



# Haldimand

Economic Development  
and Tourism



Business Retention + Expansion

# 2023 Survey Results & Action Plan



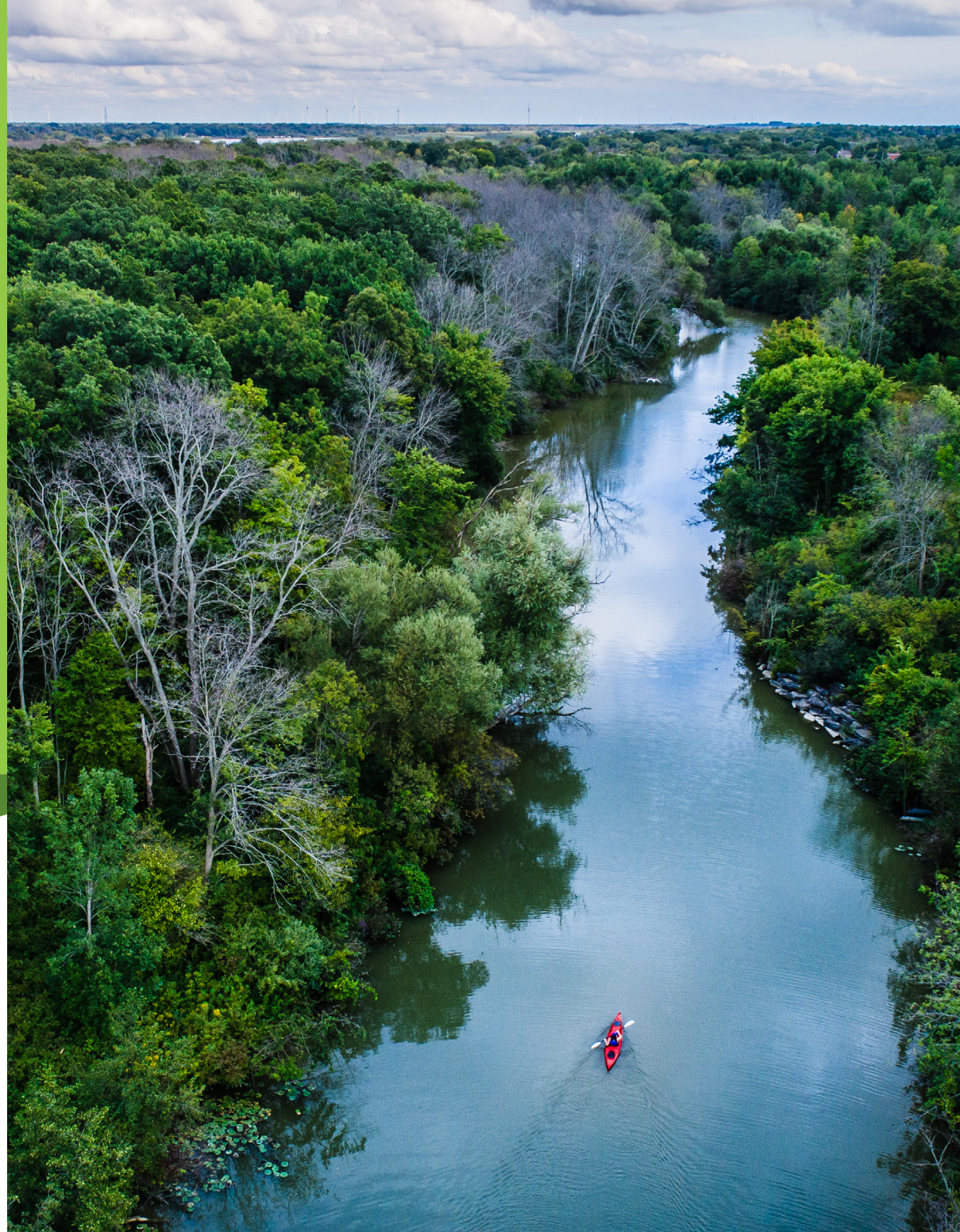
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The views expressed in the publication are the views of the Recipient and do not necessarily reflect those of the province.





# Introduction

A Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) project is a dynamic and business-friendly tool, that uses a proactive and action-oriented economic development approach to understand, support, and enhance the local business community.

Initiated in 2022, with support from the Province of Ontario's Rural Economic Development Fund, Haldimand County's BR+E project aimed to:

- Further the County's commitment to business retention within the existing business community;
- Address priorities set within the 2017 Economic Development Strategy; and
- Support the work of the Business Development and Planning Advisory Committee.

The project presented an excellent opportunity to connect with the business community following the pandemic, strengthening relationships within the local business environment. The initiative was designed to work towards the overarching goals of fostering

business development, encouraging investment and job creation, and supporting an environment conducive to sustained growth.

This report showcases the high-level findings and the recommended action plan derived from the Haldimand County BR+E project and summarizes the comprehensive feedback collected during the BR+E interview period of April to November 2023. It includes insights into the needs, concerns, and opportunities of existing businesses across all industries, including Haldimand County's key sectors (manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, professional services including healthcare, and downtown retail.)

The information collected is invaluable for making informed decisions, fostering proactive actions, and ensuring positive and lasting benefits in Haldimand's communities. Moving forward, these insights will continue to serve as an important resource to align current needs with the strategic long-term goals outlined in Haldimand County's Economic Development Strategy.

## Haldimand County Key Sectors



# BR+E Background

In essence, a BR+E initiative provides a systematic and confidential means of understanding the local business landscape, fostering strategic planning, and implementing targeted actions for sustained economic development.

