



SURVEY DATA REPORT



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Message From The Director

The Appalachian Highlands Women's Business Center (AppH-WBC), in partnership with East Tennessee State University (ETSU), undertook an important initiative to better understand the challenges, goals, and needs of women small business owners and entrepreneurs in our region. Through a thoughtfully designed survey, we sought to listen directly to the voices of the women we serve, those who are building businesses, creating jobs and driving innovation in our communities.

This project reflects our ongoing commitment to data-driven decision-making and client-centered service. The findings presented in this report go beyond surface-level statistics. They reveal both the persistent barriers women face and the opportunities that exist to break through them. From access to capital and mentorship, to training needs and the value of networking, the results inform how the AppH-WBC can continue evolving to meet emerging demands.

Our mission is to empower women to start, grow and sustain successful businesses. This report is a crucial step in aligning our strategic vision with the real-world experiences of our clients. We remain steadfast in our belief that when women thrive, communities prosper.

We are grateful to all survey participants who shared their perspectives and to our partners at ETSU for their support in making this collaboration a success. As we look ahead, we do so ready to build solutions that are responsive, relevant and rooted in the voices of those we serve.



BREA ROBERTS
Director

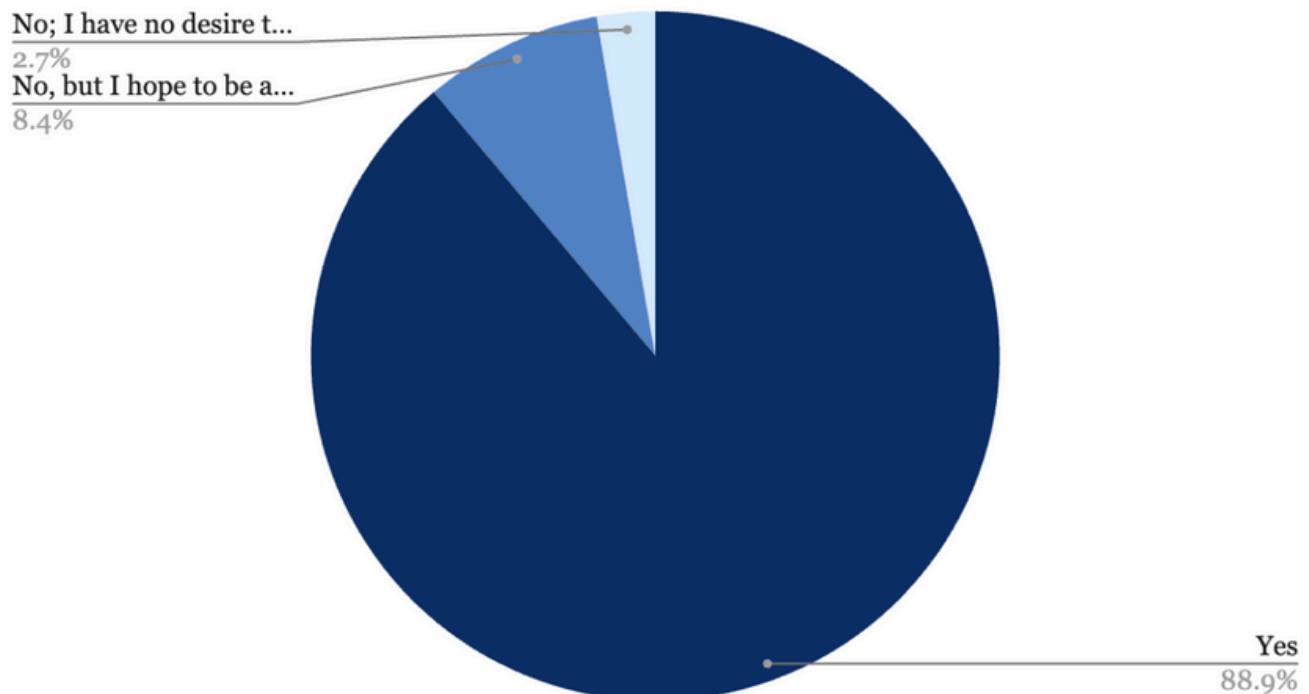
The Appalachian Highlands Women's Business Center (AppH-WBC) collaborated with East Tennessee State University (ETSU) to develop and administer a survey aimed at women small business owners and entrepreneurs. The goal was to gather data that would inform the creation of tailored services and solutions and to help us understand our client's unmet needs.

INITIAL DATA

Total Survey
Participants
1,020

The survey opened up at the end of November 2024, and closed March 2025. In that time frame, we had 1,020 participants respond to the survey.

Are you a Business Owner?



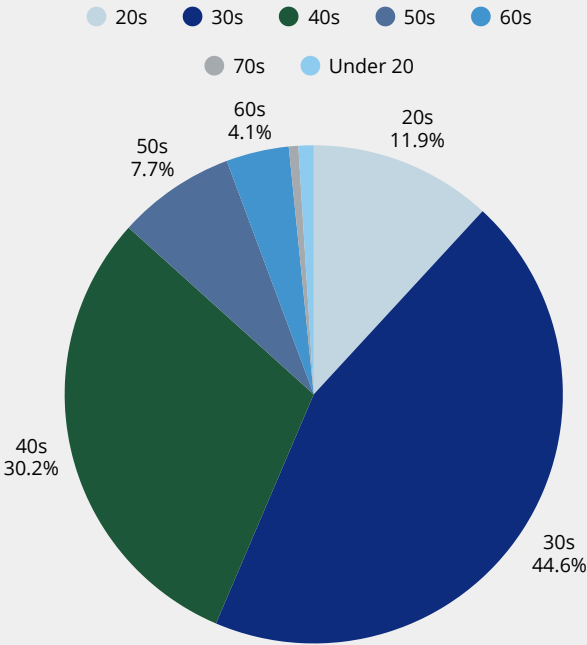
The first question in the survey was "Are you a business owner?" Depending on the participant's answer, the survey would branch off into subsurveys. Out of 1,020 people who responded to our survey, 88.9% of respondents are currently in business; 8.4% of respondents are not currently in business but have plans to open a business, and 2.7% of respondents are not in business and do not plan to be.

