

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK AMID A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

SAN MIGUEL COUNTY, COLO.



DEMOGRAPHICS:

small, rural county;
located in southwestern
Colorado mountains



UNEMPLOYMENT:

hit hard by COVID-19
induced unemployment;
large tourism industry
supports the economy



WORKFORCE INITIATIVES:

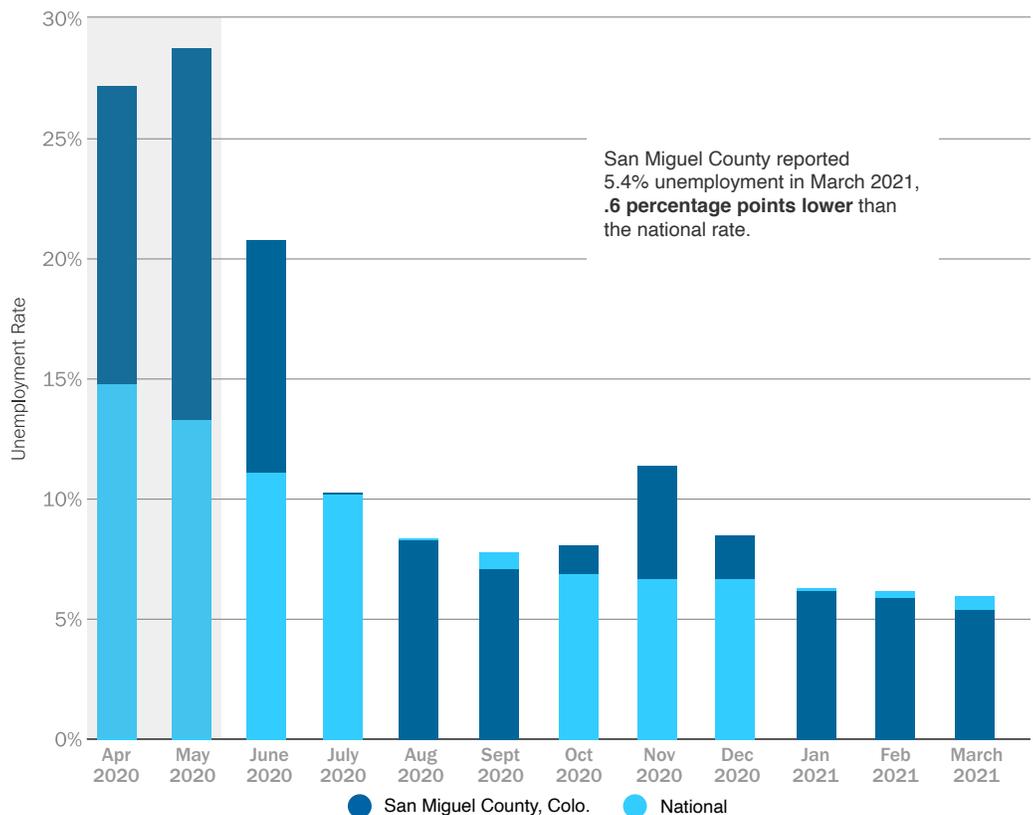
prioritizing health and housing;
employee wellness innovations;
spotlighting mental health



PANDEMIC IMPACTS ON COUNTY UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment in San Miguel County has nearly recovered to pre-pandemic levels after record highs

The onset of the pandemic drove unemployment rates in San Miguel County to record highs, peaking at nearly 29 percent in May 2020. Since the May peak, significant recovery has occurred. As of March 2021, unemployment in San Miguel County has nearly recovered to pre-pandemic levels of unemployment and is below the national rate.



NACo Analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics - Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS): Non-seasonally Adjusted, 2021; NACo Analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics - Current Population Survey: Labor Force Statistics, 2021.

COUNTY WORKFORCE PRIORITIES

Prioritizing Health and Housing

Ensuring the well-being of low-income workers is a priority in San Miguel County, particularly given the impact of COVID on workers in the hospitality industry. County leaders see affordable housing and access to healthcare as integral to conversations about worker well-being.

Wellness Innovations

San Miguel County, Colo. officials know that in 2021, many workers are looking for jobs that offer flexibility and quality of life. As an employer of 125 full-time staff, San Miguel County focuses on worker wellness to attract skilled talent to the area. Prior to the pandemic, San Miguel County offered services like lunchtime yoga and exercise classes to county staff at no cost. They saw an increase in productivity, workplace morale and interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Throughout the pandemic, the county has offered all-county staff trainings on a quarterly basis which have included “office yoga” and breathing exercises for employees to practice at home and at work. County leaders hope to evolve these efforts in the future and to explore how to “re-recruit” their existing employees by focusing on teamwork and recognition.