Originally devised by the Province of Ontario the framework encompasses four distinct stages:



This process is complemented by ongoing monitoring and tracking of results to ensure responsiveness to evolving needs.

**71**  
interviews  
have been  
completed





# Methodology

The standardized Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) survey was adapted to Haldimand County's needs. The survey covered six main sections, exploring: Business Information, Business Climate, Future Plans, Business Development, Workforce, and Community Development.

The BR+E survey, was conducted through one-on-one interviews, lasting 60 to 90 minutes, and typically took place as part of a site visit at the business' location. Although phone calls, and virtual meetings were accommodated as requested, in-person interviews served as the primary data collection method.

During the interview stage of the project Haldimand Economic Development completed 71 interviews, and introduced the project to many more local businesses through an active awareness campaign comprising of: a project landing page, multi-month social media campaign, direct mailings, media features, and presentations with advisory committees (Business Development and Planning Advisory Committee, Agricultural Advisory Committee, Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee), local Chambers of Commerce, Business Improvement Areas and the Board of Trade.

The aggregated data collected in the interviews, then served as a foundation for developing strategic action plans that were responsive to the collective needs of the local business community; and organized in four key themes:







# Business Information

The collection of *business information* creates a picture of the local business environment. The data provides insights into the size, structure and needs of the existing business community to support informed decision-making by business organizations, policymakers, and economic development.

Haldimand County's economy is shaped by many locally owned businesses (83%), where owners actively participate in the daily operations. These businesses, rooted in the community, showcase a remarkable longevity, with 41% boasting over 26 years of business in Haldimand's communities. This enduring history signals an impending focus on supporting business succession in the coming years; although that was not identified as a current concern in the interviews.

Mirroring trends across Ontario, small to medium-sized enterprises play a pivotal role, with 58% of interviewed businesses maintaining a workforce of 10 or fewer; and an additional 20% within the range of 10-29 employees. These businesses cater to local (45%) and regional (38%) markets, underscoring the importance of nurturing local supply chains and fostering consumer awareness in both B2B and direct-to-consumer markets.

**94%**

**of businesses have at least one owner who is a resident of the community**

**35%**

**of businesses are B2B, and 65% sell direct to consumer**

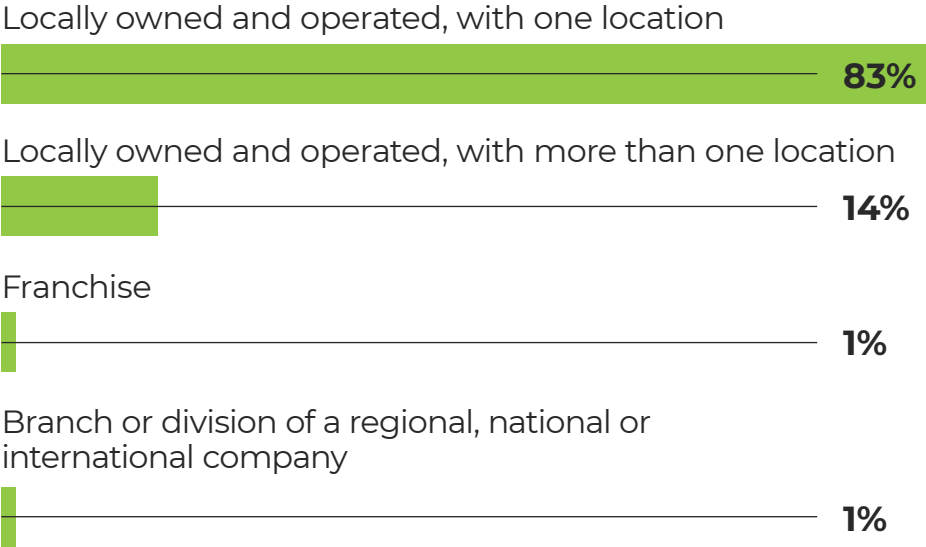




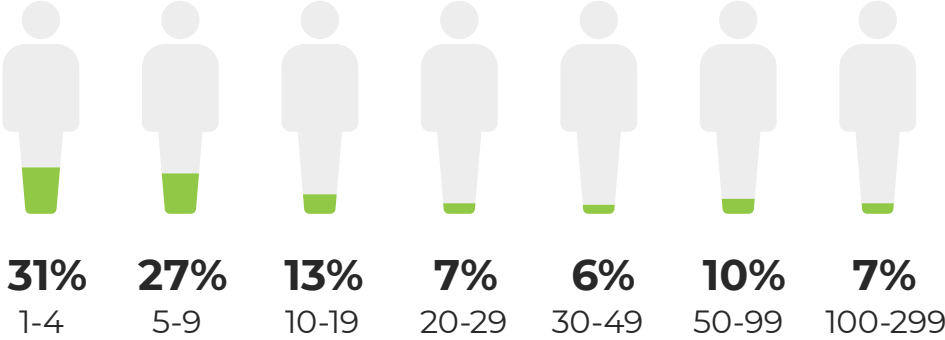
**98%**  
of owners are involved  
in the day-to-day  
operation of the  
business



**Which of the following best describes your business?**



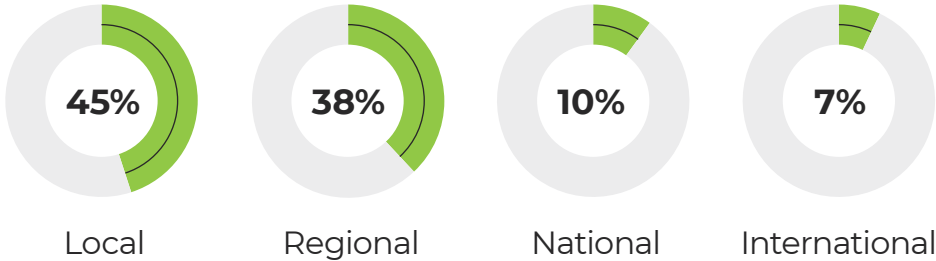
**Including owner/owners, how many employees work at this location?**



