

A photograph of two hikers on a rocky mountain peak. A woman in the foreground is crouching and reaching up to assist a man who is standing on a higher rock. The background shows a clear blue sky and distant mountain ranges.

Mountainland Region COVID-19 Economic Recovery and Resilience Plan

Prepared for the Mountainland
Economic Development District by EY

June 15, 2021



Building a better
working world

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Introduction

In January 2021, the Mountainland Economic Development District (MEDD) hired EY to assist in developing a COVID-19 Economic Recovery and Resilience Plan. The objective of this plan is to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on regional economic health and evaluate strategies for mitigation, recovery and long-term growth.

Developed under the guidance of MEDD and with targeted input from local stakeholders, this report represents EY's findings and recommendations for MEDD's plan. The plan will serve as a guide for community leaders and policymakers and includes an evaluation of the economic impact of the pandemic, strategies for mitigation and a framework for economic recovery in the region.

The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic to Mountainland region was less severe than for the State of Utah and the US overall. The region saw a rapid rise in unemployment in the first months of the pandemic as the economy adjusted during the initial health safety response, but the region recovered jobs rapidly beginning in the summer of 2020.

The resiliency of the Mountainland Region economy is likely due to overall industry diversification across the region, high concentrations of industries that continued to grow during the pandemic, and an overall attractive and supportive business climate. But hidden behind lower unemployment rates and increased retail spending are residents who dropped permanently out of the workforce, businesses struggling to operate in the new normal and leaders working diligently to support their communities through recovery while rebuilding with an eye toward greater resiliency.

Businesses, communities and individuals in the Mountainland region navigated the pandemic well, despite not having an active response and recovery plan in place. Their perseverance, innovation and collaborative spirit were demonstrated by their willingness to come together, share resources, leverage networks and activate initiatives. This unity of action including the likes of economic development roundtables, Learn and Work in Utah and MEDD's ability to administer CARES Act funding, contributed to the region's ability to rebound so quickly.

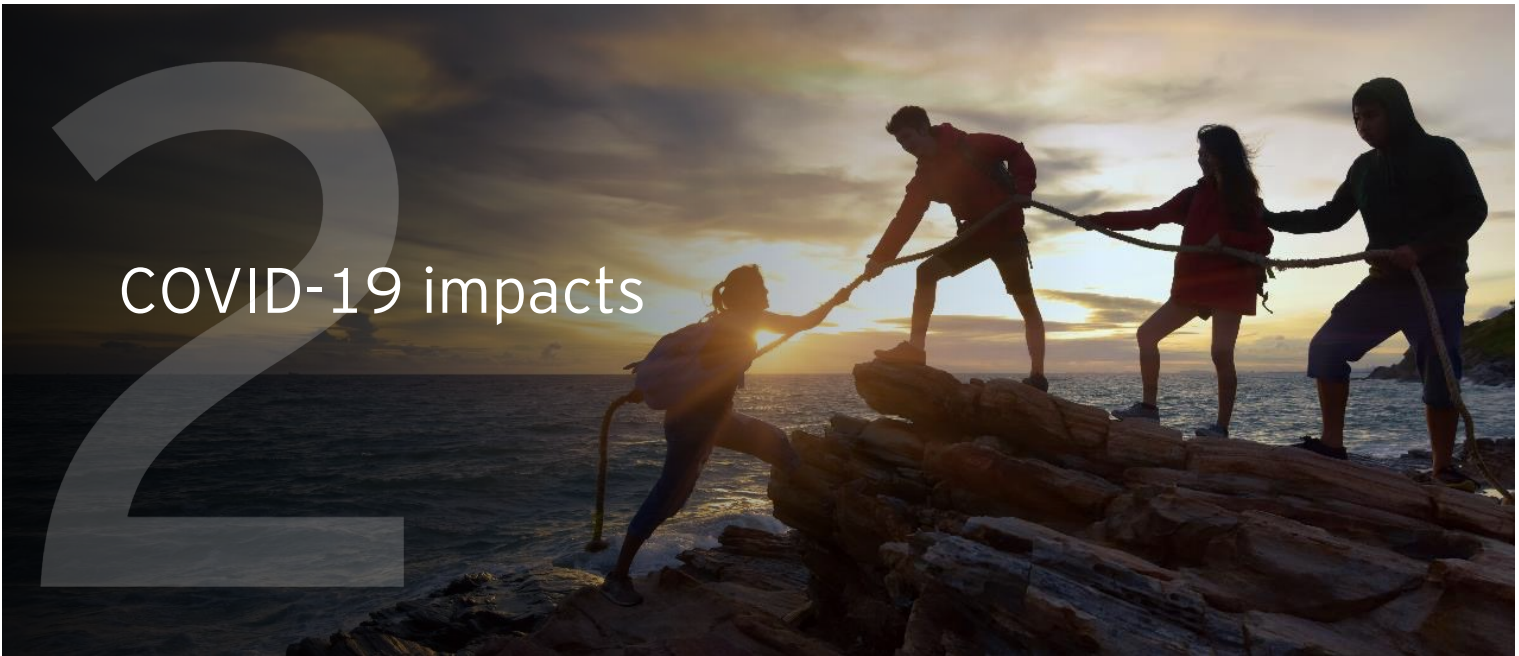
But lessons were learned over the past year and the process of recovery and future planning continues. The overall vision for this economic recovery and resilience plan is for the Mountainland region to be united in strengthening the resiliency of its residents, businesses and communities. The role of MEDD and other regional leaders now is to rebuild with even greater resiliency which includes having a plan in place for future pandemic response.

This plan outlines three core goals for the Mountainland region, along with priorities and prime opportunities for each goal area to be considered by MEDD and leaders across the region.

- ▶ Goal 1: Recovery for the Mountainland region
- ▶ Goal 2: Built back with greater resiliency
- ▶ Goal 3: Prepared for future pandemics

The suggested priorities for each goal area also align with the Mountainland Economic Development District (MEDD) 2018 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) which focused on overall competitiveness, talent retention, entrepreneurship, infrastructure and quality of life.

Moving this plan forward will require continued willingness of leaders across the region to identify needs, to share ideas and resources, and to align recovery efforts and response plans. This plan should also be viewed as a living, breathing document. Leaders should be prepared to adapt priorities based on shifting regional needs and available resources. By working better together, the Mountainland region could emerge even more resilient than before.



COVID-19 impacts

The assessed impacts in the following section are not comprehensive but, instead, represent the most significant observations gathered thus far in the planning process. This section includes findings on the COVID-19 impacts to the three-county Mountainland region overall, each county individually and the City of Provo. These findings were determined by examining available economic and demographic data, reviewing background materials provided by MEDD staff, interviews with key stakeholders conducted by EY, and feedback from the advisory committee.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the entire Mountainland region, but the region's economy was less severely impacted than the State of Utah and the US overall. This is likely due to strong relative industry diversity across the region, high concentrations of industries, such as software, that continued to grow during the pandemic, and an overall attractive and supportive business climate.

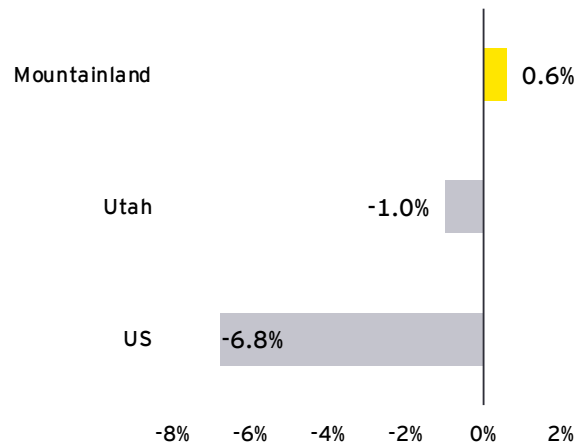
The region saw a rapid rise in unemployment in the first months of the pandemic as the economy adjusted during the initial health safety response, but the region recovered jobs rapidly beginning in the summer of 2020. This rapid return of overall low unemployment may mask lingering concerns in some geographic areas, industries, businesses and population groups that were more severely impacted.

Mountainland Region

Key takeaways

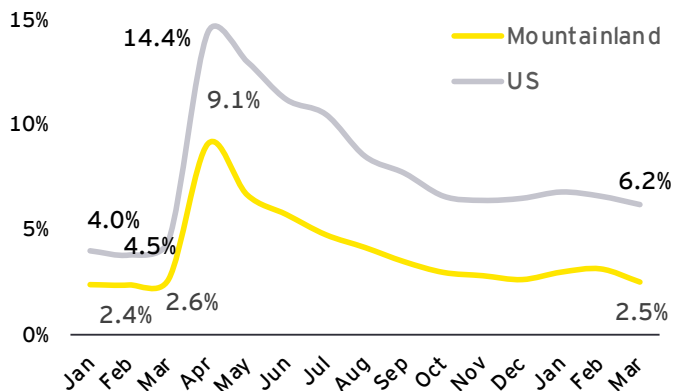
- ▶ The Mountainland region overall saw job losses from April through August of 2020, but as of September 2020, employment had recovered to near pre-pandemic levels.
- ▶ Overall, the region has weathered the pandemic well, with unemployment falling to pre-pandemic levels by March 2021 and the regional labor force actually growing.

Year-over-year job growth, September 2019 - September 2020



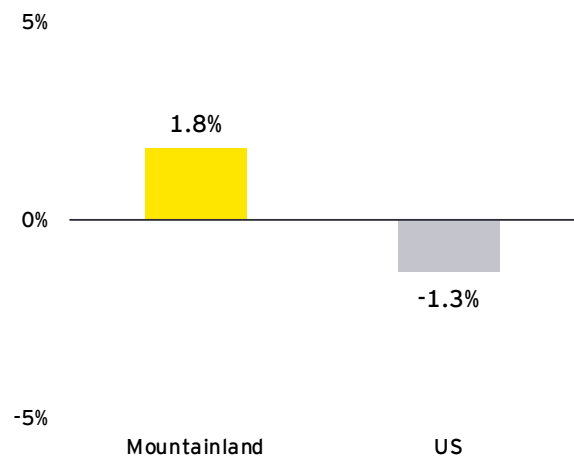
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Unemployment rate, January 2020 - March 2021



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

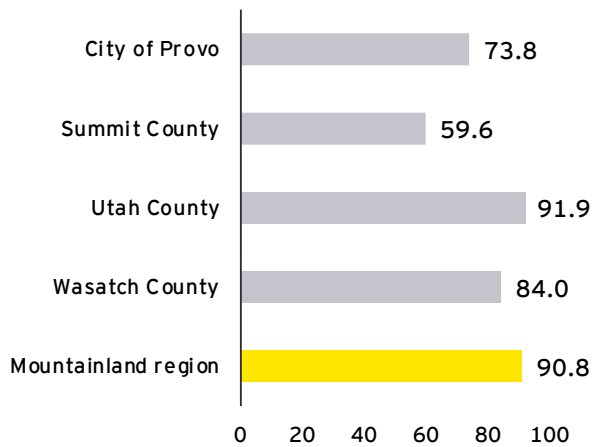
Year-over-year labor force change, March 2021



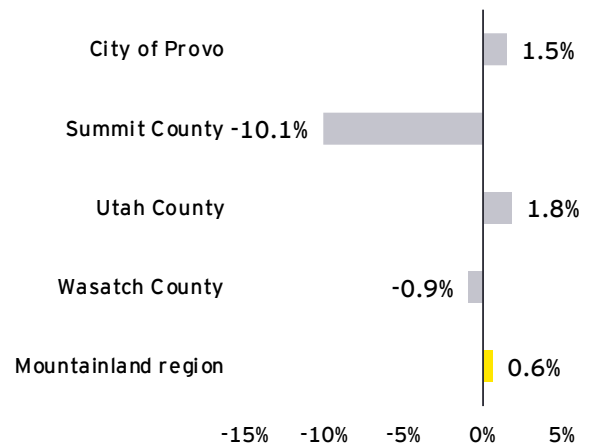
Geographic trends

- ▶ The degree of the pandemic’s economic impact on each county was largely affected by the overall industry diversity and types of concentrated industries in each.

