

# Impact of COVID-19 on Design Firms in Western Massachusetts

Data collected 4.17.2020 - 4.26.2020



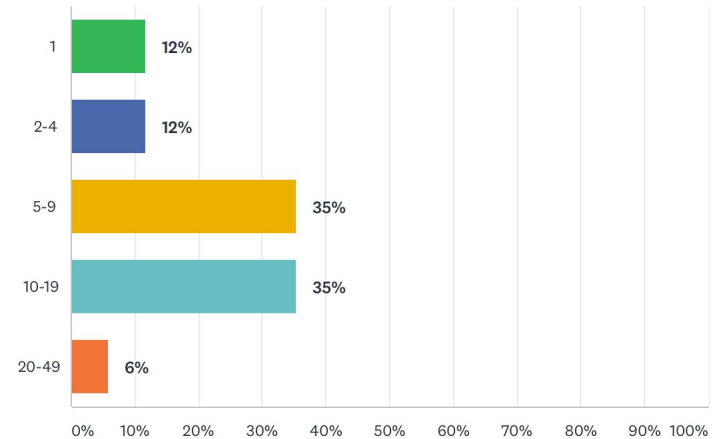
**AIA** Western  
Massachusetts

**WMAIA** has **180+** architect members

Representing **40-50** firms/sole practitioners  
across the 4 counties of Western Massachusetts

**17** firm principals  
responded to the survey  
(approx. 35- 40% of firms)

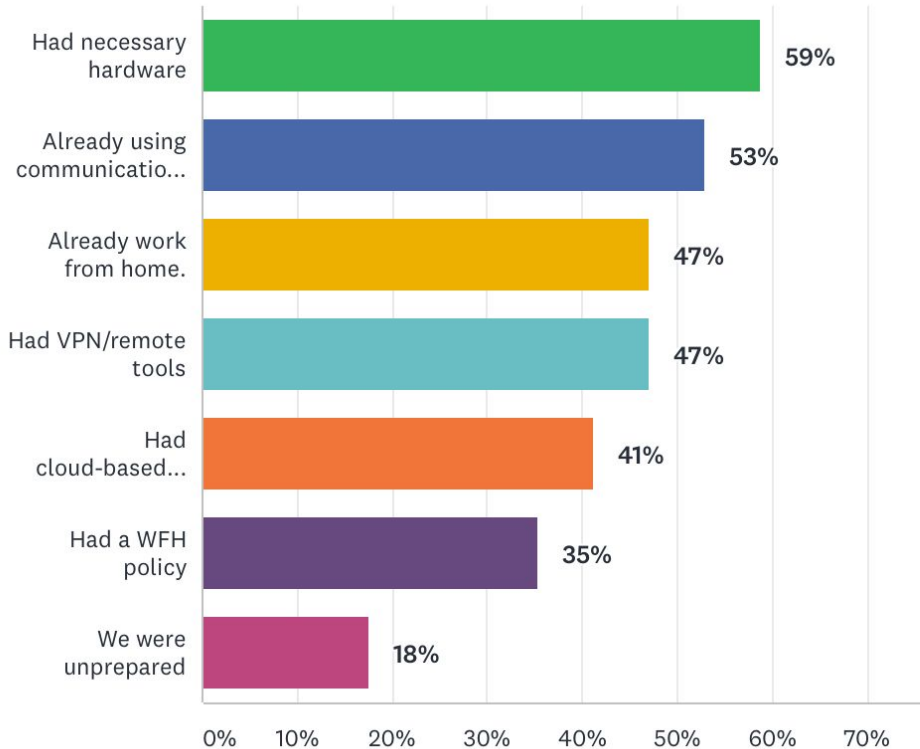
**70%** of respondents have  
between 5-19 employees



**Firms report that 88% of their staff have been able to work from home**

**..and they think staff are about 78% as efficient teleworking compared to working in the office.**

# How prepared was your office to work remotely before the COVID-19 outbreak? (Select all that apply)



*“Our head of IT said while a small percentage of staff worked from home, **we were prepared for a large snowstorm, not a global pandemic.**”*