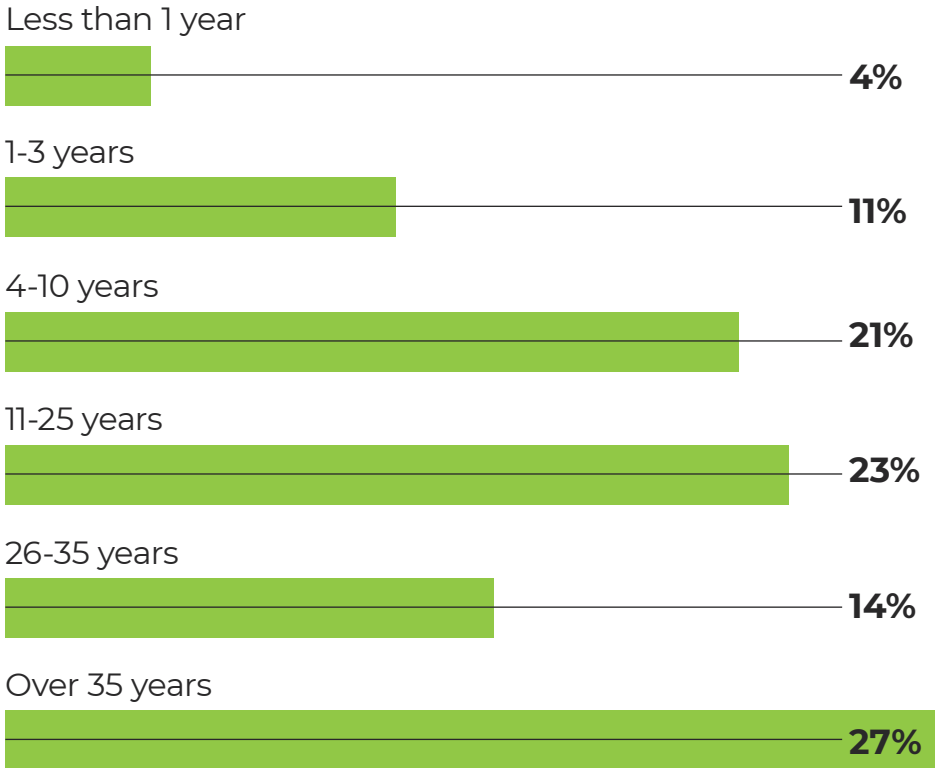




### The primary market of your business is?



### How many years has your business been in operation in this community?







**81%**  
of businesses  
anticipate no issues  
in renewing  
their lease

**62%**  
of businesses own  
their location,  
and 38% lease





**Business Retention & Support**



**Communication**



**Community Development**

# Business Climate

*Business climate* refers to the overall economic conditions and environment in a specific area. It includes factors like quality of life, municipal services and infrastructure that can either support or impede entrepreneurship and economic growth.

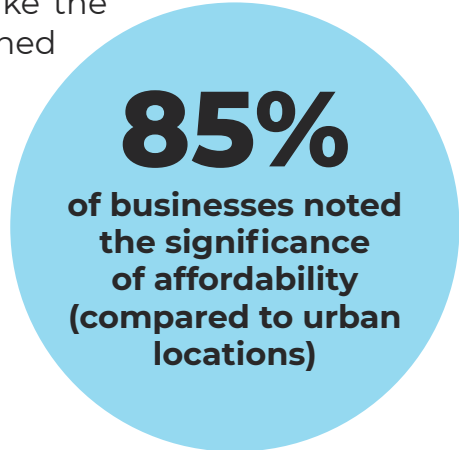


Discussions surrounding the overall business climate in Haldimand County underscored the importance of ongoing investments in community services and infrastructure, such as internet accessibility (78% of respondents reported good or excellent access), maintenance of local roads and streets, community improvement plans, and dedicated attention to childcare services (50% commented on the need for increased childcare spaces).

Quality of life was highlighted as a significant driver for economic however, these sentiments were also paired with comments that acknowledge there is still room to improve in this area; particularly when it comes to business diversification, such as food services and programming/entertainment for key demographics such as teenage youth and seniors.

Businesses interviewed also shared that they feel strongly supported by local residents (82%) and other businesses in the community (78%). During interviews, business owners expressed a need for strengthened municipal support through development, festivals and events, licensing, and building processes, with responses focused on simplified procedures and a pro-business attitude from municipal staff. The desire for transparent communication and one-to-one support initiatives like the Digital Service Squad underlined this theme.

Available inventory of industrial/commercial spaces and land, as well as attainable housing – were also noted as impacting the local business climate.





## How would you rate the following factors of doing business in this community?



Availability of serviced buildings



Availability of serviced land



Land costs



Availability of space for rent or lease



Development/building permit process



Development charges



Municipal property taxes



Local roads and streets



Regional/Provincial roads and highways



Quality of life (social, economic & cultural amenities)



Availability of attainable housing



Support from municipality



Support from other businesses



Support from local residents



Cellular phone service



Internet service – access

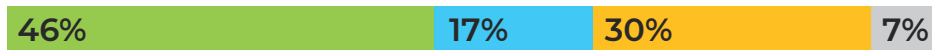




## Continued...How would you rate the following factors of doing business in this community?

■ Excellent/ Good   
 ■ Fair/ Poor   
 ■ N/A   
 ■ No response

Water and wastewater capacity



Water and wastewater fees



Availability of adequate electricity



Availability of natural gas



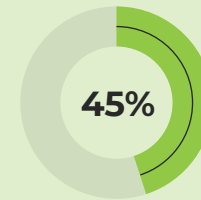
\*Availability of Serviced Land, Serviced Buildings & Land Costs: Businesses not currently looking at expansion, or relocation, indicated this business factor was not applicable for their current and forecasted operations.