Industry diversity (higher = more economically diverse), 2019



Year-over-year job growth, September 2019 - September 2020



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

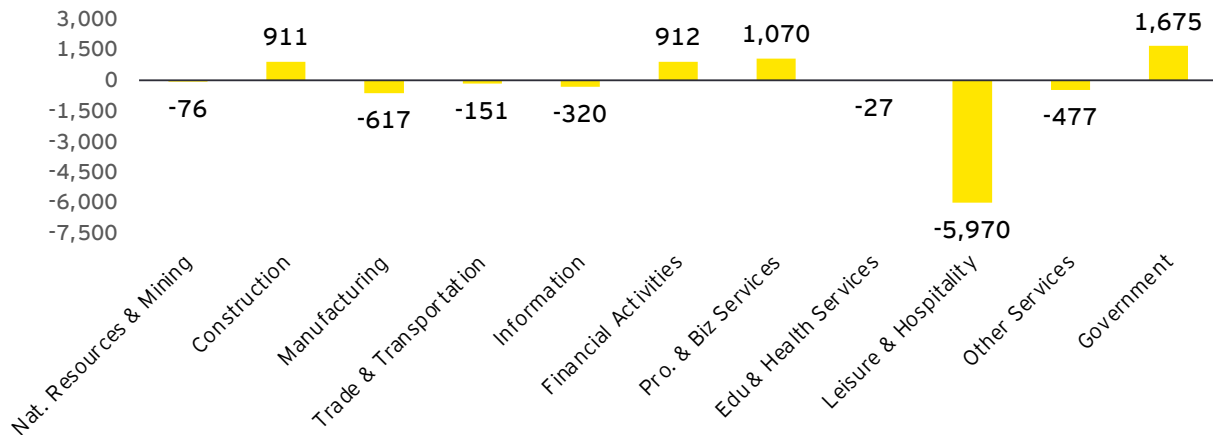
- ▶ Those areas with greater economic diversity generally experienced fewer job losses and a quicker recovery. The City of Provo seems to vary a bit from this trend, with lower industry diversity than Utah County but still strong job growth. This is likely partially due to the fact that the most concentrated sector in Provo is Software, which endured the pandemic well and even experienced strong growth. Another factor is likely that Provo’s economy cannot be truly separated from the surrounding Utah County, with which the city shares its labor and business community.

Business trends

- ▶ Leisure & Hospitality, which includes tourism and restaurants, suffered by far the greatest negative impacts, but a range of industries, especially in Utah County, which is much more economically diverse, were affected.
 - ▶ Positively, the Mountainland region did not see a net loss of establishments overall – in fact many new businesses opened across industries

Mountainland region year-over-year monthly employment change, June 2019 – June 2020

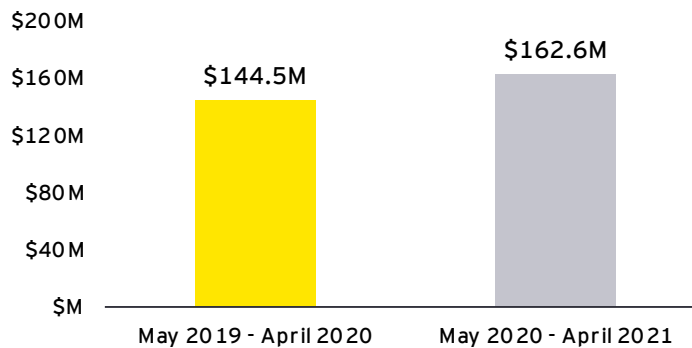
Absolute change



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

- ▶ Despite job losses and tourism declines, sales tax activity actually increased over the past year in the region as a whole.
 - ▶ This trend was not even across the region – Summit County, in particular, saw a large year-over-year decline in sales activity.
 - ▶ Most of the increase in sales occurred in Utah County (\$17.1 million year-over-year increase May 2019 – Apr 2020 vs. May 2020 – Apr 2021). Of that, the largest gains were in Orem (\$2.4M), Lehi (\$2.1M), Spanish Fork (\$1.6M), Provo (\$1.6M), American Fork (\$1.5M) and Saratoga Springs (\$1.4M)

Year to year comparison of Mountainland region sales tax distributions



Source: Utah State Tax Commission

- ▶ Restaurant activity fell significantly in the first months of the pandemic and through the summer, but has levelled out and reached nearly pre-pandemic levels through the fall and winter.
 - ▶ Hotel activity also fell significantly in the early months but has remained below pre-pandemic levels even through the fall and winter, likely due to a reduced number of ski trips and large events, such as the film festival in Park City.
 - ▶ Small business revenue remains down across the region, but especially in Summit County, which has the highest concentration of tourism-related small businesses
 - ▶ According to opportunity insights surveys, between 17% and 26% of small businesses were closed in December 2020.
 - ▶ The number of business establishments in the region increased over this period though, which indicates that larger businesses may have opened and new businesses formed, despite temporary and permanent closures of existing small businesses.

Industry trends:

Leisure and hospitality

- ▶ Leisure and hospitality experienced the greatest employment declines, resulting from the initial shutdowns and continued enforcement of social distancing policies.
- ▶ In the Mountainland region, the busy season for ski resorts in 2020 were cut short but returned by winter with the addition of certain safety protocols. While this return provided a much-needed boost to revenues, profit margins are expected to suffer from the additional costs associated with adhering to safety protocols for staff and customers.
- ▶ Many more locals ventured out to enjoy the outdoor recreation opportunities in the Mountainland region during the pandemic. As such, local tourism groups expressed plans to monetize more of these activities by creating activity passports, which encouraged support of local businesses.
- ▶ Other aspects of the leisure and hospitality sector were also impacted by the reduction in out-of-state visitors to include ski schools, movie theatres and other local attractions. Event planners, entertainment venues and caterers were negatively impacted as well. Support from the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided a much-needed lifeline, and more support will likely be needed moving forward.

Technology and professional services firms

- ▶ The tech industry and professional services firms have shown great resiliency during the pandemic due to their ability to conduct work remotely. In fact, these were some of the few sectors in the Mountainland region to grow in both employment and establishments during the pandemic.
- ▶ The impact to the office real estate market and services in those nearby business districts is yet to be determined as corporations unveil plans to either return to the office or continue to work remotely. Some larger office holders are already planning to scale down their footprints and sublet extra space.

Manufacturing

- ▶ Like most industries, manufacturing employment plummeted in March and April of 2020 due to stay-at-home orders. Manufacturing on the national level has since rebounded 95% from the initial COVID-19 reductions. Its recovery and expansion are expected to continue, with durable goods orders rising in January 2021 for the ninth straight month.
- ▶ Manufacturers in the Mountainland region adapted to social distancing measures by requiring temperature checks and staggering lunches and shifts to limit the potential for exposure. They also leaned on county health departments for support with rapid testing and contact tracing. By June 2020, the Mountainland region was only down 617 jobs in manufacturing and saw an increase in the total number of manufacturing establishments.
- ▶ Many states, including Utah, have seen an uptick in prospect activity from manufacturers looking to shore up their supply chains to maintain business continuity.

Retail and food service

- ▶ The impact of the K-shaped recovery is quite apparent when it comes to retail and food service. According to the US Bureau of Economic Analysis, spending on goods is now 6.5% above pre-COVID levels while spending on services is 5% below. Some of the biggest winners include sporting goods stores and home improvement stores, while food services and drinking places, clothing stores and gas stations continue to suffer. February 2021 was the first month of significant employment gains in food service and drinking places.
- ▶ There is speculation that household savings accumulated during the pandemic could translate to a significant boost in spending over the coming months. This is in addition to boosts from the recently passed American Rescue Plan Act.

- ▶ Based on conversations with select stakeholders in the Mountainland region, March and April were the most difficult months for operation, but most have been able to adapt. Funding to support the added expenses of operating during COVID-19 have proven to be extremely useful, as have waived regulations supporting sidewalk dining.

Demographic trends

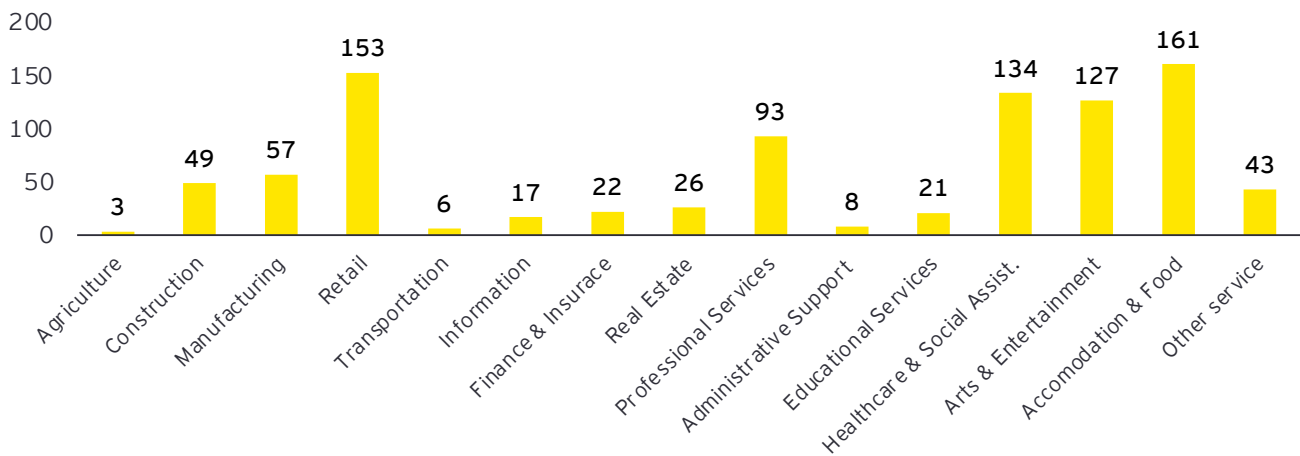
- ▶ The region's greatest job losses from June to June were in Leisure & Hospitality – with a high share of these occurring in Summit and Wasatch counties. Those industries tend to pay lower than average salaries – \$23,023 compared to \$50,452 total for the region.
- ▶ Unemployment has returned more to pre-pandemic levels, but there are likely many individuals still in need, especially lower-wage workers who were temporarily laid off, seasonal workers and those who have exited the labor force, including older workers and those with less in-demand skills.
- ▶ Housing was a challenge pre-pandemic and has likely been exacerbated. In 2019, costs were already above the state and US average, and housing was less available than those benchmarks.



Response trends

- ▶ Businesses across multiple industries received PPP loans in the Mountainland region. Leisure & Hospitality businesses, although the most impacted in terms of job losses, received less than their proportionate share of PPP loans by value. The CARES Act grants administered by MEDD managed to fill that gap, with a large share going to small business in Accommodation & Food, Arts & Entertainment and Retail. Businesses with 25 or fewer employees received 94% of CARES Act grants in the Mountainland region.

Mountainland region CARES Act grants by industry, 2020



Source: Mountainland Economic Development District

Considerations

- ▶ Overall, the region has done quite well through the pandemic, but specific population and industry groups will likely require continued support through recovery. Notably, hotels and other accommodations have seen a significant decline in activity over the past year as business and tourist travel dropped. Although business travel has begun to resume and will likely continue to pick up over the next year, with virtual communication increasing, it may never reach pre-pandemic levels. Summit County has more deeply felt the effects of declining tourism and recreational activities, especially related to large events. The potential loss of workers in those industries may cause additional issues for businesses as they look to match demand when regular travel activities resume.