The subsurveys were very similar. If someone answered "Yes" the survey would continue and questions would utilize verbiage such as "As a current business owner...". If someone answered "No, but I hope to be..." the following survey used phrasing like "When you open a business...". If someone answered "No", the survey ended for them.

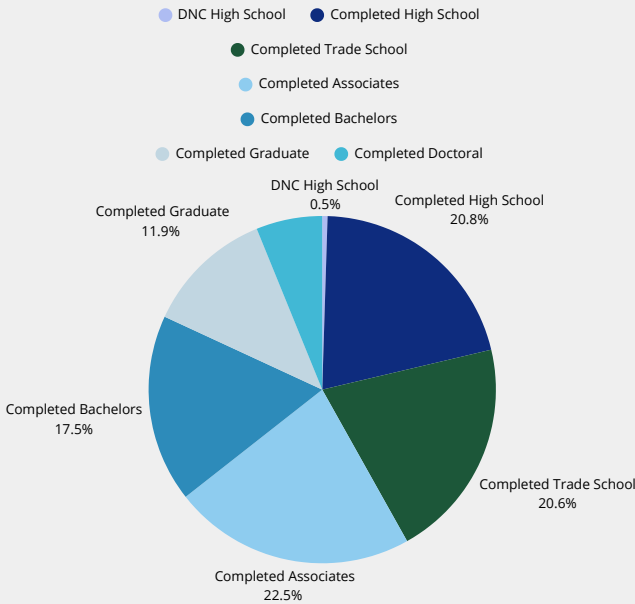


DEMOGRAPHICS

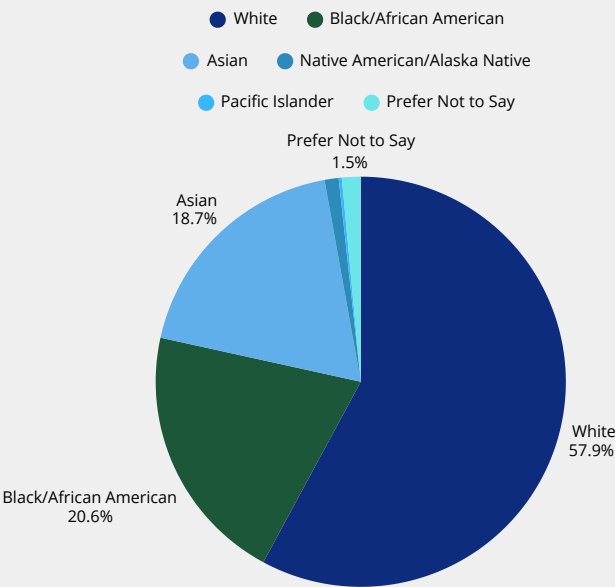
