

Community Futures Fraser-Fort George COVID-19 Outreach Program:
Regional Specific Insight: Mackenzie
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An intentional effort was made to hear from those across the entire region, not just within the municipality of Mackenzie. In the end, 11 of the 55 Mackenzie interviews were done with businesses and organizations outside of the municipality, involving the Powder King, McLeod Lake, and Bear Lake communities.

The Mackenzie interviewees predominantly (70%) reported to be “doing okay,” however, contextual analysis of the interviews would suggest otherwise. This contradiction is likely due to what our team has identified as common attitudes/beliefs prevalent among the residents of this region. For example, several interviewees felt guilty for doing the interview, thinking that their voice did not matter or they had nothing important to say; some even apologized for doing a poor/bad interview. There appears to be a culture in the Mackenzie region where people do not want to openly admit to struggling or needing help. This will be apparent as we highlight some of the other regional findings.

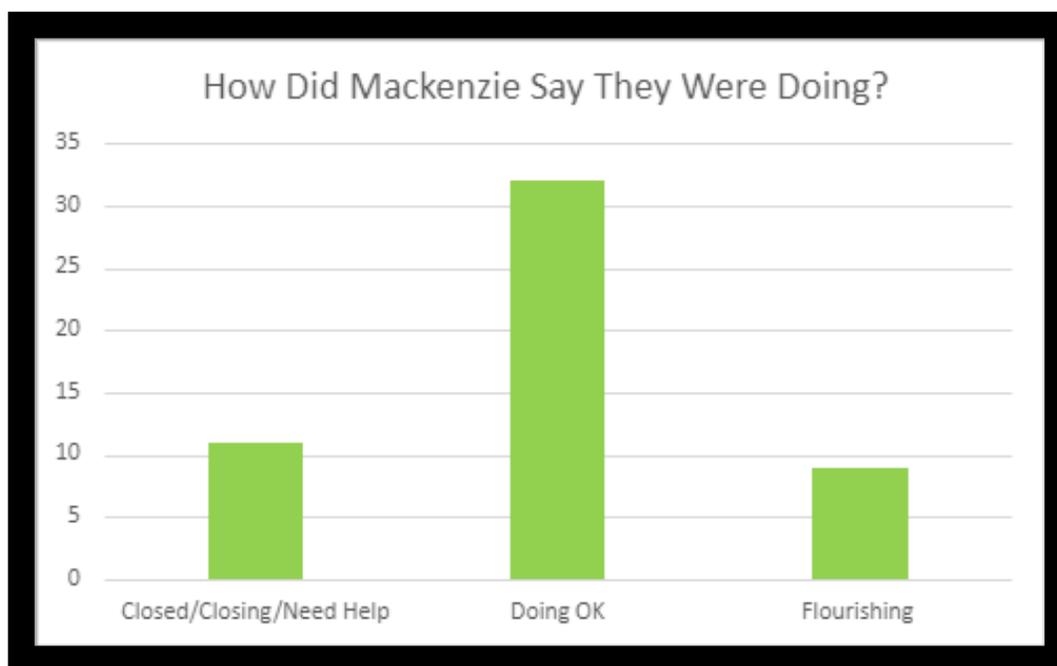


Figure 1: How Mackenzie said they were doing (n=55)

Despite saying they are okay, businesses/organizations said they could not find information on updated health and safety rules, nor could they find information on the various available support programs. When asked, “what supports did your business/organization utilize?” 75% of businesses in Mackenzie said either “nothing” or “unsure” (some thought they may have but could not remember). Others did not seek information out about supports. Even businesses and organizations that did utilize supports had informational challenges. Most of those 75%

people who did not get supports said they were “OK” to the original question. Here is a direct quote from an individual who applied for CERB:

“I got scared, and I stopped applying for stuff. Well, because the money just \$2,000 showed up in my bank account from the federal government (CERB). And then \$2,000 showed up in my postal box from the federal government and there was no this is for this month, there was no, this is your reporting period. It was just, here's money... But I yeah, I didn't apply again. Um, and like, that probably would have been okay. I probably could have got another month of CERB, but like, **I was more concerned about being able to pay back taxes later on.”**