- ▶ Restaurants and retail may continue to face challenges through recovery, as a rise in online consumption has been ongoing and is unlikely to end. Restaurants have fared somewhat better in recovery as safety concerns lessen, but if many workers continue to work remotely, lunchtime dining in employment centers may remain below pre-pandemic levels and make operating difficult for restaurants previously dependent on those sales.
- ▶ The closing of small businesses and lost revenue not only affected those businesses but often also the properties in which they are tenants. Many commercial property owners have faced financial challenges due to lost rents and tenants, despite efforts to provide relief to tenants and support them through the pandemic. Little relief has been provided to property owners, and they will likely continue to face difficulties finding tenants to fill spaces.
- ▶ There is an opportunity to support entrepreneurs in forming new businesses to fill spaces vacated by those lost during the pandemic – both physical spaces and gaps in the market of services and goods.
- ▶ The challenges faced by small businesses, nearly 20% of which may have closed either permanently or temporarily through the pandemic, indicate a need to increase resources and programs to continue to support them through recovery. It also highlights the opportunity for new business ventures to fill gaps created in the marketplace and take advantage of new business opportunities created by the pandemic. This reinforces the need to focus on supporting small business and start-ups to accelerate recovery throughout the region.
- ▶ Many businesses, especially technology companies and office users, continue to seek locations in walkable environments that offer a mixture of retail, restaurants, cultural amenities, entertainment and housing. Those cities with traditional or newly construction downtowns may have opportunities to invest in the types of physical space that will support and attract related businesses and individuals.
- ▶ Lower-income individuals continue to be the most impacted by the pandemic throughout the region. Many of those that lost their jobs over the past year were in lower-wage occupations, and even if they have since found new work, they likely suffered financial losses while unemployed and continue to face affordability challenges. Housing costs and availability are major concerns throughout the region. Housing availability and affordability, alongside a contracting labor force in some areas, may create challenges for some employers, especially those in tourism and other sectors that rely heavily on seasonal workers.

- ▶ Emerging economic and workforce trends through the pandemic may be creating new opportunities for economic growth in the Mountainland region. Many of these trends are not new but have been accelerated through the pandemic. These include:
 - ▶ Increased opportunities for remote work, especially in professional services and technology, which are two of the strongest sectors in Utah County
 - ▶ Increased onshoring as manufacturing and other sectors look to avoid supply chain disruptions
 - ▶ Consumer interest in locally made food and other products and services



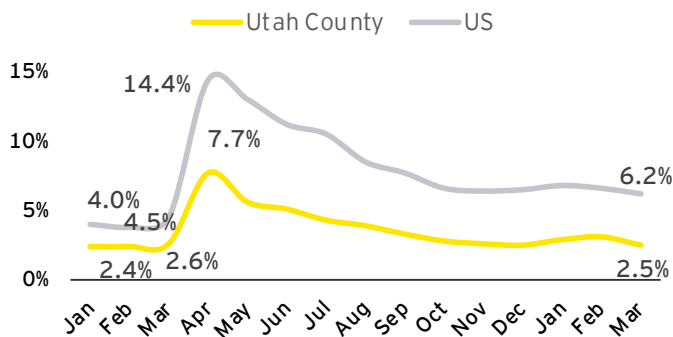
Utah county



Key takeaways

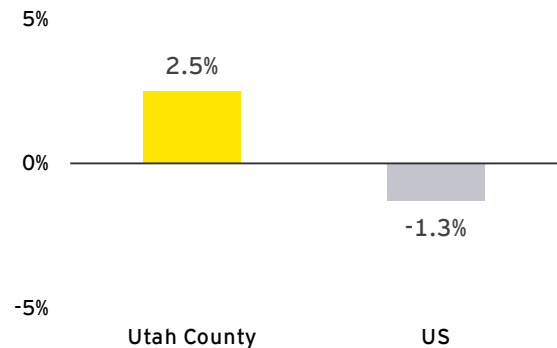
- ▶ Within the Mountainland region, Utah County experienced fewer relative job losses than the other counties and saw a return to positive growth beginning in July 2020.
- ▶ Unemployment has fallen from a peak of 7.7% in April 2020 to a pre-pandemic level of 2.5% in March 2021. Over this same period, the labor force grew 2.5% in Utah County – in contrast to a national contraction in the size of the labor force.

Unemployment rate, January 2020 – March 2021



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Year-over-year labor force change, March 2021



- ▶ Overall, one year into the pandemic, Utah County is doing quite well and experiencing strong employment, labor force and sales activity growth. Despite overall positive trends, there have been mixed impacts across industries.

Business trends

- ▶ Like the region overall, Leisure & Hospitality experienced the largest job losses in Utah County, but other negatively affected sectors include Manufacturing, Information and Education & Health Services.
- ▶ Sales tax activity actually increased significantly in the county over the past year, rising by over \$17 million between May 2019 to April 2020 and May 2020 to April 2021.
- ▶ Restaurants saw sales decline in Utah County in April through August 2020, but have since rebounded and either matched or outpaced previous year levels most months since. Accommodation activity, however, has not recovered – and transient room tax collections have fallen below the previous year every month since April 2020. There was a 31% decline in annual transient room activity between April 2019 and March 2020 and April 2020 and March 2021.

- ▶ Small businesses were more adversely affected by the pandemic, with small business revenue and the number of open small businesses falling consistently throughout 2020. Notably, small business revenues were less severely impacted in Utah County than the US overall.

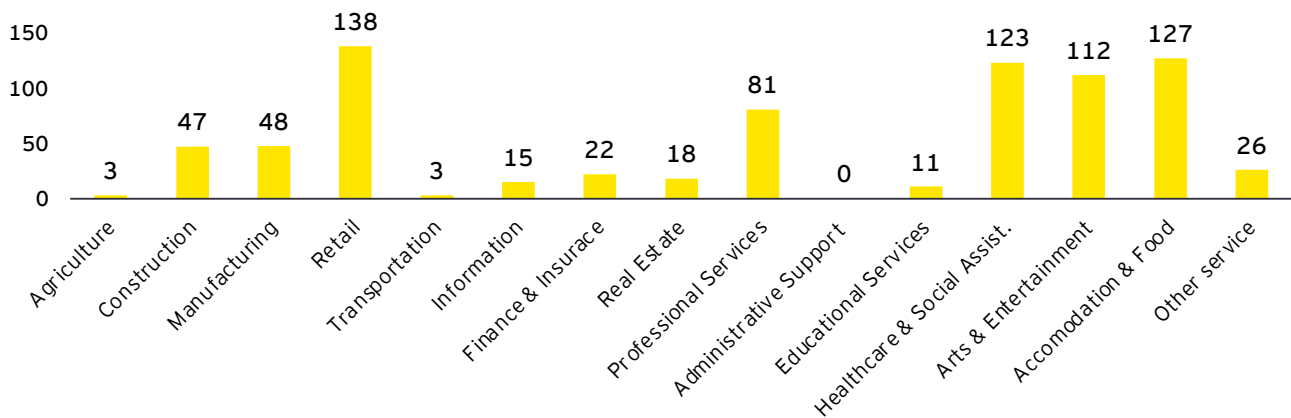
Demographic trends

- ▶ Unemployment in Utah County has now fallen to pre-pandemic levels, and the local labor force has grown 2.5%, but many individuals, especially in lower-wage Leisure & Hospitality occupations, were affected by the pandemic and may face lingering challenges.
- ▶ Although Leisure & Hospitality accounted for the most unemployed individuals at the peak of the pandemic, over the course of the past year, a higher number of individuals in Professional Services and Trade & Transportation filed first time unemployment claims. First-time unemployment claim trends reveal that volatility and workforce changes have been occurring across sectors, and individuals in a range of occupations, especially administrative and service-oriented, may require additional assistance.

Response trends

- ▶ PPP loans were obtained by businesses across sectors in Utah County, with Professional & Business Services, Trade & Transportation and Construction gaining the largest monetary value of loans.
- ▶ Utah County CARES Act grants served to fill many gaps in PPP loans, with the largest number awarded to Retail businesses (138), Accommodation & Food (127), Healthcare & Social Assistanes (123) and Arts & Entertainment (112). And 94% of these loans went to businesses with fewer than 25 employees.

Utah County CARES Act grants by industry, 2020



Source: Mountainland Economic Development District

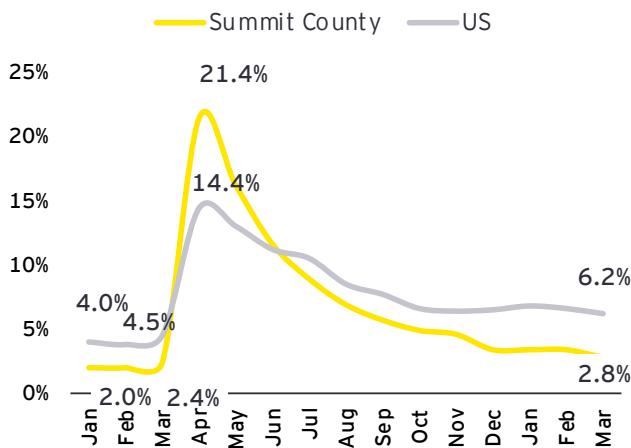
Summit County



Key takeaways

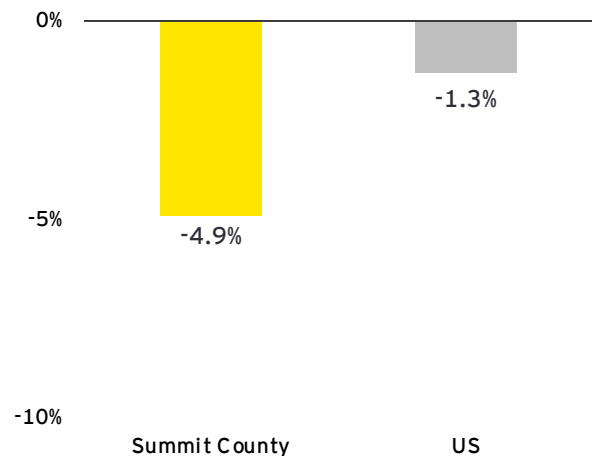
- ▶ Within the Mountainland region, Summit County experienced the greatest job losses, which continued through the most recent available data in September 2020.
- ▶ Although job growth has not returned to normal, unemployment in Summit County has fallen from a peak of 21.4% in April 2020 to a near pre-pandemic level of 2.8% in March 2021. This is likely due to a large number of people leaving the labor force though, and not from jobs returning or being created. Over the past year, Summit County's labor force contracted by 5%.