AGE



EDUCATION

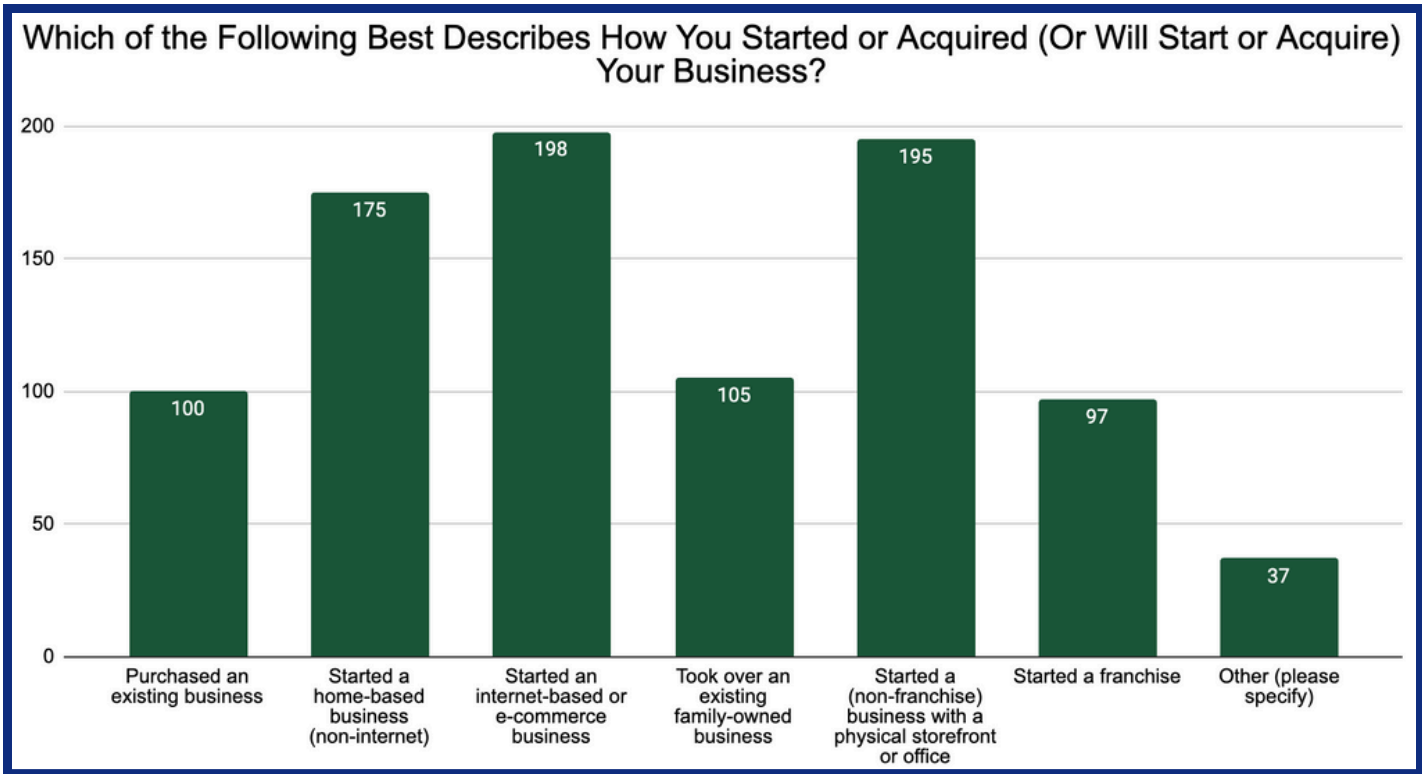


ETHNICITY/RACE

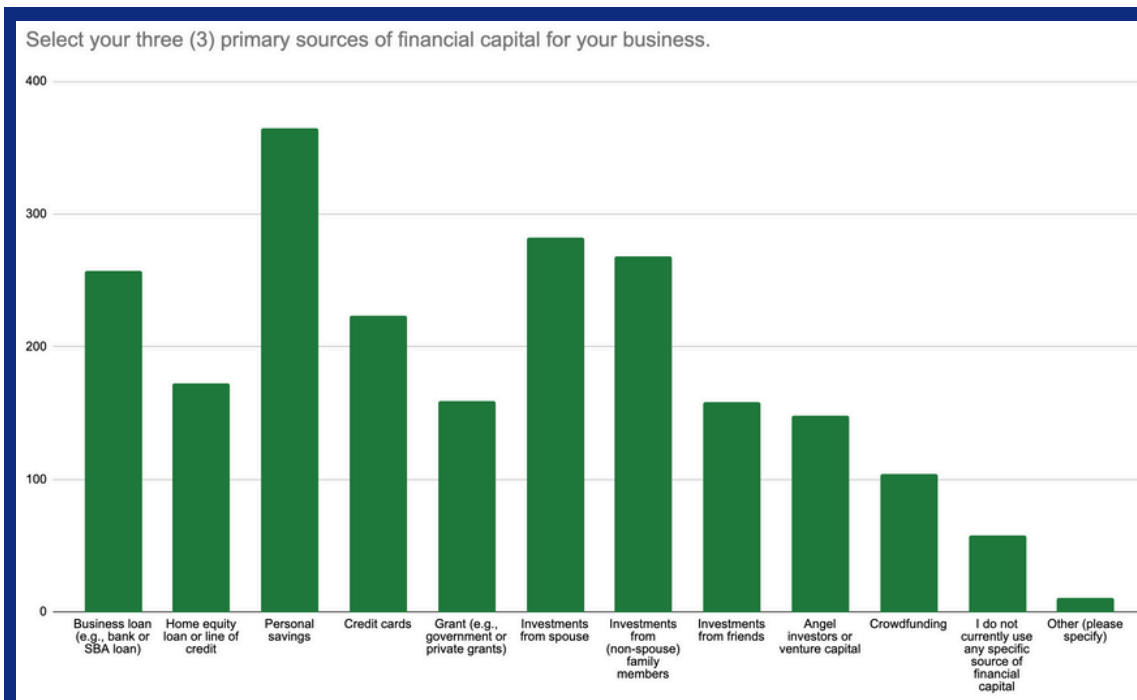




How You Will Start A Business



BUSINESS FUNDING



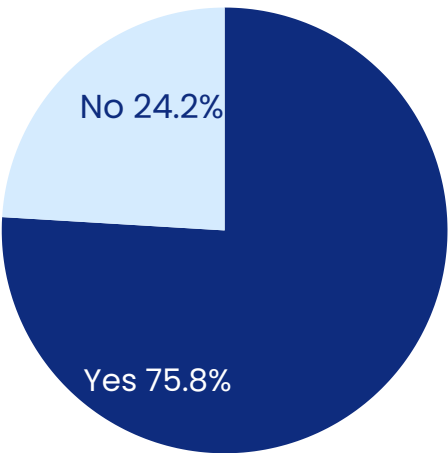
OTHER:

- I pay the previous owner in quarterly installments to pay off the sell of the business
- Income from part time job
- The income generated from the sales of our items.

