relocating to other areas for schooling or jobs. While the regional economy is based upon agriculture and should remain the primary focus, diversifying the economic base to include technological advancements, growing sectors, and the cultivation of smaller businesses helps to ensure long-term resilience of the region. Strengthening and diversifying the regional workforce is highly dependent upon the quality, availability, and affordability of childcare in the region. Lack of childcare facilities was identified as a top weakness and a top threat to retaining and attracting new families and workers to the region. Communities in the region, especially rural areas, continue to conduct childcare studies to determine gaps, develop a path to increase availability, and plan for future capacity opportunities.

The SIMPCO region has a wide variety of small businesses, with more surfacing every day. The Iowa West Coast Initiative is one organization that provides information to help point small business entrepreneurs in the right direction to resources to get their businesses started. The pandemic made evident that cooperation between small businesses entrepreneurs can help keep their businesses healthy and growing. IWCI is building the culture entrepreneurs need to succeed by hosting networking events by entrepreneurs to make key connections, organizing business idea competitions for a chance to win start-up capital, providing specialized educational programs and technical assistance, and identifying new resources and programs to bring to the region. IWCI is currently developing an Innovation Center in downtown Sioux City to further strengthen the entrepreneurial environment to promote stability of small businesses as they emerge and offer shared equipment,

peer supports, and a physical location to develop and promote their goods. A small business entrepreneurial center will help pool resources and offer materials for small business start-ups, helping with partnerships and collaboration to be more successful. The entrepreneurial center will offer an all-in-one, problem-solving environment to remove barriers to those looking to start or expand operations. The development of this important incubator in the SIMPCO region will strengthen the resiliency of small businesses if/when tenuous external economic environments temporarily arise by providing a physical and intellectual support space to evolve with changing conditions.

Conclusion

The SIMPCO region proved to work quickly and effectively in the short-term period after the onset of the pandemic by pivoting to remote work options if applicable, practicing social distancing and workforce personal protection equipment, but the pandemic exposed and exacerbated underlying weaknesses of and threats to the resiliency of the regional economy. The backbone of the regional economy lies in agriculture and while there were disruptions, especially in employee health in large meatpacking plants, food production and processing remained very stable throughout the pandemic. Building upon the goals and objectives developed from the 2022-2026 CEDS examination of the region, the steering committee considered additional goals related to the ongoing disaster response, recovery, and resiliency to add to the 2022-2026 CEDS that will make the strong SIMPCO region even stronger in the face of future economic disasters.

Appendix

University of Iowa COVID-19 Impact on Iowa Businesses – SIMPCO

COVID-19 Impact on Iowa Businesses – Survey 3

Siouxland Interstate Metropolitan Planning Commission (SIMPCO)

Iowa Service Area Report

May 27, 2021

Prepared For:



The information used in this report is from a third online COVID-19 impact survey conducted for the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) from February 23 through March 24, 2021. Businesses and organizations across the state offered information about what they are experiencing and how they are handling the current COVID-19 crisis. Over 6,450 Iowa businesses and organizations responded to the survey. The Statewide Executive Summary can be accessed [HERE](#).

The University of Northern Iowa is providing local summaries to help communities and organizations understand the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 crisis on local businesses and to assist local partners in implementing ongoing recovery strategies.

This survey was funded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration.



Research conducted by:

University of Northern Iowa
Business & Community Services
Institute for Decision Making | Strategic Marketing Services

The logo for the University of Northern Iowa (UNI), featuring the letters "UNI" in a bold, white, sans-serif font on a blue background.

University of Northern Iowa.
Business & Community Services

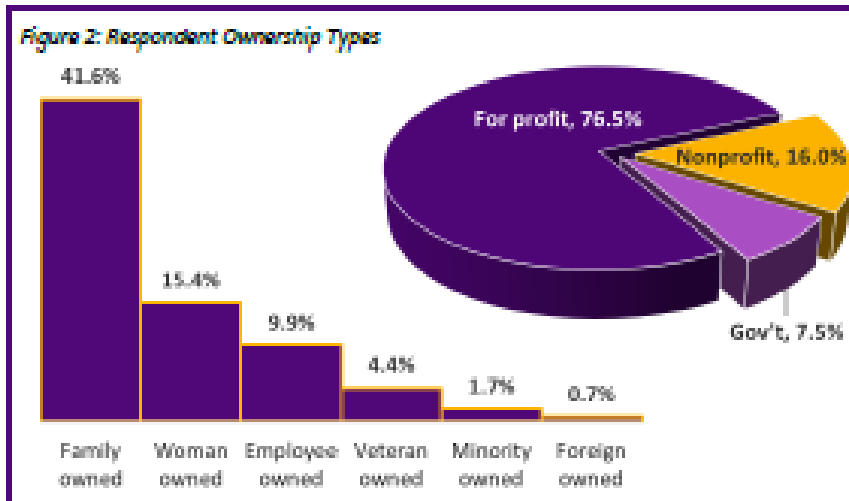
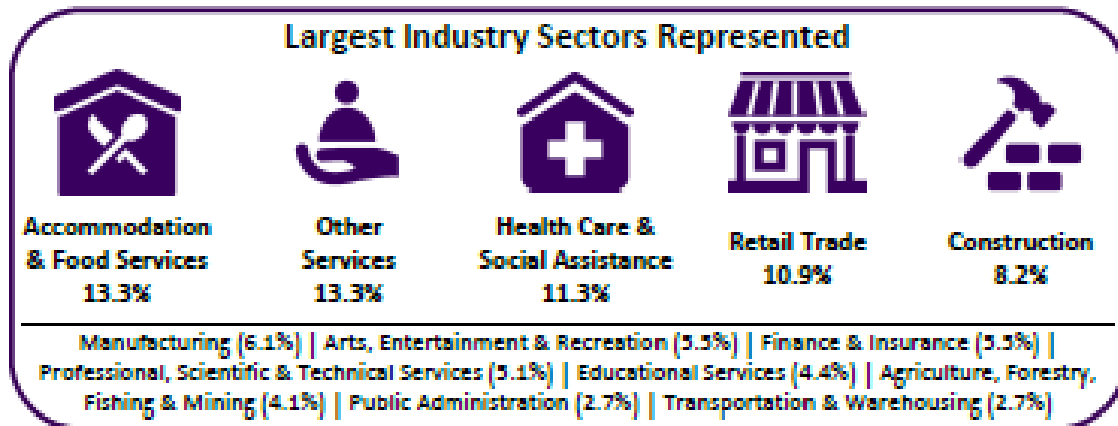
The logo for the Institute for Decision Making (IDM), featuring the letters "idm" in a bold, white, sans-serif font with a yellow diamond above the "i", and "Institute for Decision Making" in a smaller font below.



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About the Respondents

Survey 3 received 293 responses from businesses and nonprofits in SIMPCO's Iowa service area of Cherokee, Plymouth, Ida, Monona and Woodbury counties. The majority of respondents, 76.5 percent, were for profit businesses and represented several industry sectors. Over 40 percent (41.6%) of the respondents were family-owned businesses and just over 15 percent (15.4%) were women-owned businesses (Figure 1).



As a percentage of respondents, around half (51.2%) were small businesses with fewer than 10 employees and about three-quarters (74.4%) had fewer than 25 employees (Figure 2). One-fifth (20.1%) were very small businesses with 1 to 2 employees.

Figure 1: Respondents by Employment Size