*“We luckily have an employee who is very IT oriented and has been able to assist in getting everyone transitioned to remote work, however, **if we didn't have him, our IT costs would have doubled.** And our IT company is not cheap!”*

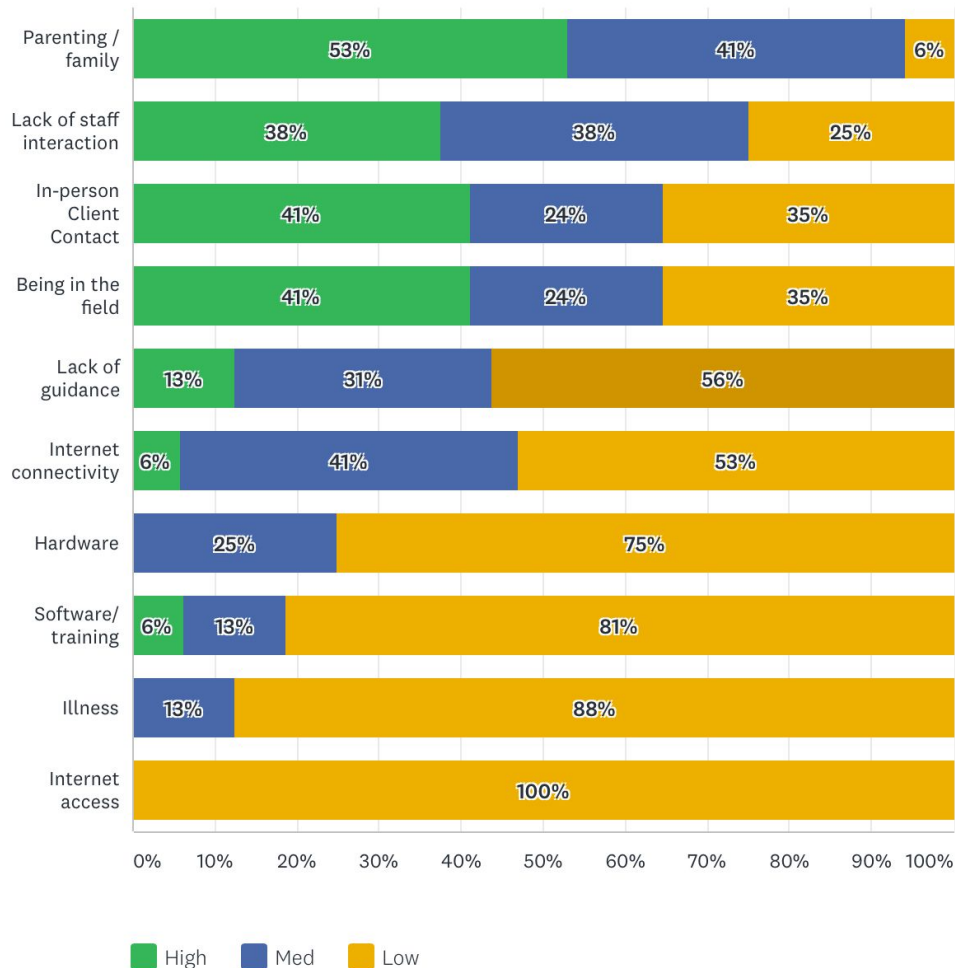
*“**We thought we were more prepared than we were.** We did not have enough VPN licenses for all of our staff. And everyone's situation is different at home, so we should have tested everyone's set ups in Feb or March.”*

*“**We definitely did not have the resources for full time work at home.**”*

*“We had **SOME** tools - but were barely using them (as opposed to now). **We had to invest significantly in new tools.**”*

## Biggest challenges for staff teleworking:

- Parenting/family distractions
- Lack of staff interaction
- Lack of in person contact with clients
- Lack of ability to be physically in the field



# What are some of the strategies you are using to address your current challenges?

*“One job requires site visits - **social distance, small groups, and masks as needed visiting the site.**”*

*“Zoom meetings; **flexibility, kindness.**”*

*“We communicate with the staff frequently to assure them of our commitment to their continued employment, and to acknowledge **our willingness to permit them to have a flexible work schedule to respond to the challenges of working from home, acting as caregivers and educators, etc.**”*