\*Development/Building Permit & Development Charges: Businesses who have not gone through the building permit or development application process indicated not applicable.

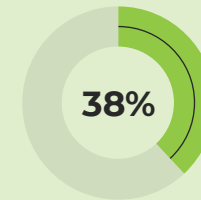
\*Attainable Housing: Not applicable was self-selected (in some cases) for businesses who do not currently employ staff.

\*Water and Wastewater capacity & fees: perspectives varied greatly dependent on industry specific needs, this is a summary of all responses.

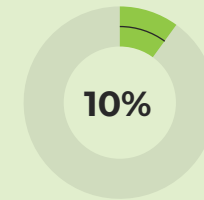
## In the past three years, businesses stated their attitude about doing business in the community has?



Changed positively



Have not changed



Changed negatively





## Level of satisfaction with community services?



Child care services (daycare)



Cultural services



Access to post secondary education



Recreation programming



Access to a family physician



Street / road repair



Chamber of Commerce / Board of Trade



Snow removal



Business Improvement Area (BIA)



Garbage/recycling



Health department/health unit approvals



Economic development services



Police services



Municipal communication (social media, newsletters, public consultation & engagement)



Fire services



Development services (i.e.. planning, engineering, zoning and building permits)



Library services







Workforce Development



Business Retention & Support

# Future Plans

*Future planning* contributes to the sustainability, adaptability and strategic vision of a business. It is inclusive of future expectations, alongside opportunities and threats.

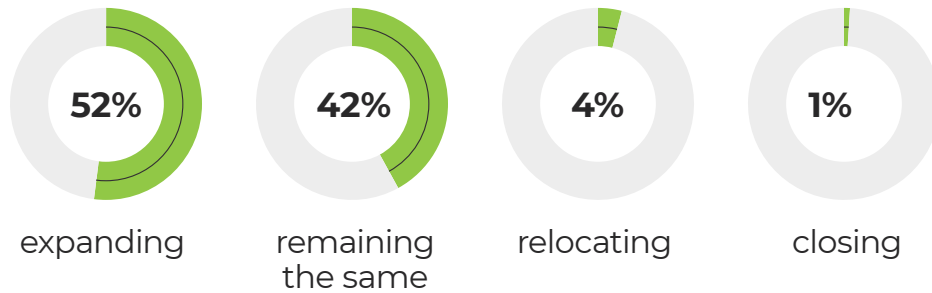


52% of businesses interviewed plan to expand within the next 18-24 months. Notably, 31% of businesses anticipate an increase in their workforce, creating an estimated 150 jobs collectively. Additionally, 13 businesses foresee the need to expand their floor space requirements.

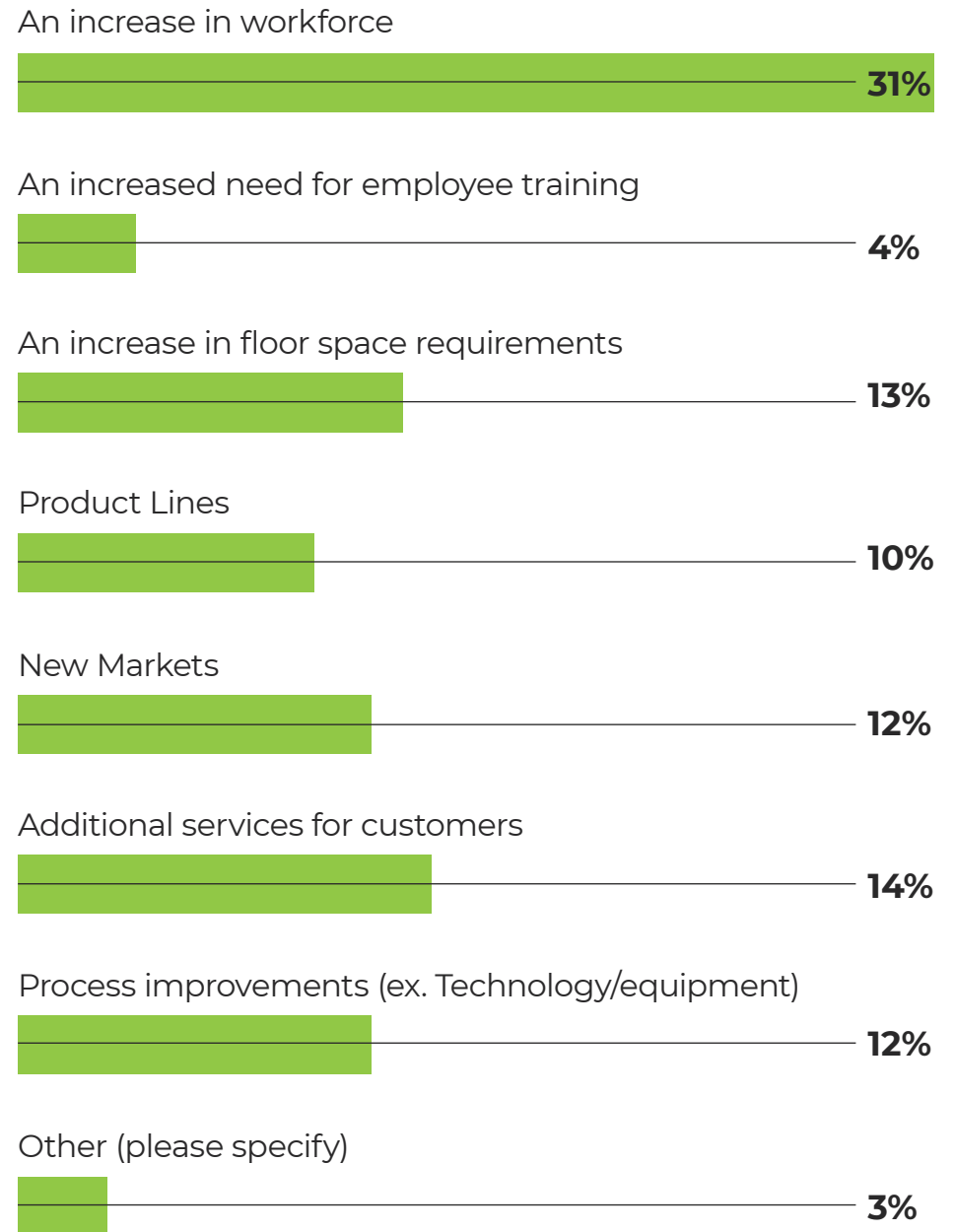
Businesses' expansion plans are expected to lead to new product lines (10%); additional services for customers (14%); and new markets (12%). However, challenges in expansion are recognized by 58% of businesses, citing issues such as: a shortage of skilled workforce, a lack of serviced commercial/industrial land or buildings, and complexities in the development process.