Unemployment rate, January 2020 – March 2021



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Year-over-year labor force change, March 2021

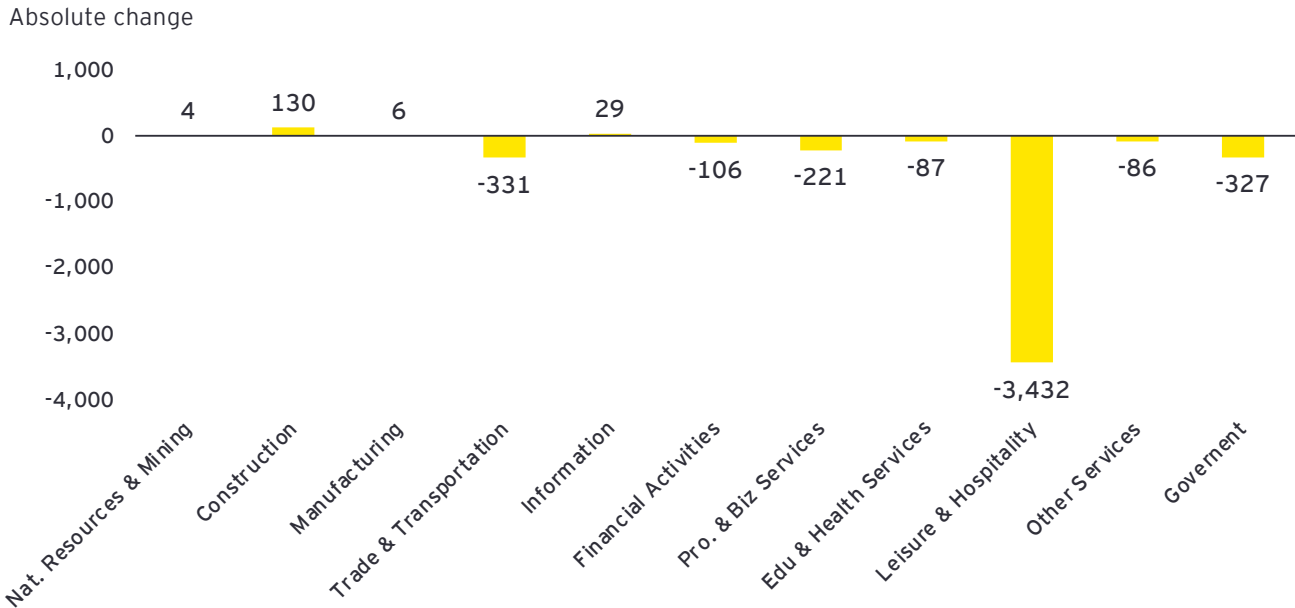


- ▶ Overall, Summit County faces challenges around housing affordability, workforce availability (especially seasonal workers) and recovery for tourism-related businesses, especially smaller establishments.

Business trends

- ▶ Almost all the job losses in Summit County occurred in Leisure & Hospitality and Trade & Transportation (which includes retail).

Summit County year-over-year monthly employment change, June 2019 – June 2020



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

- ▶ Sales tax activity in Summit County fell during the pandemic, with all distributions dropping \$0.3 million between May 2019 and April 2020 and May 2020 and April 2021.
- ▶ Summit County restaurants and accommodations also continued to see significant declines in activity throughout the pandemic, with May 2020 and March 2021 seeing the greatest year-over-year declines. For example, transient room tax distributions in March 2021 were nearly half of March 2020.
- ▶ Small businesses in Summit County were most adversely affected by the pandemic, with small business revenues dropping more than US averages and as low as 55% in April 2020.

Demographic trends

- ▶ Unemployment in Summit County has now fallen to near pre-pandemic levels, but the labor force also shrank 5% between March 2019 and March 2021. This indicates that many lost jobs were not actually recovered.
- ▶ Most jobs lost during the pandemic were in Leisure & Hospitality, and these are generally lower-wage occupations. Lower-wage individuals that have fallen out of the workforce may face significant challenges remaining in Summit County, as housing costs are the highest in the region and few new job opportunities have been created that match their current skills.
- ▶ The shrinking labor force and rising housing affordability and availability issues may escalate concerns of Summit County businesses that rely on seasonal and lower-wage labor.

Response trends

- ▶ PPP loans were obtained by businesses across sectors in Summit County. The greatest number of preserved jobs associated with PPP loans were in Leisure & Hospitality (5,088 preserved jobs), Trade & Transportation (2,184) and Professional & Business Services (1,768). The greatest total value of PPP loans went to Professional & Business Services businesses, Construction, and Trade & Transportation.
- ▶ CARES Act grants offered in Summit County primarily went to Accommodation & Food (29 businesses), Retail (9) and Arts & Entertainment (9) establishments. Of these loans, 94% went to businesses with 25 or fewer employees.



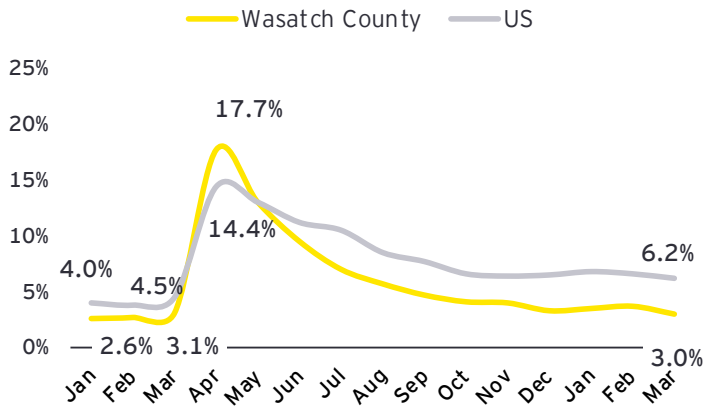
Wasatch county



Key takeaways

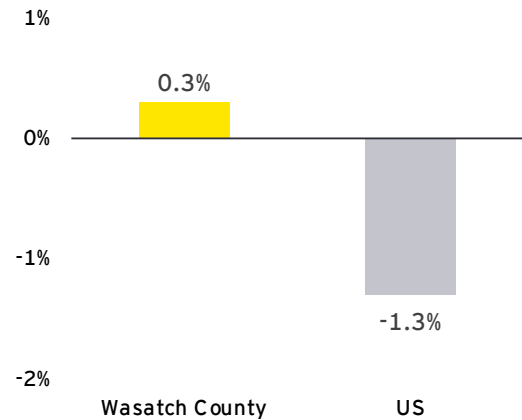
- ▶ Within the Mountainland region, Wasatch County's economy was less adversely impacted by the pandemic than Summit County, but still has not recovered as quickly as Utah County. Total employment in Wasatch County recovered to pre-pandemic levels in August 2020 but then experienced a slight dip to 0.9% year-over-year growth in September 2020.
- ▶ Local employment growth has nearly returned to normal, and unemployment has followed a similar trend. The unemployment rate in Wasatch County has fallen from a peak of 17.7% in April 2020 to a pre-pandemic level of 3.0% in March 2021. At the same time, the county's labor force grew slightly – 0.3% between March 2020 and March 2021.

Unemployment rate, January 2020 – March 2021



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Year-over-year labor force change, March 2021



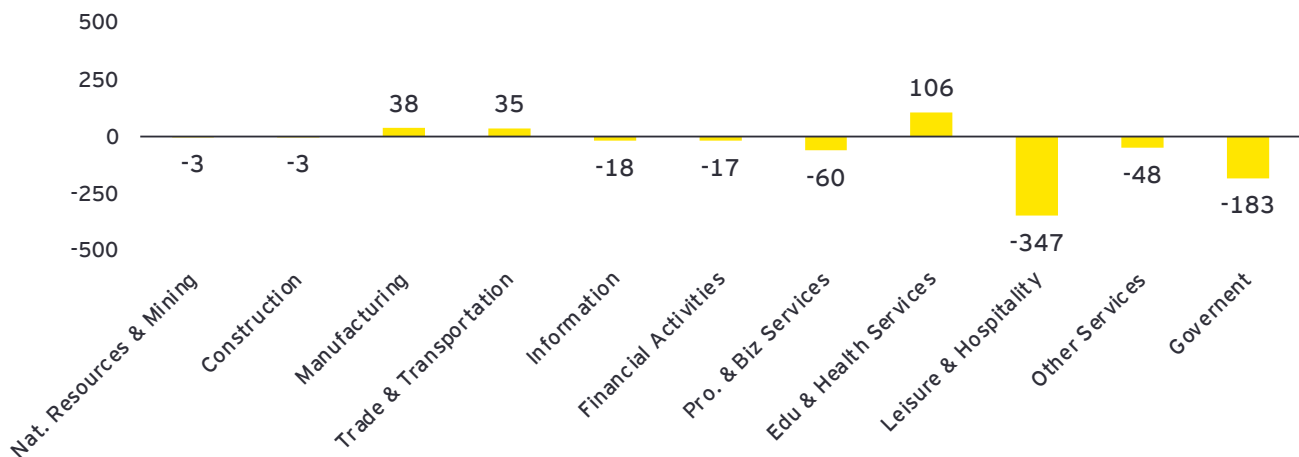
- ▶ Overall, Wasatch County is more economically diverse than Summit County but still has a high concentration of Leisure & Hospitality jobs, which made the area more vulnerable to the unique impacts of a pandemic. Recovery, resiliency and response will likely need to focus on alleviating the impacts to tourism-related businesses and continuing to support the growth of more diverse industry clusters.

Business trends

- Wasatch County has the smallest employment base in the Mountainland region, with just over 10,000 jobs as of September 2020. As a result, the total number of lost jobs seems relatively small, but the impact to specific businesses and individuals is large. The most lost jobs during the height of the pandemic occurred in Leisure & Hospitality (347 lost jobs from June 2019 to June 2020), Government (183) and Professional & Business Services (60).

Wasatch County year-over-year employment change, June 2019 – June 2020

Absolute change



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

- Consumer spending in Wasatch County has grown steadily since June 2020 and remained well above average in October, November and December 2020.
- Sales tax activity also saw a large increase during the pandemic. Overall, sales tax distributions in Summit County grew \$1.3 million, a 19% increase) between May 2019 and April 2020 and May 2020 and April 2021.
- Restaurants and accommodations saw less change in Wasatch County over the past year than the rest of the Mountainland region. Restaurant activity declined year-over-year in April and May 2020 but maintained near previous year levels through much of the summer of 2020. In February and March 2021, restaurant tax distributions once again fell below previous year levels though. Transient room tax distributions fell slightly (6%) in Wasatch County over the past year, but considering the significant drops in Utah and Summit County, this is a relatively minor impact.

Demographic trends

- ▶ Unemployment in Wasatch County has fallen to pre-pandemic levels, while the labor force has grown slightly. This indicates a relatively strong recovery and continued attraction of new individuals to the county, adding to the labor force. However, it may hide a corresponding loss of some individuals who have dropped out of the labor force over this period.
- ▶ Relatively high housing costs and limited availability likely contribute to affordability challenges in Wasatch County, as well as the entire region.

Response trends

- ▶ PPP loans were obtained by businesses across sectors in Wasatch County. The greatest number of preserved jobs associated with PPP loans were in Leisure & Hospitality (1,516 preserved jobs), Professional & Business Services (1,437) and Trade & Transportation (752). The greatest total value of PPP loans went to Professional & Business Services businesses, Construction and Trade & Transportation.
- ▶ The largest share of CARES Act grants in Wasatch County went to businesses in Healthcare & Social Assistance (8 businesses), Arts & Entertainment (6), Educational Services (6) and Retail (6).
- ▶ Of these loans, 96% went to businesses with 25 or fewer employees – a slightly higher share than the other two counties.



