

Fall 2024
Lake Tahoe Region
Business Walks
Report



TAHOE PROSPERITY CENTER



Lake Tahoe Business Walks 2024

Final Report

Tahoe Prosperity Center

Tahoe Prosperity Center (TPC) is an innovative economic and community development nonprofit. In order to make Lake Tahoe truly inclusive and prosperous, we are working to establish attainable workforce housing, improve job and training opportunities, extend reliable and robust internet, and ensure a safe Basin equipped with fire safety cameras - all driven by locally focused, community indicators data. Our mission is uniting Tahoe's communities to strengthen regional prosperity. Collaboration is the foundation of Tahoe Prosperity Center.

Tahoe is made up of two states, five counties, and an incorporated city and we work across jurisdictional lines to ensure positive change happens for all of Lake Tahoe. Each of the Tahoe Prosperity Center's projects are informed by verified data and community input to ensure accountability and measurability.

Business Walks Background

TPC was asked by the Chambers and Business Associations in the Lake Tahoe region to support a region-wide set of "Business walks" in October 2024. TPC had previously coordinated business walks in the spring of 2016. While business and resident surveys have been conducted online since that time, an in-person survey of businesses had not happened on a regional, coordinated basis since before the pandemic.

Business walks and surveys are a way of understanding a "moment in time" of how things are going in the regional economy. This snapshot of information can be very useful in providing local business associations and chambers of commerce, as well as local government partners data to use that can support ongoing business support efforts. It can also be useful to better understand what is working or not working in the

region, helping elected officials and leaders make informed decisions that impact local small businesses in the region. It is also part of the Tahoe Prosperity Center mission to regularly check in with businesses and residents as part of the Envision Tahoe Prosperity Playbook, so coordinating these business walks aligns with that goal.

Project Partners

Regional Partners included the following organizations and agencies and we greatly appreciate the time and effort they put into ensuring the success of these business walks:

- The Tahoe Prosperity Center
- Tahoe Chamber
- Lake Tahoe Community College
- South Tahoe Chamber
- Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority
- City of South Lake Tahoe
- El Dorado County Economic Development
- North Tahoe Community Alliance
- North Tahoe Chamber
- North Tahoe Business Association
- Tahoe City Downtown Association
- Placer County Economic Development
- Incline Village Crystal Bay Business Association
- Travel North Tahoe Nevada
- Douglas County Economic Vitality
- Destination Stewardship Council
- All 64 of the community volunteers!

Methodology

The business walks included both an in-person survey using the Ecanvasser application pre-loaded with questions. This program, typically used for political canvassing, had everything needed for business to business surveying. With the businesses uploaded into this software accessible via mobile devices and computers, modifiable custom fields for each contact, and an interactive map of the area we were able to coordinate the in-person survey effort of the business walks. Volunteers were organized in teams to walk into businesses and complete the surveys between October 15-17, 2024.

In-person surveys through Ecanvasser were tracked as Not Available, Gave a QR Card, Not Interested, and Answered; 277 businesses answered during the in-person surveys, but over 700 businesses were contacted. Some businesses were unavailable or closed when visited, others were not interested in completing the surveys, others were busy and some were given a QR code card to complete the online survey at a later time.

The same survey questions were included in an online SurveyMonkey to allow businesses that were closed or unavailable to complete it at a later time. QR codes were left behind at those businesses when canvassing in person to allow easy access to the online option. The online survey was open during the same timeframe through October 31, 2024 and 92 businesses completed online surveys. Consistency between the in-person surveys and online surveys was critical in order to merge the data for this final report.

Survey Questions

1. How is business?
 - Increasing
 - Stable
 - Decreasing

2. Do you have the staff and/or resources you need for your business to thrive?
Yes/No
 - If not, what is needed?
 - If you need more staff, what is working in finding them and what isn't?



