



THE NBS™
The National Business Survey™

Fort Collins, CO

Business Climate Report

2018



2955 Valmont Road Suite 300
Boulder, Colorado 80301
n-r-c.com • 303-444-7863

Contents

- About 1
- Highlights 2
- Doing Business in Fort Collins 3
- Community Characteristics 4
- Governance 6
- Business Climate 8
- Workforce 9
- Special Topics 11



NRC is a charter member of the AAPOR Transparency Initiative, providing clear disclosure of our sound and ethical survey research practices.

About

The National Business Survey™ (The NBS) report is about the business climate of Fort Collins and provides guidance about community characteristics and services that support local businesses.

Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NBS captures business owners' and managers' opinions across eight central facets of community livability (Safety, Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement).

The Business Climate Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 506 business owners and managers in the City of Fort Collins. Because no statistical weighting was performed, no traditional margin of error was calculated. However, because not all business owners or managers responded to the survey, NRC recommends using plus or minus five percentage points as the “range of uncertainty” around any given percent reported. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



Highlights

Business owners and managers continue to value the quality of the life in Fort Collins and the city as a place to do business

As in 2017, about 9 in 10 survey respondents rated their quality of life in the city as excellent or good, marks higher than the national average. They also gave Fort Collins above average ratings in terms of its overall appearance, overall image and the city as a place to visit. When considering Fort Collins as a place to work, 90% of business owners and managers felt it was excellent or good, while three-quarters rated the city favorably as a place to do business. More than 80% of respondents also gave positive marks to Fort Collins' overall economic health and its vibrant downtown, ratings higher than the nation. The quality of the community and business environment was evident, with about 8 of 10 members of the business community surveyed reporting they would be very or somewhat likely to recommend operating a business in Fort Collins and 9 in 10 respondents planning to keep their business in Fort Collins for the next five years.

Mobility ratings indicate that business owners appreciate alternate modes of transportation but attention may be needed to alleviate concerns with traffic and car travel.

Nearly 90% of business owners and managers offered excellent or good ratings to paths and walking trails and the ease of travel by bicycle and by walking (all ratings that were higher than national averages); further, ease of travel by walking in the community increased in 2018 compared to 2017. Respondents also gave high and above average marks to sidewalk maintenance and street lighting. However, when reviewing traffic flow, ease of public parking, amount of public parking, ease of travel by car and by public transportation, less than half offered excellent or good ratings and these items and the scores were lower than national averages (a national comparison was not available for ease of public parking). When considering overall ease of travel, only half of business owners offered positive ratings; an amount fewer than reported in communities across the nation.

The Fort Collins job pool is middling, but showing some increases from 2017.

While 9 in 10 business members surveyed felt Fort Collins was a great place to work, finding the right employees continues to be a challenge. With regard to workforce, about 43% of survey respondents planned to hire within the next 6 to 12 months. When asked to rate the applicant pool, about half of respondents gave an excellent or good rating to their overall impression of job applicants (48%) and slightly more offered excellent or good ratings to applicant's prior experience (a rating that increased since 2017). Each of these applicant ratings were similar to the national comparisons in 2018; however, in 2017, Fort Collins ratings were all lower than the nation. Only one-third of business owners offered excellent or good ratings to the number of qualified applicants; however, this rating was similar to the national comparison.

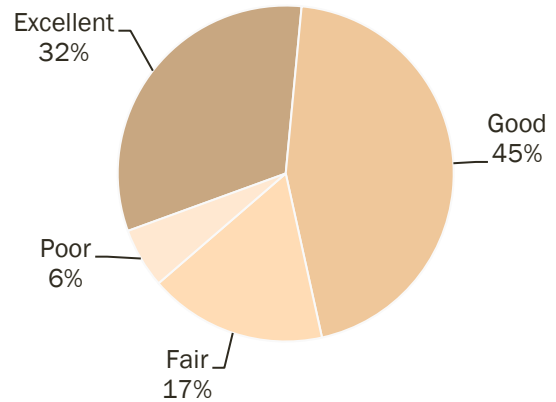
Doing Business in Fort Collins

Knowing where to focus resources to establish or preserve a thriving business climate requires information that targets features that are most important to the business community. Overall, about three-quarters of business owners rated Fort Collins as a place to do business as excellent or good. This rating was similar to ratings in comparison communities (see Appendix B of the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover).

Business owners rated eight facets of community (Safety, Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement) in two dimensions on the survey, first by their overall quality and then how important each was for the City to focus on in the next two years. The chart below summarizes these ratings by showing how each facet's quality compared to the benchmark; stars indicate the areas deemed most important for Fort Collins's efforts in the future.

Business owners identified Safety, Economy and Mobility as priorities for the Fort Collins community in the coming two years. Ratings for Economy, Built Environment and Natural Environment were strong and higher than the national benchmark while ratings for Mobility were lower than the national benchmark. Ratings for the remaining facets were similar to the national benchmark. This overview of the key aspects of community quality provides a quick summary of where businesses see exceptionally strong performance and where performance offers the greatest opportunity for improvement. Linking quality to importance offers community members and leaders a view into the characteristics of the community that matter most and that seem to be working best.