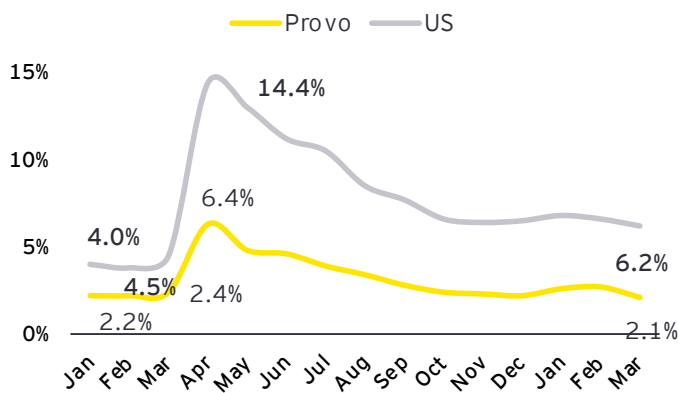
City of Provo



Key takeaways

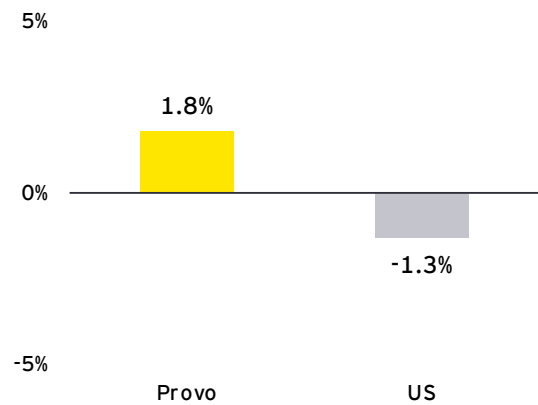
- ▶ Impacts to Provo's economy roughly mirrored Utah County overall, with the city experiencing slightly slower job and labor force growth. Total employment in the city returned to pre-pandemic levels in July 2020 and by September 2020, had grown 1.5% relative to September 2019.
- ▶ The unemployment rate in Provo has fallen from a peak of 6.4% in April 2020 to 2.1% in March 2021, which is lower than pre-pandemic levels. This reflects an incredibly tight labor market in Provo, despite the city's labor force growing 1.8% from March 2020 to March 2021.

Unemployment rate, January 2020 – March 2021



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Year-over-year labor force change, March 2021



- ▶ Overall, the City of Provo is economically diverse and home to many concentrated and growing industry sectors, especially Software & Professional Services, which have performed relatively well through the pandemic. Strong total job and labor force growth may mask negative impacts to some local sectors though, notably Leisure & Accommodation and the employees who work in these sectors.

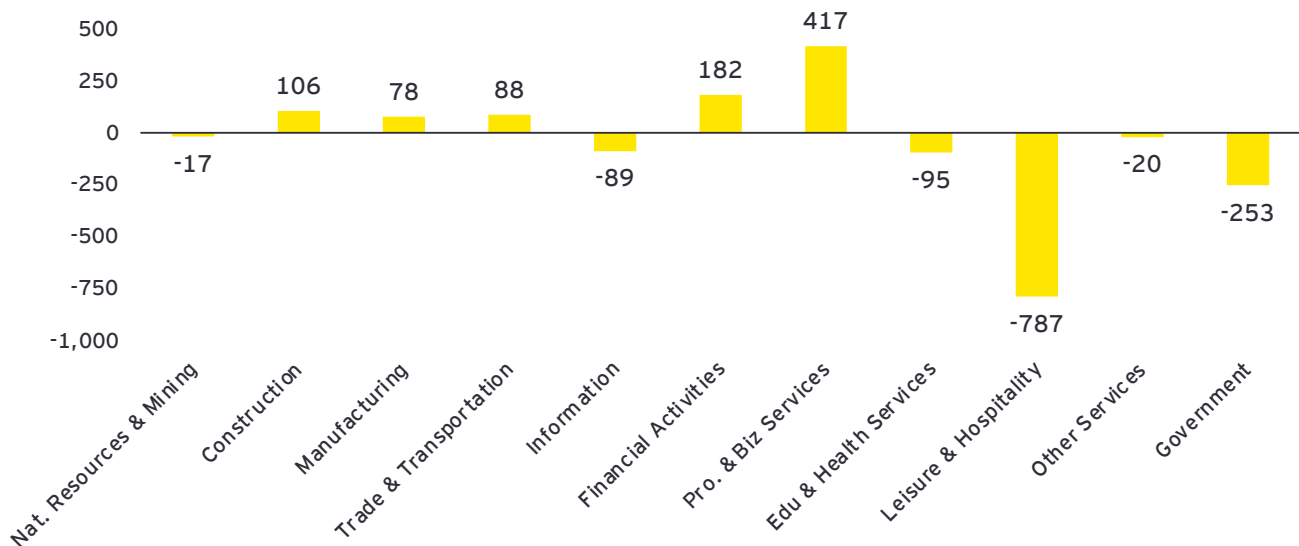
Business trends

- ▶ Provo actually saw job growth occur in many industry sectors at the height of the pandemic, with Professional & Business Services adding 417 jobs from June 2019 to June 2020, followed by Financial Activities (182 new jobs), Construction (106), Trade & Transportation (88) and Manufacturing (78). These were partially offset though by job losses in Leisure & Hospitality (787 lost jobs), Government* (253) and Education & Health Services (95).

* Government includes county and city government, as well as public state hospitals.

City of Provo year-over-year employment change, June 2019 – June 2020

Absolute change



Source: EMSI

- ▶ Sales tax activity saw a large increase in Provo during the pandemic. Overall, sales tax distributions to the City of Provo grew \$1.6 million, an 8% increase, between May 2019 and April 2020 and May 2020 and April 2021.
- ▶ Restaurant and accommodation activity data is not shared at the city level in Utah, but if Provo trends follow Utah County overall, restaurants have likely recovered well, while hotel and other accommodations have seen a significant drop in activity throughout the year.

Demographic trends

- ▶ Unemployment in Provo has fallen to below pre-pandemic levels, while the labor force has grown. This indicates a relatively strong recovery and continued attraction of new individuals to the city, but it also reflects a tight labor market in which many employers struggle to find skilled talent. Provo is able to draw from a broader labor pool throughout the Utah Valley, but with low unemployment throughout the region, talent remains a top concern for many employers.

- ▶ Supporting lower-income individuals in the city and attracting new talent are both made harder by housing challenges in Provo and in the region. Relative to other parts of the Mountainland region, housing is slightly more affordable in Provo, with the median home value (\$271k) in 2019 below the Utah median value (\$279k) and median rent (\$877) below the state value as well (\$1,037). A high concentration of student housing contributes to a median values appearing slightly below average. The cost of housing for non-students may be more on par with the surrounding Utah County.
- ▶ A notable housing concern in Provo is the lack of availability and slower new housing unit construction. In 2019, Provo had a low owner-occupied vacancy rate (0.9%) and rental vacancy rate (3%). According to US Census data, between 2014 and 2019, the number of owner-occupied housing units (occupied and vacant) actually declined 4% within the City. Over the same time period the number of rental units grew 7.9%, which was slower than all other areas of the region.

Response trends

- ▶ The distribution of PPP loans in Provo was different from other examined geographies. The greatest number of preserved jobs associated with PPP loans in the city were in Education & Health Services (5,401), Leisure & Hospitality (4,407) and Professional & Business Services (3,587). The greatest total value of PPP loans went to businesses in Professional & Business Services, Education & Health Services and Trade & Transportation.



Promising practices and lessons learned

The pandemic has altered the way businesses, communities and municipalities operate across all functions. Considering the hardships, the Mountainland region and MEDD have proven to be adaptable, demonstrating the true resiliency of the region.

Leveraging conversations with the advisory board and other key stakeholders, we have created the following list of promising practices and lessons learned, which helped inform the recovery opportunities outlined in the plan.

Promising practices from the region

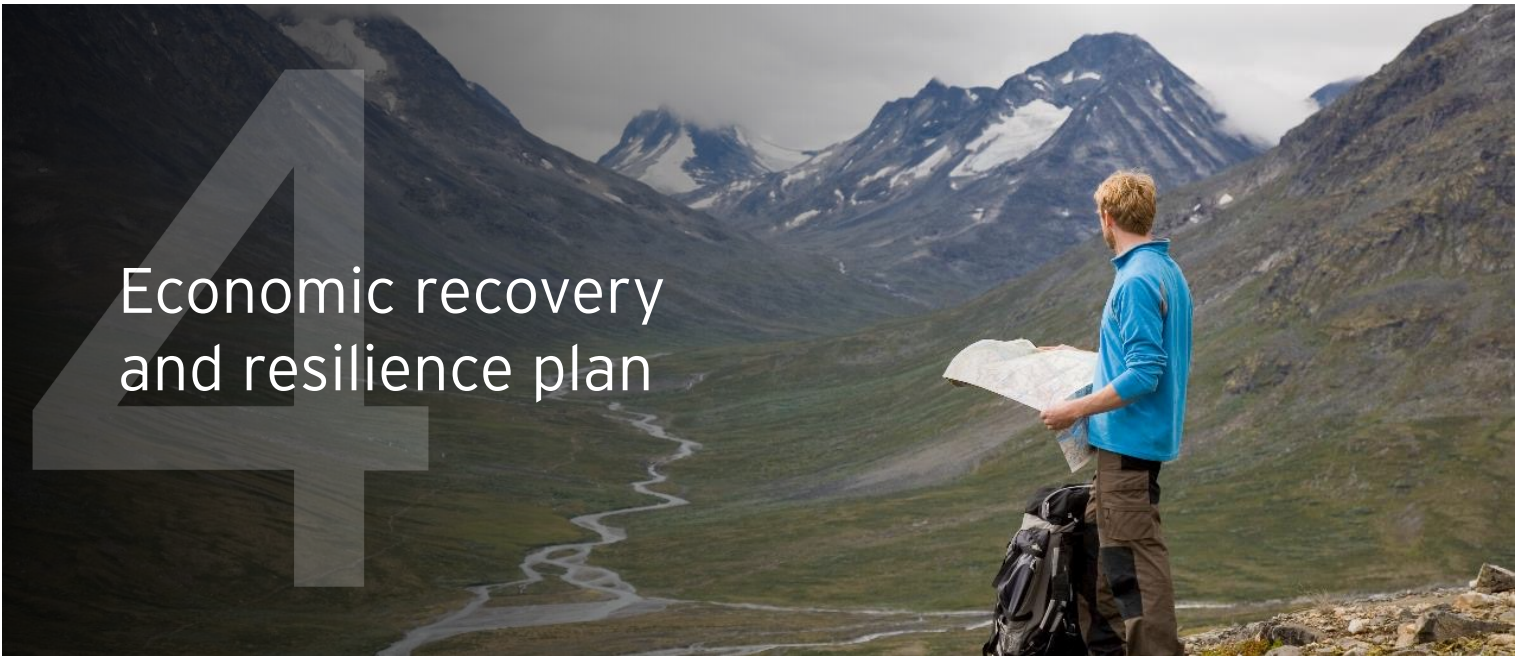
- ▶ Leaders from across the region expressed how businesses, communities and individuals were able to innovate, persevere and unify through creative forces.
- ▶ The existing economic development roundtables provided a valuable platform for sharing promising practices throughout the pandemic.
- ▶ The administration of Small Business CARES Act and community development block grants (CDBG) funding by MEDD proved to be a great way to provide extra capacity to the local counties and cities.
- ▶ The “Learn and Work in Utah” reskilling initiative activated by Utah Valley University, Mountainland Technical College and other higher education institutions provided free career development courses in high-demand careers. These initiatives were supported by federal CARES Act funding.
- ▶ Funding provided to restaurants to cover the costs of tents and tables to expand outdoor dining capacity helped to restore business revenues.

- ▶ MEDD’s ability to adjust how it safely provided meals to seniors during the pandemic reduced food insecurity for this high-risk population.
- ▶ Personal protective equipment and rapid testing resources provided by communities to their local employers and school districts allowed them to reopen sooner.
- ▶ Groups like the Utah Central Association of Realtors leveraged their networks to keep real estate and related businesses classified as essential.
- ▶ Tourism groups reallocated marketing dollars to target trucking associations and traveling nurses. They also developed a passport for experiences that monetized some of the outdoor activities that became popular during the pandemic.
- ▶ Chambers of Commerce leveraged CARES Act funding to support local businesses through gift card programs and to cover membership costs of struggling businesses.