Photo provided by the Tahoe Chamber

3. What tools, resources or infrastructure would enable you to grow or maintain your business in the next few years?
 - Employee Housing
 - Affordable Childcare
 - Workforce Development & Training
 - Improved Broadband/cellular service
 - More Parking/Transit
 - Business Loans
 - Other:

4. How do you feel about the future of our Tahoe economy?
 - Very good
 - Good
 - Unsure
 - Concerned
 - Very concerned

5. How can local government and business associations/chambers help your business?
 - Advocacy
 - Marketing/Advertising
 - Streamlined Permitting & Licensing
 - Improved Broadband/cellular service
 - Business Loans
 - Providing local employee housing
 - Consolidated/Discounted Credit Card processing fees
 - Pooling together for discounts for major purchases/procurement or employee health benefit programs
 - Disability access and inclusion policies
 - Customer service training
 - Other:

6. How important is the tourism economy to your business?
 - Very important
 - Somewhat important
 - Neutral
 - Not very important
 - Irrelevant



Photo provided by the Tahoe Prosperity Center

7. In your opinion, how important is sustainability/environmental stewardship to the success of our local economy?
- Very important
 - Somewhat important
 - Neutral
 - Not very important
 - Irrelevant

8. Do you have any sustainability practices you would like to share with us today?

- Water conservation efforts
- Water bottle filling station
- Compostable takeout packaging
- Sourcing local products
- Energy-efficient appliances
- Visitor education
- Other:

9. Type of business – list in the app and check. For “Other” allow a text box response.

- Food & Beverage
- Lodging (including real estate industry/vacation rental services)
- Outdoor Recreation

- Healthcare/Fitness/Beauty
- Retail
- Non-profit/Government/Agency
- Professional Services (finance, insurance, accounting, IT)
- Trades
- Other:

Regional Summary

The Lake Tahoe Business Walk survey provides critical insights into the current business environment and community needs in the Tahoe region. Key findings from the survey indicate that while many businesses are stable or growing, there is still a significant need for workforce housing and improved transportation infrastructure. These challenges are echoed in the Prosperity Playbook, which highlights the need for a coordinated regional approach to address these issues and support economic resilience.



The survey also underscores the importance of tourism to the local economy, with most businesses considering it very important. This aligns with the Playbook's focus on balancing tourism and leveraging the region's reputation for health and wellness to attract new investment.

Photo provided by: NTCA

Additionally, regional collaboration between local government, business owners and the Chambers/Business Associations has room to improve. There are a lot of misunderstandings about the role of government with business attraction, support and services as well as workforce development, tourism and resident advertising to support local businesses, etc. Infrastructure needs were consistently brought up, but often business owners did not know who to talk to about things such as better broadband or coordinated support for employee training and skills development.

Finally, streamlining regulations, improved transportation and more affordable housing were brought up consistently as major roadblocks to local small businesses. The Tahoe Prosperity Center suggests a few solutions that could help in these areas, some that are already in progress, with others' ideas to consider in 2025. They include:

- Sharing the status of housing projects in the region in one easy to access website for community members (the TRPA Living Working Group has done much work in this area and maybe that website is the right place for this information). Each jurisdiction has already worked on many housing programs and projects, but the collective effort hasn't been quantified. The Tahoe Prosperity Center would be happy to host this on our housing website to feature all the regional housing work that has been done, if there is interest.
- A region-wide Elected Officials briefing and discussion meeting to share the common areas and differences between the jurisdictions to further community understanding. The Tahoe Prosperity Center is also willing to coordinate and host this meeting. We could share the results of the Business Walks Survey, update on the status of some of the key socio-economic data points regarding population, jobs, incomes/wages and other indicators, and then allow for our local elected officials to share what is working or challenging in each of their jurisdictions. We believe there is likely more in common with each community than differences.



Photo provided by the Tahoe Chamber

Business Walks Survey - Questions + Answers + Top Insights

How is business?

Stable: 179 responses (48.8%)

Increasing: 118 responses (32.2%)

Decreasing: 70 responses (19.1%)

Do you have the staff and/or resources you need for your business to thrive?

Yes: 274 responses (74.3%)

No: 95 responses (25.7%)

If not, what is needed?