## Within the next 18-24 months, do you plan on:



## Will your expansion require or lead to:





## Trends identified for businesses remaining the same over the next 18-24 months:

**Economic Uncertainty:** Businesses expressed concerns about the anticipated constriction of the economy.

**Sustainable Growth:** Some businesses stated a longer term approach to growth plans, beyond the 18-24 month time-frame.

**Personal Considerations:** Factors such as impending family events or lifestyle were identified as considerations for remaining the same.

**42%**  
of businesses intend  
to maintain their  
current business  
activity for the next  
18-24 months

**58% identified difficulties with expansion including:**



**Shortage of skilled workforce**



**Complexity of development process, and approval timelines**



**Lack of serviced commercial/industrial land or buildings**





## How can Haldimand County Economic Development & Tourism assist?

- **Maintain ongoing support for businesses by continuing to offer and promote various grants and funding programs (21%),** including but not limited to Community Improvement Plans, the Digital Service Squad, and facilitating referrals to applicable Federal and Provincial funding initiatives
- **Execute targeted awareness campaigns and marketing efforts (16%)** with a focus on “Visit Haldimand”, “Shop Local”, and “Work in Haldimand” messaging to enhance the visibility of local businesses, attract visitors, and promote the County as an ideal place to live, work, and explore.
- **Providing concierge services to businesses new to the development process,** by delivering timely communication and assistance navigating through required applications/processes.
- **Actively connect businesses to relevant information, both internally and externally, to support their expansion planning.** Through strategic referrals, businesses can access resources, partnerships, and insights crucial for informed decision-making and successful growth within the Haldimand business ecosystem.



**82%**

**of respondents indicated that Haldimand Economic Development and Tourism could potentially provide some assistance with their expansion plans**






# Business Development

The *business development* section provided broad insights into respondent's outlooks for their respective industry, and how individual businesses approach a range of issues such as technology, industry trends, and collaboration.

Haldimand County businesses are currently navigating through some economic uncertainties. Industry-specific challenges, including supply chain issues and varying market impacts in the wider economy, continue to create a dynamic business landscape locally.

Giving consideration to these wider economic influences, 46% of interviewed businesses reported the outlook for their industry as growing, and an additional 31% noted stability.

Community engagement and awareness emerge as critical factors, with businesses expressing an interest in collaborative marketing efforts (32%), the importance of networking and information sharing (21%), and adopting technology for sustained growth.



**77%**  
of businesses interviewed rated their use of technology as moderate to very high



## How integrated is technology in your current operations?

The majority of businesses interviewed (77%) rated their use of technology as moderate to very high.

20% of businesses noted that they had low technology integration in their businesses and cited barriers to technology use as:



**Cost of Technology**  
(35%)

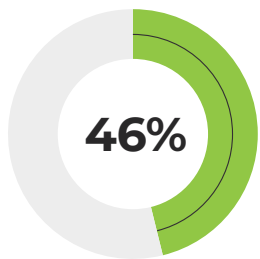


**Knowledge and Training**  
(17%)

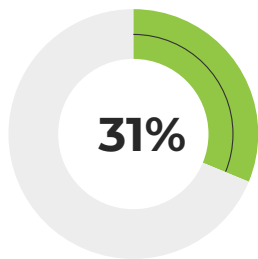


**Internet Speed**  
(6%)

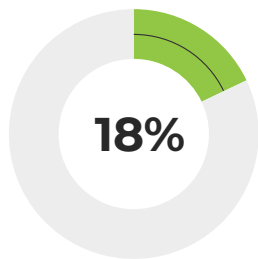
## What is the outlook for your industry?