Lessons learned for future pandemics

- ▶ **Identifying new risks and vulnerabilities** – The 2018 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the Mountainland Economic Development District (MEDD) outlined the role of MEDD and other partners in the event of a disaster, to include wildfires, windstorms, floods and the like. A pandemic disease outbreak was not, at the time, an identified hazard and should be included in future disaster preparedness and post-disaster economic recovery plans.
- ▶ **Clearly defining roles** – An outline of roles for relevant partners at the national, state, regional and local levels would be a critical aspect of this plan.
- ▶ **Expanding MEDD’s role from convener to leader** – A regional point person for coordinating the roles of economic development, workforce training, transportation and housing between the state and local communities could have enhanced the delivery of information and programs.
- ▶ **Offering a neutral forum for discussion** – The learning curve for adapting to this pandemic was both steep and complex. Some national and state-level industry associations provided platforms for sharing promising practices. A similar platform would have proven beneficial to business and community leaders across the Mountainland region and the state to share information on a variety of topics from testing to return-to-work policies.

- ▶ **Providing technical support and resources** – There appeared to be major gaps and/or overlaps in information available across the region. A coordinated, online repository of pandemic data for decision-making and resources for grants, loans, credits, policies and general guidelines would have ensured equal access to all businesses and communities.
- ▶ **Providing technical support and resources** – Direct communications to local businesses to provide information and collect feedback on needs was noted as a significant weakness across the region. An accurate regional database of business contacts would have ensured consistent information was delivered to all who needed it.
- ▶ **Developing data tools and impact analyses** – Building out tools to better understand the impacts on the region and specific industries would be helpful in prioritizing stimulus money and determining the best next step forward. For example, if there was a central data source for the impact of housing demand and supply, the construction industry could better fiscally prepare forecasts and financial planning.
- ▶ **Providing technical assistance with funding** – The distribution of CARES Act funding through MEDD was seen as extremely beneficial to small businesses, and it also alleviated the administrative responsibilities for communities.
- ▶ **Serving as a funding source expert** – There were a myriad of funding and assistance programs to navigate throughout the pandemic on a federal and state level. The region would have benefitted from a central authority on the various programs, along with a support team for accessing these resources.
- ▶ **Providing guidance on flexibility in existing programs** – Given the uniqueness of this pandemic, flexibility on the use of certain local and state incentives could have opened up allocations for more businesses. Some of those mentioned included specific revolving loan funds and incentives from the Utah World Trade and Manufacturing Association.
- ▶ **Identifying priority projects and possible sources of funding** – The need for continued expansion and upgrades to high-speed broadband infrastructure identified in the 2018 CEDS has become increasingly important as more employees work remotely.
- ▶ **Identifying priority projects and providing expertise** – An increased demand for housing and rising construction costs have amplified the region’s existing affordable housing crisis. The region will need support in planning for new developments, as well as creative solutions for creating density and driving more affordability. Additionally, the migration of population from high-density areas to more rural neighborhoods could negatively impact transit revenue.



Economic recovery and resilience plan

The COVID-19 pandemic and its resulting impacts to the Mountainland region way of life forced its communities to be creative, collaborative and adaptive. It demonstrated the importance of humanity and the power of grit and determination. There was no instruction manual for dealing with a global pandemic. The Mountainland region, like the rest of the world, was learning as it went and making decisions with the information it had on hand.

The goal of this economic recovery and resiliency plan is three-fold. First, MEDD and leaders from the Mountainland region should provide continued support in the recovery of their residents, businesses and communities. The next goal should be to build back a Mountainland region more resilient to future economic shocks. Lastly, this plan should aim to support the Mountainland region in defining a pandemic response plan based on the lessons learned over the past year.

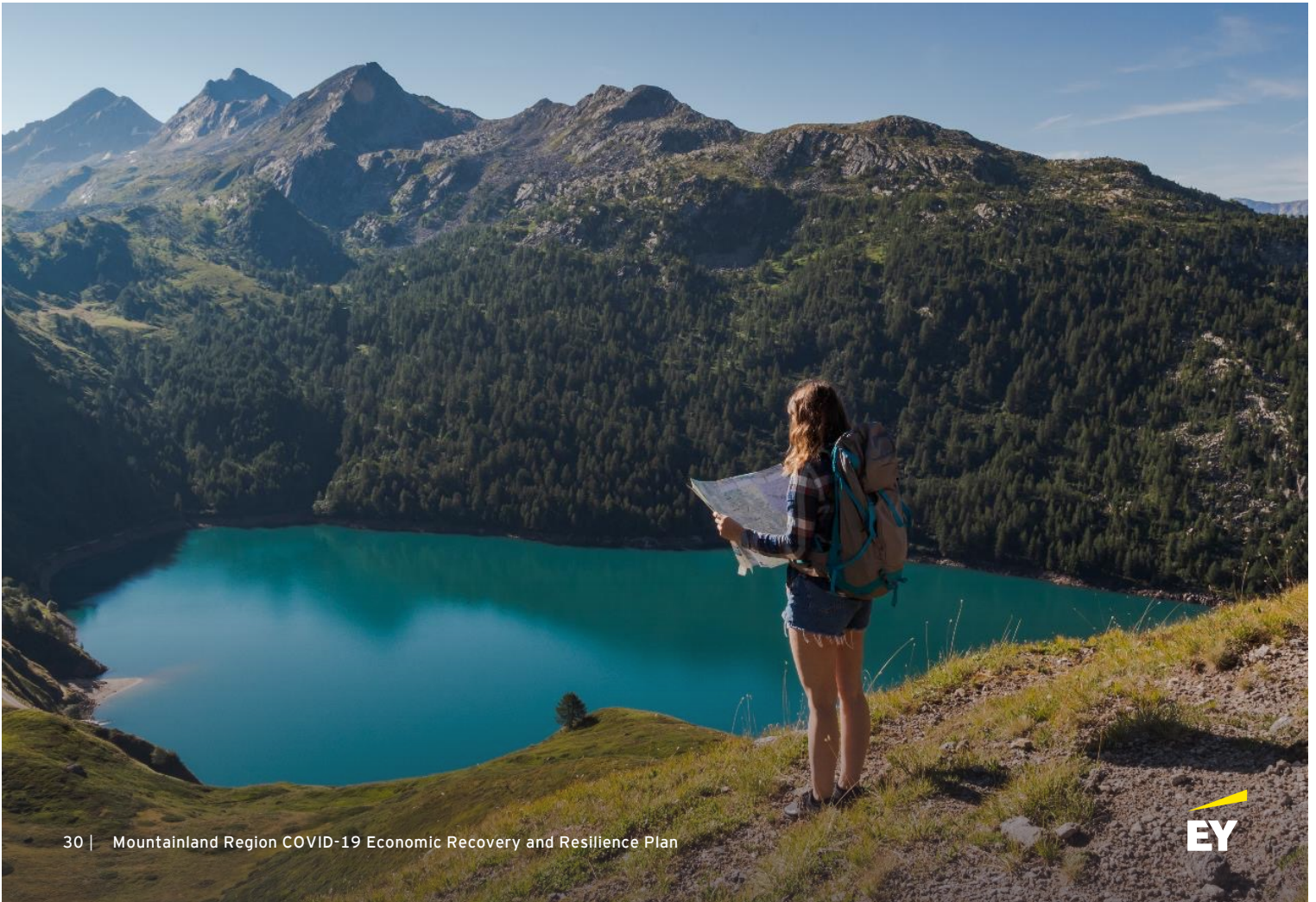
Vision: The Mountainland region is united in strengthening the resiliency of its residents, businesses and communities.

- ▶ Goal 1: Recovery for the Mountainland region
- ▶ Goal 2: Built back with greater resiliency
- ▶ Goal 3: Prepared for future pandemics

We will suggest opportunities in each of these goal areas for MEDD and its regional partners to consider as they work together in recovering, rebuilding and preparing for the future. These opportunities will include initiatives within and beyond the purview of MEDD to cover industry diversification, entrepreneurship, infrastructure, future planning and enhanced regional collaboration. Throughout, an effort was made to ensure alignment with the Mountainland region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

Alignment with Mountainland Economic Development District (MEDD)
2018 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

- Goal 1: The MEDD is recognized nationally as one of the most competitive places to do business in the State of Utah and the US.
- Goal 2: Graduates from MEDD colleges and universities can find employment with local businesses and build lifelong careers in the district.
- Goal 3: The MEDD has a successful entrepreneurship network supporting local business creation and retention.
- Goal 4: Travel through the MEDD is convenient and offers multiple transportation options for personal and business users.
- Goal 5: Every community in the MEDD has access to high-speed broadband infrastructure and other utilities (noted as shovel-ready sites for commercial and industrial development)
- Goal 6: Residents and visitors to MEDD enjoy a high quality of life that includes affordable living, a family environment, cultural entertainment and access to natural resources and recreation.



Goal 1: Recovery for the Mountainland region

The Mountainland region has made great strides in its recovery from the economic shock brought on by the initial shutdowns. But hidden behind lower unemployment rates and increased retail spending are residents who dropped permanently out of the workforce, businesses struggling to operate in the new normal and leaders working diligently to support their communities through recovery while rebuilding with an eye toward greater resiliency.

Substantial amounts of funding have and are planned to come down the pipeline in support of COVID-19 recovery and resiliency efforts. The ability of the counties within the Mountainland region to collectively identify and prioritize the areas of greatest need could enhance the region's ability to secure funding. These funds could support investments for expanded childcare services, reskill programs and transportation infrastructure, to name a few.

The willingness of leaders across the three-county region to connect and share ideas was critical in the early stages of recovery. But now, those discussions should shift toward active engagement in recovery initiatives outlined herein. The primary goal of the recovery strategy is to identify those groups who still need assistance in the short-term and connect them with available resources. Furthermore, leaders could leverage current funding opportunities as investments in long-term transformative regional projects. Working together, regional leaders could accelerate the recovery of residents and businesses and begin rebuilding a more resilient Mountainland region.

Prime recovery opportunities:

- ▶ Regional recovery task forces
- ▶ Shared investment and infrastructure plan
- ▶ Enhanced capacity for childcare
- ▶ Upskill and reskill initiatives
- ▶ Buy local programs

Recovery opportunities for the Mountainland region include:

1. Activating a committee for regional recovery and resiliency efforts to drive action in specific areas of recovery.

- ▶ Continue to **convene as regional leaders to identify needs, coordinate resources and share leading practices**. Leverage these roundtables to define shared plans and disseminate coordinated information across the three-county region.
- ▶ Establish a **task force for navigating new funding opportunities and their associated guidelines**. Additionally, this task force could assist in identifying creative or expanded uses for existing monies, like revolving loan funds or CDBG.
- ▶ Develop a **data-driven approach for decision-making** as an objective way for determining future allocation of resources. It is important for these data points to be agreed upon and shared across the region.
- ▶ **Engage subject-matter experts in identified areas of recovery** such as workforce and education, childcare and development and infrastructure, which could provide valuable insights into existing needs and initiatives. These experts could also provide technical support in their areas of expertise. For example, MEDD provided technical assistance in the administration of numerous grants during the initial recovery and provided food security for the region's senior population.

2. Identifying community investment opportunities that accelerate recovery and build regional capacity.

- ▶ Establish a **task force to identify and evaluate investment projects** in the Mountainland region. This task force could be made up of members from the recommended regional recovery and resiliency committee.
- ▶ Compile a **regional priority list for investment projects**. Leverage this list in pursuing state and federal funds, as well as private investment. Coordinate with the recommended funding task force to determine possible sources of funding.
- ▶ Consider developing **impact analyses or feasibility studies to evaluate the return on investment for each project**. Use these studies to prioritize short- and long-term needs.