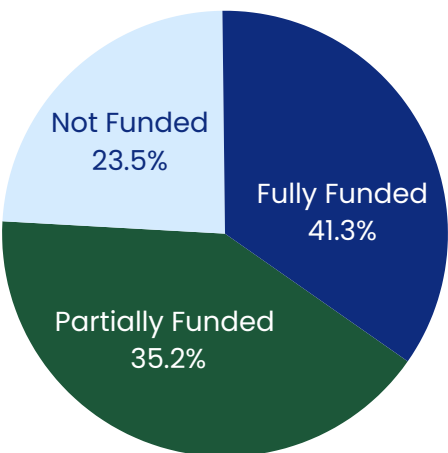


BUSINESS FUNDING

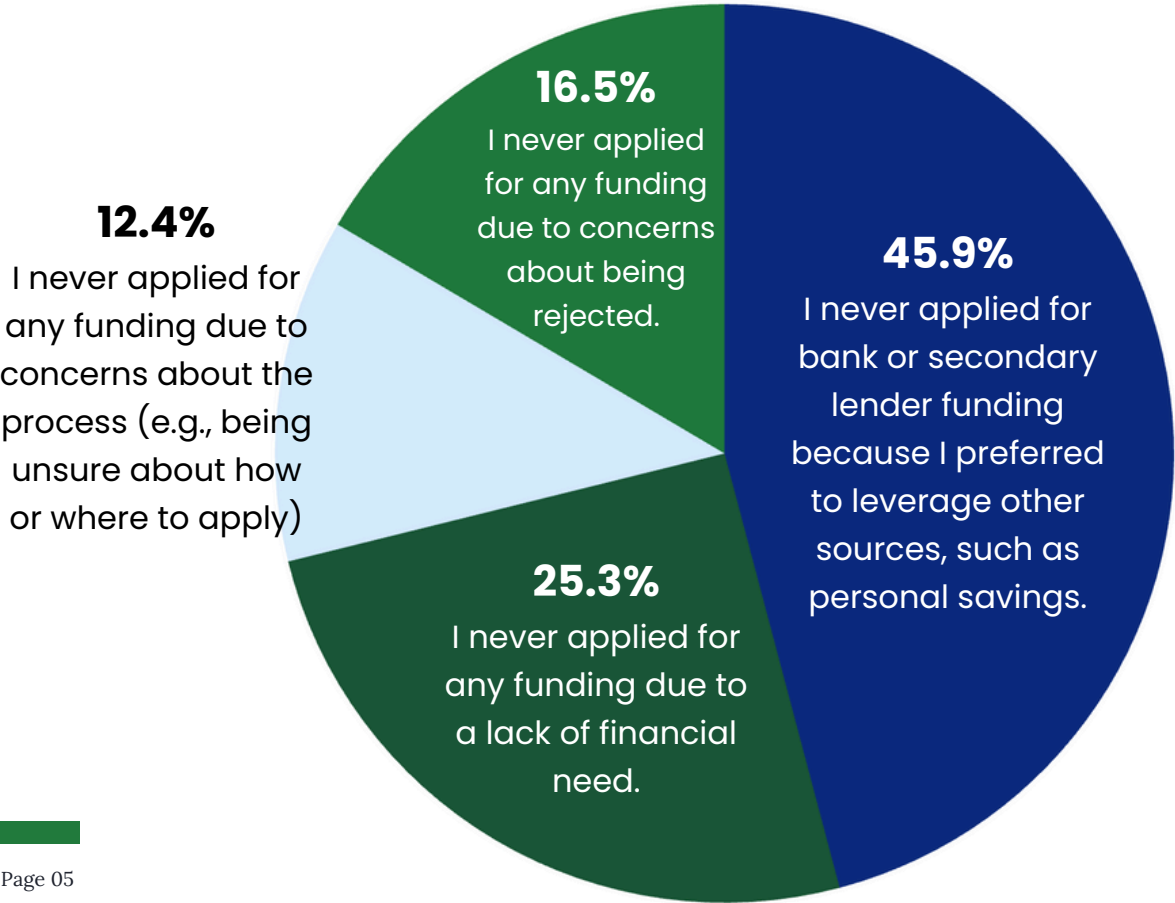
Have You Applied for Business Funding from a Bank or a Secondary Lender, Such as an Online Lender or an Alternative Lender?



I Have Applied for Bank or Secondary Lender Funding and was:



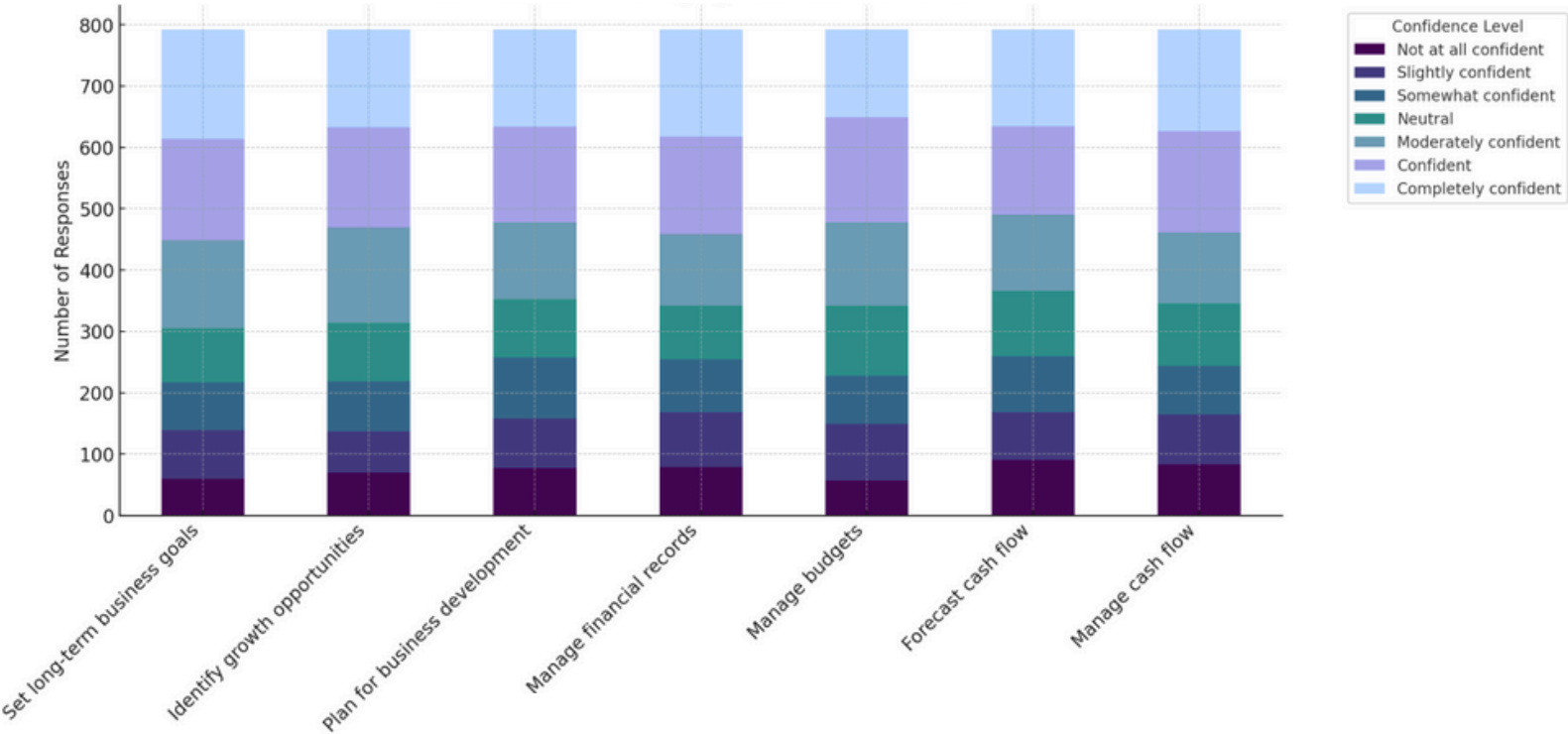
Which statement best describes your experience?