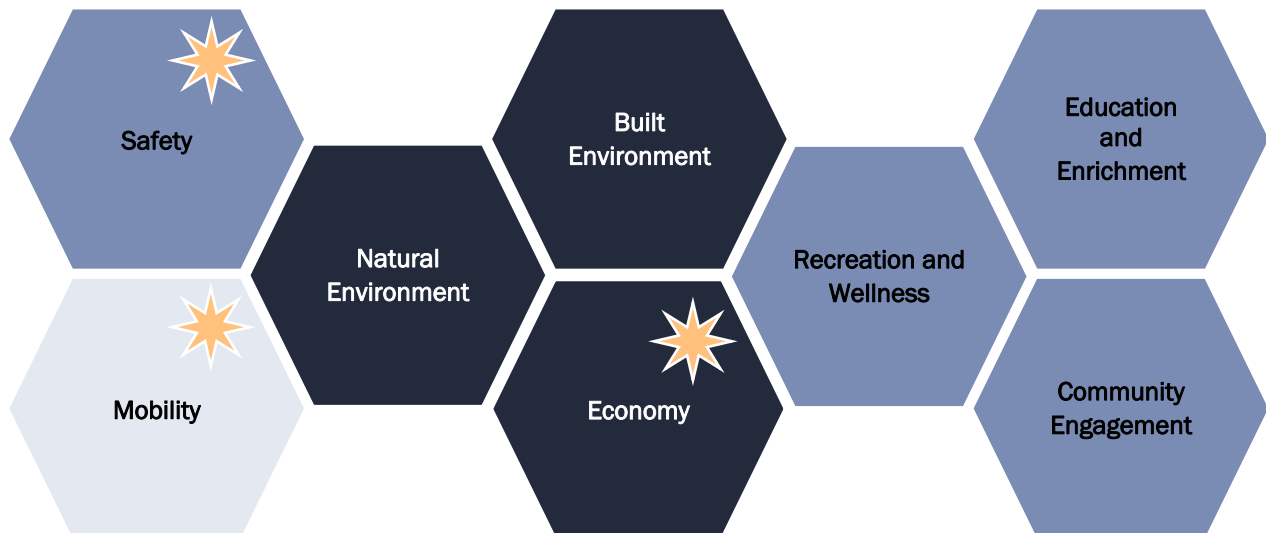
Place to do business



Legend

- Higher than benchmark
- Similar to benchmark
- Lower than benchmark

★ Most important



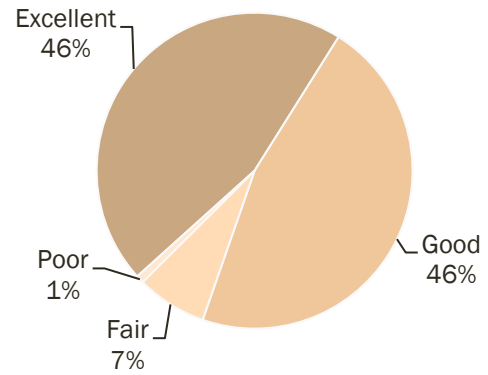
Community Characteristics

Overall quality of community life represents the natural ambience, services and amenities that make for an attractive community. How the business community views the overall quality of life is an indicator of the overall health of a community. In the case of Fort Collins, 92% felt the city had an excellent or good quality of life. Respondents' ratings of quality of life were higher than ratings in other communities across the nation.

In addition to rating the city as a place to live, business owners and managers rated several aspects of community quality including Fort Collins as a place to work, to retire and to visit, the overall image or reputation of Fort Collins and its overall appearance. Overall, 9 in 10 respondents rated Fort Collins as a place to visit and to work, Fort Collins' overall appearance and its overall image as excellent or good. Further, these ratings were generally higher than the national comparisons (place to work was similar). A high proportion of respondents also felt that Fort Collins was an excellent or good place to retire (69%).

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 25 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. National benchmark ratings were mixed with eight aspects rated higher, eight rated lower and 11 rated similar to the national benchmarks (a benchmark was not available for ease of public parking). Ratings of Natural Environment were strong with at least 85% of respondents offering excellent or good ratings to each aspect listed including cleanliness which was rated higher than the national comparison. The Economy also was rated highly with at least two-thirds offering positive evaluations to each aspect listed and the overall quality of business establishments and vibrant downtown/commercial area at the top of the list. Ratings of Mobility ranged from 30% excellent or good for traffic flow to 95% excellent or good for paths and walking trails. Further, benchmarks were the most diverse within this facet with five aspects related to auto and bus travel rated lower than the nation and three aspects related to alternate modes of transportation (ease of travel by walking, by bicycle ad paths and walking trails) scoring higher.

Overall quality of life



Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)

