



# Business Partners Participant Survey — Findings Highlights

September 2021

HDT Evaluation Core Team

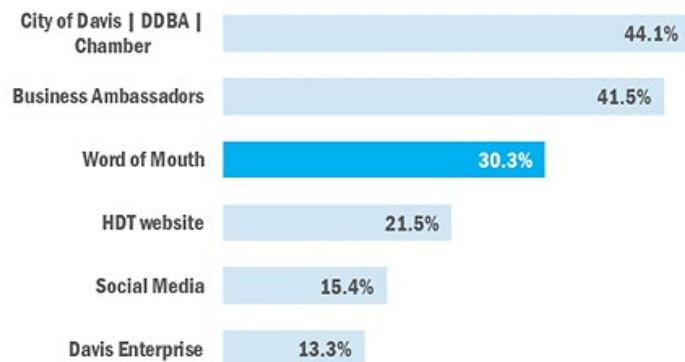
For a more in-depth understanding of survey responses, please see the Business Partner Participant Survey Question-by-Question Summary, also compiled by the HDT Evaluation Core.

If you have any questions about either report, please contact Robin Kipke at [rakipke@ucdavis.edu](mailto:rakipke@ucdavis.edu)

## Word of mouth was a powerful recruitment method.

Respondents were drawn to the Business Partners (BP) program by the opportunity to get reimbursement grants, gift card purchases, free COVID-19 testing and personal protective equipment (PPE).

Nearly a third of respondents learned about the program from other businesses.



- As expected, survey respondents primarily learned about the program from BP mailings and Business Ambassador visits. Yet almost 1/3 of respondents heard about it from other colleagues.
- Recommendations can be a powerful recruitment mechanism. **Word of mouth sharing could be incentivized** in order to draw more participants to the program sooner.
- Publicity on the Healthy Davis Together website, social media and the Davis Enterprise newspaper had less impact.

Ninety-nine percent of respondents said it was either “very easy” or “somewhat easy” to enroll in the program.

Yet, there was often a delay from the date when businesses first heard about the program to the date they actually enrolled. This meant there was a period of time when they were missing out on receiving benefits.

- Just 26% of survey respondents enrolled in the program immediately upon hearing about it.
- Almost 20% said they delayed because they didn’t have time.

**Simplifying the registration process** could hook participants into the program earlier and allow for collecting remaining information in small chunks over time, especially if tied to the delivery of benefits.

**Make it easier for businesses to say “Yes!” and to sign up on the spot.**

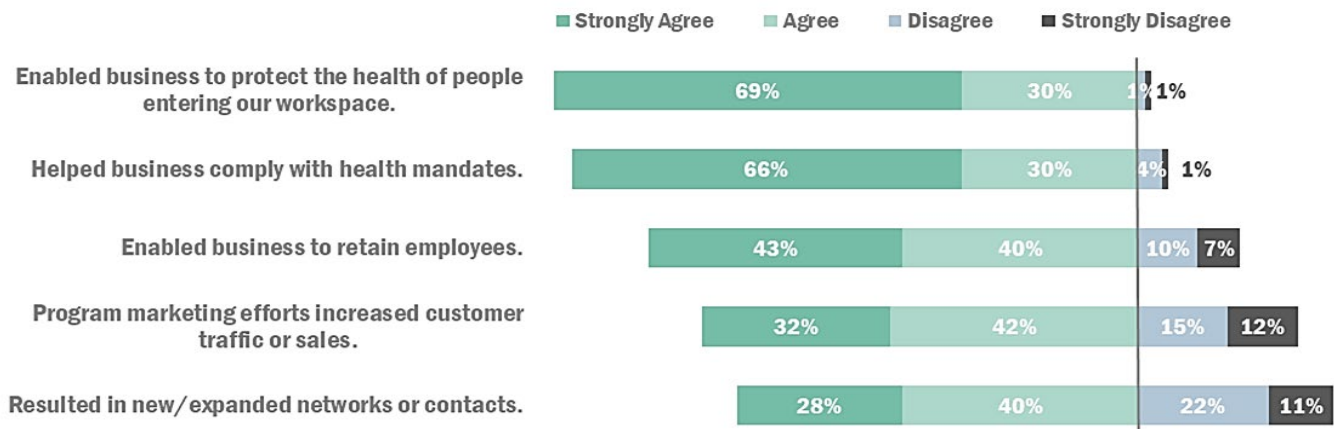
- Whether they hear about the program through email, social media, a Business Ambassador or from another business, keep the registration process short and quick.
- Collect just the most crucial information initially, such as business name, contact information, business license number and type of business. Other necessary information could be collected via weekly or biweekly surveys or forms or collected during the first few Business Ambassador visits.
- To ensure that all required data is provided, the program could make completion of forms and surveys a condition for the participant business to receive deliveries of benefits such as PPE, gift card purchases or grants.