Growing

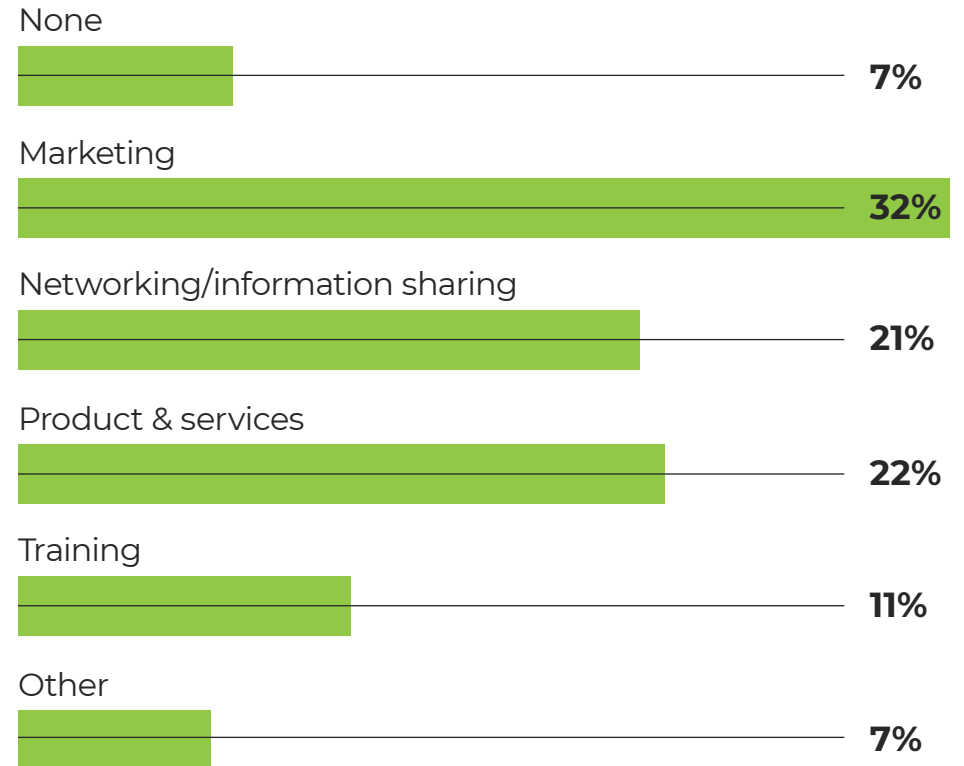


Stable



Declining

## Interest in working cooperatively with other businesses?



### If other, please specify

- Event hubs
- Community engagement initiatives
- Business retreats
- Community sponsorships
- Industry trade shows
- Workforce initiatives
- Increasing awareness efforts such as partnerships with local media



 Business Retention & Support

 Communication

 Workforce Development

# Workforce

Within the *workforce section*, business owners discussed employment patterns, highlighting industry specific attraction and retention considerations, and what training or strategies they have used to address their staffing requirements.

Haldimand County, like many communities, is currently facing labor challenges that impact local businesses across various sectors. With a backdrop of economic growth (41% of businesses have hired staff in the last three years), businesses in Haldimand are strategizing how to retain, and attract talent.

This challenge is particularly emphasized in specialized fields like healthcare, professional services, skilled trades, and manufacturing; and highlights the opportunity for collaborative efforts between the public and private sectors to address the evolving labor landscape.

**53%**  
indicated the availability of skilled labour locally was fair to poor

**41%**  
have added staff in the last 3 years



## Level of satisfaction with skilled labour availability?

Excellent/Good

Fair/Poor

N/A

None

21%

53%

24%

1%



## 46% of businesses interviewed said they had difficulties hiring

The top reasons were:

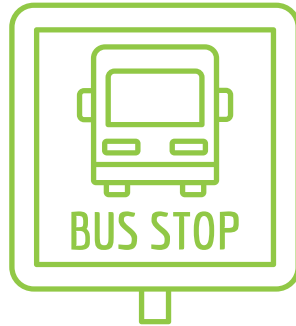
- Too few applicants
- Lack of appropriate skills or training
- Lack of soft skills
- Lack of experience

**42%**  
of businesses use external training

**82%**  
of businesses said they do not have difficulty with employee retention

**27%**

of businesses believe that their workforce would utilize a public transportation system to/from or around Haldimand County  
**15 businesses (14%) described access to transportation as a hiring challenge**



## Occupations identified as being difficult to recruit included:



CNC Machinist



Greenhouse labourer



Massage Therapist



Welder



Service Technician  
(Truck & Coach, Agricultural Equipment)



Food Services  
(Front House, Back House)



Machine Operator



Sales Manager



Pharmacist



 Community Development

 Communication

 Business Retention & Support

# Community Development

The *community development* section asked about the overall economic well-being in the community; noting the unique combination of advantages, assistance, opportunities and disadvantages related to doing business in Haldimand.

Interviewees commented on perceived enhancements in community amenities and service levels, attributing these improvements to ongoing municipal initiatives aimed at increasing resident communication, investing in community partnerships, and upgrading critical infrastructure such as internet.

Identified gaps included programming for youth and seniors, as well as challenges engaging new residents to support local businesses and discover local jobs.

While business owners highlighted Haldimand's quality of life, access to key markets, and comparative affordability as significant advantages to doing business in this community, concerns were raised regarding limited availability of industrial and commercial lands/buildings, a complex and time-consuming development process, and a lack of business networking opportunities.




**60%**  
prefer one-to-one  
individualized services;  
with the exception  
being in-person  
networking events





## Community advantages and disadvantages as a place to do business:

### Advantages

-  Haldimand County is strategically positioned, offering easy access to larger regional markets.
-  The quality of life in Haldimand County, is often characterized by natural beauty and balanced living.
-  Haldimand is perceived as having comparatively lower costs, both in terms of commercial building ownership and the cost of living – compared to other locations in Southern Ontario.