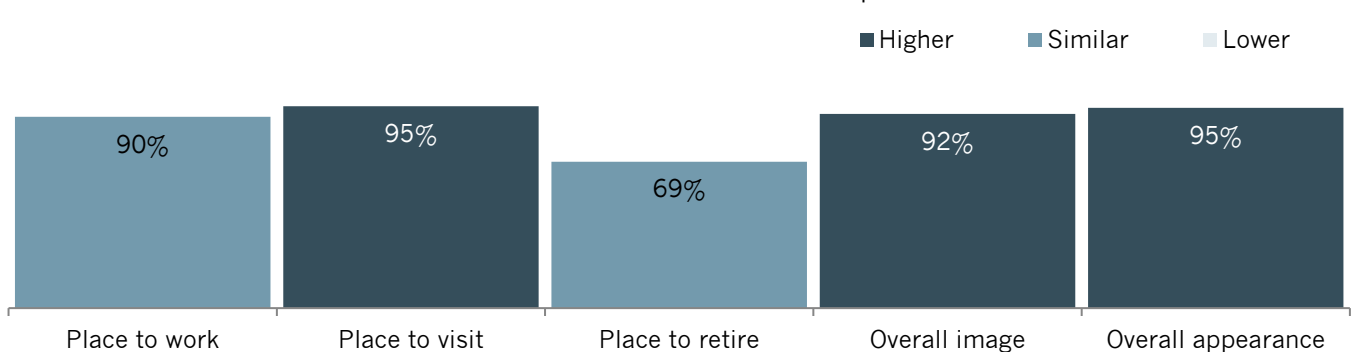
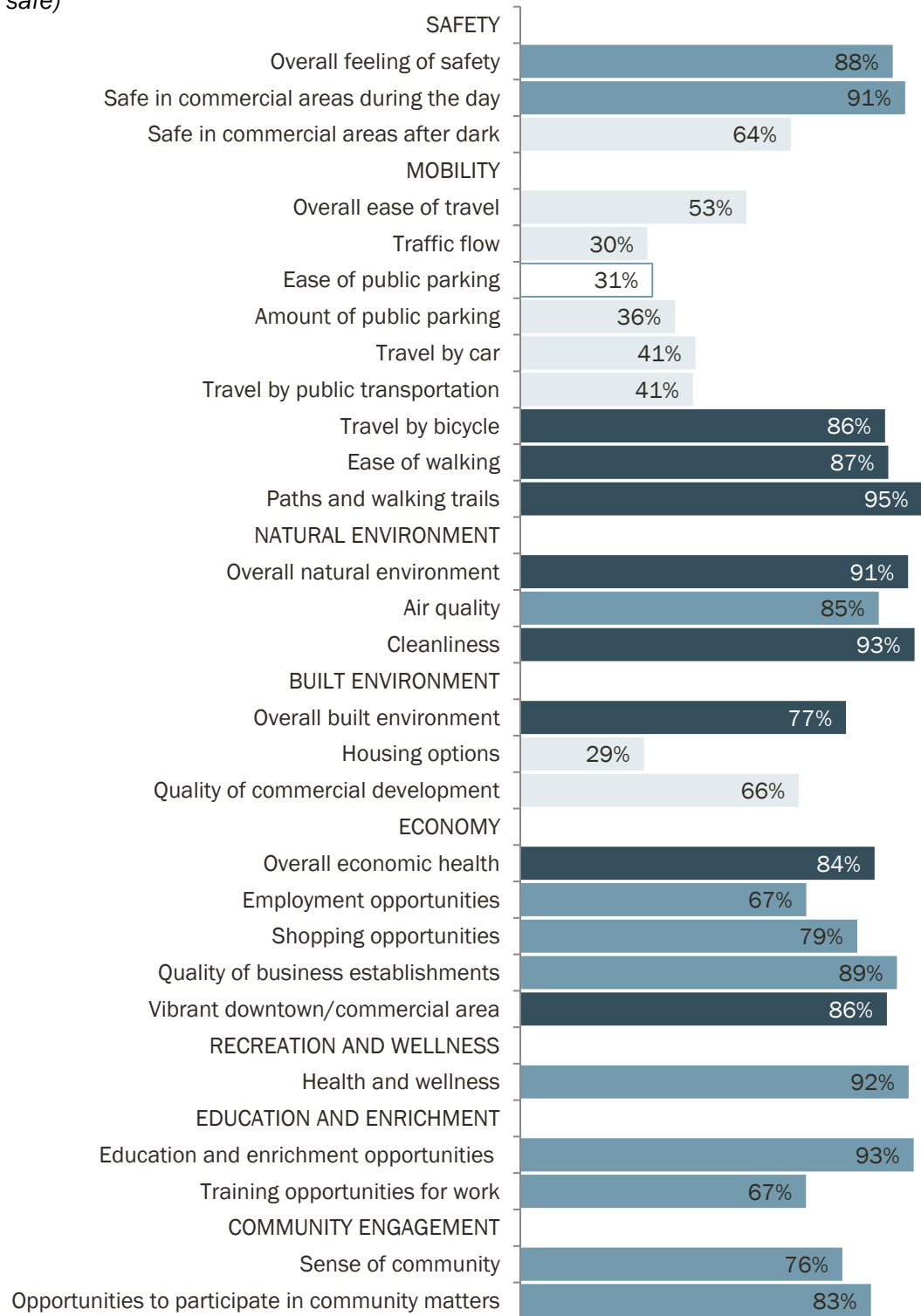


Figure 1: Aspects of the Community

Percent positive (e.g., excellent or good, very or somewhat safe)

Comparison to benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower
- Not available

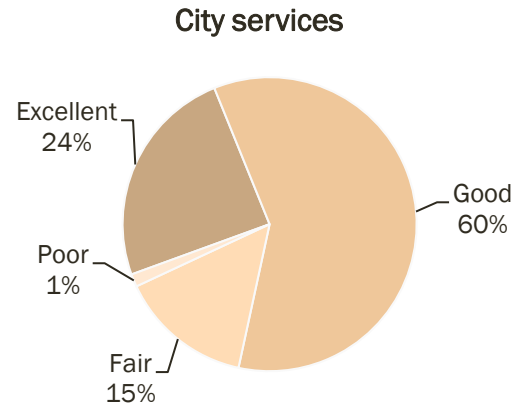


Governance

The overall quality of the services provided by Fort Collins as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how the business community rates their quality of life and the City as a place to do business. About 8 in 10 business owners or managers gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of services provided by the City of Fort Collins which was a rating higher than the national comparison. In comparison, only 4 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the services provided by the Federal Government (a rating similar to the national comparison).

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Fort Collins' leadership and governance. Over 8 in 10 business owners or managers offered positive evaluations to the customer service provided by Fort Collins employee(s), a rating higher than the nation. About two-thirds or fewer offered positive evaluations to the remaining aspects listed which were rated lower than the national comparisons with one exception (value of services for taxes paid) which was rated similar.

Respondents evaluated over 20 individual services and amenities available in Fort Collins. All services and amenities related to Mobility were given positive ratings between 59% and 83%; however, comparisons were mixed with four services rated similar to the benchmark (traffic enforcement, street repair, etc.) and three rated higher (sidewalk maintenance, street lighting, street repair). Ratings of Economy were mixed with three-quarters of respondents offering positive ratings to economic development (a rating higher than the national comparison) and fewer than half offering positive evaluations to the job the City does at retaining existing businesses and supporting or creating new jobs (both rated lower than the national comparisons). About 60% felt the City did a good or excellent job at attracting new businesses, a mark similar to comparison communities. Built Environment housed three of the five services that were rated lower than national averages (utility billing, building permits and inspections and land use, planning and zoning); further two services declined in 2018 compared to 2017 (power utility and utility billing). City-sponsored special events were rated positively by 9 out of 10 respondents, a score higher than the national average.



Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to benchmark

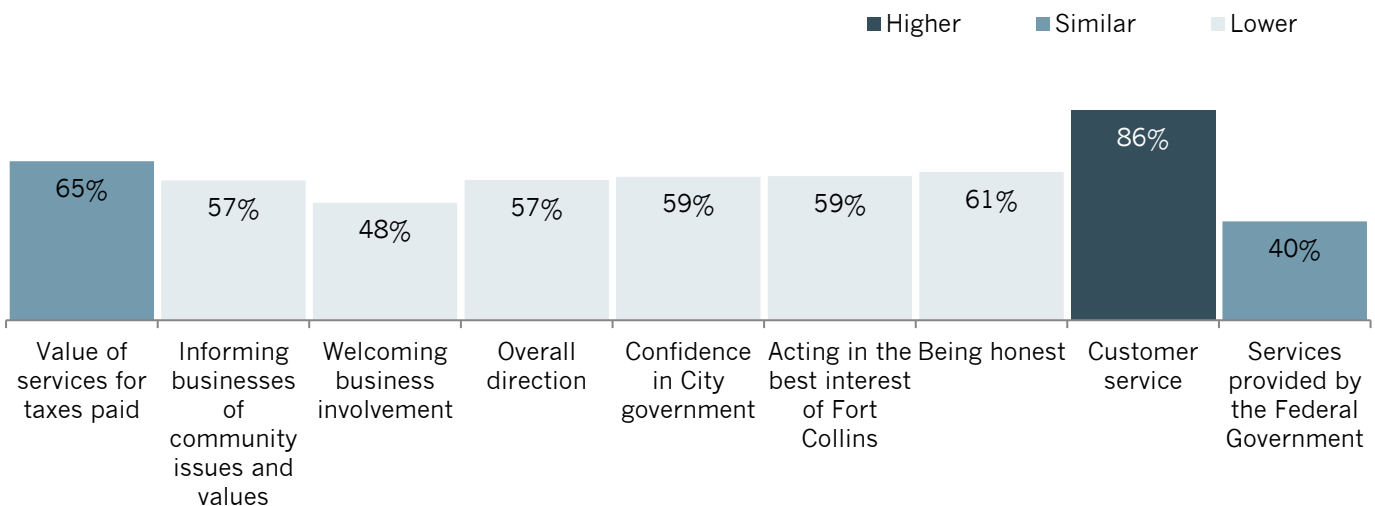
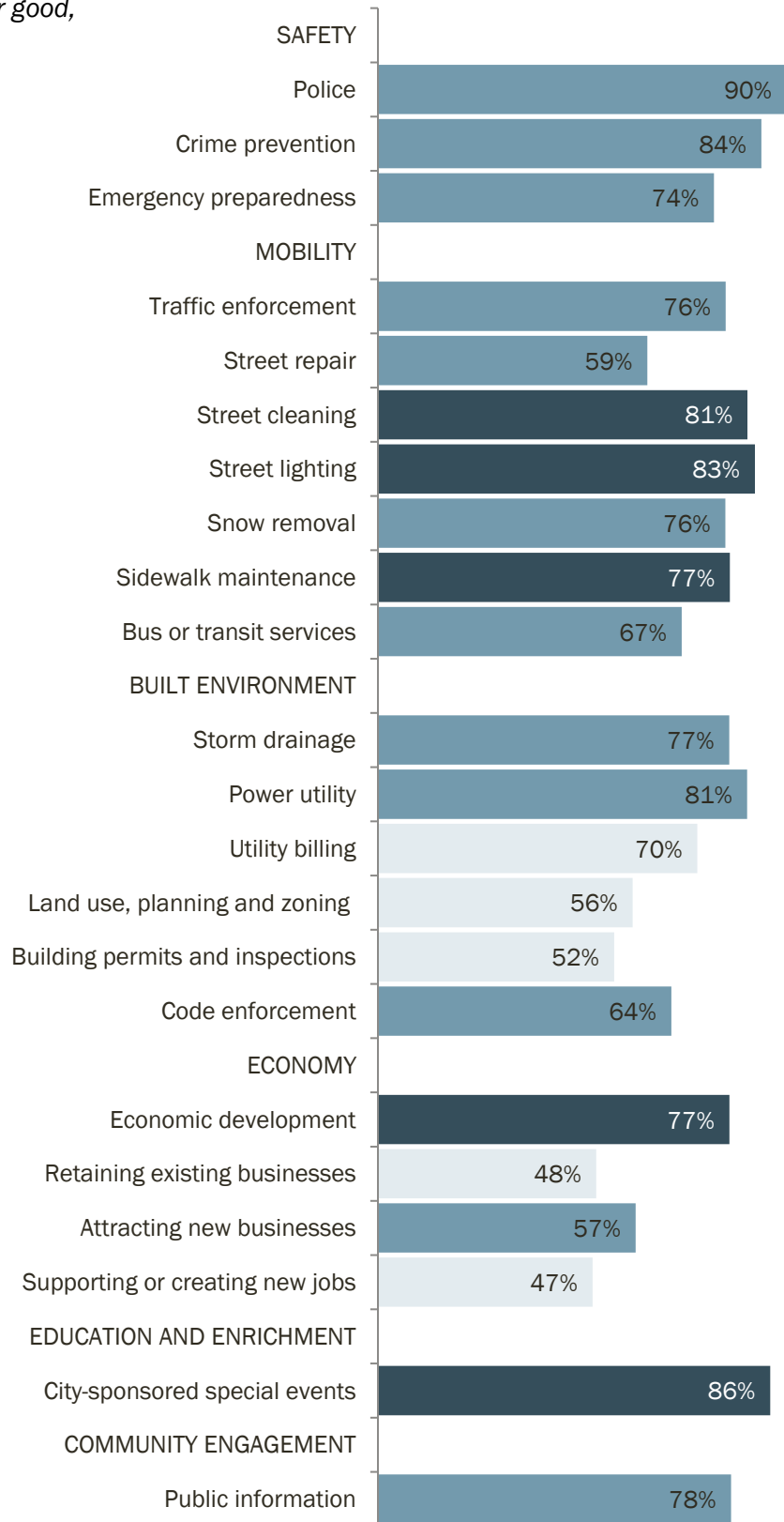


Figure 2: Aspects of the Governance

Percent positive (e.g., excellent or good, very or somewhat beneficial)