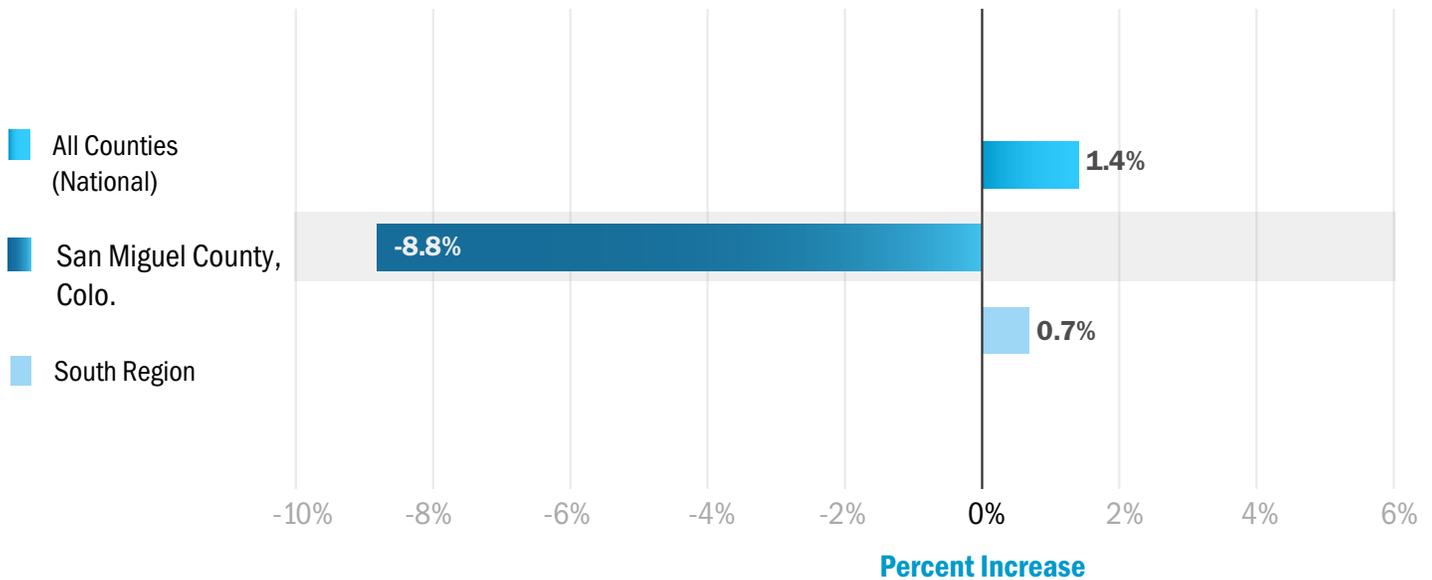
“WE CAN’T JUST FOCUS ON THE LOCAL ECONOMY AS WE RECOVER FROM THIS, WE’VE REALLY GOT TO FOCUS ON INCREASING THE WELLNESS OF OUR COMMUNITY TOO.”

Spotlighting Mental Health

The county has also required that employees partake in mental health first aid classes, with the goal of teaching employees to support one another and to look out for danger signs of mental health crisis. Finally, San Miguel County has found strong productivity among employees during their period of remote work and is looking to offer additional flexibility post-pandemic. These combined efforts highlight the county’s commitment to worker wellness as a means of supporting their employees but also attracting and maintaining talent during a period of workforce change.

COUNTIES WORK TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN BUSINESSES

The number of business establishments per capita declined in San Miguel County between 2011 and 2018



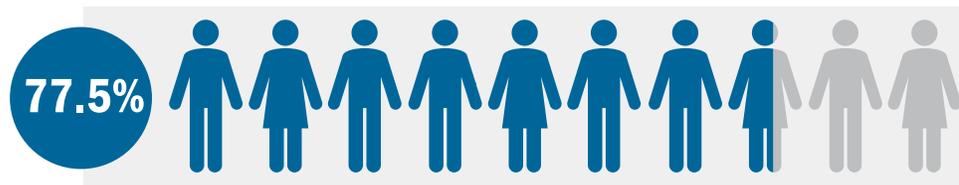
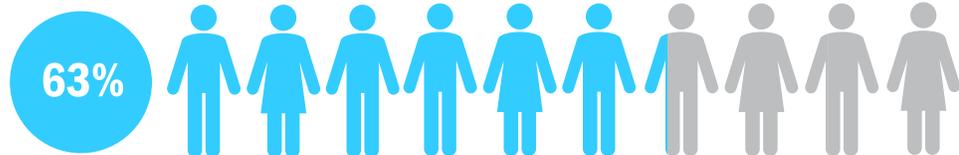
NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau – Business Dynamics Statistics: Establishment Size, 2018; NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau – Population Estimates Program: Population and Housing Units Estimates, 2019.

LABOR MARKET PARTICIPATION SIGNALS CONFIDENCE

Labor force participation rate, a measure of working-aged individuals actively working or seeking work, exceeds national and regional trends in 2019

PERCENT ACTIVE WORKERS

-  All Counties (National)
-  San Miguel County, Colo.
-  South Region



NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau – American Community Survey: Employment Status for the Population 16 Years and Over, 2019.

“[OUR] CONCERN IS ALL THE UNCERTAINTY AROUND OUR FUTURE RIGHT NOW. [OUR] HOPE IS THAT WE CAN ADAPT OUR HISTORICAL MODELS OF WORK, WHICH ARE SOMEWHAT INFLEXIBLE [TO] THIS NEW GENERATION THAT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BRING IN ALL SORTS OF CREATIVE IDEAS AND MORE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE WAYS AT PROBLEM SOLVING.”

NACo would like to thank San Miguel County for sharing information on the county’s efforts.

This case study was created with support from Walmart as part of the Future of Work, a project that aims to collect data and provide commentary on the new workforce landscape, including the impact of COVID-19 on workplace and workforce policies and practices and key lessons learned that counties should know about rebuilding the workforce in their community in recovery from pandemic and/or recession.

Contact research@naco.org for more information.

¹ Sources: Labor force participation rate, 25-54 and median household income, and share of population ages 25-34 with a bachelor’s degree come from the American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 2017; changes in the unemployment rate from 2019 to 2020 come from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, February 2021.