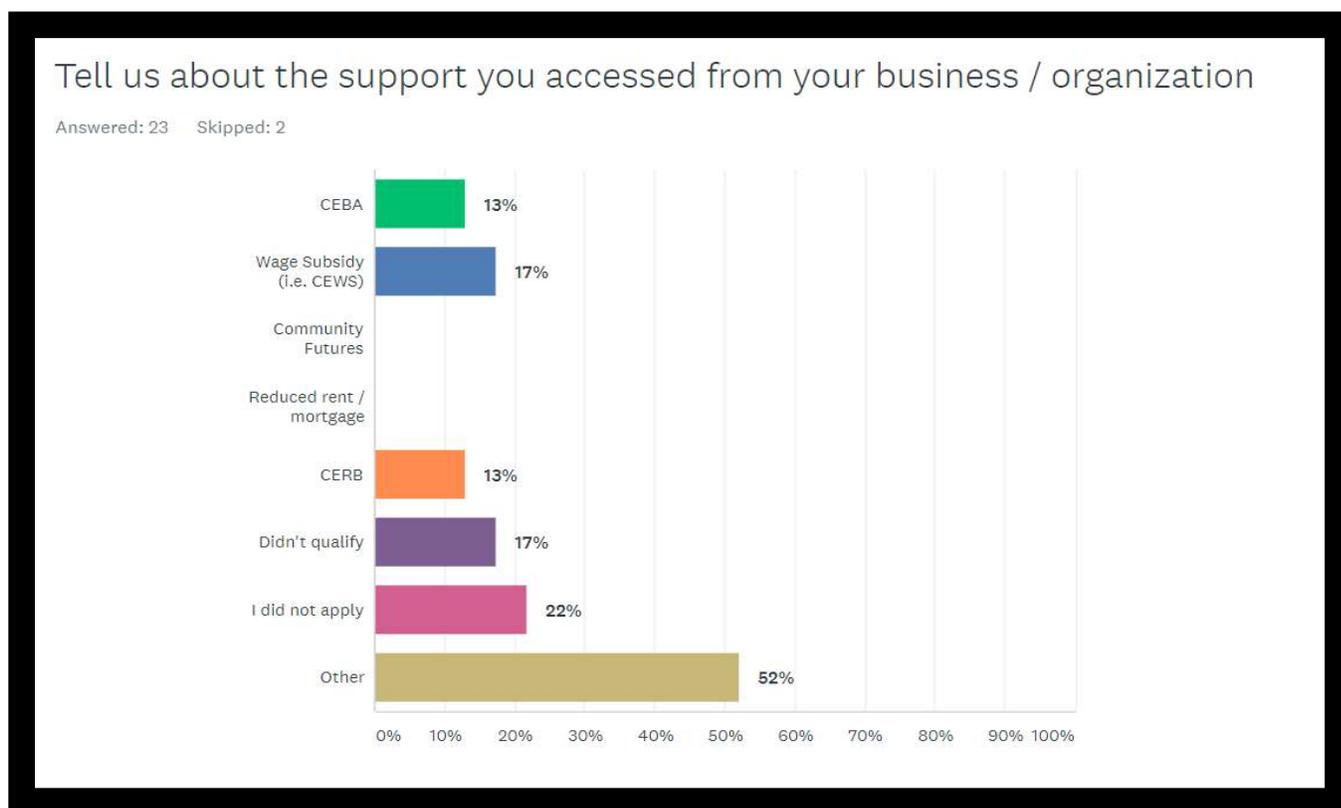


Figure 2: What supports did you access for your business/organization? (n=23)

Note that the “other” category often meant they were unsure to which supports they had applied.

Many interviewees felt they did not have a trusted place to find reliable and relevant information. For those who did know where to look, the information they found was unlikely to reflect their circumstance or needs. Additionally, people expressed a lack of venue for voicing complaints and concerns.

Of the original 25 interviews in Mackenzie, only 3 reported having an association/network to rely on. We suspect this number is actually higher, but the low reporting suggests affiliations with associations/networks were not in the forefront of their business operations or they did not hold much value for the business. An example of a less formal association would be of the organizations who operate in district-owned buildings. Because of this arrangement they were told when to close and what documentation was needed to reopen. Even this small amount of guidance was appreciated, but it was not something an individual owner-operator would experience.

Not all experiences with associations and networks were positive. Some businesses that were part of British Columbia industry groups complained the focus was on Vancouver and Vancouver Island businesses, so the advice offered did not fit with the Mackenzie context. One spoke of an association helping businesses “that see 500 people a day,” while Mackenzie businesses were only seeing single digits, so how were they supposed to apply the advice. On the other hand, a business mentioned that those in the same industry in Vancouver were struggling compared to their thriving experience in Mackenzie, also making the association’s recommendations non-applicable.

Online groups have also proven to be a double-edged sword. Multiple businesses and organizations spoke of using Instagram and Facebook to watch how other businesses in the same industry adapted and use them as inspiration for their own business. However, when asked, “what is one thing COVID-19 has brought that is particularly negative or harmful to your life?” the overwhelming answer was online aggression and intolerance. Multiple people said they had stopped going on social media and stopped watching the news because of this negativity.

In conclusion, Mackenzie businesses had a lot to say about COVID-19. Mackenzie businesses and organizations do not want to be seen as making a fuss: they apologized for the poor quality (their perception, not ours) of their interview, they did not see themselves as needing help or struggling, and they were not big on requesting improvements. At the end of every Mackenzie interview, the person was asked, “what kind of supports could help the business/organization?” The overwhelming answer was “nothing” or “I don’t know,” even with the interviewer providing options to pick from. From what we did hear, businesses/organizations are in need of clear information channels and networks that foster the spread of important information. Moving forward, Mackenzie businesses and organizations require a platform to amplify their voices and strengthen community connections so they are better prepared to face any future crisis.