Comparison to benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

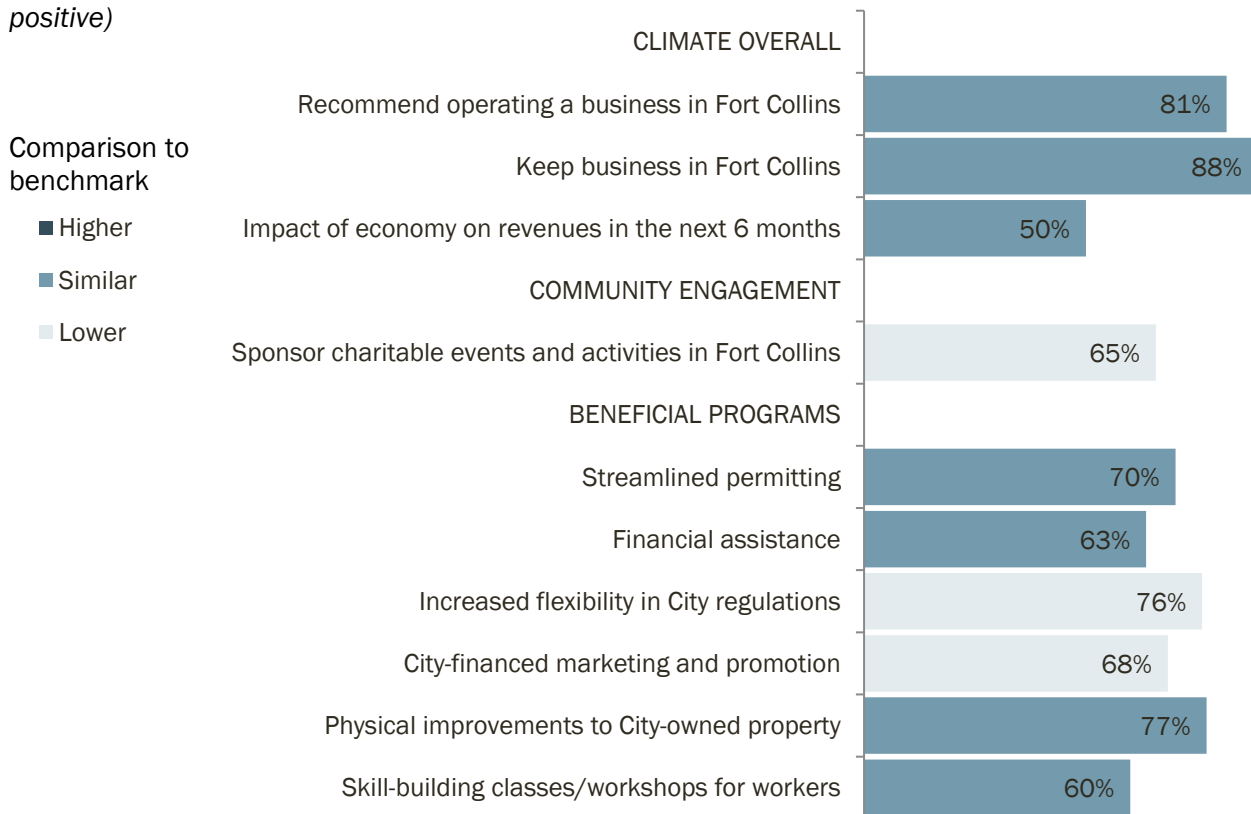


Business Climate

City businesses weighed in on the business climate of Fort Collins. Of those surveyed, 8 in 10 would be very or somewhat likely to recommend operating a business in Fort Collins, which was similar to other municipalities across the nation. Slightly more were likely to keep their business in Fort Collins for the next five years and half felt positive about the impact of the economy on their revenues in the coming six months (a rating that declined in 2018 compared to 2017).

When asked about potential programs and services to benefit businesses in Fort Collins, all six offerings were felt to be somewhat or very beneficial by a majority of respondents. Physical improvements to City-owned property and increased flexibility in City regulations topped the list with about three-quarters of respondents indicating these services and programs would be of benefit.

Percent positive (e.g., very or somewhat likely, very or somewhat beneficial, very or somewhat positive)



Workforce

Business owners and managers evaluated several aspects of Fort Collins’s workforce, including whether they planned to hire in the near future, the types of positions needed as well as the quality of the applicants they have encountered in the past. Owners and managers also indicated the extent to which they used various hiring resources available in the community.

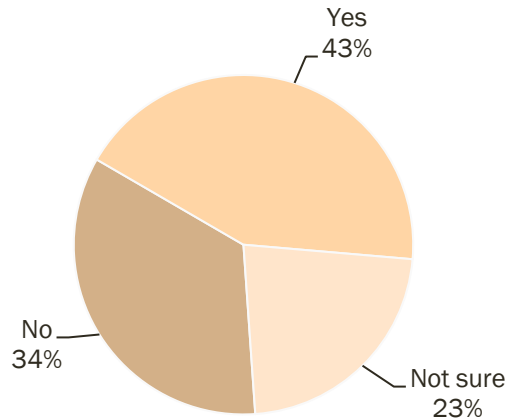
About 4 in 10 survey respondents planned to hire within the next 6 to 12 months; about one-quarter were unsure if they would be hiring.

About half indicated they would be adding technically skilled jobs, 4 in 10 would be adding administratively skilled jobs and one-third would be adding unskilled labor. Only 13% of business owners and managers were likely to hire for unskilled administrative positions.

When asked about their impression of job applicants in their most recent hiring experience, survey respondents gave the most positive ratings to applicants’ prior experience with 55% giving an excellent or good rating (this rating increased in 2018 compared to 2017). When indicating their overall impression of applicants, 48% gave an excellent or good rating and one-third offered positive evaluations to the number of qualified applicants. Each impression of job applicants was similar to national averages.

As in 2017, job websites were the most relied upon hiring resources followed by the business’ website and social networks.