**PROGRAM  
BENEFITS**

## The BP program had important positive impacts, especially protecting the health of employees.

- **Program elements that were most important in helping businesses stay afloat during the pandemic** in the order of importance were: the reimbursement grants (a mean score of 3.7 out of 4), free COVID-19 testing (3.6), and free PPE (3.4). Organizers assumed that an infusion of cash coming from the purchase of gift cards would be ranked higher in importance by businesses. It came in fourth with a score of 3.2.
- **There was enthusiastic appreciation for the Business Ambassador visits.** Eighty percent of open-ended comments (n=155) were positive. Respondents revealed these visits: *made them feel "supported by a community that cared," "helped me remember that there was help out there,"* and that *"awareness of the community's health...was the most important aspect of my business."*
- There were some misses, too. **Fourteen percent disclosed that they never received a visit from a Business Ambassador.** Another 8% said the visits were infrequent, not weekly. Some attributed this to operating after work hours or behind locked doors. Using phones, email, snail mail or door hangers in addition to BA visits would ensure that communication between program staff and partner businesses could take place even when there are barriers to dropping in.
- **The gift card distribution** (receiving gift cards from other businesses to give to reward employee and customer healthy practices) **had a mixed effect** on participant businesses. Nearly 25% of respondents said it promoted camaraderie with other businesses, helped build customer loyalty, promoted safe practices and COVID testing; while 32% said the gift cards had no effect. Eighteen percent said they did not receive any gift cards to give to customers. (Partners had to specifically apply for the card program.)
- An important goal of the BP program was to promote weekly COVID-19 testing for business owners/managers and their employees. **Almost 80% of respondents indicated that their business was either much more likely or somewhat more likely to encourage their employees to get tested than it would have done otherwise without the program.** Also, 64% revealed that their attitudes about the county's health mandates had grown more supportive because of the program.
- The program had other important outcomes as well.

### The BP program had the biggest impact on helping businesses protect the health of people in the workspace and comply with mandates.



