

The Sangamon County Business Economic Outlook Survey



Sponsors:
The Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce
and
University of Illinois at Springfield
Center for Entrepreneurship / Center for State Policy and Leadership
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Overview and Methodology

The Sangamon County Business Economic Outlook Survey, a joint venture of The Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce and the University of Illinois at Springfield, is a vehicle to assess and track the economic outlook of businesses and non-profit organizations in Sangamon County. The Outlook Survey solicits opinions from a sample of businesses/firms/organizations in Sangamon County with 10 or more employees. The inaugural survey was conducted in late February and March, 2008.

Sample selection. The sample was selected from list of Sangamon County employers (*Reference USA* list) provided by The Chamber to the UIS Survey Research Office in the Fall of 2007. First, the total list was pared by deleting employers with less than 10 employees, deleting nearly all public sector employers, and deleting public and parochial elementary schools as well as private and public colleges and universities. The sampling procedure then consisted of the selection of all employers on the pared list having 50 or more employees -- and the random selection of half of the remaining employers on the list (i.e., those having 10 to 49 employees). In addition, a few additional employers were selected for those economic sectors with relatively few employers.¹

Treatment of the sample. Each of the employers in the selected sample was sent an initial survey package, consisting of a personalized letter, a questionnaire, a postage-paid envelope and an email address notification form. Sample members were also informed about how they could complete the questionnaire on-line. For those employers on the list without an associated contact name, the envelope was addressed to "CEO/Manager." Two weeks later, second survey packages similar in nature to the first were sent to all non-respondents.

It should be noted that there were some "duplicate" employer names and duplicate CEO/manager names in the original sample. Most of the "duplicate" employer names were the result of multiple locations in Sangamon County. Duplicate CEO/Manager names were either the result of multiple locations or the result of the person being an executive of more than one business/firm. In some cases, elimination of the duplicates was possible. In other cases, we decided to be inclusive and leave the sorting out to the sample members themselves. We did so by including the following in the follow-up letter.

P.S. IF YOU RECEIVE MORE THAN ONE QUESTIONNAIRE, this is because our list of Sangamon County employers associated your name with more than one employer organization. You need only return one questionnaire. *For the questions about your "firm,"* you can answer either with regard to your primary business/firm -- or with regard to your firms taken altogether (whichever makes more sense to you).

¹ Despite the sampling procedures reported above (i.e., selection of all employers with 50 or more employees; selection of about one-half of the employers with 10 to 49 employees), the proportion of the sample which is composed of employers with 50 or more employees (27%) is only slightly greater than the comparable proportion taken from all Sangamon County employers with at least 10 employees (25%). (Percentages derived from table found on:

<http://www.gscc.org/econdev/industry.asp>.)

It should also be noted that the list of businesses contained numerous “errors,” both in terms of employers no longer in operation and in terms of out-dated contact information (names and/or addresses). This is typical of nearly any list of the “universe” of employers in a locale. When we became aware of out-dated contact information, we made corrections and followed up with new survey packages. Employers identified as no longer in existence were, of course, removed from the sample.

The respondents, the response rate and representativeness. From late February through March 24, 2008, just over 180 respondents completed the questionnaire (n=182) -- from a total of 927 employers on the unduplicated employer sample list. One-tenth of these respondents completed the questionnaire on-line. This return represents a response rate of 20 percent.

Further analysis shows that the responding employers are quite-to-very representative of all employers on the unduplicated list in terms of both the number of employees and their economic sector. The largest differences here are found for employers in retail trade and in accommodations/food/entertainment, where we find a modest degree of under-representation in the responding sample. (See comparisons in tables below.)

Given a random sample of the respondent size (n=182) from the total population of relevant Sangamon businesses and non-profit organizations, the sampling error is just under +/- 7% at the 95 percent confidence level – and just under +/- 6% at the 90th percent confidence level.

Comparison of the Total “Unduplicated” Employer Sample and the Responding Sample

Employer characteristics compared	Total Unduplicated Employer Sample (927)	Responding Sample (182)
Number of employees		
10 to 49	73%	70%
50 and over	27%	30%
Economic sector		
Accommodations/food/entertainment	20%	15%
Retail trade	16%	11%
Business and professional support	10%	12%
Medical/health care	9%	10%
Finance/real estate/insurance	8%	9%
Other services	8%	10%
Construction	5%	7%
Wholesale trade	5%	4%
Social assistance	5%	7%
Manufacturing	4%	2%
Information/communications systems and services	4%	4%
Transportation/warehousing	3%	4%
Education/educational services	1%	1%
Agriculture/mining/utilities	1%	2%