Planning to hire in the next 6 to 12 months



Types of positions needed

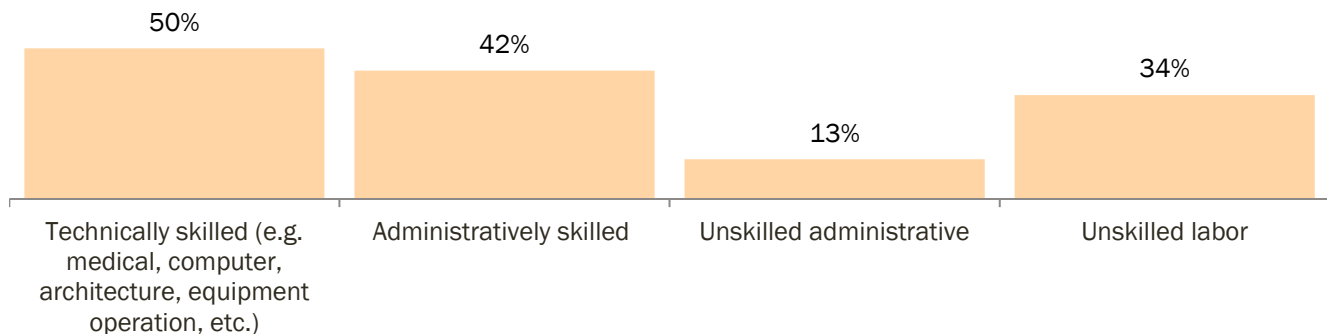
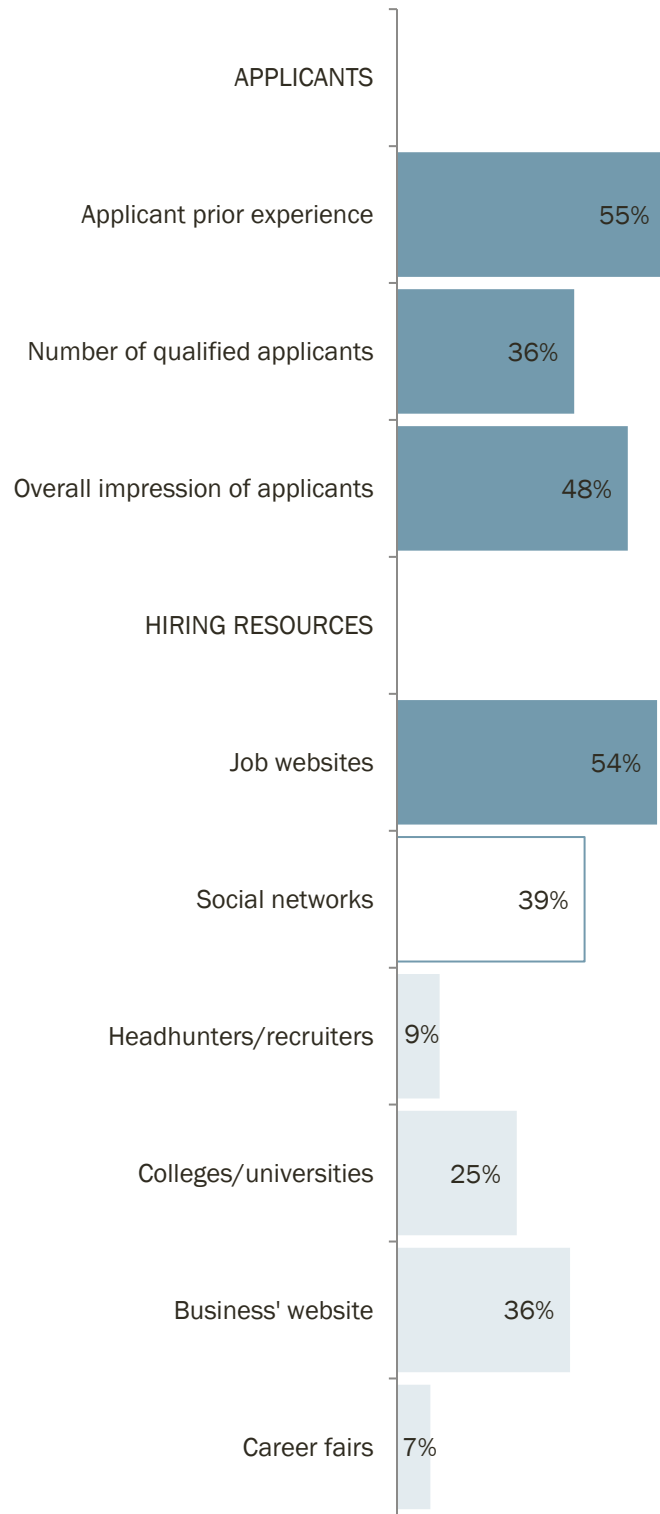


Figure 3: Aspects of the Workforce

Percent positive (e.g., excellent or good, great or moderate extent)

Comparison to benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower
- Not available



Special Topics

The City of Fort Collins included 10 questions of special interest on The NBS ranging from likelihood of relocating and allowing telecommuting to effectiveness of Out Reach Fort Collins and use and perceptions related to the Timberline Recycling Center.

Respondents shared whether their business currently allowed employees to work remotely from home. About 4 in 10 reported yes, and about 3 in 10 reported they were somewhat or very likely to allow telecommuting to attract and keep talented employees. When asked how likely, if at all, they would be to relocate their business outside of Fort Collins or relocate outside of Northern Colorado, at least 80% of respondents indicated they were very or somewhat unlikely to relocate out of Fort Collins or Northern Colorado.

Figure 4: Remote Employees

Does your business currently allow employees to work remotely from home at least some times (telecommute)?

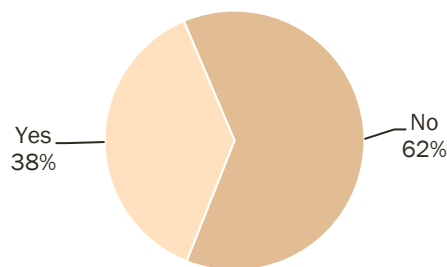
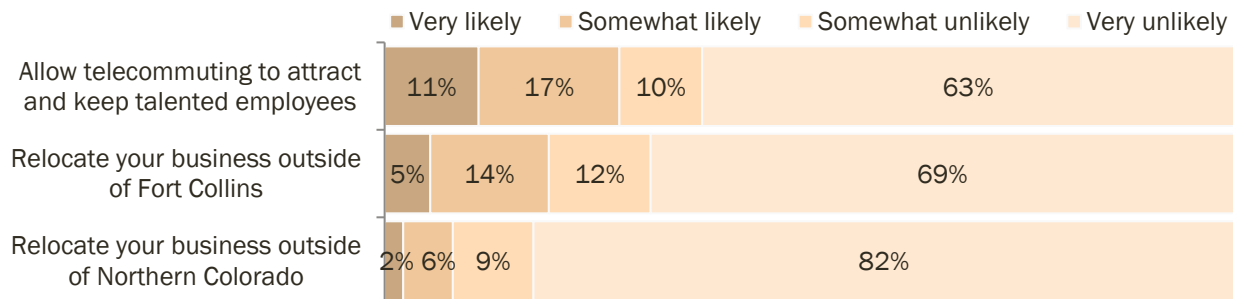