Possible investment areas could include:

- ▶ Upgrades to the **existing broadband infrastructure** to support increased usage and future population growth.
- ▶ Repairs and expanded **capacity of recreational and lodging amenities**, especially those areas heavily trafficked during shutdowns.
- ▶ Upgrades and expansion of **public transit options**, to include usage studies to determine priority growth needs.
- ▶ Expanded **road infrastructure on key arterials** to reduce commute times and alleviate traffic congestion.
- ▶ Expansion of **regional career and technical centers across the region** to reach more Mountainland region residents. Consider locating near public transit stations to increase accessibility to more residents.
- ▶ Evaluate **redevelopment opportunities** to capitalize on underutilized space where there are existing concentrations of businesses and services.

3. Addressing barriers to employment and re-employment to support Mountainland region residents in their economic recovery.

- ▶ Leverage information collected by Workforce Services to **identify barriers to employment**, as well as high-demand career opportunities.
- ▶ Secure funding to continue programs that provide **subsidized trainings and certificates in high-demand careers** like the “Learn and Work in Utah” program.
- ▶ Continued **expansion of online outreach and training capabilities** to reach residents with limited mobility options.
- ▶ Develop **return-to-work assistance programs for caretakers** that exited the workforce during the pandemic. These could include expanded childcare and development programs, assistance with finding care or tuition stipends, job fairs or reskill programs.
- ▶ Develop **marketing campaigns and ambassador programs** for occupations facing significant talent shortages. These campaigns could raise awareness for the learning and earning potential of high-demand career opportunities in the region, like technology or trades.

4. Accelerating the recovery of existing businesses in the Mountainland region.

- ▶ Establish a **business roundtable** by size and sector that provides a pulse on current business needs. Connect these needs to resources as they come available. Leverage the roundtable participants to identify the best method for announcing new recovery initiatives.
- ▶ Compile and share **promising business practices** from across the region and share through chambers of commerce and business associations across the Mountainland region. Consider hosting free webinars by sector to share ideas.
- ▶ Continue to push **buy-local programs** through local communities and chambers. Consider mobile applications, a website or special events that makes it easier to support local businesses. When safe, host events and drive traffic to commercial corridors.
- ▶ Allocate **marketing funds for especially hard-hit sectors, like tourism**. Encourage staycations in local and regional markets as a way to boost traffic in the off seasons. Develop a targeted tourism attraction campaign to highlight that the region is open and safe for visits, as well as the numerous attractions, such as skiing, hiking and cultural activities.



Goal 2: Build back with greater resiliency

The US Economic Development Administration defines economic resiliency as a region's ability to prevent, withstand and quickly recover from significant shocks to its economic base. The shock of the COVID-19 shutdown was felt across nearly every industry sector and community in the early months of 2020. As the initial round of shutdowns were lifted, the speed of recovery was greatly determined by levels of economic diversification and industry concentration.

This was true for the Mountainland region as well. The pandemic inflicted the most damage to Summit County given its strong concentration of jobs in hospitality and tourism. Utah County was more shielded due to higher levels of economic diversification and a concentration of jobs in technology and professional services. Wasatch County fell in the middle of the two given its relatively small employment base spread across a number of industries.

Economic resiliency goes beyond just diversification to include the ability of residents to adapt to economic shocks and shifts. Additionally, it requires regional leadership that is united in its efforts to support economic growth and resiliency goals. While some regions are simply navigating through the COVID-19 economic recovery, others are steering resources toward unique opportunities to accelerate future growth and resiliency.

Prime resiliency opportunities:

- ▶ Regional economic development effort
- ▶ Supply chain continuity and regional buying power
- ▶ Capital capacity for entrepreneurship and innovation
- ▶ Education efforts around density and workforce housing

Resiliency opportunities for the Mountainland region include:

1. Elevating economic development leadership to a regional level in the Mountainland region.

- ▶ Evaluate the feasibility of **expanding staff and funding capacity at MEDD to support regional economic development efforts** that could drive economic growth and opportunity in the Mountainland region.
- ▶ This regional economic development effort could focus on **goals in economic diversification** to include those listed below, as well as **building the talent pipeline and advocating for infrastructure** investments on a state and federal level.
- ▶ Additionally, a regional effort focused on economic development could **amplify existing local economic development efforts** while driving more resources toward promoting the region externally.

2. Driving economic growth across a diversity of sectors and opportunities.

- ▶ Continued support for existing industry through **dedicated business retention and expansion programs**. Consider programming related to business continuity and supply chain disruptions.
- ▶ **Coordinated and visible support for small businesses, start-ups and entrepreneurs**. Consider a consolidation and alignment of support services and organizations. When possible, all customer-facing websites should provide or direct to the same information sources.
- ▶ Support local businesses in **regional supply chain integration and regional purchasing efforts** which have the potential to reduce supply chain costs, drive growth in the local economy and reduce carbon footprints. The Manufacturing, Healthcare and Hospitality sectors represent strong opportunities for regional supply chain growth.
- ▶ Designate **funds to expand the capital, space and support for start-ups and entrepreneurs**. Consider utilizing the existing revolving loan fund or CDBG dollars to increase the existing capacity in the region for capital and space. These investments are the basic infrastructure for supporting the region's entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem.
- ▶ Consider a study to **identify regional industry targets** that reflect existing assets and high-growth opportunities while respecting the region's values and vision for the future.

3. Building strength and resiliency in the region's talent pipeline.

- ▶ Continued expansion of efforts that **identify and address barriers to work**. Build upon successful initiatives from the recovery strategy, like the reskill/upskill programs, while working to identify new opportunities for increasing economic mobility.
- ▶ Initiate programs focused on the **retention of talent graduating from area colleges and universities**. Consider initiatives that increase the number of paid internship and experienced-based learning opportunities, as well as events that connect students to the community.
- ▶ Host **career-awareness events and jobs fairs** across the region. These events could target parents and students in middle and high school. Consider promoting training and development opportunities during these events as well.
- ▶ Educate regional leaders and residents on **the role density plays in supporting the workforce and employers, and protecting the Mountainland region environment**, namely air quality. When possible, encourage density in development in close proximity to existing transit centers.

4. Ongoing efforts to drive new investment in the Mountainland region, namely infrastructure.

- ▶ Continue to **refine the investment** priority list established during the recovery period with support from a regional task force.
- ▶ Coordinate **regional efforts to drive awareness** for these priorities on a local, regional, state and federal level.
- ▶ Employ the funding task force to provide **alerts and guidance on new funding opportunities** as they come available.



Goal 3: Prepared for future pandemics

The 2018 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the Mountainland Economic Development District outlined the role of MEDD and other partners in the event of a disaster, to include wildfires, windstorms, floods and the like. A pandemic disease outbreak was not, at the time, on the radar as an identified hazard. Nor had the region planned for a disaster where the disaster event itself continued for over a year. During this pandemic, response and recovery efforts occurred in phases as we learned more about the virus and how it was transmitted. Additionally, the global nature of this disaster magnified some impacts like increased demand for personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies and the overall strain on all supply chains.

Better preparation, coordination and communication efforts could have alleviated some, but not all, of the negative impacts caused by the pandemic and its related restrictions. As the Mountainland region moves forward, it should inventory the promising practices and lessons learned from over the past year to develop a response plan for future pandemics. As a start, this plan could include an operating structure for regional response efforts, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, communications plans, data-driven decision-making tools and a regional stockpile of supplies.

Any plan should be developed in collaboration with partners across the region and in coordination state and federal response plans. These plans should be adapted over time as more is learned about the long-term impacts of the pandemic and revisited after each future occurrence.

Prime response opportunities:

- Regional pandemic response plan
- Stockpile of PPE and cleaning supplies
- Repository of leading practices

Future response opportunities for the Mountainland region include:

1. Developing a regional response plan for future pandemics.

- ▶ Define an **operational structure with clearly defined roles and responsibilities** to support the region in the event of a future pandemic. This plan should be in coordination with state and federal response plans and partners.
- ▶ Establish a **communications plan and network to inform residents and businesses** about the threat, suggested health guidelines and the resources available to them.
- ▶ Develop a **shared platform of data and resources for decision making**. This platform could include GIS capabilities to illustrate spread and impacts across the region and sectors.
- ▶ **Provide guidance for employees and employers on safe return to work** policies in the plan. Consider recommendations for tourism and hospitality sectors as well. Include resources for acquiring PPE, cleaning supplies and testing services.

2. Leveraging lessons learned, leading practices and impact analyses to improve future response efforts.

- ▶ Develop a **repository of leading practices** from government, businesses and nonprofits to consider for future response and recovery support. Encourage regional partners to provide insights from their own communities and from state and national associations to which they belong. Consider sharing these via webinar.
- ▶ Review the response efforts from 2020 to **identify additional lessons learned that could improve future planning efforts**. Evaluate how information, resources, funding and other supports could be better distributed.
- ▶ Compile and **evaluate data related to COVID impacts overtime**, as well as impacts by sectors to understand the effectiveness of past support programs and identify improved programs and resources for future response efforts.

3. Establishing a regional stockpile of critical supplies and equipment.

- ▶ Identify the **supplies and equipment that were in high demand** during the pandemic, such as PPE, cleaning supplies, testing supplies, Wi-Fi hotspots and certain outdoor dining equipment, like tents or heaters.
- ▶ Establish a **regional stockpile** of these critical supplies and equipment along with **defined plans for prioritizing distribution**.
- ▶ Consider a **buy-back program for certain items** to build initial inventory. These buy-back programs could provide revenue to existing businesses and reduce their need for storage.



City of Provo Economic recovery and resilience plan

This section of the Mountainland Region Economic Recovery & Resilience Plan focuses on potential priorities and strategies specific to the City of Provo. The other sections of this document consider needs and opportunities across the entire three-county region, with a focus on activities that could be performed by MEDD and numerous other organizations. As part of the planning effort, the City of Provo requested a deeper dive into COVID-19 economic impacts, priorities, and strategies within the city itself. Assessed impacts to the City of Provo were discussed in a previous section.

In many circumstances, the COVID-19 pandemic did not create new needs but rather accelerated existing trends and highlighted the importance of previously identified priorities and strategies. Notably, Provo's Vision 2030 Core Values still align with economic recovery, especially Business & Economic Vitality, which values:

- ▶ Diverse employment opportunities
- ▶ Role as a regional economic center
- ▶ Commitment to economic vitality, growth and development
- ▶ Strong entrepreneurial spirit
- ▶ Vibrant business districts
- ▶ Educated, skilled, and industrious workforce
- ▶ Commitment to ethical business standards
- ▶ Favorable and supportive business environment

Provo City Council Vision 2030 - Core Values

Family | Safe City | Faith | Education | Sense of community | Business & economic vitality
Responsible government | Health | Inviting environment

The Provo City Council Priorities for 2018-2019 similarly align with identified recovery needs. Economic development is one of these priorities, with desired outcomes focused on:

- ▶ community well-being (demographics, workforce, household income)
- ▶ stable well-paying employment opportunities;
- ▶ retail opportunities that meet community desires;
- ▶ business attraction, retention, and creation; and
- ▶ expanded relationship management (internal and external stakeholders)

Each of these can and should remain priorities through recovery, alongside affordable housing and other previously identified City priorities. These priorities for Provo should be incorporated into a similar structure to the overall regional plan, focusing on:

1. Continued recovery
2. Built back with greater resiliency
3. Preparedness for future pandemics



Goal 1: Recovery for the City of Provo

The City of Provo weathered the COVID-19 pandemic well due mostly to a diversified economy concentrated in growth sectors such as software and professional services. In fact, Provo experienced growth in jobs, the labor force and sales tax activity over the past year. But these positive gains should not overshadow the struggles that remain for some businesses, property owners and residents. The goal of the recovery phase is to identify those groups who still need assistance and connect them with available resources. Additionally, leaders in Provo should help guide the allocation of new funding into programs that support the city's continued recovery.