CONFIDENCE QUESTIONS

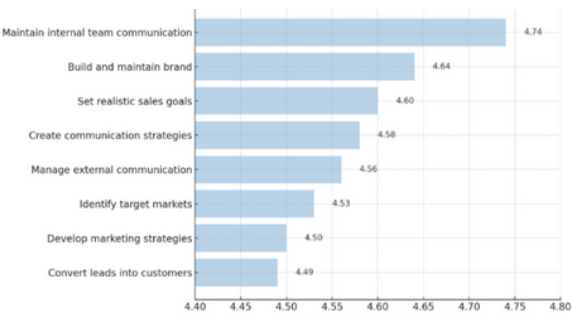
Rate your confidence in your ability to create and manage the following elements of a business plan.



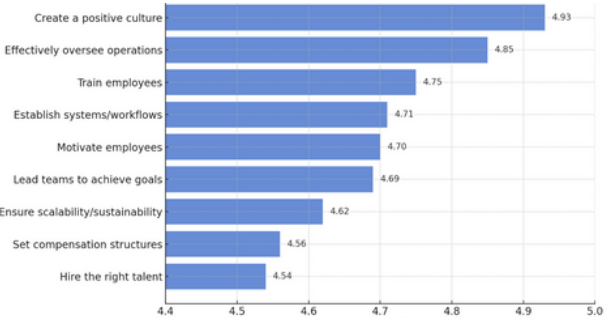
Confidence in Managing Business Planning

BUSINESS PLANNING ABILITIES

The most confident ability was maintaining internal team communication. On the lower end, respondents felt slightly less confident in developing marketing strategies (4.50) and converting leads into customers (4.49), suggesting these areas may benefit from additional support or training.