*“We are having group conference calls every other day. **Trying to set up video conferencing and DM-ing but that's been a struggle because of lack of software knowledge in these areas.**”*

*“**Our strategies have evolved substantially over the past month. From limited Remote Desktop access - to a full transition to the cloud.**”*

*“Multiple full office check-in calls per week. **Upgrading networking and internet equipment in employee's homes.**”*

*“We use RingCentral for calls, messages, email, meetings. **Working on in-house projects that get thought about but not normally done.**”*

*“For all staff, except for 2 admin people, we are paying everyone for a 40 hour work week, no matter how much time they are actually productive.*

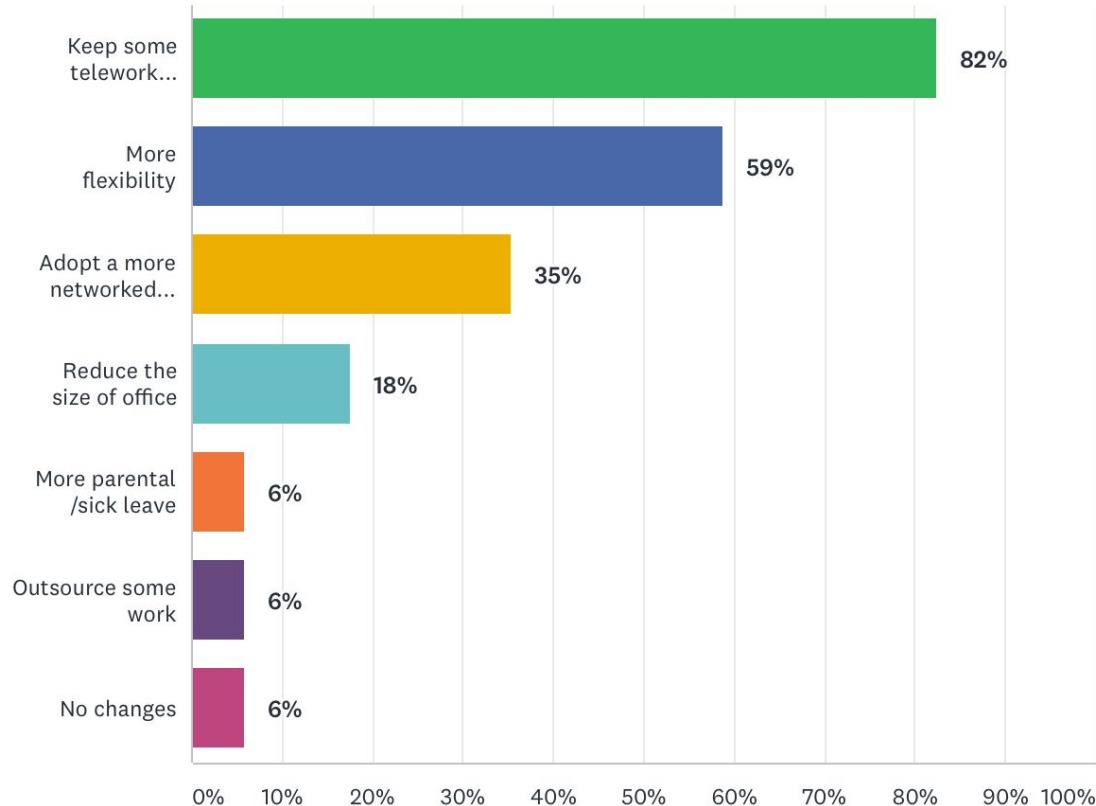
***We are having them keep track of their non-productive time so that we know the impact and can work to flatten the curve.”***

*“We work from home and communicate by phone and email. **Once a week we meet in the parking lot to discuss the status of things.**”*

*“Regular staff meetings - **Monday morning check-in, non-mandatory/social lunch and happy hours.**”*

*We're also maintaining **normal communication with clients in order to assure them of our continued operations and support, and engaging in frequent Zoom meetings to facilitate ongoing design work.***