1. **Housing Affordability:** This is the most prominent theme, with many respondents expressing concern about the rising cost of housing and its impact on attracting and retaining employees.
2. **Workforce Development:** There is a need for training and developing a skilled workforce to meet the demands of the local economy.
3. **Economic Challenges:** Many businesses are facing economic challenges, including rising costs, decreased revenue, and increased competition.
4. **Business Climate:** The overall business climate in the area is a concern for many, with factors such as taxes, regulations, and competition impacting businesses.
5. **Regulatory Hurdles:** Regulatory burdens, such as those imposed by the TRPA, or local governments are hindering business growth and development.
6. **Infrastructure Issues:** Poor infrastructure, particularly in terms of transportation and snow removal, is impacting businesses and residents.
7. **Community Support:** Local businesses are seeking more support from the community, including through marketing and advocacy efforts.

8. **Seasonal Workforce:** The seasonal nature of many businesses in the area creates challenges in staffing and workforce management.
9. **Government Support:** Businesses are calling for more government support, including funding for affordable housing and infrastructure improvements.

If you need more staff, what is working in finding them and what isn't?

Top 5 Themes: What's Working

1. **Word-of-Mouth & Personal Networks:** Many businesses find success through recommendations from existing staff and connections within the community. (e.g., Word of mouth, Social media, In person applications, Networking with local groups)
2. **Targeted Advertising:** Strategies like advertising on location, using local platforms (e.g., Sierra Sun, Craigslist), and social media marketing show some success in attracting local candidates.
3. **Competitive Wages & Benefits:** Offering competitive wages, full-time hours, and benefits like healthcare and training can attract qualified candidates.
4. **J1 Visa Program:** Utilizing the J1 visa program allows businesses to access a temporary workforce.
5. **Remote Work:** For some positions, offering remote work options can expand the applicant pool beyond limitations of local housing availability.

**Lake Tahoe
Visitors
Authority
Photo**



Top 5 Themes: What's Not Working

1. **High Cost of Housing:** The primary challenge identified is the high cost of housing in the area, making it difficult for potential employees to afford to live there.
2. **National Job Boards:** Platforms like Indeed and other major job boards appear to have limited effectiveness in attracting local candidates.
3. **Recruiting Challenges:** Expenses associated with recruiting, difficulty finding qualified candidates, and low application turnout are ongoing struggles.
4. **Seasonal Workforce:** The seasonal nature of some businesses makes it difficult to find and retain staff, particularly during peak seasons.
5. **Limited Local Workforce:** Businesses report a lack of skilled or qualified labor available locally, particularly for specialized positions.

What tools, resources or infrastructure would enable you to grow or maintain your business in the next few years?

Employee Housing: 143 responses (37.0%)

More Parking/Transit: 74 responses (19.1%)

*Other: 170 responses (43.9%)



Themes in the "Other Category"

Photo provided by NTCA

- **Childcare:** Lack of affordable childcare options hinders families and businesses.
- **Economy:** High cost of living, declining tourism, and struggling businesses.
- **Infrastructure:** Need for broadband improvement, better signage, and public facilities for tourists.
- **Regulations:** Concerns about government involvement and high taxes.

How do you feel about the future of our Tahoe economy?

- Very Good: 7 responses (2%)
- Good: 131 responses (43%)
- Unsure: 86 responses (28%)
- Concerned: 74 responses (24%)
- Very Concerned: 8 responses (3%)

How can local government and business associations/chambers help your business?

Marketing/Advertising: 125 responses (24.0%)

Providing local employee housing: 94 responses (18.0%)

Consolidated/Discounted Credit Card processing fees: 40 responses (7.7%)

Streamlined Permitting & Licensing: 40 responses (7.7%)

Advocacy: 39 responses (7.5%)

Customer service training: 31 responses (6.0%)

Business Loans: 28 responses (5.4%)

Pooling together for discounts for major purchases/procurement or employee health benefit programs: 27 responses (5.2%)

Disability access and inclusion policies: 13 responses (2.5%)

*Other: 84 responses (16.1%)

Themes in the "Other Category"

1. **Address Housing Crisis:**

- Implement policies to increase affordable housing options more quickly.