### Disadvantages

-  Businesses face challenges in finding suitable spaces for growth.
-  The complexities within the development process, especially for small and medium sized businesses primarily focused on their core operations can feel overwhelming.
-  Limited opportunities to connect with other businesses in the community.

**In terms of overall impact to Haldimand County as a place to do business, owners were asked to identify the most significant change they would like to see in the next five years. Their comments included:**

- Improve awareness of local businesses, and workforce opportunities.
- Implement initiatives to retain the middle demographic (working population).
- Focus on community engagement, and events that draw residents and visitors to explore local offerings.
- Maintain a balance between the communities' rural features, and urban growth.

## Top requests for assistance



Access to capital/grant  
(21%)



Joint advertising and marketing  
(16%)



Training in e-marketing, social media & online content creation  
(14%)



Business Networking  
(13%)



Business planning support  
(7%)



# Recommended Action Plan

## 2023 Business Retention + Expansion Project



*\*Identified BR+E actions, recommendations and timelines contained within this report may be subject to change; pending the evolving needs of the business community, strategic actions developed by the Municipality, and staffing/budget levels.*





## Business Retention & Support

**Priority Action:** Deliver ongoing business retention + expansion visitation program geared to existing businesses, coordinated by sector and incorporating all business sizes. With a goal of maintaining communication, supports and referrals.

**Time Frame:** • Within 6-12 months (\*Contingent upon approval of future budgets).

**Lead/Partners:** • Haldimand County Economic Development & Tourism

**Key Performance Indicators:**

- Participation rates by employers
- Referrals made/supports provided
- Insights prepared for Council, BDAPAC, AAC, HBN

**Action:** Continue to work with provincial and federal ministry's distributing program and funding announcements to eligible businesses.

**Time Frame:** • In progress

**Lead/Partners:** • Haldimand County Economic Development & Tourism

**Key Performance Indicators:**

- Referrals made

**Action:** Economic Development and Investment readiness training required by staff across the corporation to ensure business-friendly approach and support.

**Time Frame:** • Timeline to be determined (\*Contingent on funding)

**Lead/Partners:** • Haldimand County Economic Development & Tourism

**Key Performance Indicators:**

- Participation rate by staff





## Business Retention & Support

**Action:** Improve online materials, articulating local planning and building processes. The landing pages, and any associated print materials (such as "fact sheets") should be designed to more thoroughly inform businesses of the steps, preparation required, applications, timelines and costs. Ultimately, ensuring applicants are well informed of the legislated steps required.

**Time Frame:** • 24 months

**Lead/Partners:** • Haldimand County: Economic Development & Tourism, Planning & Development Building & Municipal Enforcement, Customer Experience & Communications

**Key Performance Indicators:** • Resources created  
• Website downloads

**Action:** Creation of additional business networking opportunities (beyond small business week, and business excellence event). Format to be determined in consultation with Haldimand Business Network, BDAPAC and AAC. Consideration should be given to business familiarization tours or business after hours (rotating to different business locations).

**Time Frame:** • 12-24 months (\*Contingent on funding and staffing levels.)

**Lead/Partners:** • Haldimand County Economic Development & Tourism  
• Haldimand Business Network

**Key Performance Indicators:** • Participation rates by employers  
• Events hosted





## Workforce Development

**Priority Action:** A workforce “recruitment” campaign, focused on local career awareness that showcases unique companies, trades and high-skilled jobs in our community (targeted to residents, and nearby regions). Campaign to include a complement of business features, and key occupations.

**Time Frame:** • Within 6-12 months

**Lead/Partners:**

- Haldimand County Economic Development & Tourism
- Industry partners/Local Business
- St. Leonard’s community Services
- Workforce Planning Board of Grand Erie

**Key Performance Indicators:**

- Content created (business profiles)
- Website analytics
- Campaign metrics

**Action:** Continued efforts toward college programming partnerships (such as partnership with Mohawk College City School) focused on programming that addresses “difficult to hire” positions. Implement a long-term planning cycle with partnering institutions.

**Time Frame:** • 12 months

**Lead/Partners:**

- Haldimand County Economic Development & Tourism
- Mohawk College City School
- Employment Ontario (St. Leonard’s Community Services)
- Industry Partners

**Key Performance Indicators:**

- Courses provided
- Number of course completions
- Increased interactions between businesses and post-secondary institutions



## Community Development

**Priority Action:** Create an 'Explore' local print piece (for direct mail) for new and existing residents that showcases restaurants, and links to TourismHaldimand.ca for shop local opportunities, and community amenities/entertainment/events.  
Print will be paired with a social campaign promoting its distribution (*i.e., watch your mailbox*)  
With a goal of engaging new community members, informing them of 'explore local' opportunities, and increasing local spend.

**Time Frame:** • 6-12 months

**Lead/Partners:** • Haldimand County Economic Development & Tourism  
• Possible media partner  
• Haldimand Business Network

**Key Performance Indicators:** • Print pieces distributed  
• Website analytics  
• Campaign metrics

**Action:** Continue to incentivize and promote business investment through Haldimand's Community Improvement Plans.  
Conduct a review of existing CIP's, to ensure the guidelines are impactful and continue to leverage business investment.

**Time Frame:** • Within 6-12 months

**Lead/Partners:** • Haldimand County Economic Development & Tourism

**Key Performance Indicators:** • Business Improvement Areas (promotion support)  
• Inquiries received  
• Grants distributed



**Action:** Increase promotion of grant incentives available through the Downtown Area Community Improvement Plan, for the addition of downtown housing (apartment spaces above commercial units) to support accessible housing development.