## The program benefitted some business types more than others.

- **Fifty-four percent of survey respondents were satisfied with the program as delivered.**
  - *"The gift card program [brought] in more traffic in this difficult time, and it is really helpful to us!!"*
  - *"It was a great way to support local businesses and provide vital information to all businesses during a health crisis."*
  - *"...we felt less alone having you reach out to us. It affirmed our actions and concerns about being safe and keeping our business vital and as healthy as possible."*
  - *"Not all business[es] may have been affected, but it served a unique purpose [in] that it was a mini economy that received stimulus to help booster their best business[es]...."*
  - *"I really appreciated getting gift cards from 4 different businesses. I'm not aware of any being left out. I know the ambassadors contacted each business owner and if they decided not to participate that was on the business owner as the ambassadors worked very hard to get every business support."*
- **The other 46% had suggestions for improvements.**
  - About half of those expressed a desire for greater clarity, simplicity and fairness of program components. Specifically, less paperwork, clearer explanation of parameters, fewer limitations.
  - A similar number of partners commented on the need for better program follow through, outreach and communication.
  - Some respondents felt that revenue in the form of gift card purchases from partner businesses was unevenly distributed because certain enterprises did not have the capacity to generate cards, particular products or services were not a good fit (too expensive or were for adults only), and others were not in high demand with customers or were not in high foot traffic locations.
- When asked how equitably program components benefitted all Davis businesses, **about one third of survey takers thought it was equitable, but another third were not so sure** or felt they didn't have enough information to judge. Comments pointed to a number of factors which prevented certain types of businesses from taking part (and therefore profiting from the rewards): such as those without a Davis business license, operating wholly online or at home, or those that were temporarily closed.
- **A number of comments also mentioned disparities affecting certain types of businesses:**
  - *"BIPOC businesses could have been actively included more."*
  - *"I think smaller businesses outside of Downtown Davis or with pop up locations were left out."*
  - *"I do not feel the financial support was balanced for participating businesses. More emphasis seemed to be put on food establishments than any other."*
  - *"I think there were many sole proprietorship businesses who never received the information."*

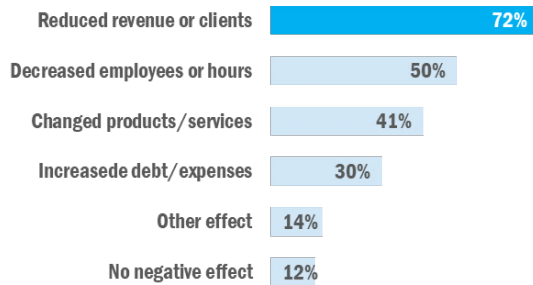
Individual comments in the question-by-question summary of results document offer insightful suggestions as well as confirmation of what the program meant to participants.

## Most respondent businesses took a hit from the pandemic, but there were upsides as well.

The pandemic affected participant enterprises in a variety of aspects, most often in a negative manner. As a result, businesses adopted a variety of survival strategies. However, there were positive impacts as well.

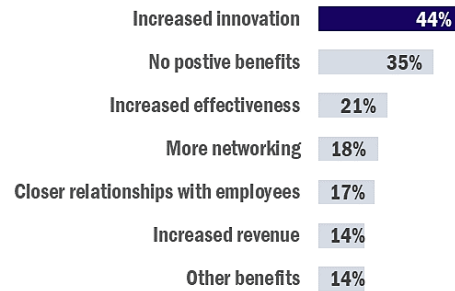
### NEGATIVE IMPACTS

**Almost 3 in 4 respondent businesses lost revenue or clients during the pandemic.**



### POSITIVE IMPACTS

**The pandemic led respondent businesses to be more innovative.**



The range of adaptations and innovations respondent businesses used to counter negative impacts were diverse. They were not only offsetting economic hits to their bottom lines, but also contending with labor shortages, health concerns of employees and customers, supply line issues and county regulations. As a result, businesses utilized tactics such as:

- Invested in technology to master teleconferencing and e-commerce platforms
- Instituted strict safety protocols on site (cleaning, masking, air filtration, etc.)
- Changed to online, or curbside or mobile delivery of services
- Increased marketing through social media, website, ads
- Allowing only one person per vehicle for field work
- Reduced or extended open hours, offered flex hours to employees
- Cut expenses, broadened the scope or developed new products or services

Seventy percent of respondents increased or expanded their marketing efforts to attract or retain customers:

- Almost half described the safe business practices they were deploying
- Over one-third increased their social media presence

Of those who took any such steps, 48% said they mentioned Healthy Davis Together or the Business Partner program as part of their marketing efforts.