# What changes do you anticipate this will have on your workplace culture? (select all that apply)



*“The size of our office will be determined by how many and how often people choose to continue to work at home... We already had some flexible work opportunities in place.”*

*“We already had a lot of flexibility and paid personal time.”*

*“We are already very flexible so I think **increasing our work at home capability is the number one priority** to keep things moving forward.”*

*“We may be able to increase staff without increasing office area by **rotating teleworking.**”*

*“Zoom has worked well for many meetings. Might continue for some stages/aspects of future projects.”*

*“We may pivot to **a different income stream.**”*

## Are there any ways that you or your office are contributing in the effort to manage COVID-19 in your community or more broadly?

*“We have consulted with several of our health care clients to guide their preparations for care of Covid-19 patients, and we have prepared documents for two facilities developing temporary environments for patient care.”*

*“Some pro bono and community service.”*

*“We have made contributions to the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts for their Covid-19 Emergency fund. If we agreed to sponsor charitable events that did not happen, we are not asking for our money back.”*

*“We have participated in a design competition for temporary testing kiosks as well as working with the HAIO (Hospital Acquired Infection Organization), a Boston-base task force comprised of local designers, engineers, CMs and Owners, to share infection prevention ideas and learn from one another.”*

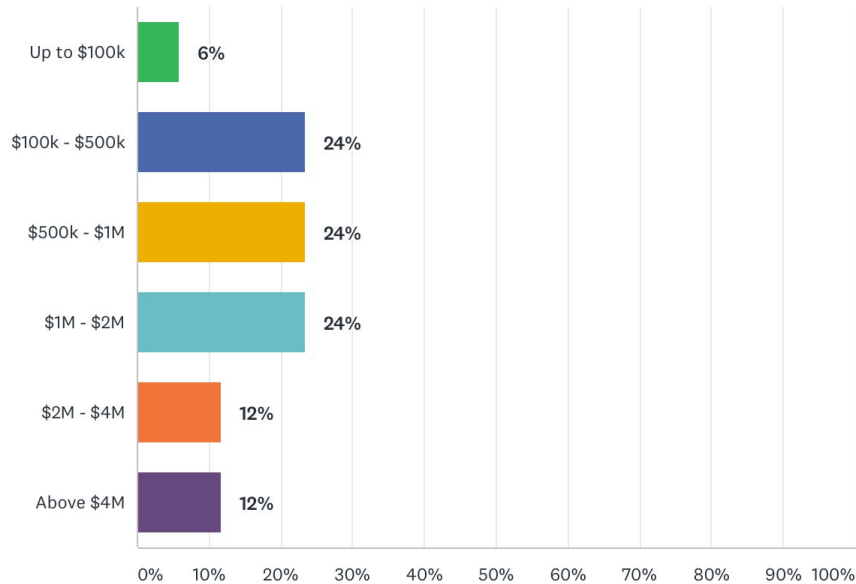
*“I am personally collecting and distributing masks and gloves when possible to nurses in a couple of different fields. ”*

*“Donating money to local charities.”*

*“More involvement with WMAIA and MassAIA. Some staff volunteer hours with building officials, etc.”*

