How do entrepreneurs in the Heartland – Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, and Nebraska – perceive challenges compared to entrepreneurs nationally?

- Entrepreneurs in the Heartland and nationally most commonly report that finding customers is challenging – about 6 in 10 entrepreneurs in the Heartland and across the country.
- In the Heartland, funds to start the business is a challenge among 54% of entrepreneurs and funds to grow the business is a challenge among 60% of entrepreneurs, compared with 46% and 49% of entrepreneurs nationally.
- Laws, policies, and regulations are a challenge for 55% of Heartland entrepreneurs, compared to 46% of entrepreneurs nationally.
- Self-doubt and fear is a challenge for 55% of Heartland entrepreneurs and 42% of entrepreneurs nationally.
- Entrepreneurs in the Heartland report more difficulties in attaining information, education, and knowledge than entrepreneurs nationally – 47% compared with 37%, respectively.
- Both groups are similarly challenged by finding networks and connections – 44% in the Heartland and 45% nationally – and skilled employees – 50% in the Heartland and 53% nationally.
- Finding mentors to provide guidance is more of a challenge for Heartland entrepreneurs than nationally – 40% compared with 33%.
- Time to devote to the business is reported as challenging by 34% of entrepreneurs in the Heartland and 39% of entrepreneurs nationally.
- Location, region, or geography is a challenge for almost 4 in 10 entrepreneurs in the Heartland, compared with 1 in 4 entrepreneurs across the country.
- Social support is a challenge for 1 in 3 Heartland entrepreneurs compared with 1 in 4 entrepreneurs nationally.
- Inclusion based on race, ethnicity, gender, income, or other factors is a challenge among 18% of Heartland entrepreneurs and 13% of entrepreneurs nationally.
But what matters most?

In addition to knowing many of the barriers that entrepreneurs face, it is helpful to understand what barriers are considered to be the most challenging. For example, an entrepreneur may identify obtaining knowledge, inclusion, and mentors as challenges, but one might be much more difficult to overcome than another. This helps provide balance in interpreting how severe the above barriers may be for entrepreneurs. To gain this kind of insight, entrepreneurs in the Heartland also ranked their most challenging concern.

In addition to being reported most frequently by entrepreneurs (61%), finding customers was also the most challenging concern among 20% of Heartland entrepreneurs. Laws, policies, and regulations was the most challenging concern among 15% of Heartland entrepreneurs. The most challenging concern for 13% of Heartland entrepreneurs was skilled employees. While a striking majority of Heartland entrepreneurs reported that funds to start (54%) and funds to grow (60%) the business were challenging to 1 in 10 reported funds as the most challenging concern. And, while self-doubt and fear were identified as a challenge by more than half of Heartland entrepreneurs, less than 1 in 10 reported this as the most challenging. All other barriers discussed above were identified as the most challenging by less than 6% of Heartland entrepreneurs.
About the Data
Entrepreneurs across the United States (405) and in Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, and Nebraska (247) were surveyed in Fall 2019. Entrepreneurs were identified as individuals who had either opened or co-opened their own business. Respondents were asked to rank the order of the 3 to 5 most challenging barriers from a list of 13 barriers. They were also asked to rank each as “very challenging,” “somewhat challenging,” “not that challenging,” “not at all challenging,” or “not applicable to my business.” Responses of “very” or “somewhat” challenging are considered challenges. Probability weights were used to calculate descriptive statistics. Refer to Looze and Desai (2020) for expanded discussion of barriers faced nationally.


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