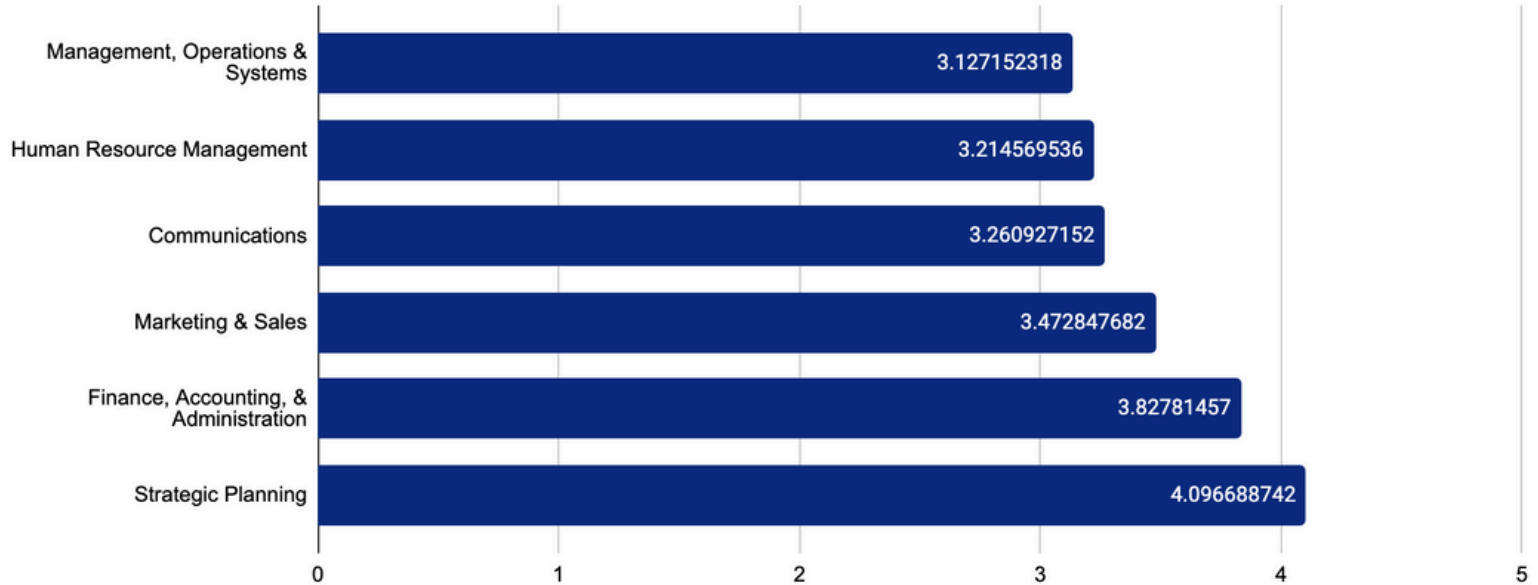
BUSINESS PLANNING ELEMENTS



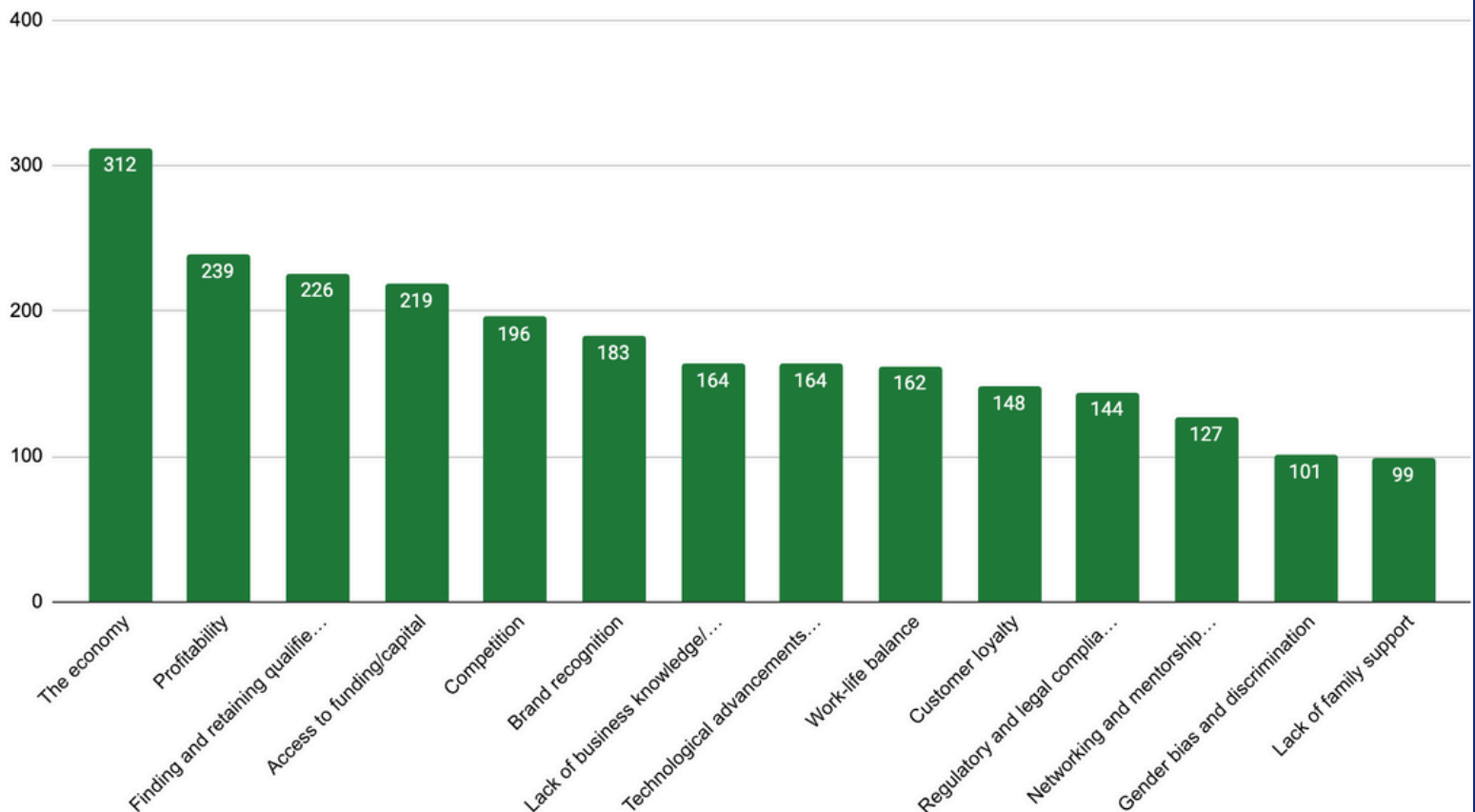
The most confident ability was creating a positive culture. On the lower end, respondents felt slightly less confident in setting compensation structures (4.56) and hiring the right talent (4.54), suggesting these areas may benefit from additional support or training.

GAPS AND CHALLENGES

Please rank the following business areas in order of greatest need, based on where you feel you have the most significant SKILLS GAP (1 = greatest need, 6 = least need):