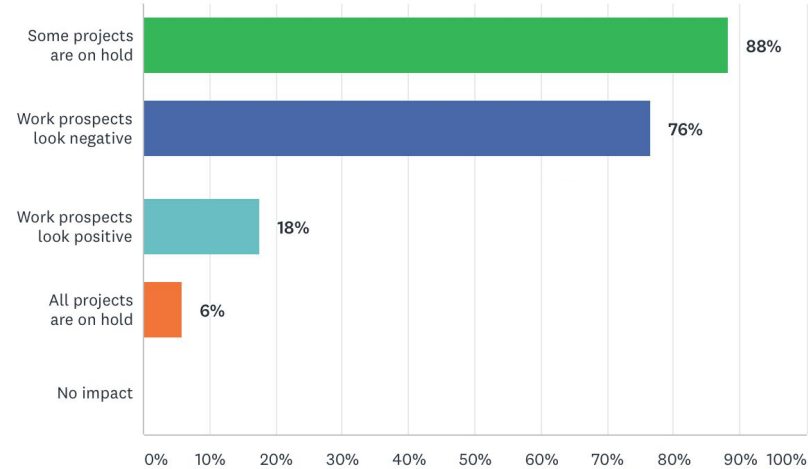


## What is your gross revenue per year?

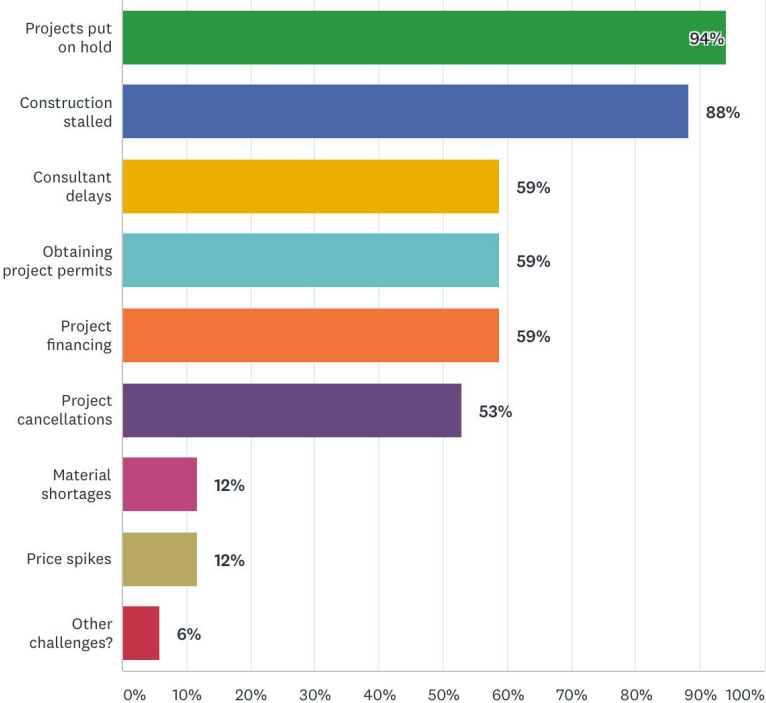


**77%** of members anticipate a **30 - 50%** decline in revenue as a result of the pandemic.

# Firms reported on the impact COVID-19 outbreak has had on their work and their assessment of future prospects:



# Some specific challenges:



## What are some of the impacts the outbreak is having on your work?

*“Many of our healthcare projects have gone on hold ....**our clients are dealing with more important things right now.**”*

*“Construction sites mostly have been ordered to be shut down unless considered "essential". **New work is not starting, 6 months from now we will feel the pinch.**”*

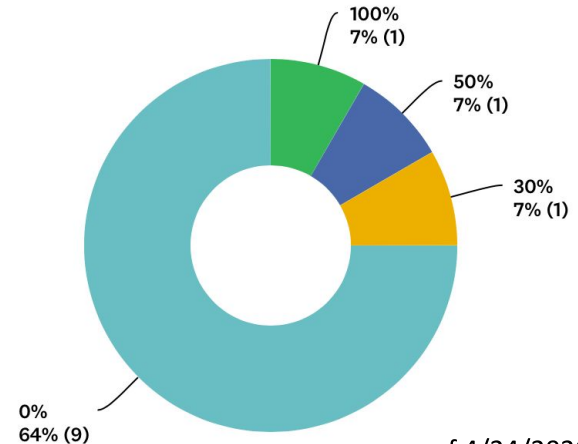
*“We were in the middle of ZBA meetings for our largest ever project. **The second meeting was delayed indefinitely, with the result that the funding for the project was permanently withdrawn. Damn!!!**”*

***“Clients' funds have dried up and/or they are afraid to spend.”***

*“There are going to be some feelings of inequity that we are going to have to deal with. **Folks with kids are less productive than those without.**”*

*“I think the biggest challenge is the collaboration that we usually do. **It so easy to bounce things off one another when your in the same room.**”*

## If you have had to make staffing changes due to COVID-19, what percentage of your staff have you laid off or furloughed?