**Time Frame:** • Within 6-12 months

**Lead/Partners:** • Haldimand County Economic Development & Tourism  
• Business Improvement Areas (promotion support)

**Key Performance Indicators:** • Inquiries received  
• Grants distributed

**Action:** Evaluate the special events process – and potential for a “simplified intake” for small scale events on municipal property.

**Time Frame:** • 6-12 months

**Lead/Partners:** • Haldimand County Economic Development & Tourism  
• Community Development & Partnerships

**Key Performance Indicators:** • Improvements implemented





## Communication

**Priority Action:** Create business welcome packages that emphasize opportunities, incentives for new and expanding businesses (format to be determined). Combine with existing EDT resources; and include other municipal services (i.e., building, planning, licensing, special events) and external supports as applicable.

Further templates should be developed, to aid Economic Development staff when responding to site selection inquiries, and requests for information.

**Time Frame:** • Within 6-12 months

**Lead/Partners:**

- Haldimand County: Economic Development & Tourism, Community Development & Partnerships, Planning & Development, Building & Municipal Enforcement
- Haldimand Business Network (distribution)

**Key Performance Indicators:**

- Website analytics
- Program inquiries received

**Action:** Increase awareness of Economic Development services through increased online promotional campaigns (supports & services, community improvement plans, digital service squad, development concierge, workshops and networking opportunities).

**Time Frame:** • Within 6-12 months

**Lead/Partners:** • Haldimand County Economic Development & Tourism

**Key Performance Indicators:**

- Partner programming: Brantford Brant Resource Centre, Grand Erie Business Center, Ontario's Southwest
- Website analytics
- Program inquiries received



**Action:**

Continue to improve communication channels between the Economic Development & Tourism Division and business community addressing opportunities to improve.

Analysis of current activities including website analytics, e-blast click throughs, and input received through the wider municipal communication survey.

Promote sign-up to the subscription-based EDT e-blast that shares information relevant to businesses in Haldimand.

**Time Frame:**

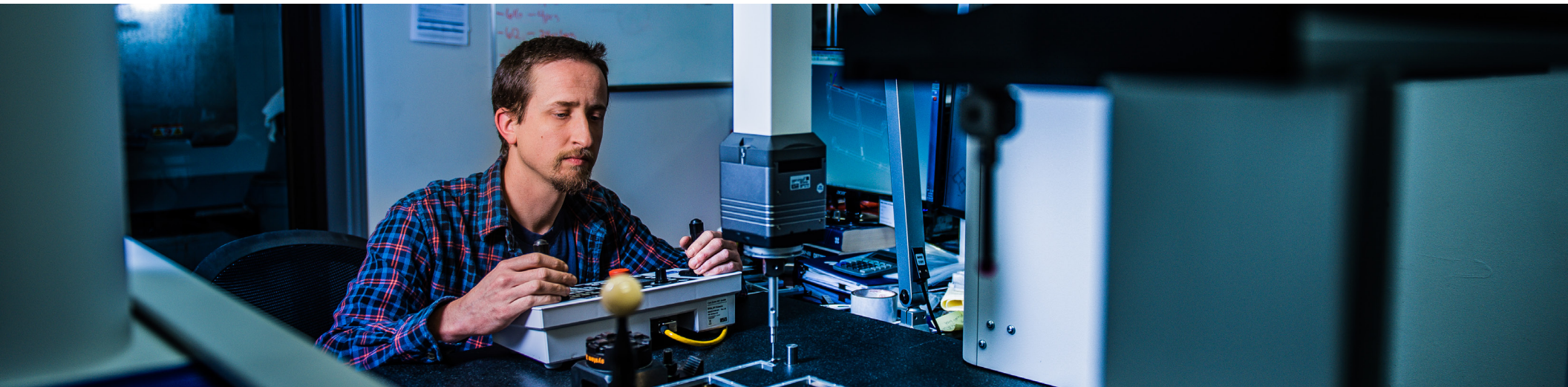
- 12 months

**Lead/Partners:**

- Haldimand County: Economic Development & Tourism, Customer Experience & Communications

**Key Performance Indicators:**

- Evaluate e-blast click through links
- Website analytics
- Business feedback
- Improvements implemented



# Acknowledgements

## The Haldimand County Business Community

The Haldimand County Economic Development & Tourism Division extends gratitude to the 71 participating vibrant and dynamic businesses in Haldimand County for their participation in the Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) project. Your choice to operate and invest in Haldimand County, is a testament to the thriving and supportive environment you have helped to cultivate. Economic Development & Tourism looks forward to continuing collaborative efforts for the sustained growth and prosperity of the community.

## Haldimand County Advisory Committee's & Business Organizations

The Haldimand County Business Development and Planning Advisory Committee, Agricultural Advisory Committee, Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee, and Haldimand Business Network (comprised of the local Chambers of Commerce, Business Improvement Areas and Board of Trade) contributed industry insights during

the shaping of the project framework. Special recognition is extended to the members of each of these groups which participated as "test" interviewees during the project's development phase, providing essential feedback that meaningfully contributed to refining the survey approach.

The Haldimand County Economic Development & Tourism Division is also grateful for the instrumental role in leveraging these groups' and organizations' extensive networks, aiding in the seamless outreach to the broader business community. Your collaborative efforts have not only strengthened the foundation of the BR+E project but have also exemplified the power of community driven initiatives.

## Province of Ontario

Haldimand County gratefully acknowledges the project is funded in part by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs; and thank them for their project advisory supports. The views expressed within this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Province.

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**Haldimand**  
Economic Development  
and Tourism