COUNTY SURVEY ON EFFECTS AND REACTION FROM COVID-19

Presented by Pennsylvania Economy League

In partnership with:

CCAP
County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania

www.pelcentral.org
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ABOUT THIS REPORT

The Pennsylvania Economy League, partnering with the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP), sent the “County Survey on Effects and Reaction from COVID-19” to the association’s membership, which includes all Pennsylvania counties, by email using SurveyMonkey.

SURVEY PERIOD:
April 12 – 23, 2021

SURVEY RESPONSES:
- At least 67% of second class A through eighth class of counties, including 100% of second class A, fifth class and seventh class counties, completed the survey.
- Of second class A and third class, all indicated they are urban-rural mix
- Of fourth and fifth class, 60% and 40% indicated they are urban-rural mix and rural, respectively
- Of sixth through eighth class, virtually all indicated they are rural.

SURVEYS COMPLETED
82% OF PA’S 67 COUNTIES
55 SURVEYS COMPLETED

Responses by Class of County

Responses by General Character of County

How challenging has it been for your county to deal with the following issues because of the COVID pandemic?

Rural counties had greatest challenges in “implementing new procedures for personnel/public,” while those with urban-rural character had greatest challenges in “recruiting and retaining staff in jail, nursing home, emergency management & other human services.”

Counties with urban-rural character, including 2nd class A – 3rd class, indicated “recruiting and retaining staff” as most challenging.

Northern counties had more challenges in “keeping employees and the public safe” than other regions.

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1 For a listing of counties by class, see CCAP’s website at www.pacounties.org/PAsCounties/Pages/Counties-by-Class.aspx.
2 Regions were determined based on PennDOT districts since district location was a qualifying question in the survey.
Which of the following changes do you see your county continuing or making after COVID?

Greater percentages of 2nd class A – 3rd class counties (93%), southeastern counties (93%), and those with urban-rural character (79%) are likely to “employ hybrid operations.”

Similarly, greater percentages of same two classes of counties (50%), southeastern counties (56%), and those with urban-rural character (46%) are more likely to “consolidate positions.”

Higher percentages of 4th and 5th class counties (60%) and those with urban-rural character (46%) are likely to “increase contracting for services.”

“We have repositioned several county departments to the first floor entrance to avoid public walking through three buildings to get what they need.”

(4th class county)

Which of the following personnel changes, if any, has your county made due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Larger percentages of southeastern counties (44%), and 2nd class A – 3rd class counties (43%), “eliminated positions” than other regions and classes of counties.

Notably lower percentages of 6th – 8th class counties (35%), northern counties (28%), and those with rural character (39%) “pay employees to stay at home; require work as needed.”
EFFECTS ON REVENUES

Has COVID-19 led to an increase or a decrease in county revenues?

- 40% of respondents (22 counties) reported a “decrease in revenues.”
- 33% (18 counties), including 43% in the western region, 42% of 6th – 8th class counties, and 42% of those with rural character, indicated “too early to tell.”
- Over 25% (14 counties) reported “no change.”
- Only one county reported an “increase in revenues.”

Has your county had, or does it anticipate, any significant revenue losses from the following sources?

- Large majority of responding counties (91%), regardless of class, region or character, indicated a significant loss in hotel taxes.
- 64% indicated a significant loss in state liquid fuels program allocation and state shared revenue.
- 39% of counties with rural character versus 17% of those with urban-rural character indicated a significant loss of property taxes.
- 33% of 4th – 5th class and 38% of 6th – 8th class counties, versus only 7% of 2nd class A – 3rd class counties, indicated a significant loss of property taxes.

Other noted revenue loss: “ROW office fees”
(2nd class A county)
EFFECTS ON EXPENSES

Has COVID-19 led to an increase or decrease in county expenses?

- In contrast to the effects on revenues, 76% of respondents (42 counties) reported an “increase in expenses.”
- 13% (7 counties) reported “no change.”
- 11% (6 counties) reported a “decrease in expenses.”
- A larger percentage of 4th – 5th class counties (40%) cited “decrease in expenses” or “no change,” versus those of 2nd class A – 3rd class (14%) and 6th – 8th class (19%).
- Southeastern and northern counties more often cited “increase in expenses by 10% or more” (38% and 33%, respectively) than western counties (14%).
- Urban-rural and rural counties gave similar responses.

Other noted expense: “PPE expense primarily related to County-owned Nursing Home”
(2nd class A county)

How much of a COVID-related expense has your county incurred, or does it anticipate incurring, for each of the following items?

- Although a significant majority of counties saw much expense for “purchasing COVID-related equipment and supplies” and “cleaning,” the vast majority of all counties realized much or some expense for all the items.
- Survey results revealed no large differences in the types of expenses incurred or anticipated among counties by class, character or region.
- 2nd class A – 3rd class counties typically cited more “overtime for other personnel (i.e., jail, nursing home)” than other classes.
Which of the following actions has your county taken, or might or will your county take, to help cover revenue shortfall?

- 38% of respondents already “restructured existing debt,” and 20% said they might or will do the same.
- 42% said they might or will “draw down reserves.”
- 44% said they might or will “institute a spending freeze on nonessential or capital items.”
- 42% said they might or will “curtail or limit services from providers or vendors.”

Other noted action: “Change budget process (move to Priority Based Budgeting).”
(3rd class county)

How likely is your county to take the following actions during the next year or two to mitigate the financial impact of COVID-19?

- Survey results revealed no large differences among counties by class, character or region.
- Southeastern counties are slightly less likely to “enter into intergovernmental agreements for shared services/equipment.”
- 8 counties indicated they may “raise property tax rates.”
- 6 counties said they may “apply to participate in DCED’s STMP (Strategic Management Planning Program).”
- 2 counties replied they may “request entry into DECD’s Act 47” program.
How much has your county used, or does it anticipate using, federal COVID stimulus funds from 2020 and 2021 for the following purposes?

Top two responses by county class:
- 2nd class A – 3rd class: “purchase PPE” and “provide grant program to assist businesses.”
- 4th – 5th class: “offset cost of county response, planning and outreach” and “provide grant program to assist businesses.”
- 6th – 8th class: “purchase PPE” and “invest in infrastructure (sewer, water, broadband).”

Counties with urban-rural character are more likely to use funds to “provide grant program to assist businesses” than rural counties.

Counties with rural character are more likely to use funds to “invest in infrastructure” than urban-rural counties.

Western counties are less likely to use funds to “provide grant program to assist businesses” than northern or southeastern counties.
What entities has your county used, or does it plan to use, in seeking guidance, technical assistance or resources because of COVID-19?

- Substantially larger percentages of 2nd class A – 3rd class counties, southeastern counties, and those with urban-rural character indicated they rely on chambers of commerce than other counties.
- Substantially larger percentages of 4th – 5th class and 6th – 8th class counties, northern and western counties, and those with rural character indicated they rely on regional planning commissions than other counties.

Other noted resources: “private sector consultants and charitable organizations”
(3rd class county)

“NACO, solicitors, special counsel”
(4th class county)

“Economic Development Agency”
(5th class county)