Figure 5: Relocating and Telecommuting Likelihood

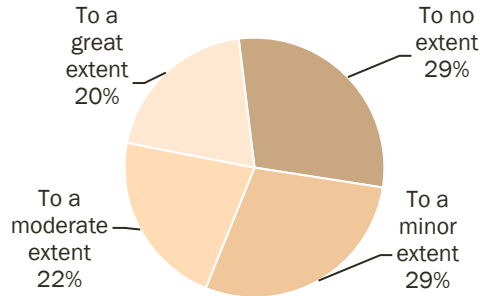
Please indicate how likely or unlikely you are to do each of the following:



When asked if disruptive, nuisance, or illegal behaviors negatively impact their business, ratings were evenly split but leaned to the lesser extent ratings. About 60% of respondents felt the impact to a minor extent or to no extent, while about 4 in 10 felt an impact to a great extent or moderate extent.

Figure 6: Impact of Disruptive or Illegal Behaviors

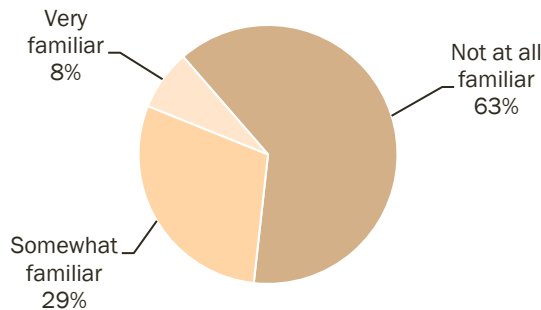
To what extent, if at all, does disruptive, nuisance, or illegal behaviors negatively impact your business (e.g., loitering, vulgar language, panhandling, etc.)?



When given brief details about Outreach Fort Collins and asked about level of familiarity prior to receiving the survey, knowledge was low with about 6 in 10 reporting they were not at all familiar and another 3 in 10 reporting to be somewhat familiar with the program. Only 1 in 10 respondents were very familiar with Outreach Fort Collins.

Figure 7: Familiarity with Outreach Fort Collins

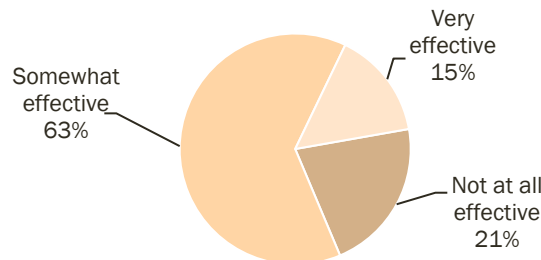
Outreach Fort Collins is community-driven outreach to maintain the downtown area as a safe and welcoming place while connecting our community's most vulnerable to the services and supportive networks they need. Before this survey, how familiar, if at all, would you say you were with Outreach Fort Collins?



Respondents who were familiar with Outreach Fort Collins rated the effectiveness of the program maintaining a safe and welcoming environment downtown. Most respondents fell in the middle and offered somewhat effective ratings, while about 2 in 10 or fewer offered each of the book-end ratings of very effective or not at all effective.

Figure 8: Effectiveness of Outreach Fort Collins

How effective, if at all, do you think Outreach Fort Collins has been at maintaining a safe and welcoming environment downtown?

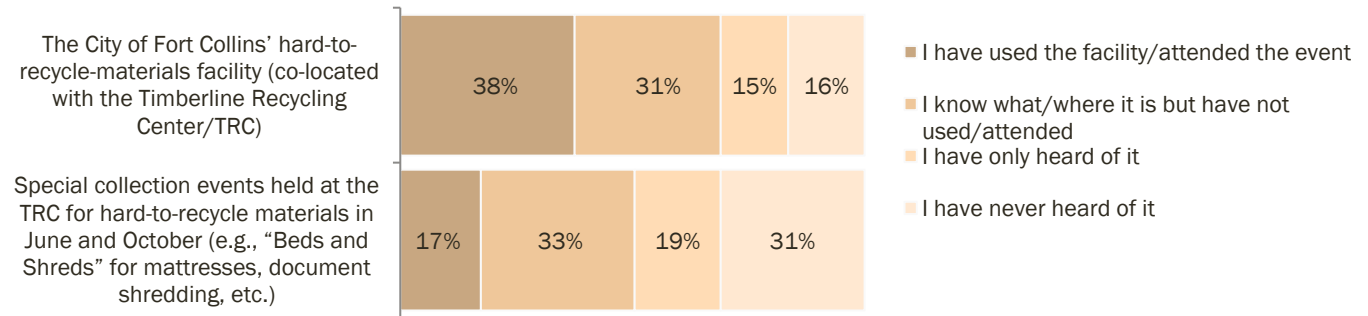


Asked only of those who were familiar with Outreach Fort Collins.

A series of questions on the survey related to the Timberline Recycling Center. The first questions related to respondent knowledge and use of special services offered by the center. About 4 in 10 respondents had used the hard-to-recycle facility and another 3 in 10 respondents knew what/where it is but had not used it. About 16% of business members had not heard of the facility. Fewer reported attendance at special collection events for hard-to-recycle materials, with about 2 in 10 reporting attendance and 3 in 10 reporting knowledge of it but no attendance. About 3 in 10 had not heard of these events.

Figure 9: Familiarity with the Hard-to-recycle Facility

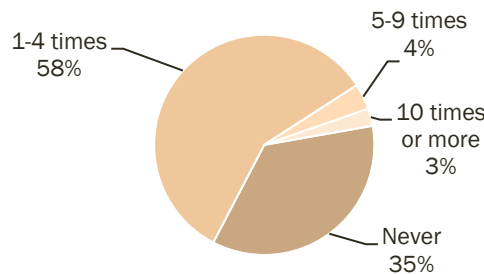
How familiar, if at all, are you with each of the following?



Those who had used the hard-to-recycle facility indicated how often they had used it in the 12 months prior to the survey. Of the 38% of business members who had used the facility, frequency of use in the prior 12 months was low with a majority of respondents reporting using the City's hard-to-recycle-materials facility 1-4 times in the last 12 months and about one-third had never used it.