Leadership priorities

- ▶ Active participation in regional efforts
- ▶ Seek out resources and opportunities for Provo
- ▶ Expand mayor-led huddles

Values-based priorities for recovery:

Community well-being

- ▶ Assisting lower-income individuals who lost jobs during the pandemic, notably those in leisure & hospitality occupations
- ▶ Evaluating expanded childcare options and funding mechanisms to help people get back to work
- ▶ Exploring options for a mental health network to support the community - at all ages - as it transitions to the new normal

Stable well-paying employment opportunities

- ▶ Finding ways to connect students and unemployed workers with open jobs
- ▶ Connecting the unemployed with upskilling and training opportunities

Retail opportunities that meet community desires

- ▶ Helping property owners find solutions for vacant space and maintaining operations
- ▶ Hosting events that drive traffic to retail corridors and encourage local spending

Business attraction, retention, and creation

- ▶ Continuing to meet with companies and business owners to identify needs and connect them with resources
- ▶ Shifting business attraction efforts to reflect changing dynamics like remote workers, technology companies leaving the coasts, and supply chain continuity

Expanded relationship management

- ▶ Continuing to share resources and information with local businesses
- ▶ Providing communications about safety and encouraging the return to pre-pandemic consumer behavior

Goal 2: Built back with greater resiliency

The City of Provo withstood much of the immense economic devastation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic due to its economic diversification. Enhancing resiliency will require continued efforts to diversify the economy by sector and size while driving efforts that support greater economic mobility. Doing so might require Provo to reimagine and redevelop spaces within the community to increase density and create greater connectivity among people, places, institutions and ideas.

Leadership priorities

- ▶ Support for a regional economic development effort
- ▶ Identify and advocate for investment opportunities such as downtown redevelopment, workforce housing and infrastructure

Values-based priorities for resiliency:

Community well-being

- ▶ Identifying opportunities to increase Provo's affordable housing stock
- ▶ Educating the community on the role density plays in livability and future growth

Stable well-paying employment opportunities

- ▶ Continuing to build the knowledge and skillsets of lower-skill workers in areas such as software, advanced technology and entrepreneurship

Retail opportunities that meet community desires

- ▶ Continuing revitalization and redevelopment of downtown - especially newer mixed-use opportunities
- ▶ Encouraging and supporting new small business owners through increased funding opportunities, streamlined permitting and expanded resource networks

Business attraction, retention, and creation

- ▶ Build on existing strengths in software & technology, professional services and advance manufacturing to keep Provo - and Utah County - economically diverse
- ▶ Consider support for niche opportunities that contribute to quality of life, such as specialized food manufacturing, farm-to-table type operations, speciality goods and services / experiential retail and consumer goods design and manufacturing
- ▶ Encouraging and supporting entrepreneurship through increased funding availability and collaboration spaces. Consider how to tie entrepreneurship initiatives to the university.

Expanded relationship management

- ▶ Enhancing the connectivity and sharing of resources among business support organizations with Provo, Utah County and the greater region
- ▶ Connecting with the university to enhance town and gown relationships increase talent retention and to spur greater economic connection

Goal 3: Prepared for future pandemics

Few communities, if any, were prepared to handle a global pandemic. The lessons learned over the past year should be combined with the knowledge and expertise from other disaster plans to provide a response framework for future pandemics. Much like the regional plan, the City of Provo's plan should include an operating structure for local response efforts, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, communications plans, data-driven decision-making tools and a stockpile of supplies. The planning process should be a collaborative and iterative process that aligns with plans at the regional, state and levels.

Leadership priorities

- ▶ Coordinate response plans with other local, regional and state-level stakeholders

Values-based priorities for future response efforts:

Community well-being

- ▶ Setting up and sharing safety guidelines for businesses to keep employees and community safe

Stable well-paying employment opportunities

- ▶ Providing ways to support businesses in keeping doors open and people in their jobs (like PPE stockpiles, grants, etc.)
- ▶ Coordinating with educators to ramp-up training programs to upskill and reskill displaced workers

Retail opportunities that meet community desires

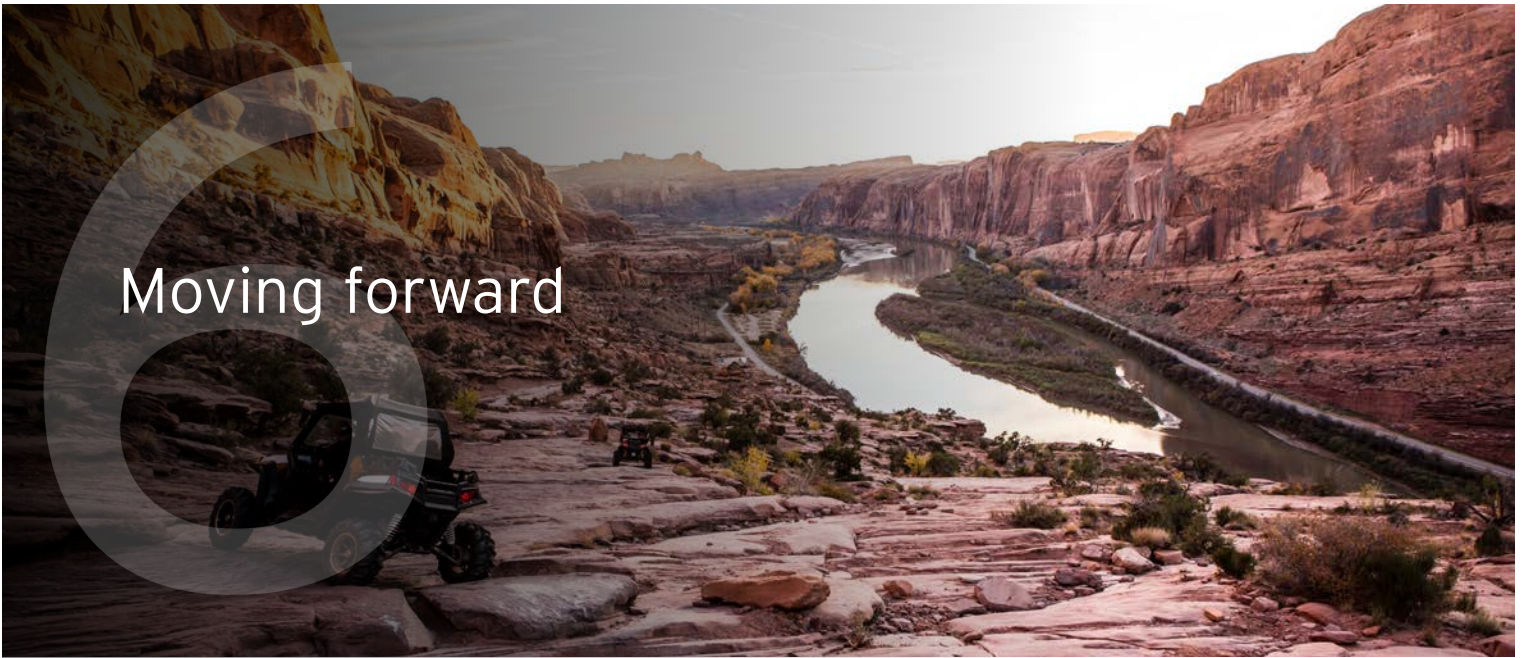
- ▶ Providing safety guidelines, supplies and resources to support local retailers
- ▶ Fast-tracking regulations and permitting that increased businesses' ability to serve customers, like special parking privileges for order pickups and sidewalk dining

Business attraction, retention, and creation

- ▶ Develop a real-time system for connecting with business owners and identifying their needs

Expanded relationship management

- ▶ Develop plan and operational framework for response in coordination with various stakeholders across the community



Moving forward

Moving forward with implementation

The ultimate vision for this plan is to unite the Mountainland region in strengthening the resiliency of its residents, businesses and communities. Moving towards this vision will require the coordination, collaboration and cooperation of numerous partners across the Mountainland region. Communication will also be critical.

The immediate priorities for each goal area - as defined by the Advisory Committee - are outlined in the next section but the following actions are important first steps to support overall implementation.

1. Designate an implementation leader

The Advisory Committee for this planning process agreed that it was important to identify an entity or person to move this plan forward and to ensure the tactics outlined in this strategy are activated and adjusted overtime. MEDD was the original coordinator and convener for this recovery plan and has expressed having the capacity to support its activation. Based on these facts and initial feedback from the committee, they seem to be a natural leader for the implementation phase.

2. Establish an implementation committee and task forces

Reconvene the Advisory Committee in the next month to officially designate MEDD as the implementation leader and to stand up the implementation committee and initial task forces that support the priorities outlined in the next section. These groups will play an integral role in defining priorities, building support, identifying resources, activating initiatives and disseminating information on progress and opportunities.

Suggestions for initial task forces might include: communications, funding, workforce, supply chain, housing and future response.

3. Communicate the priorities and opportunities

Conversation and coordination are critical to accelerating recovery in the Mountainland region. This implementation process should work towards breaking down existing silos to ensure there is a regional approach to solving the Mountainland region's largest problems.

Begin to build these networks by communicating the plan's priorities and recruiting additional partners and subject-matter experts to the activated task forces.

4. Develop an implementation timeline and communications plan

Once the task forces have met, reconvene the Advisory Committee to define timelines for implementation. Develop a plan for communicating the initiatives and progress across the region. Consider the many stakeholders to be reached from elected officials, industry, small business, students and residents, to name a few.

Create channels for connecting with these various stakeholders. First, identify the stakeholders - residents, students, small business owners, regional employers, support organizations and the like. Then, identify the possible channels for reaching each of these stakeholder groups and the types of information pertinent to each group.

5. Share updates along the way

This recovery and resilience plan will spur initiatives that require regional leadership while providing support for those that were negatively impacted by the pandemic. It will be important for information on these initiatives and the region's progress to reach a diverse set of stakeholders. Plan for regular updates to be shared via the channels mentioned above.

Additionally, consider establishing a central online command center for sharing information about all initiatives and resources moving forward related to recovery, resilience and future response. Be sure to direct inquiries from press releases and partner communications back to this site.

Immediate priorities

The Advisory Committee identified the following as immediate priorities. These priorities should be confirmed and plans to activate them defined during the next meeting.

Goal 1. Recovery for the Mountainland region

- ▶ **Establish a task force to identify and address barriers to work.** Staffing shortages are seen as the biggest challenge facing businesses now, especially in the hospitality sector. A workforce barriers task force could leverage the suggested funding task force to identify sources of federal funding to support their initiatives.

Possible task force members could include employers, workforce development organizations, childcare providers, social service organizations and training providers, to name a few.

Goal 2. Built back with greater resiliency

- ▶ **Commission a study to understand the supply and demand for workforce housing,** along with the impacts of an inadequate supply. Define a plan for communicating these findings. Start with business and community leaders to refine the messaging and build support before tackling the general public's perceptions.
- ▶ **Dedicate efforts to building regional supply chain continuity.** Convene business associations and other key partners to develop a plan for ensuring greater supply chain continuity through targeted business attraction efforts and local / regional buying initiatives.
- ▶ **Assess interest in a regional economic development entity.** Begin to hold conversations with elected officials, business leaders and existing local economic development entities to assess interest in and possible roles for a regional entity for economic development efforts.

Goal 3. Prepared for future pandemics

- ▶ **Activate a response task force** charged with developing the future pandemic response and recovery plan as described in the strategy report. Assess response and recovery efforts and leverage other disaster recovery models in its development. Ensure alignment with other local, regional and statewide plans.



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