- Encourage the development of workforce housing.
 - Support programs to help employees with housing costs now, while housing projects are being built.
- 2. Simplify Regulations and Streamline Processes:**
- Reduce bureaucratic red tape and streamline permitting procedures.
 - Advocate for lower taxes and fees for small businesses.
 - Improve communication and collaboration between government agencies and businesses.
- 3. Enhance Infrastructure and Support Services:**
- Invest in public transportation and parking infrastructure.
 - Improve internet connectivity and broadband access.
 - Provide more support services for small businesses, such as marketing assistance and business counseling.

How important is the tourism economy to your business?



Very important: 251 responses (69.5%)

Somewhat important: 59 responses (16.3%)

Neutral: 27 responses (7.5%)

Not very important: 15 responses (4.2%)

Irrelevant: 9 responses (2.5%)

Photo provided by NTCA

In your opinion, how important is sustainability/environmental stewardship to the success of our local economy?

Very important: 251 responses (69.5%)

Somewhat important: 59 responses (16.3%)

Neutral: 27 responses (7.5%)

Not very important: 15 responses (4.2%)

Irrelevant: 9 responses (2.5%)

Do you have any sustainability practices you would like to share with us today?

Water bottle filling station: 61 responses (13.2%)

Sourcing local products: 60 responses (13.0%)

Compostable takeout packaging: 55 responses (11.9%)

Energy-efficient appliances: 51 responses (11.0%)

Visitor education: 49 responses (10.6%)

Water conservation efforts: 47 responses (10.2%)

Final Thoughts

Overall, the survey highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to address the challenges facing businesses in the region. This includes addressing housing affordability, improving infrastructure, streamlining regulations, and providing more support for workforce development.

Business Outlook:

- **Optimism:** A significant portion of businesses feel they have the necessary resources to thrive.
- **Growth and Stability:** A majority of businesses are either stable or increasing.
- **Economic Challenges:** Despite this optimism, there are concerns about economic challenges, including rising costs, decreased revenue, and increased competition.

Workforce and Housing:

- **Staffing Shortages:** Businesses are facing challenges in hiring and retaining employees, particularly in seasonal industries, although the majority of businesses noted they currently have the staff they need.
- **Housing Affordability:** The high cost of housing is a major barrier to attracting and retaining employees.
- **Workforce Development:** There is a need for more skilled workers, and businesses are seeking solutions to address this gap. This is an area for potential alignment with the Chambers, Business Associations and schools.

Government and Community Support:

- **Government Support:** Businesses are calling for more government support, particularly in the areas of affordable housing, infrastructure, and regulatory reform.
- **Community Collaboration:** Local businesses are seeking more support from the business and visitor bureau community, including through marketing and advocacy efforts.
- **Chambers/Business Associations:** Businesses are looking to business associations and chambers of commerce to provide more resources and support, such as marketing assistance, business counseling, and advocacy.

The Lake Tahoe Business Walk survey serves as one tool for understanding the needs and priorities of local businesses. By aligning with the strategic goals outlined in the Prosperity Playbook, the survey provides a roadmap for fostering economic growth and community resilience in the Tahoe region. The Playbook strategies also closely align with the goals of local government economic development efforts, the Chambers and Business Associations work to support small businesses. Improving the success of small businesses in the Lake Tahoe region helps support local residents and therefore a thriving community, so the synergy of these efforts moving forward is a key goal.

The insights gained from this survey will inform future initiatives and partnerships aimed at addressing challenges such as workforce housing, transportation, and a balanced tourism economy. By working together, the Tahoe community can build a more inclusive and resilient economy that benefits all residents and businesses.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the Tahoe Prosperity Center Program Manager, Derrick Martin and Office Manager, Evelyn Mejia Ronquillo for coordinating and implementing the Ecanvasser application used to collect data during the in-person business walks. This was a new app and had never been used by the TPC team or any of the Chambers or business associations. Evelyn and Derrick supported the training of the volunteers using the app and consolidating the final data to support preparing this final report.

In addition, TPC would like to acknowledge and thank each of the partners organizations. They quickly coordinated all the volunteers for the business walks, hosted many planning meetings and organized food and beverages for the volunteers, in addition to conducting surveys. Coming together as a region is always inspiring and we appreciate your time and commitment to improving our community and economy.



Photo provided by the Tahoe Chamber