## Participants needed information and support beyond what the program provided.

In addition to program benefits received, respondents said that additional information, training or technical assistance would have helped their businesses navigate the changes that the pandemic brought to the local economy. The top five items mentioned were:

1. **Help finding and/or applying for other financial assistance.** Some people found it difficult to locate as well as navigating the requirements and paperwork for funding from various sources. Having a knowledgeable person assist them in managing the process might improve their success in obtaining grants or loans.
2. **Interpreting or following health regulations at their business.** The ever-changing nature of health mandates and the sometimes conflicting guidelines coming from state or county sources made it hard for businesses to understand just what they were supposed to implement. Having someone who could explain the meaning of the latest guidance would save time and frustration among busy business owners and managers.
3. **Creating safer workspaces** (with improvements like installing air filtration systems, plastic barriers, properly disinfecting surfaces). This assistance was available to businesses applying for reimbursement grants from the Business Partners program in the form of consultation with Tom Harper. However, it is not clear if this service was open to all partners.
4. **Information about reopening safely.** As the stay-at-home orders were lifted, expectations and regulations changed for businesses once again. Ironically, just as the BP program drew to an end, participants entered a new and uncertain landscape about regulations, testing and vaccinations. They felt they were left on their own just as they were forced to grapple with returning workforces, available COVID-19 vaccines, and eventual resurgence of COVID cases and new variants.
5. **Marketing their businesses more effectively.** The marketing done by the BP program was seen as lacking. Respondents needed more than HDT signage and lists of participating businesses advertised in the Davis Enterprise. They needed marketing strategies that brought in more patrons.

Other support they said would have been helpful included:

- **Financial support other than gift card purchases.** As noted earlier, some businesses did not have the capacity to generate gift cards and so missed the opportunity to receive an influx of funding from program purchases of cards.
- **Equally distributed financial assistance.** Some businesses were more in demand than others as gift card suppliers given the popularity or price of their products or services. This meant that some businesses were able to sell more gift cards to the program than others.
- **A one-stop resource** (with links to a comprehensive range of information). Especially in turbulent times, business owners/managers do not have a lot of spare time to research and digest information—even when it is greatly needed. Having one place where businesses could turn for information or assistance would ease the burden on seekers and ensure they get accurate info.
- **Rent assistance and/or negotiations.** During shutdown periods when businesses were closed to customers, they often had to continue paying rent. As a result, some respondents expressed a need for additional funding or help to negotiate rates with landlords.

By project's end in June 2021, a total of 424 Davis businesses were participating in the Business Partners program. The Business Partners Participant survey was conducted online via emailed survey links sent to all 401 partner businesses with known email addresses on June 12, 2021. After several weeks, despite repeated reminders including a letter from the City of Davis reminding program participants of their obligation to provide information 195 businesses took part in the survey — a response rate of 49%.

Here is a summary of the demographic make up of the businesses that completed the survey.

- Most of the respondents (80%) had been a Business Partner for more than two months.
- More than half owned or managed a sole proprietorship or limited partnership.
- Over half of the respondent businesses were minority or women owned.
- Almost half of those responding worked in industries that were most affected by the shutdown — the restaurant/winery/hospitality, fitness/personal care, and retail industries.

The respondents themselves were:

- The majority (64%) of respondents were White; 20% were Asian; and 15% declined to specify.
- Fifty-three percent of survey takers were women; 8% declined to specify.
- More than half were 50 years or older.

### LIMITATIONS

At the end of June 2021, the survey was conducted at a busier-than-normal period when there was a flurry of program closeout activities as well as quarterly reporting for some businesses. As an end-of-program evaluation activity, the survey was comprehensive and rather long, which may have discouraged some people from taking it. The survey was conducted online and in English, yet a small number of businesses were known to have language barriers. Not all Business Partners had a current email address and therefore were excluded from the providing their input with a survey. Because of the anonymous nature of the survey, it is impossible to tell how partners who responded may have differed from those who did not. Similarly, without data on the characteristics of all businesses in Davis, it is difficult to know how representative the results are to the larger business community.