as of 4/24/2020

# **75%** of firms have applied for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP)

*“Information was constantly changing. But we were still lucky, and able to apply on time - despite submitting two different applications after the requirements changed.”*

*“Those of us with no paid sick leave, no unemployment benefits, there's very little help that I've found.”*

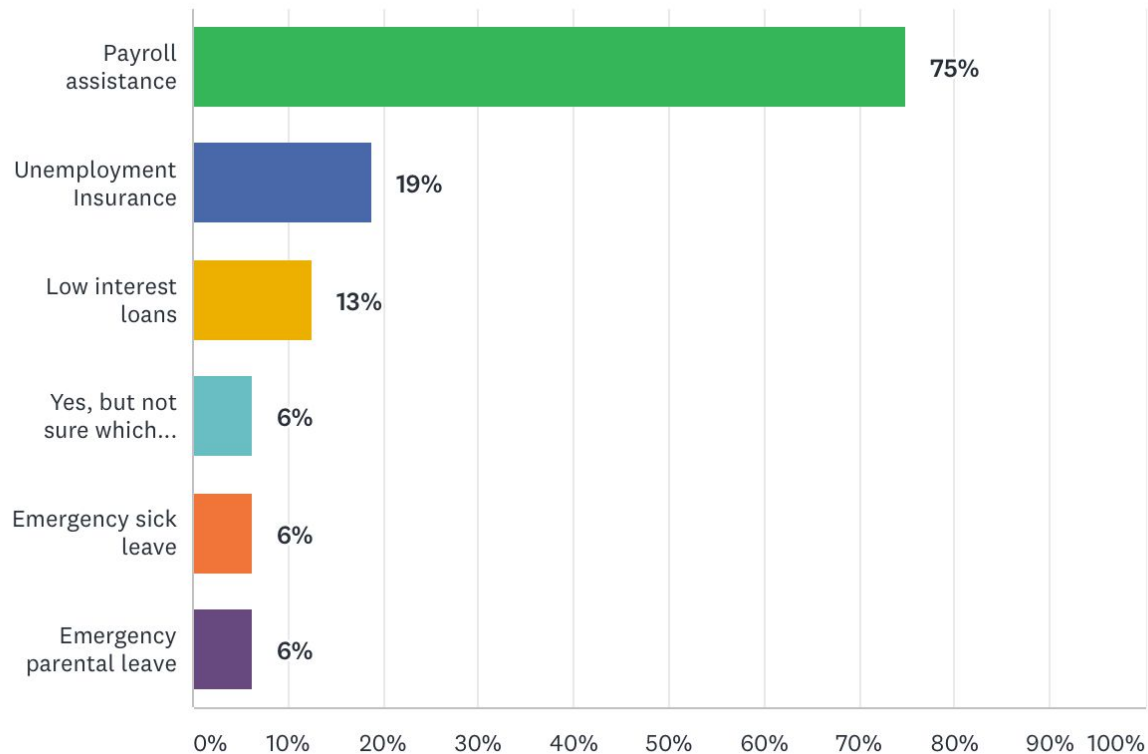
*“The Payroll Assistance is not clear on how it relates to the owners of an LLC type partnership.”*

*“We did apply for a Payroll Protection Plan loan, but its still not fully understood what the business implications are for the future.”*

*“My bank was great, the government, not so much!”*

**45%** have  
**experienced barriers  
obtaining information  
and assistance**

# Have you applied for, or do you intend to apply for, any stimulus/relief programs or other state or federal assistance to support your firm at this time?



# Strategic Planning for the Future: Answers to Open Ended Questions

## What's particular to Western Mass?

- We can work from home easily and staff enjoy the flexibility!
- We are mostly small to medium size firms, with the ability to bounce back more easily than large firms with large staff
- To do so, we need more consistent broadband
- Investments in Education and Healthcare support our region - both particularly affected by the pandemic
- Concerned that public funding will not be equitably distributed to Western MA

*“Invest in deep energy retrofits for existing housing stock!”*

*“All employees have internet, but speeds vary wildly.”*

*“Subsidized basic income & housing!”*

*“Setting up an **unemployment system for self-employed workers** would be an asset.”*