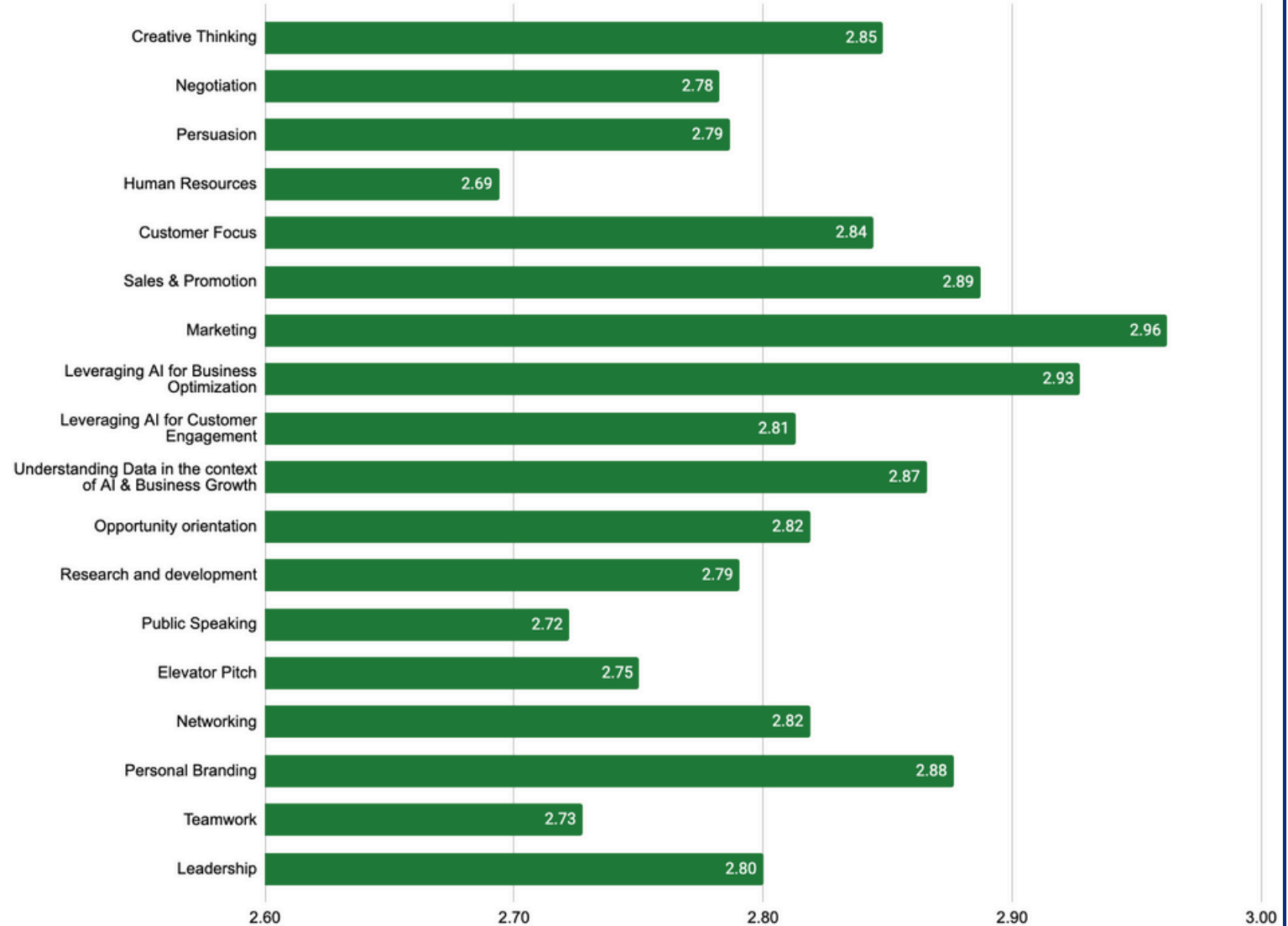


Select the THREE (3) BIGGEST CHALLENGES you are facing as a business owner.



INTEREST IN OPPORTUNITIES

Rate Your Interest in Professional Development Opportunities in the Following Competency Areas:



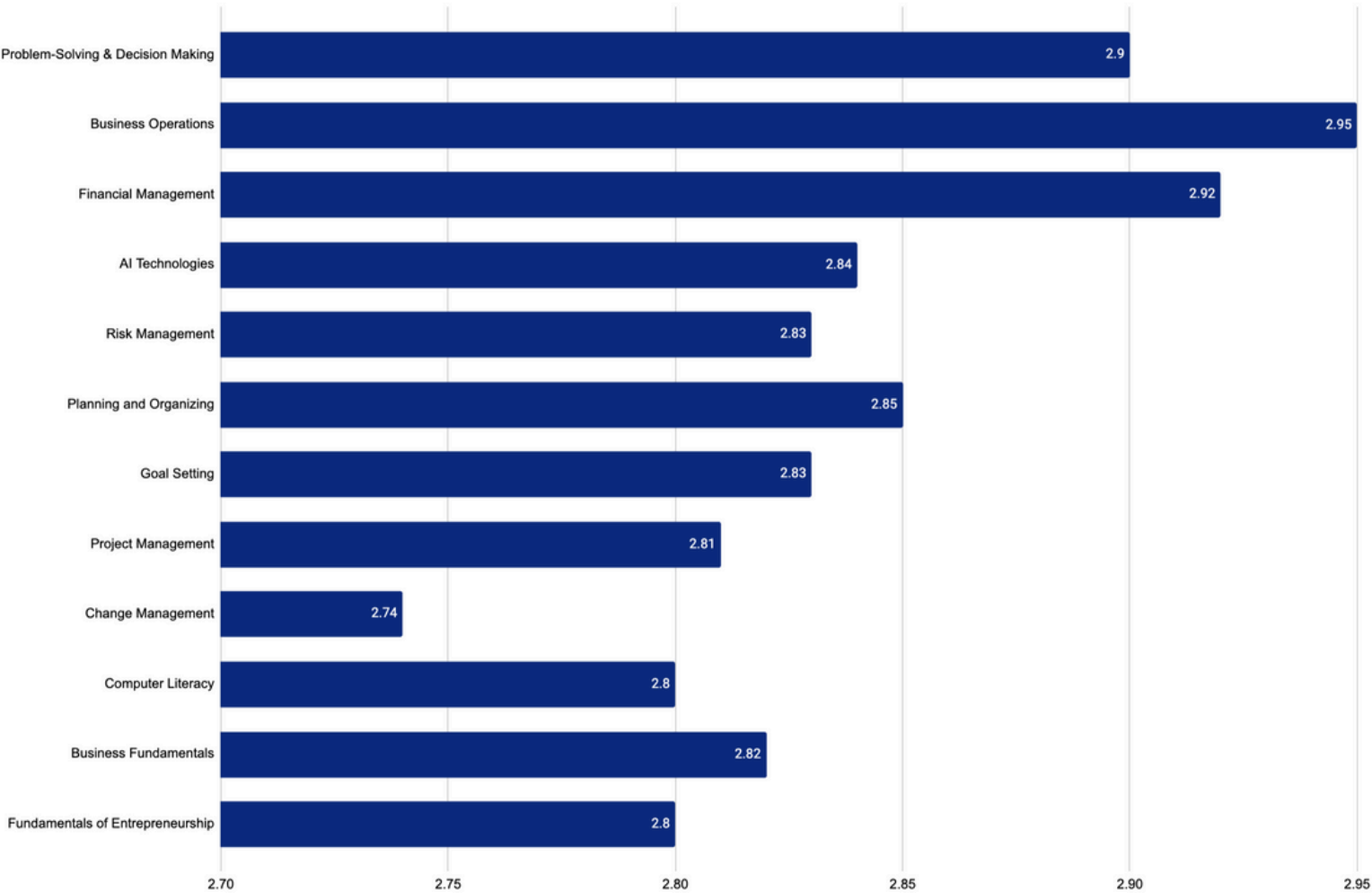
Participants were asked to rank their interest in these competency areas using this scale:

Not interested = 1
Neutral = 2
Somewhat interested = 3
Very interested = 4



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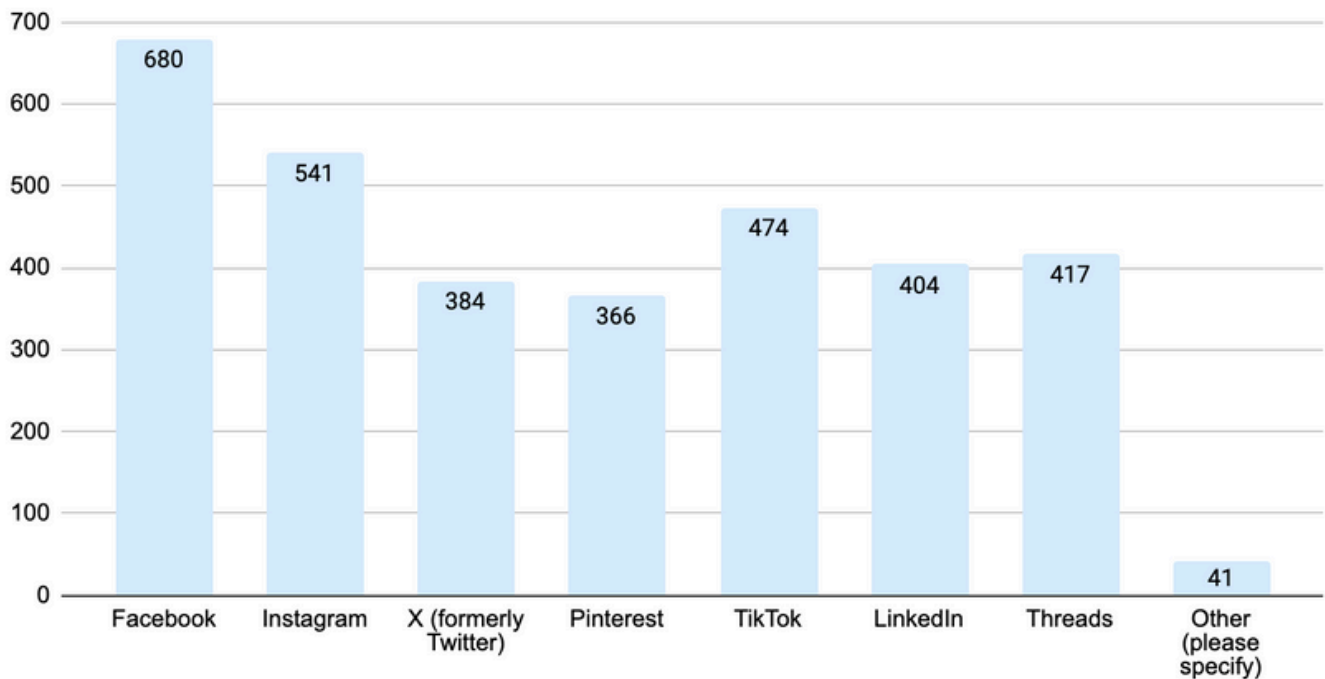


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- Not interested = 1
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- Very interested = 4

SOCIAL MEDIA

Which of the Following Social Networks Do You Use or Plan to Use For Your Business?



Facebook is the leading response with 680 entrepreneurs using or planning to use it for their business. Instagram is second with 541 responses, followed by TikTok with 474 responses.

Other social media listed:

- Alignable
- Bluesky
- Etsy
- Youtube





PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

RESULTS



At least 75% of women surveyed reported that the desire to reach their full potential was an influential factor in their business journey



At least 75% of women surveyed reported that the desire for the satisfaction of owning their own business was an influential factor in their journey

EXPERIENCES FROM BUSINESS OWNERS

"Medical Practice. I started with my own funds and a home office."

"I started my own medical consulting business."

"I purchased all of the equipment and supplies needed to start my business as well as the business model from a very successful business owner. I then started my own research and development and hit the ground running!"

"I created Ginseng Mobile Bar (mobile bartending services for events) from a crazy idea, a Pinterest board, and a tremendous amount of grit - plus a cute little vintage camper!"

"I decided to leave a big corporation and go out on my own."

"I got my health/life insurance license and began to establish a book of business."

Closing



Moving forward, the AppH-WBC can leverage the findings from this survey to refine its programs, deepen mentorship and financial support offerings, and ultimately foster a more inclusive and resilient entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Moving forward, the AppH-WBC will leverage the insights gathered from this survey to inform and strengthen our programs. These findings provide a roadmap for refining our support services, expanding access to mentorship, enhancing financial education and resources, and creating more intentional networking and training opportunities.

By centering the real-world experiences of women entrepreneurs, we reaffirm our commitment to fostering an equitable and resilient entrepreneurial ecosystem in the Appalachian Highlands. This report is not an end, but a tool for transformation as we continue to listen, learn and lead alongside the women who are shaping the economic future of our region.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all who contributed to this effort. Together, we move forward with purpose, partnership and a renewed sense of possibility.

We want to thank everyone who participated in this survey. We hoped to have a few hundred women entrepreneurs take the survey, and we ended up having 1,020 responses. Thank you for all of the women entrepreneurs that are helping our local economy.

We also want to thank East Tennessee State University (ETSU) and the professors from the College of Business and Technology (CBAT) that created the survey. We would not have been able to make such a comprehensive survey without their expertise and knowledge.