Figure 10: Frequency of Using the City's Hard-to-recycle Facility

In the last 12 months, how often, if at all, have you used the City's hard-to-recycle-materials facility to recycle items from your business?

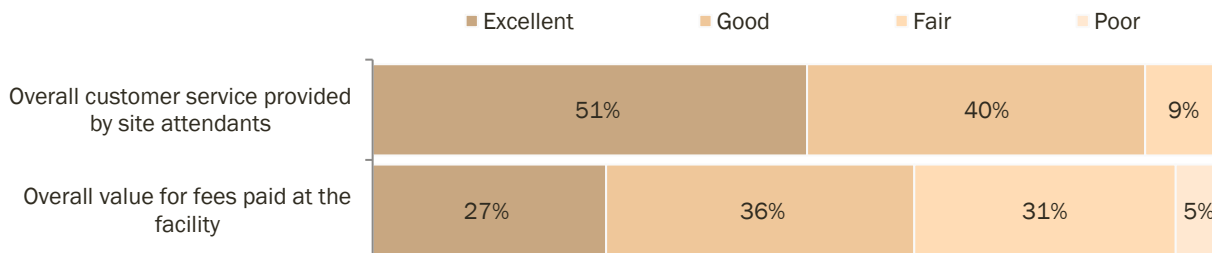


Asked only of those who had used the hard-to-recycle facility.

Users of the facility in the past 12 months gave high quality ratings to the overall customer service at the facility, with about 9 in 10 respondents giving excellent or good ratings. About 6 in 10 respondents offered positive ratings to the overall value for fees paid at the facility.

Figure 11: Quality of Hard-to-recycle Facility

Please rate the quality of each of the following at the hard-to-recycle-materials facility.

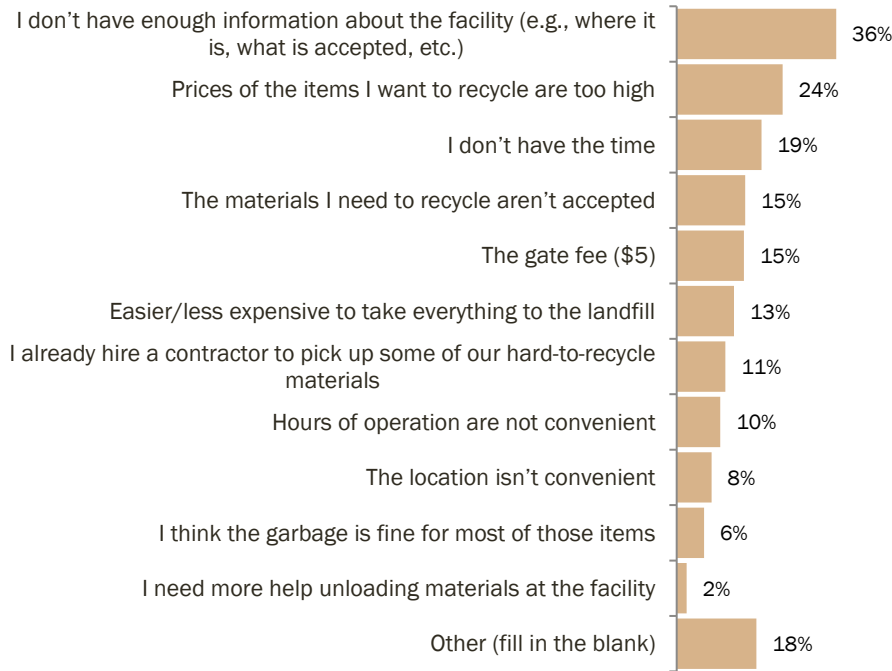


Asked only of those who had used the hard-to-recycle facility in the last 12 months.

When asked about reasons that prevent usage of the hard-to-recycle-materials facility, the most common reason was that they did not have enough information about the facility, with about one-third selecting this option. The price of the service was the second most common response. About 2 in 10 or fewer selected each of the remaining reasons.

Figure 12: Reasons That Prevent Usage of Hard-to-recycle Facility

Which of the following reasons, if any, prevent you from using the hard-to-recycle-materials facility at all or more frequently than you currently do? Please select all that apply.

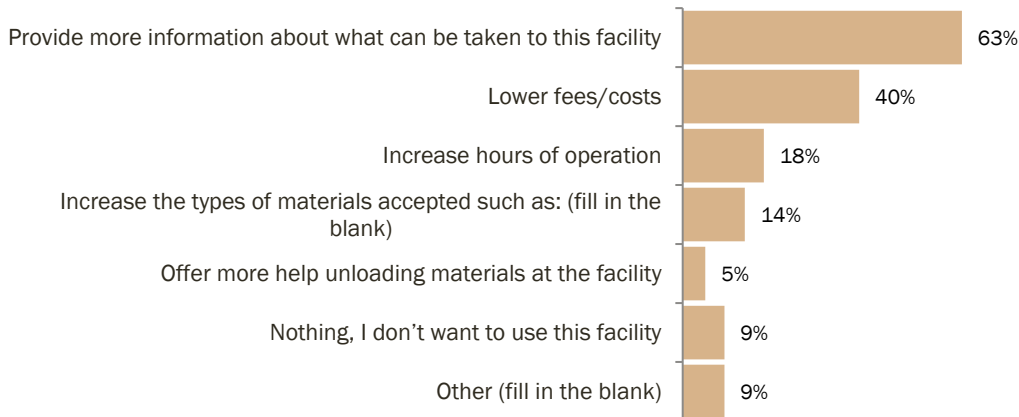


Total may exceed 100% as respondents could select more than one option. Please see *Technical Appendices* report under separate cover to review the verbatim responses for other.

Supporting data from the previous question, about 6 in 10 respondents felt that their interest in using the facility could be increased if they had more information about it and 4 in 10 were interested in lower costs and fees.

Figure 13: Ways to Increase Interest in Using Hard-to-recycle Facility

What, if anything, can the City do to increase your interest in or willingness to use the hard-to-recycle facility at the TRC? Please select all that apply.



Total may exceed 100% as respondents could select more than one option. Please see *Technical Appendices* report under separate cover to review the verbatim responses for other and other types of materials.