

## **Nebraska Business Confidence Index: September 4, 2020**

**Prepared by the UNL College of Business, Bureau of Business Research**

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*Summary: The Business Confidence Index – Nebraska had a value of 89.7 during August, which is well below the neutral value of 100. While negative, the aggregate index value reflects differences between recent conditions and expectations for the next 6 months. The recent conditions sub-index was far below 100 due to a loss of sales and employment in recent months. The expectations sub-index, by contrast, was positive, with a value of 106.4. In terms of specific issues, businesses were most concerned about the COVID-19 Pandemic and other factors that influence customer demand. Thirty-five percent of businesses specifically mentioned the COVID-19 Pandemic as the top issue, typically due to its impact on customer demand or firm operations. Another 27 percent of respondents indicated that customer demand was their top issue, without specifically mentioning COVID-19. Labor availability and quality was the top issue for 14 percent of businesses while 9 percent highlighted the cost of goods and services, and 8 percent chose operations challenges.*

### **Business Confidence Index - Nebraska**

The Business Confidence Index – Nebraska (BCI-N) summarizes responses to the monthly *Survey of Nebraska Business* regarding sales and employment. Respondents provide their assessment of both recent employment and sales change and expectations for the next 6 months. The *Survey of Nebraska Business* is sent to 500 Nebraska business establishments each month. The survey asks respondents whether: 1) the dollar sales volume at their business was higher, lower, or about the same as it was over the previous 6 months 2) the dollar sales volume at their business will be higher, lower, or about the same over the next 6 months, 3) the total number of employees at their business increased, decreased or stayed the same over the last 6 months and 4) the total number of employees at their business will increase, decrease, or stay the same over the next 6 months. The survey also asks, “What is the most important issue facing your business today?” Individual responses to that question fall into one dozen categories of business and public policy issues. Surveyed businesses are randomly selected from all industries, including agriculture. Businesses of all sizes are surveyed. In August, responses were received from 119 of the 500 surveyed businesses, for a 24 percent response rate.

The Business Confidence Index – Nebraska is estimated based on responses to the first four questions. For each question, the percentage of respondents who indicate that sales or

employment decreased (or will decrease) is subtracted from the percentage who indicate that sales or employment increased (or will increase). The number 100 is added to the difference in percentages. A value of 100, therefore, indicates that businesses are neutral since a value of 100 would only arise if the same percentage of businesses declare an increase as declare a decrease. A value above 100 indicates positive business confidence. A value below 100 indicates negative business confidence.

The Business Confidence Index – Nebraska is the average of the values for the four questions. Therefore, a value over 100 for the BCI-N indicates positive business confidence. The recent conditions sub-index is the average of the two questions about sales and employment change over the last 6 months. The expectations sub-index is the average of the two questions about sales and employment change over the next 6 months. Recent values for the Business Confidence Index – Nebraska are reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Business Confidence Index - Nebraska, August 2020

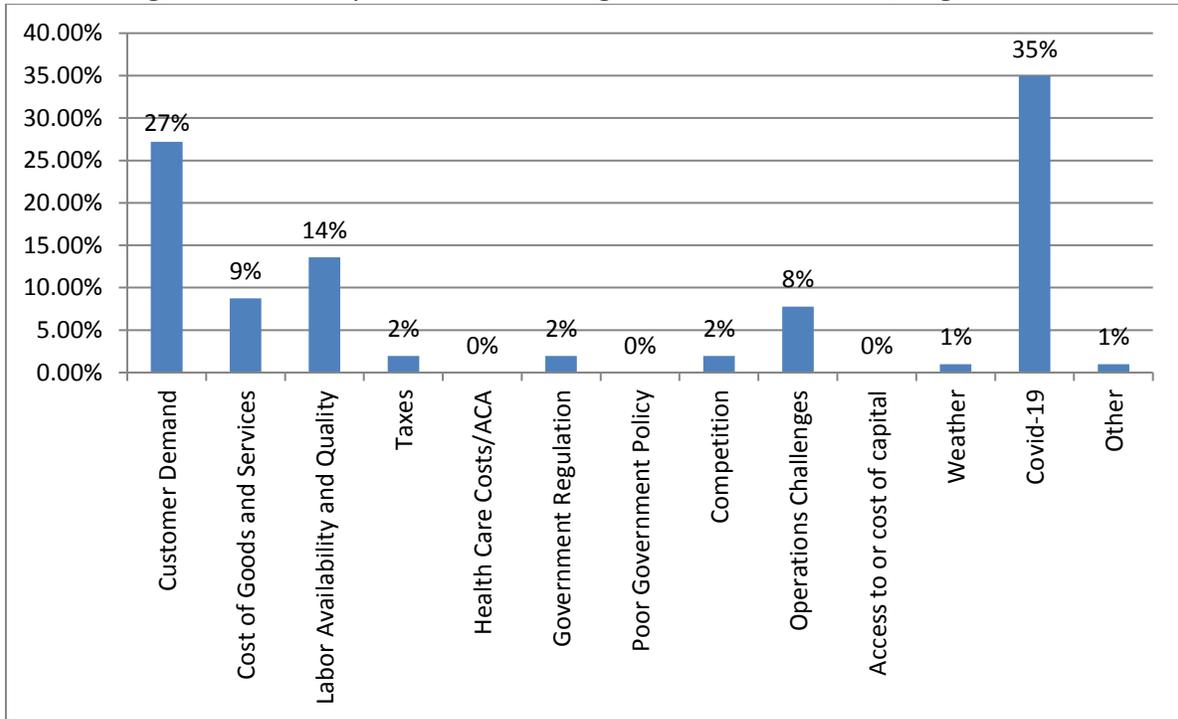
Business Confidence in Nebraska August 2020	
Index/Sub-Index	Value
Business Confidence Index	89.7
Recent Conditions Sub-Index	73.0
Expectations Sub-Index	106.4

Source: Survey of Nebraska Business

As seen in Table 1, the Business Confidence Index – Nebraska was at 89.7 in August, well below the neutral level of 100. The index was below 100 due to the loss of sales and employment over the last six months. In particular, the recent conditions sub-index had a value of 73.0 during August. The expectations index, by contrast, was above neutral, with a value of 106.4. Businesses have a positive outlook for the next 6 months.

Results in Figure 1 show the top issues of business owners and managers responding to the August survey. Respondents were primarily concerned about the COVID-19 virus and other factors, which influence customer demand. Thirty-five percent of businesses mentioned the COVID-19 Pandemic when describing the most important issues facing their business. Many of those responses discussed how COVID-19 was impacting customer demand, but some discussed the impact on business operations. Another 27 percent of respondents discussed challenges with customer demand without specifically mentioning COVID-19. Fourteen percent of August respondents indicated that their top concern was the quality and availability of labor, while 9 percent choose the cost of goods and services, and 8 percent highlighted business operations challenges.

Figure 1: Most Important Issue Facing Nebraska Businesses, August 2020



Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Source: Survey of Nebraska Business